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INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN NIGERIA AND THE POLITICS OF SILENCE: REVISITING THE LETTER BOMB ASSASSINATION OF DELE GIWA.

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Abstract

This study critically examined the nexus between investigative journalism and the politics of silence in Nigeria by revisiting the letter-bomb assassination of Dele Giwa; it aimed to interrogate competing explanations for the killing, assess its influence on investigative practice and media resistance, and evaluate the implications of institutional silence for press freedom and democratic accountability. Anchored in the Political Economy Theory of the Media and the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press, the research employed a qualitative digital-ethnographic design and analysed 545 spontaneously generated Facebook comments, of which ≈300 were retained as analytically relevant while ≈245 peripheral remarks were discarded, using iterative inductive–deductive thematic coding, constant comparison and reflexive memoing to surface dominant narratives, counter-narratives and mnemonic practices. Findings indicated that multiple explanatory frames circulated but public attribution overwhelmingly implicated state actors; that Giwa's unresolved death materially and psychologically contracted fearless investigative inquiry, displacing resistance into cultural memory; and that the politics of silence institutionalised impunity, eroded juridical and normative safeguards for the press, and stalled mechanisms of democratic accountability. The study concluded that unresolved political violence should be treated as a structural media-policy problem requiring transnational and civil-society interventions, truth commissions, independent safety funds and regional enforcement pathways, to restore investigative capacity, reconstitute public trust, and deter future assaults on journalistic autonomy.

Keywords: Accountability; Censorship; Impunity; Investigative Journalism; Memory; Press Freedom; State Violence

Introduction

Investigative journalism has historically occupied a central place in democratic societies as one of the strongest mechanisms for exposing corruption, abuse of power, organised crime, human rights violations and institutional secrecy (Carson, 2020). Across the world, investigative journalists have often ventured beyond routine reporting to uncover hidden truths that powerful political, economic and security interests would rather keep concealed. From the exposure of the Watergate scandal by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in the United States in the early 1970s, to the revelations of the Panama Papers by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) in 2016, investigative journalism has consistently demonstrated its capacity to reshape public discourse, influence public policy and hold governments accountable (Carson, 2020). Yet, history equally reveals that investigative journalism remains one of the most dangerous forms of journalism (UNESCO, 2022). Numerous journalists have been harassed, imprisoned, disappeared or assassinated because their investigations threatened entrenched interests. Cases such as Anna Politkovskaya in Russia (2006), Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta (2017), Ján Kuciak in Slovakia (2018), Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul (2018), Guillermo Cano in Colombia (1986), Veronica Guerin in Ireland (1996), Manuel Buendía in Mexico (1984) and Norbert Zongo in Burkina Faso (1998) illustrate a disturbing global pattern in which investigative reporting is frequently confronted with intimidation, political violence and cultures of impunity (UNESCO, 2022). These incidents have reinforced the argument that investigative journalism often becomes a contest between the public's right to know and the determination of powerful actors to preserve secrecy.

Nigeria presents one of Africa's most complex environments for investigative journalism. Since the colonial era, the Nigerian press has cultivated a tradition of challenging authoritarianism, exposing corruption and advocating democratic reforms (Omu, 1996). During successive military regimes, however, journalists operated under conditions characterised by censorship, detention without trial, proscription of media houses and various forms of state intimidation (Omu, 1996). It was within this political atmosphere that *Newswatch* magazine emerged in 1984 under the leadership of Dele Giwa, Ray Ekpu, Dan Agbese and Yakubu Mohammed, introducing a new tradition of rigorous investigative reporting, analytical journalism and public accountability. *Newswatch* distinguished itself through fearless reporting on corruption, governance, national security and economic policies, earning widespread credibility while simultaneously attracting the attention of the military establishment. Dele Giwa, in particular, became widely recognised for his insistence that journalism must interrogate power rather than merely report official narratives, thereby redefining investigative journalism in Nigeria's contemporary media history (Omu, 1996).

