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Illusion and Reality of Press Freedom in the Performance of the Watchdog Function of the Press in Nigeria

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Abstract

This article analyzed the illusion and reality of press freedom in the Nigerian context. It also identified the real obstacle to press freedom in Nigeria and pointed out how press freedom would be realized in Nigeria. Theoretical framework of this article was anchored on two of the normative theories of the press namely: The Authoritarian Theory and the social Responsibility Theory. In the article, write-ups from available relevant literature were considered and used to analyze the illusion and reality of press freedom in Nigeria. In the conclusion, it was noted that the highly desired press freedom would unfortunately remain unrealizable for as long as humans remain imperfect and the system of things imperfect. It was therefore recommended that meanwhile, both the government and the press should learn to manage themselves with love. While government officials should endeavour to eschew corruption and greed and embark on programmes and policies that would make for national development and beneficial to the masses, the press should also perform their functions devoid of corruption and greed and in line with their code of ethics in order to give the impression that they can carry out their press duties with responsibility and thus build government confidence in them.

Keywords: *Illusion, Reality, Press freedom, Performance, Watchdog function of the press, Nigeria.*

Introduction

The need to inform and to be informed is an inherent human need that as we go from day to day becomes so crucial that no one can afford to ignore the natural urge to fill it especially in a democratic society. Of course, the basic freedoms of a democratic society are freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of petition (Agee, Ault and Emery, 1985:41). The importance of these freedoms (especially freedom of the press) can never be over stressed. The issue of press freedom is one of astute concern not just to the journalism terrain of Nigeria mass media or press alone, neither that of the African continent nor of the developing nations of the world but of the entire globe (Okoye, 2009:247). Of course, unhindered communication or free flow of information gives life, unity, and stability to any given society. According to Ike and Udeze (2015:240), all the component units that make up any society are not only organized, but are held together through information flow that emanates from the complex web of communication channels within the society.

All the same, granted that free flow of information is crucial to the peaceful and harmonious existence of any given society, it is not always guaranteed as the different sectors of the society may have some different concerns that might affect free information flow.

Of course, every society, according to Nwankwo (1984:44) cited in Ike and Udeze (2015) is made up of five major sectors:

- (i) The economic and technological sector which adapts the society to its physical and natural environment;
- (ii) The political sector with power to formulate and implement public policy;
- (iii) The legal and administrative sector which co-ordinates the activities of other sectors;
- (iv) The cultural sector which socializes individuals into the society's ideological and valued processes, and
- (v) The communication sector which shares the activities of each sector with not only itself but with other sectors for the overall benefit of the society.

The communication sector through the media industry as a social institution releases a large amount of the information that flows through the society on daily basis. In view of this, the general public has naturally come to look up to the media for the needed information that would help the society to function peacefully and cope with the harsh reality of life's conditions. Of course, virtually all over the world today, the socio-economic and political situation is becoming so adverse that the masses groan over the weight of it. Many nations of the world look to their governments (and ideally, it should be so) to provide solutions to the socio-economic and political issues affecting their citizens. Some even attribute these issues affecting them negatively to their government's inability to govern well, perhaps, because of corruption and greed among government officials, and their lack of genuine concern for the welfare of the people they govern. These ones tend to believe that there might be some shadowy things about their government operations that should come to the open so that the masses would get to know about them and be given the opportunity to have a say in some matters affecting them. Regarding this situation, the mass media of communication play a very significant role of information dissemination, for the benefit of the general public. But unfortunately, the political sector of the society, based on what might be its concerns, often interfere with press freedom.

According to Martin, 1983:61-62) cited in Ume-Nwagbo, (1995:26) most African government strongly believe in the concept of guided media, which expects the mass media in developing societies not only to become instruments of national policy for mass education and mobilization, but also that mass media operators become fully partisan and committed ideological and political role players in all matters of nation building. In other words, journalists and gatekeepers should judge, evaluate and select, the news, and programmes they present from a position of commitment, to promote national goals; support authority, and for a new social order. So, it is quite obvious that press freedom (even globally) has remained a contending issue.