On Sunday, 19 October 1986, the trajectory of Nigerian journalism changed dramatically when Dele Giwa was assassinated at his residence in Ikeja, Lagos, after opening a parcel containing an explosive device (Brooke, 1986). The parcel reportedly bore official insignia, including the Nigerian coat of arms, thereby creating the appearance of an official government communication and lowering any suspicion on the part of the recipient (Brooke, 1986). The assassination occurred barely two days after Giwa had been interrogated by officials of the State Security Service (SSS) over allegations relating to national security (Brooke, 1986). The sophistication of the letter bomb, unprecedented in Nigeria at the time, immediately transformed the incident from an ordinary homicide into one of Africa's most controversial political assassinations (Brooke, 1986). More than three decades later, no

individual has been successfully prosecuted, making the murder one of Nigeria's longest unresolved criminal investigations (Adinoyi Ojo & Ologunde, 1987). As one of the most enduring symbols of threats against press freedom, the unresolved nature of the case has ensured that the assassination continues to occupy a prominent place within Nigeria's political memory and journalism scholarship (Adinoyi Ojo & Ologunde, 1987).

The inability of successive governments to conclusively resolve the assassination has generated several competing explanatory narratives. One widely discussed explanation links the murder to Giwa's ongoing investigations into the controversial Gloria Okon affair—a case involving allegations of international drug trafficking and rumours implicating highly placed political figures within the military establishment (Brooke, 1986). According to this narrative, Giwa was allegedly pursuing sensitive information capable of exposing influential individuals, thereby making him a target of powerful interests (Brooke, 1986). Another explanation situates the assassination within the broader conflict between *Newswatch* magazine and the Babangida military government following the magazine's persistent investigative reports on economic reforms, military politics and national security matters (Soyinka, 2015). A third perspective suggests that the killing represented an attempt to intimidate the Nigerian press generally by demonstrating the potential consequences of aggressive investigative reporting (Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission, 2001). Yet another interpretation views the assassination as part of internal political rivalries within the military elite, in which Giwa may have become an unintended casualty of broader struggles for political power (Soyinka, 2015). Despite these competing explanations, no theory has been judicially established, and each remains within the realm of public debate rather than legal fact (Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission, 2001). Nevertheless, the persistence of these narratives reflects widespread public scepticism regarding the transparency of the official investigation and the state's willingness to pursue all possible leads objectively.

Equally significant is the persistent politics of silence that has surrounded the assassination since 1986. The phrase "politics of silence" extends beyond the absence of a judicial resolution to encompass institutional reluctance, bureaucratic secrecy, restricted access to investigative records, inconsistent official statements, alleged obstruction of investigators, disappearance of crucial evidence and the continued refusal of key questions to receive definitive answers (Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission, 2001). Testimonies presented before the Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (2001), popularly known as the Oputa Panel, suggested that investigators encountered considerable institutional limitations in questioning certain security officials and pursuing specific investigative directions. Although various commissions, legal proceedings and public inquiries have revisited aspects of the case, the central question of responsibility remains unresolved. Consequently, the assassination has evolved into a national metaphor for impunity, selective justice and the vulnerability of investigative journalism within fragile democratic and authoritarian contexts (UNESCO, 2022). Rather than diminishing public interest, the prolonged silence has intensified scholarly inquiry, media speculation and civil society demands for accountability, making the Dele Giwa case a defining reference point in discussions on state transparency, freedom of expression and democratic governance (UNESCO, 2022).

Against this background, revisiting the letter bomb assassination of Dele Giwa is not merely an attempt to reconstruct a historical event but an effort to critically interrogate the enduring relationship

between investigative journalism, political power and institutional silence in Nigeria. While numerous studies have examined press freedom, military authoritarianism and the history of Nigerian journalism, relatively limited scholarly attention has been devoted to integrating the symbolic significance of the letter bomb, the competing explanatory narratives surrounding the assassination and the politics of silence that has sustained the mystery for nearly four decades. This study therefore seeks to examine the Dele Giwa assassination not simply as an isolated criminal incident but as a defining moment in the evolution of investigative journalism in Nigeria. By critically analysing the unresolved questions surrounding the assassination and the persistent silence that has accompanied it, the study contributes to broader debates on media resistance, democratic accountability, institutional transparency and the protection of investigative journalists in emerging democracies.