Objectives of this Article

The main objective of this article is to analyse the illusion and reality of press freedom in the performance of the watchdog function of the press in the Nigerian context. Specific objectives of the article are to:

1. Identify the real obstacle to press freedom in Nigeria and
2. Point out how press freedom would be realized.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this article is anchored on two out of the four normative theories of the press as postulated by Siebert et al (1956). Obasi, (2013:63) wrote that according to these theories, press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates. The two of these theories on focus here are Authoritarian Theory and Social Responsibility Theory.

Authoritarian Theory

The Authoritarian Theory which was the oldest of the theories of the press places the state and its ruling authorities very high while the citizens are looked upon as insignificant in comparison. According to Obilade (1999:24) cited in Ndolo (2011:233), the theory is based on the idea that the government has absolute power. The press is simply an instrument for the achievement of government policies; the press should not criticize the government or any government official; the idea expressed by the press should reflect prevailing political and moral values, and the press is subject to strict legal control. Thus laws and other measures are used by the government to keep the press under strict control in the interest of the government. Of course, this so played out in the matter of press freedom in Nigeria that no matter the weight of the clamour for press freedom, it still remains an illusion as the ruling authorities are averse to the watchdog posture of the press.

Social Responsibility Theory

This theory holds that freedom of the press should be exercised with a sense of responsibility to the society, (Ndolo, 2011:234). According to Mc Quail, (1987) cited in Okunna (1995:24), one of the main foundations of the theory is the acceptance of the view that in media work, certain standards of performance can be stated and should be followed. So, the theory recognizes that journalists who are the press men are rational enough as to have the capability to act with a sense of responsibility. Of course, this is what is required from the press, to perform their functions in line with the spirit of social Responsibility Theory.

Illusion of Press Freedom in Nigeria

The idea of press freedom, as sweet as it could sound to the ears of those yearning for it (the press, civil society groups, the general public) and no matter how the Nigerian constitution paints a picture of it, may likely remain just a good idea in the hearts of many but exercising it as desired by those clamouring for it may continue to be an illusion (even in many nations of the world). In Nigeria, various reasons could account for this, including, (1) socio-political and economic environment (2) feeling of insecurity and lack of trust.

1. Socio-political and Economic environment

The political history of Nigeria is a sad narrative. Granted that at the beginning of Nigeria's existence as an independent nation from first October, 1960, Nigerians were exuding happiness and brimming with expectations of many good things to come, but those things did not come as expected and their excitement did not last just as its democratic rule did not last. In 1966, Nzeogwu's coup brought a change that Nigerians believe had done incalculable damage to the socio-political and economic life of Nigerians. The military rule which the coup ushered in (and which Nigerians were wishing away as it were) lingered in one way or the other to the extent that today it is a fact that the number of years Nigeria had been under military rule really amounted to twenty eight. Many Nigerians believe that military rule brought to citizens of the country untold consequences. Ndolo (2015:6) wrote: Twenty eight (28) years of military dictatorship completely destroyed the social, health, educational, political, military, infrastructural and economic fabric of the nation. Consequently; Nigeria became the 15th Poorest nation in the world, populated by very helplessly and hopelessly poor, hungry and unemployed citizens. The psyche of Nigerians became militarized leading themselves only to violent solutions and approaches to life.

There are some points in what Ndolo wrote that we want to isolate as they have a bearing on the nature of relationship between the government and the ruled (particularly gentlemen of the press).

- (i) Military rule is dictatorial
- (ii) Nigerians became very poor.
- (iii) The psyche of Nigerians became militarized.

(i) Military Rule is Dictatorial

Of course, military rule is never a democratic rule; rather it is dictatorial and from what has been known about dictatorial governments, it wields power and authority in a commanding way. Under dictatorial government, the ruled are usually suppressed and their freedom of expression (including the freedom of the press) often restricted as they are not considered rational enough as to contribute ideas pertaining to governance to the ruling authorities.

Such political environment (in the renaissance era) produced the authoritarian theory which was the oldest of the theories of the press. The Authoritarian Theory of the press places the state and its ruling authorities very high while the Citizens are seen as insignificant in comparison. Ogbuoshi (2012) wrote concerning the assumptions of the authoritarian theory of the press thus:

The Authoritarian theory promotes top-down-flow approach. The mass media in this system, act as the servant of government and are highly censored not to publish any unfavourable reports against the government in power. The theory justifies advance censorship and punishment from the ruling government. This theory believes that the state is greater and more important than its members. The theory postulates that human beings are irrational, and that everybody is not equal. It states that human beings need rational leader and that the leader has to say what will happen in a polity.

Agee, Ault and Emery (1985:43) wrote that this authoritarian concept of the relationship between citizens and the state could brook no challenge from those who thought the rulers were reflecting error, not truth. The foregoing captured what Nigerians went through under military government. Various kinds of decrees were promulgated to gag the press. Olaide (2009), P:2-4) cited in Ike and Udeze. (2025: 245, 246) noted that the intervention of the revolutionary (military) government of General Aguiyi-Ironsi in 1966, which was welcomed initially based on the disappointment experienced by the people from the then politicians who made sumptuous promises during Nationalist struggle which its fulfillment appeared to the contrary, laid the worst foundation for oppressing the press. General Yakubu Gowon who succeeded General Aguiyi-Ironsi in his contribution to this oppression promulgated the Emergency Decree of 1966 which made arrest and detention of citizens without warrant lawful and also empowered the Inspector-General of police and other officers of the same or higher rank to search any newspaper office or premises in Nigeria without warrant or notice; based on which Daily Times office (Weekend Times) was searched by the police in 1968. The Decree was criticized by Nigerians amongst who is Alhaji Lateef Jakende (1974) who observed that the Army's Emergency Decree of 1966 was sufficient to turn Nigerian press into a captive press.

These were just the initial blows to the freedom of the Press. More blows kept coming. Still pointing out further draconian laws meant to cripple the free practice of journalism profession, Olaide (2009, p: 2-4) cited in Ike and Udeze, (2015:246) goes on to say: The administration also proceeded in 1967 to promulgate another decree titled, the Newspaper Prohibition of Circulation Decree 1967 which empowered the Head of Federal Military Government to restrict the circulation of any newspaper in Nigeria where he is satisfied that it is detrimental to the interest of the federation or any state thereof within the federation which may subsist within 12 months unless restricted or extended by the Head of State as the case may be and refusal to comply entitled such journalist to 6 months imprisonment and or N500 fine. As if this was not enough, Trade Disputes (Emergency Provision) Amendment Decree No. 53 of

1969 was also promulgated which made it an offence for any person to publish in a newspaper, television or radio or by any means of mass communication, any matter which by reason of dramatization or other reflects in the manner of its presentation was likely to cause public alarm or industrial unrest. Looking at these Decrees carefully, it will be discovered that the major motive of this administration was to shut men of the press up.

As the military headship of Nigeria moved from the hands of one military officer to the other, decrees of various kinds kept emerging. The Obasanjo administration promulgated on 8th April 1979, Newspaper Public Officers Report Decree which in its section I provided that any person who published or reproduced in any form whether written or otherwise, any statement, rumor, or report alleging that a public officer has in any manner been engaged in corrupt practices or has in any manner corruptly enriched himself or any other person being a statement, rumor, report which is false in any material particular, shall be guilty of an offence and be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years without option of fine. (Ike and Udeze, 2015:246).

Regarding this decree, Ike and Udeze (2015:246) wrote that Nigerians in general as well as men of the press in particular accepted their fate. They highlighted the observation of Alhaji Lateef Jakande as cited in Ogbondah (1992, p.2), the then Managing Director of Nigeria Tribune, thus:

The decree would stifle criticisms and offer protection to corrupt officers.... Supposed a reporter comes to know that a certain minister purchased a row of buildings (with public money) in a particular street. If he (the reporter) prints that and it just happens that the Minister used his wife's name to disguise the purchase, the reporter would be liable under this law... The only way is not to publish it at all. Few years later, a similar decree was also promulgated. In 1984, Decree No. 4 of 1984 otherwise known as the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusations) Decree 1984 was introduced. The Decree made it an offence for a Newspaper or any wireless Telegraph Station in Nigeria to publish or transmit any message, rumour, report or statement which is false, in particular that any public officer has in any manner corruptly enriched himself or any other person. The Degree also made any person found guilty of this offence to be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years without option of fine and in the case of corporate body, to fine not less than \$10,000 (Ogbondah, 1992), cited in Ike and Udeze (2015:247).