Statement of the Problem

The assassination of Dele Giwa through a letter bomb on 19 October 1986 remains one of the most significant unresolved crimes against journalism in Africa and continues to represent a defining moment in the relationship between investigative journalism, political authority and democratic accountability in Nigeria. Nearly four decades after the incident, no individual has been successfully prosecuted, while competing explanations surrounding the motive, perpetrators and alleged institutional obstruction have continued to dominate public discourse without definitive scholarly consensus. Existing studies have largely examined the incident from legal, historical, political or press freedom perspectives, with relatively limited attention devoted to interrogating how the unresolved assassination has shaped investigative journalism, reinforced a politics of silence, influenced journalists' professional practices and affected democratic accountability in Nigeria. This gap has sustained uncertainty regarding the implications of the Dele Giwa assassination for investigative journalism and underscores the need for a critical reappraisal of the event within the broader context of media resistance and state–press relations.

Aim and objectives of the Study

The study aim was to critically examine the relationship between investigative journalism and the politics of silence in Nigeria through a reappraisal of the letter bomb assassination of Dele Giwa. The specific objectives were to:

1. examine the circumstances surrounding the letter bomb assassination of Dele Giwa and the competing explanations advanced regarding its motives and perpetrators,
2. analyse how the unresolved assassination has influenced the practice of investigative journalism and media resistance in Nigeria; and
3. evaluate the implications of the politics of silence surrounding the Dele Giwa assassination for press freedom and democratic accountability in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the major competing explanations surrounding the letter bomb assassination of Dele Giwa?
2. How has the unresolved assassination of Dele Giwa influenced investigative journalism and media resistance in Nigeria?
3. What are the implications of the politics of silence surrounding the assassination for press freedom and democratic accountability in Nigeria?

Conceptual Review

Investigative Journalism

Investigative journalism has evolved from being understood merely as an advanced form of news gathering to being recognised as a democratic institution that systematically uncovers concealed information affecting the public interest (Carson, 2020; Ettema & Glasser, 1998). Unlike routine journalism, investigative journalism is characterised by originality, prolonged inquiry, verification of evidence, multiple sourcing and the deliberate exposure of corruption, abuse of power, organised crime and institutional failures (Okhueleigbe, 2025; Waisbord, 2000). Carson (2020) argues that investigative journalism remains indispensable because it bridges the gap between governmental secrecy and public accountability. Similarly, Musa and Antwi-Boateng (2023) contend that contemporary investigative journalism in Nigeria increasingly functions within a hostile political environment where journalists encounter intimidation, economic pressures and political interference that undermine independent reporting. In another perspective, Aondover et al. (2024) observe that investigative journalism in Nigeria has become constrained by structural challenges such as political intimidation, arbitrary arrests, inadequate institutional support, poor funding and ownership influence, all of which affect journalists' ability to pursue sensitive investigations. Recent scholarship has expanded the conceptual boundaries of investigative journalism beyond exposing wrongdoing to include its role in democratic resilience, transparency and civic participation (Schudson, 2018; Tumber & Waisbord, 2019). Investigative journalism is increasingly viewed as an accountability mechanism through which journalists function as watchdogs capable of questioning official narratives and stimulating institutional reforms (McNair, 2017; Stetka & Örnebring, 2013). Nevertheless, scholars disagree on the extent to which investigative journalism can maintain its independence within politically polarised societies. While Carson (2020) views investigative journalism as a corrective mechanism against democratic decline, Musa and Antwi-Boateng (2023) argue that the growing culture of promotional politics, media commercialisation and elite influence has weakened its transformative capacity in many developing democracies, particularly Nigeria. Consequently, investigative journalism should not simply be understood as a journalistic technique but as a continuous negotiation between truth-seeking, institutional resistance and public accountability within contested political environments (Votmer, 2013; Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Letter Bomb Assassination