The regime of the only 'Military President' Nigeria ever had, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida also used decrees, even the one targeted at press censorship. Regarding his military administration, Ike and Udeze (2015:247) wrote: It wooed the press by pretending to undo the atrocities of the previous administration but within a year Babangida and his men also began to censor the press. The administration repealed Decree No 4 of 1984 and reintroduced another Decree titled the State Security (Detention of persons) Decree 2 1984 which was used to deal ruthlessly with the Press.

Still in the chain of Military Head of State in Nigeria, General Sanni Abacha also took actions against journalists in a remarkable way. Ike and Udeze (2015:247) expressed it in this way, "The regime did not rely much on promulgation of decrees but on extra judicial acts to repress the press."

(ii) Nigerians became very poor

As noted by Ndolo, military dictatorship completely destroyed, among others, socio-economic fabric of the nation; hence Nigeria became very poor. From every indication, the poor state of the nation extends even to today that the country is said to be a democratic nation. Significantly,

Nigeria lacks basic amenities. It is no news that ‘no motorable road’ is a feature that marks Nigeria rural hinterland across the states of the federation. Even some notable cities in Nigeria cannot boast of many good, pothole-free motorable roads. To talk about costly fuel, crippling energy issue, meager supply of potable water, epileptic educational system, is merely to talk about the obvious. As Nigerians languish in poverty, corruption and greed take the centre stage soiling the hands of those in want of heart. In this circumstance, money becomes a ‘king’ and the pursuit of it, a ‘battle field’ where the war is fought without conscience. Ndolo (2015:6) captured this situation thus: Money has become an end rather than a means to an end. People believe that money is “like the Kingdom of Heaven”, once they acquire it and consume it conspicuously, everything else will fall upon them. Nigerians therefore get out, acquire and amass wealth through avenues very inimical to rational development. With regard to the high level of corruption in Nigeria, Ndolo (2015:6) wrote, “Nigeria today is the 36th most corrupt nation in the world where gratification, egunje, PR, kick back, Family Support, Ghana-must-go and Refurbishment have been shamelessly and blatantly classified as Culture.”

How does this situation affect journalists, their work, and press freedom? Ndolo (2015:7) wrote:

...there is a high level of corruption in the media. Journalists demand money before they can write stories or give coverage. They collect sandwich, extort gifts and gratifications either directly or indirectly all in attempts to influence news judgment. We now witness a lot of “cash and Carry” or “Cajun-pepper” journalism. For the same reason they become chatter boxes and sycophantic megaphones of government.

From this, it becomes clear that the trust and credibility which press men would have built around them are already lost. Government officials can always cash in on this situation and decided for themselves when to trust and when not to trust the press. For instance, if a journalist carried out an objective criticism of government programmes and policies (instead of at all times eulogizing them), it would easily be construed as an opponent-sponsored criticism, hence government would not hesitate to descend heavily on that journalist.

So, the same corruption that has ruined the socio-economic fabric of the nation has also wrecked professionalism in the journalism profession contributing to why government officials make efforts to gag the press.

(iii) The psyche of Nigerians became militarized.

No doubt, Nigeria is today seen as a democratic nation. Certainly there are some rights and privileges that the citizens are supposed to enjoy in a democratic nation. One of such is enjoyment of some critical freedoms. According to Agee, et al (1985:41), the basic freedoms of a democratic society are freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and freedom of petition. Upon these freedoms rest freedom of religious expression, of political choice, of intellectual growth and of communication of information and ideas. They went further to say that a society possessing and using these freedoms will advance and change as it exercises democratic processes (Agee, et al, 1985:43).