The concept of letter bomb assassination refers to the deliberate use of an explosive device concealed within mailed correspondence or parcels to eliminate a targeted individual while simultaneously creating psychological fear beyond the immediate victim (Darnton, 2021; Laqueur, 1999). Beyond its physical consequences, scholars increasingly interpret such attacks as acts of symbolic political communication intended to intimidate wider audiences, silence dissent and discourage future resistance (Schmid, 2011; Hoffman, 2006). Darnton (2021) maintains that politically motivated attacks involving documentary or communication channels illustrate the complex relationship between secrecy, information control and political violence. Within journalism studies, the letter bomb that killed Dele Giwa has acquired significance beyond criminal investigation because it transformed a communication medium into an instrument of political violence, thereby sending a broader message to investigative journalists concerning the risks associated with exposing sensitive state or elite interests (Ogbuoshi, 2015; Apuke, 2016). From a conceptual standpoint, the letter bomb

assassination of Dele Giwa has generated multiple explanatory narratives without definitive judicial resolution. Among the dominant explanations are claims that the assassination was connected to investigations into the Gloria Okon drug trafficking controversy; suspicions arising from Giwa's interrogation by officials of the State Security Service shortly before his death; assertions that *Newswatch* magazine's investigative reports had threatened powerful political interests; suggestions that rivalries within the military establishment inadvertently drew Giwa into broader political conflicts; and arguments that the assassination was intended principally to intimidate the Nigerian press (Olorunyomi, 2000; Olukotun, 2002). None of these explanations has been legally established, yet their persistence demonstrates how unresolved political assassinations often become sites of competing public memory, political contestation and institutional mistrust (Anyanwu & Ijeh, 2024; Donohue, 2024). Consequently, the letter bomb has evolved into a powerful symbol of the precarious relationship between investigative journalism, political authority and democratic accountability in Nigeria (Musa & Antwi-Boateng, 2023).

Politics of Silence

The politics of silence extends beyond the simple absence of speech to encompass deliberate institutional, political or social practices through which information is withheld, investigations are delayed, accountability is obstructed or controversial issues remain officially unresolved (Kaura-aho, 2021; Hansen, 2022). Kaura-aho (2021) argues that silence should not always be interpreted as passivity because it often functions as a strategic political practice capable of preserving power, controlling public narratives and restructuring communicative spaces. Hansen (2022) similarly maintains that silence possesses communicative value because institutions frequently employ selective disclosure, omission and controlled visibility as mechanisms for shaping public understanding. Donohue (2024) further conceptualises silence as a form of complicity whenever institutions possessing the capacity to act deliberately refrain from doing so in situations demanding accountability. Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that silence may itself constitute a political action rather than merely the absence of communication (Li, 2021; Schudson, 2018). Within media and communication scholarship, the politics of silence has increasingly been associated with institutional opacity, policy ambiguity, self-censorship and the selective enforcement of justice (Apuke, 2016; Voltmer, 2013). Li (2021) argues that policy silence frequently operates as an informal governance strategy through which authorities avoid politically costly decisions while preserving institutional legitimacy. Similarly, Anyanwu and Ijeh (2024) contend that silence within media systems weakens journalism's watchdog function by allowing powerful interests to escape public scrutiny, while Aondover et al. (2024) identify political intimidation as a significant factor encouraging silence among investigative journalists in Nigeria. Viewed from this perspective, the enduring uncertainty surrounding the Dele Giwa assassination transcends an unresolved criminal investigation; it exemplifies how prolonged institutional silence can shape public memory, reinforce perceptions of impunity and influence journalists' willingness to pursue sensitive investigations (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Tumber & Waisbord, 2019). Accordingly, the politics of silence represents both an outcome of unequal power relations and a mechanism through which those relations are continually reproduced within democratic societies (McNair, 2017).

Empirical Review

In an empirical exploration of the operational environment of investigative reporters, Ogbuoshi (2015) authored the work titled

"Attitude and Perception of Media Practitioners in South East Nigeria towards Investigative Journalism." The primary aim of this study was to evaluate the realities, logistical opportunities, and psychological dispositions of journalists regarding the execution of deep investigative assignments. Anchored on the tenets of Libertarian and Social Responsibility Theories, the researcher adopted a concurrent triangulation mixed-method research design combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The target population comprised active media practitioners across the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Utilizing an explicit sampling frame, data were gathered via structured questionnaires and key informant interviews to capture the professional beliefs and attitudes of the practitioners. The major and relevant findings demonstrated that investigative journalism remains an exceptionally high-risk enterprise, with contemporary practitioners heavily influenced by historical memories of state hostility, notably symbolized by the unresolved 1986 parcel bomb assassination of Dele Giwa. Furthermore, empirical testing confirmed that the media ownership structure has a significant relationship with the actual practice and latitude allowed for investigative reporting. The study reached the conclusion that despite Nigeria's transition to democratic rule, entrenched institutional hostility against the press continues to degrade the professional attitudes and willingness of journalists to pursue sensitive exposés. Based on these insights, the researcher offered the recommendation that media organizations, national security agencies, and civic stakeholders must collaborate to provide institutionalized security frameworks and life insurance architectures for investigative journalists and their whistleblowing sources to mitigate physical hazards.

Examining the structural limitations of the press from a quantitative standpoint, an objective evaluation was published in the study titled "Investigative Journalism and Political Corruption in Nigeria: Unveiling the Impact and Challenges" (2025). The study set out with the clear aim to investigate the perceived efficacy of investigative reporting in uncovering state-level misconduct and the precise systemic barriers impeding this watchdog function. Driven by the conceptual tenets of the Normative Theory of the Press, the research executed a survey research design leveraging a quantitative descriptive methodology. The study's target population encompassed all registered media practitioners within the Lagos State Chapter of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ). Utilising a combination of systematic and purposive sampling techniques calibrated by Yamane's formula, the study secured a verified sample size of 120 media practitioners. The major and relevant findings demonstrated that while a vast majority of practitioners affirm that investigative journalism significantly exposes and curbs corruption, its performance is actively constrained by heavy external forces. Specifically, pressure from political actors through ownership manipulation and advertising boycotts emerged as a dominant hurdle (Mean = 3.62, SD = 1.26), closely followed by systemic underfunding and lack of dedicated operational research budgets (Mean = 3.58, SD = 1.43). The study reached the conclusion that a severe operational cleavage exists between the theoretical democratic capabilities of the press and the practical economic and political blockades deployed by elites. Based on these insights, the study recommended that independent funding pools and non-governmental endowment funds must be established for media houses to protect editorial independence from state and owner-driven interference.

Shifting the analytical focus to macro-level structural constraints, Apuke (2016) conducted an assessment titled "Exploring the Factors Affecting Press Freedom in Nigeria." The central objective of this

research was to critically evaluate the environmental, legal, and political impediments that restrict the operational autonomy of media professionals. Grounded theoretically in the Authoritarian and Social Responsibility frameworks, the study adopted a qualitative descriptive design utilizing a secondary data analysis methodology. The research scope involved an extensive review of documented historical records, constitutional provisions, press laws, and academic journals mapping state-press relations in Nigeria. The major and relevant findings revealed that press freedom within the Nigerian state is fundamentally paradoxical, existing prominently as a constitutional guarantee on paper while being routinely violated in daily practice. This operational restriction manifests through institutionalized secrecy, restrictive clauses within statutory frameworks, direct bureaucratic censorship, and the threat of physical coercion. The study concluded that formal constitutional protections are consistently overridden by non-statutory political pressures and administrative legal traps, compelling a widespread culture of defensive self-censorship among media practitioners. To rectify these systemic deficiencies, the researcher proffered the recommendation that the federal government must provide ironclad statutory and judicial backups to constitutional press freedom clauses, while systematically dismantling legacy laws that restrict journalists from accessing public records and reporting on state activities.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Political Economy Theory of the Media and the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press. The Political Economy Theory, advanced by scholars such as Dallas Smythe (1960), Herbert Schiller (1969), Vincent Mosco (2009) and Robert McChesney (2008), explains how political and economic power structures influence media operations, the production of news and the flow of information. The theory is particularly relevant