Now let us single out freedom of the press and consider it in the context of Nigerian environment. Could it be said convincingly that freedom of the press is a recognized tenet in Nigeria as it is in the democratic western world? What is the position of the Nigeria constitution regarding press freedom? Ike and Udeze (2015:245) wrote that the constitutional provisions in the various Nigerian constitutions do not clearly guarantee the freedom of journalists in the performance of their roles of monitoring the governments. In this regard, Nwanolue and Ude-Akpe (2011, P:8) cited in Ike and Udeze (2015:253) state that perhaps: The reviewed 1999

constitution and that of the Nigerian press council drafted in 1999 are better than the previous constitutions used in the country, a critical look at the two writs reveals that the provision made thereto did not stipulate any consequences from the violation of journalists right to freedom of expression; and that no penalty whatsoever whether in form of fines or jail terms was encoded in the writs for those who would dare to stop journalism from exercising their right to freedom of expression. They argue that the unpleasant implication of this is that freedom of expression for the journalists is seen as the individual right to freedom of expression for respective journalist and not as legal entity which had been empowered by the constitution of the land. Section 21 of the 1979 and 22 of 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, have not spoken well of freedom of the press in their minds.

Accordingly journalists in Nigeria carry out their journalistic duties in constant fear of the sledge hammer of government authorities who may misconstrue the reports of journalists as sedition and take action against them. Ndolo (2011:8) wrote in this regard: Journalists do not enjoy freedom of expression and are denied access to information due to the official secrets act which provides a cover for civil servants and others to hid information. Journalists are killed, jailed, horsewhipped, branded coup plotters, broken bottled used to share their heads, their media houses closed, newspapers and magazines proscribed and licenses withdrawn even if temporarily. Do we have a better way of expressing this kind of treatment being given to journalists than describing it as militarize action?

Well, with regard to the Official Secret Act for which many journalists had been mistreated, we still look forward to seeing how things would turn out with the signing of the freedom of Information Act. As Ike and Udeze (2015:252) noted: On May 27 2011, Nigeria passed the Freedom of Information Act which has been under consideration for many years. The Act makes it possible for a journalist or any Nigerian for that matter to request information from an official of government, and receive the information requested for. It equally gives the journalist or any Nigerian the power to take a public official to court, who has breached this law and to obtain judgment that can send the individual to jail. Though the signing brought too many jubilations and praises by individuals, groups and associations whose personal and collective activities are directly and indirectly affected by the Act, the arising issue of the day is the applicable implications of the Act on the official Secret Act.

They went further to point out, “Good as the asserting of the Act may sound; the effect has not been seen as many government activities are still being shrouded in secrecy. (Ike and Udeze, 2015:259) Of course it is when the effect is seen that democracy could be seen to be in action regarding that situation.

Generally speaking, militarize psyche can hardly lead to democratic action, so it becomes necessary that Nigeria should practice democracy to be seen as a democratic nation by granting her citizens the rights of a democratic society especially the rights to freedom of expression and press freedom.

2. Feeling of insecurity and lack of trust

Nwuneli, (1985:149) wrote: we have undoubtedly borrowed idea of “freedom of the press” from culture where the press pretends to be “Watchdog” for “the people”. To what extent can our press serve as watchdog for our people?

The impression given here is that press freedom in Nigeria, for instance, is still an illusion. Buttressing this point, he wrote, “.....we do wish to point out that the press in Nigeria will be only as free as the individual Nigerian is allowed to be. Our society is not sympathetic to individual freedom and to the notion of a free flow of information’ (Nwuneli, 1985:149).

Providing further reasons for the assertion he wrote: We are afraid to let people know what they should know: perhaps because we have come to realize that knowledge is power. Unless care is taken to guarantee freedom of information for every individual, our journalists will make little headway by invoking special privilege for the press.