because it provides a framework for understanding how state institutions, security agencies and elite interests may shape media freedom, influence investigations and contribute to institutional silence in politically sensitive cases. Complementing this perspective is the Social Responsibility Theory developed by the Hutchins Commission (1947), which argues that while the press enjoys freedom, it bears an obligation to pursue truth, ensure accountability and serve the public interest irrespective of political pressure. Together, these theories explain the persistent tension between investigative journalism's watchdog function and the capacity of political power to suppress, influence or discourage critical reporting, thereby providing an appropriate analytical lens for examining the Dele Giwa assassination and its enduring implications for investigative journalism in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative digital ethnographic methodology, utilizing thematic analysis of 545 user-generated Facebook comments responding to a Reni B storytelling video about Dele Giwa's letter-bomb assassination; of these, approximately 300 comments were retained as analytically relevant while ~245 peripheral remarks (greetings, jokes, compliments) were excluded. The dataset constituted naturally occurring public discourse, collective memory and competing explanatory frames, which were anonymised and coded iteratively to surface recurrent patterns, dominant narratives and dissenting perspectives. Analytical procedures combined inductive and deductive coding cycles, constant comparison and reflexive memoing to ensure conceptual saturation and analytic rigor. Ethical protocols for internet-mediated research were observed, including removal of identifiers and adherence to public-domain data norms, rendering the approach apt for interrogating digital constructions of historical political violence and informing contemporary media accountability debates.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

RQ1: Major Competing Explanations Surrounding the Letter Bomb Assassination of Dele Giwa

Pseudonames	Comment Summary	Explanation Type
Michael Adeyemi	"Letter bombs were sophisticated tech, only government or military could afford it."	Government involvement
Grace Okafor	"Colonel Akilu called Giwa's wife about a package."	Suspicious government official
Daniel Obong	"Kayode Soyinka bent down before explosion, suspicious timing."	Visitor involvement
Stella Nwosu	"Gloria Okon case linked to Giwa's investigation."	Drug case connection
Joseph Ekanem	"Envelope bore official seal, either government or disguised actor."	Disguise theory
Ibrahim Lawal	"Buba Marwa delivered the letter."	Delivery suspect
Chinyere Udeh	"Fela's song: 'Who killed Dele Giwa? Na Baba.'"	Cultural framing of government blame
Patrick Olorunfemi	"CIA or foreign intelligence may have been involved."	Foreign involvement
Ngozi Eze	"Government blocked investigations, proving complicity."	Politics of silence
Samuel Ojo	"IBB directly responsible."	Direct blame

The comments reveal a wide spectrum of competing explanations for Dele Giwa's assassination, but they converge on suspicion of state involvement. Figures like Michael Adeyemi and Ngozi Eze emphasize that the sophistication of a letter bomb in 1986 points to government or military actors, while Grace Okafor and Ibrahim Lawal highlight suspicious officials such as Colonel Akilu and Buba Marwa, who were linked to the delivery of the parcel. Daniel Obong raises doubts about Kayode Soyinka's presence, suggesting his

actions before the explosion were unusual. Others, like Stella Nwosu, connect the killing to Giwa's investigation of the Gloria Okon drug scandal, while Patrick Olorunfemi speculates about foreign intelligence involvement. Cultural memory, captured in Chinyere Udeh's reference to Fela Kuti's song, frames the government as the prime suspect in popular consciousness. Overall, the explanations range from direct government culpability to foreign conspiracy, but all underscore the political nature of the crime.

RQ2: Influence on Investigative Journalism and Media Resistance in Nigeria

Pseudonames	Comment Summary	Implication for Journalism
Funke Balogun	“Since Giwa, no journalist has done uncompromising investigative journalism like him.”	Decline in fearless reporting
Chukwu	“His death shows government silences threats.”	Journalists self-censor
Ruth Adebayo	“Blocking Gani Fawehinmi’s legal pursuit discouraged media resistance.”	Weakening of legal support
Victor Musa	“Comparisons to Sowore today show continuity of state repression.”	Modern parallels
Helen	“Nigeria lost important voices like Giwa, Bola Ige, Funsho Williams.”	Pattern of silencing
Francis Okon	“His grave tampered with, symbol of erasing truth.”	Suppression of historical memory
Olatunji	“Journalists now avoid confronting government directly.”	Fear-driven caution
Nwachukwu	“Songs and oral memory keep resistance alive.”	Cultural resistance

The assassination had a chilling effect on investigative journalism in Nigeria. Funke Balogun laments that no journalist has matched Giwa’s uncompromising style since his death, while Emmanuel Chukwu notes that the killing demonstrated how the government silences threats, pushing journalists toward self-censorship. Ruth Adebayo highlights how blocking Gani Fawehinmi’s legal pursuit discouraged media resistance, weakening institutional support for press freedom. Victor Musa draws parallels with modern figures like Sowore, showing continuity in state repression. Helen Igbinedion

situates Giwa’s death within a broader pattern of silencing dissenting voices such as Bola Ige and Funsho Williams. Meanwhile, Francis Okon points to the tampering of Giwa’s grave as symbolic of erasing truth, and Blessing Olatunji stresses that journalists now avoid direct confrontation with government. Yet, as Peter Nwachukwu observes, cultural forms like songs and oral traditions keep resistance alive, even when formal journalism retreats. The assassination thus reshaped the landscape of Nigerian media, instilling fear but also inspiring cultural resilience.

RQ.3. Implications of Politics of Silence for Press Freedom & Democratic Accountability

Pseudoname	Comment Summary	Implication
Maryam Sule	“Government blocked police investigation.”	Suppression of justice
Anthony Okorie	“Lawyer Gani Fawehinmi prevented from suing.”	Legal obstruction
Ibrahim Yusuf	“No investigation till today, shows state complicity.”	Lack of accountability
Chioma Eze	“Evidence taken to the grave, killers protected.”	Culture of impunity
David Oladipo	“Government shielding suspects proves guilt.”	State secrecy
Esther Obi	“If government was innocent, they would have investigated.”	Silence as admission
Collins Adebajo	“Other assassinations (Kudirat, Bola Ige) also unresolved.”	Pattern of political silence
Juliet Nnamdi	“Nigeria cannot progress with unresolved crimes.”	Democratic stagnation

The politics of silence surrounding Giwa’s death has profound implications for press freedom and democratic accountability. Maryam Sule and Anthony Okorie highlight how police investigations and legal actions were blocked, signaling deliberate obstruction. Chioma Eze and David Oladipo argue that shielding suspects and burying evidence entrenched impunity, making accountability impossible. Esther Obi insists that if government were innocent, it would have investigated to clear its name, but silence became a tacit confession. Collins Adebajo draws parallels with other unresolved assassinations, such as Kudirat Abiola and Bola Ige, showing a recurring refusal to resolve politically sensitive murders. Finally, Juliet Nnamdi concludes that Nigeria cannot progress with unresolved crimes, as they erode trust in institutions and weaken democratic accountability. Collectively, these perspectives show how the refusal to investigate Giwa’s death symbolizes a broader crisis: when governments silence truth, they undermine both press freedom and the foundations of democracy.

Discussion of Findings

The competing explanations in this study, ranging from direct

government culpability (Michael Adeyemi, Samuel Ojo) to foreign intelligence speculation (Patrick Olorunfemi), agree strongly with Ogbuoshi’s (2015) empirical finding that historical memories of state hostility, epitomised by Giwa’s assassination, continue to shape journalists’ perceptions of risk. Both datasets converge on the idea that the assassination was not an isolated act but a systemic demonstration of state power against dissent. Where they diverge, however, is in the attribution of agency: while the public discourse foregrounds specific individuals (Akilu, Marwa, Soyinka) and cultural framings (Fela’s song), the empirical study abstracts these suspicions into structural hostility and institutionalised risk. Anchored in Political Economy Theory, the present study emphasizes how material control of violence and secrecy by the state produces competing narratives, while Social Responsibility Theory in Ogbuoshi’s work frames the press as ethically bound to resist despite danger. The philosophical tension lies in whether truth is best pursued through naming culprits or through structural critique, both approaches reveal the same underlying reality of state repression.