Obviously, the feeling of insecurity as alluded to here as a factor hindering people from divulging information greatly affects government authorities as it is observable that they often tend to keep some aspects of government operations secret, and frown at the inquisitive eyes of the press. In this regard, Ike and Udeze (2015:243) wrote that while people in government want to keep the operations of government secret, media professionals on the other hand want to subject government operation to the minutest scrutiny in order to ensure that government remains accountable to the people. It is a tug-of-war, as it were. Agee, Adult and Emery, (1985:42) wrote: Today's journalist knows that there remains a constant challenge to the freedoms to print, to criticize, and to report and that, therefore, the people's right to know is in constant danger. This is true in the democratic western world, where freedom of the press is a recognized tenet, as well as in the larger portion of the world where it is denied. And it is true of the twentieth-century additions to the printing press: film, radio, television, and cable.

They went further to write concerning this matter thus: Very naturally, then, these freedom will come under attack from those opposed to any change that might diminish their own power or position in society - today as in past eras. The press occupying a key role in the battle for these basic freedoms is a particular target. (Agree et al, 1985:43).we Nworah, (2021:11) wrote that there have been reports of some media practitioners, being manhandled by security agents, and their camera and other equipment seized. Some have also been arrested and spent days in police call.

Truly, no government in the world would like to condone anything that would diminish its power and authority. Government officials usually entertain the feeling that the watchdog function of the press and the press' ability to mold public opinion make the press powerful hence the need for censorship. Regarding the control of the media, Ike and Udeze (2015:241) wrote, "The reason for control as often put forward by government authorities was that the media were too powerful and therefore should be controlled.

The Real Obstacle to Press Freedom

Ike and Udeze, (2015:241) wrote: The struggle to control the communication sector is as old as creation. In the eighteenth century which marked the advent of printing press, the mass media were in the hands of royal or religious leaders who exercised control in freedom of expression. The nineteenth century saw the extraordinary struggles to control freedom of the press. Freedom of the Press 2003 – A global survey of media Independence rated 115 of 193 countries as either not free only partly free. However, subtle manipulation of the news may occur even in contries that enjoy freedom of the press (Awake, 2005: 9)

But why should a struggle that is as old as creation continue till date, even without an end in sight? Think! If all the governments of the world become responsive to the needs of their subjects (loving them and caring very much for their welfare) and are devoid of corruption and greed, for instance, would there really be need for watchdogs to keep monitoring them? On the other hand, if all the citizens of various countries of the world become clothed with love and righteousness and are purged of corruption and greed while obediently supporting their rulers, would the government authorities still be eager to gag them or take away their freedom of expression in any way? These thought-provoking questions make it easier to identify the root

of the problem that has resulted in a stiff battle between government authorities and the gentlemen of the press regarding press freedom. The problem or the real obstacle to press freedom simply put is that all humans are imperfect and operating an imperfect system. There is no perfect government anywhere in the world, hence there would be no guarantee that they would use their power and authority in the most desirable way.

On the other hand, journalists themselves are much the same with government officials in existing in an imperfect state. No journalist anywhere in the world could be said to be totally without corruption and greed, and possess absolute wisdom and sense of justice and so would not abuse the power of the pen. As Mahatma Gandhi said, the sole aim of journalism should be service. The press is a great power, but just as an unchained torrent of water submerges whole countryside and devastates crops, even so as uncontrolled pen serves but to destroy. (Kamath, 2008:269). Of course, government officials know that journalists themselves are also imperfect and capable of reflecting imperfection in their performance of the watchdog function of the press hence it is increasingly difficult for governments in most countries of the world to invest much confidence in journalists as to grant them, in reality, press freedom.

For there to be real press freedom of expression and indeed the freedom of expression of every person living in any part of the world, there must be a special government that is devoid of corruption and greed, and has genuine concern for the welfare of the governed, hence it will not suppress the ruled nor deny them the freedom of expression which was why God gave them mouth and gift of speech.

The government is certainly what Jesus Christ came to publicize on earth and urged his disciples to pray for as contained in the Bible book of Matthew, (6:9,10), "...let your Kingdom come....." This special government as the Bible explains has Jesus Christ (a perfect person) as the king (Isaiah 9:6,7).

On the other hand, the subjects of this government must also be special citizens who had renounced unrighteousness including corruption and greed, and have accepted to live their lives in harmony with God's righteous standards, hence their freedom of expression would be no threat in any way.