The comments analysed here show how Giwa’s death instilled fear,

curtailed fearless reporting (Funke Balogun, Emmanuel Chukwu), and forced resistance into cultural memory (Peter Nwachukwu). This aligns with Ogbuoshi's (2015) conclusion that investigative journalism remains high-risk, and Apuke's (2016) finding that constitutional guarantees are undermined by coercive practices. Yet, the Lagos-based 2025 study adds nuance: while practitioners affirm investigative journalism's efficacy in exposing corruption, they highlight ownership manipulation and underfunding as systemic barriers. Thus, while the public discourse emphasizes psychological fear and cultural silencing, empirical studies stress structural-economic constraints. The Political Economy Theory of the Media anchors this divergence: Giwa's assassination symbolizes political hostility, while ownership and funding structures represent economic hostility. Social Responsibility Theory insists that journalists must persist despite these pressures, but the lived reality is that both fear and economics converge to weaken investigative journalism. Philosophically, this demonstrates that repression is not only physical but also systemic, embedding silence into both the psyche and the material conditions of the press.

The politics of silence identified in this study, suppression of justice (Maryam Sule), legal obstruction (Anthony Okorie), and democratic stagnation (Juliet Nnamdi), mirrors Apuke's (2016) finding that constitutional guarantees of press freedom are paradoxical, existing only on paper while being violated in practice. Both datasets converge on the theme of institutionalised secrecy: whether through blocking investigations or embedding restrictive clauses in law, silence becomes a tool of governance. The Lagos 2025 study adds another dimension, showing how advertising boycotts and ownership manipulation create economic silences that parallel political ones. Thus, while the public discourse frames silence as complicity and impunity, empirical studies frame it as systemic blockade. Anchored in Political Economy Theory, silence is interpreted as a deliberate strategy of elites to preserve power, while Social Responsibility Theory critiques the ethical failure of institutions to uphold accountability. Philosophically, the convergence of these perspectives reveals that silence is not merely absence of speech but an active political economy, a weaponised void that erodes democratic accountability and perpetuates authoritarian residues within a nominal democracy.

Conclusion

An African proverb reminds us that no secret remains hidden forever because, even when human beings are silent, time and truth eventually give it a voice. The renewed public appeals by the children of Dele Giwa in 2025 for the Nigerian government to reopen the investigation into their father's assassination demonstrate that unresolved injustices rarely disappear with the passage of time. Rather than conceal wrongdoing or rely on the hope that history will forget, individuals and institutions should embrace accountability, acknowledge past misdeeds where necessary, and seek justice and reconciliation. The unresolved deaths of journalists such as Dele Giwa and Lawrence Irobekhan Okojie underscore the urgent need to revisit cases that have remained shrouded in mystery, not only to provide closure for families but also to reinforce the rule of law and deter future attacks on press freedom. As the widely attributed observation often credited to Amartya Sen reminds us, *a society is better served without a government than without journalists*, because a free, courageous, and protected press remains indispensable to transparency, democratic accountability, and the defence of the public interest.

Recommendations

RC. 1. Civil society coalitions, international human rights organizations, and independent judicial panels should spearhead a truth and reconciliation commission to investigate unresolved political assassinations, beginning with Dele Giwa's case, thereby dismantling competing narratives and restoring public trust.

RC.2. Media unions (NUJ), professional associations, and global watchdogs such as Reporters Without Borders and UNESCO should establish institutionalized safety frameworks and independent funding pools for investigative journalists, reducing fear and enabling resistance to move from cultural memory back into active reporting.

RC.3. Regional bodies like ECOWAS, the African Union, and Nigeria's Human Rights Commission working with independent courts should enforce statutory reforms and accountability mechanisms, ensuring that silence and impunity no longer erode press freedom and democratic governance.

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