The Reality of Press Freedom in Nigeria

From the perspective of what is being practically experienced or observed in the country today, could it be said that there is press freedom in Nigeria? Truly, yes or no answer to this question could generate arguments. The journalists who are the pressmen themselves often lament that they are not being given the freedom to carry out their journalistic functions of playing watchdog role, pointing out that the governments use various means to gag them.

On the part of government functionaries, they often feel that they have clear conscience because the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria contains some provisions which could be interpreted to give impression of press freedom. Momoh (2004) cited in Ike and Udeze (2015) submits that the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria contains some provisions which must be read together to have an idea of the constitutional base of the Nigeria press. Again, it is also on record that on May 27, 2011, Nigeria passed the freedom of Information Act which makes it possible for a journalist to request information from an official of government, and to receive the information requested for. Of course, the foregoing sounds good, and based on that, government authorities could say, "what's more, you (the press) are free to carry out your so called watchdog role as you may wish to"

But is it as simple as that? Ike and Udeze (2015) wrote that the constitutional provisions in the various Nigerian constitutions do not clearly guarantee the freedom of journalists in the performance of their role of monitoring the government. They cited Nwanolue and Ude-Akpe (2011, P:8) that state that perhaps the reviewed 1999 constitution and that of the Nigeria press council drafted in 1999 are better than the previous constitutions used in the country, a critical look at the two writs reveals that the provisions made thereto did not stipulate any consequences for the violation of journalist's right to freedom of expression; and that no penalty whatsoever whether in form of fines or jail terms were encoded in the writs for those who would dare to stop journalism from exercising their right to freedom of expression. They argued that the unpleasant implication of this is that freedom of expression for the journalists is seen as the individual right to freedom of expression for respective journalists and not as legal entity which had been empowered by the constitution of the land.

What that means is that from constitutional point, the press has been weakly given the freedom to operate in a way that could mean, "you are free to carry out your watchdog role but remember that we are also your watchdog and if you are not very careful, we can cut your tale or mouth and would get away with it." So, it is clear that the situation today is that Nigerian journalists are "free", as it were, to publish whatever they want to but do not have the guarantee of their safety if what is published or broadcast stirred the anger of those in positions of power. Of course, in the past, there were cases of unlawful detention of journalists like Chris Anyanwu, Bayo Onanuga, etc and even the death of Dele Giwa because of their performing their journalistic functions in a way that did not go down well with the superior authorities. So, by and large, the reality of press freedom in Nigeria is that journalists can make bold to carry out watchdog role and damn the consequences if they wished.

Conclusion

The long longed press freedom would unfortunately remain unrealizable for a very long time to come and so the battle for press freedom would keep raging for obvious reasons discussed in this article. Majorly, all humans (journalists and government officials) are imperfect and the system of things is also imperfect. Accordingly, the government would not likely dispose of their sledge hammer meant to hit the journalists to order if they dared to over watch and expose government operations in the way the government would find objectionable. Again, corruption and greed among governments officials heavily distract them from embarking on programmes and policies that would bring economic development and thus cater for the needs of the ruled.

On the part of journalists, they too are not free from corruption and greed hence they are at times seen to be distracted from performing their watchdog function in harmony with their code of practice. Therefore, as press freedom would continue to be illusive, needed efforts would be made to cope with the situation and ensure a measure of peace among the citizens of the Nigerian nation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the conclusion drawn:

1. Granted that all humans are imperfect, those with governmental authority should work hard to carry out their functions in harmony with their oath of office which does not allow for corruption and greed among government functionaries and thus probably reduce corruption and greed within them in order to serve the people better and be more transparent. This may reduce the constant urge by the press to look deeper and deeper into government operations which often is the bone of contention between the government and the press. Likely, in this way, there could be a measure of trust and peace in the environment.

2. Journalists on their part should tread with caution and endeavour to carry out their functions in harmony with their code of ethics. As stated in the preamble of the new code of ethics for Nigeria Journalists, journalism entails a high degree of public trust. To earn and maintain this trust, it is morally imperative for every journalist and the various news media to observe the highest professional and ethical standards. In the exercise of his duties, a journalist should always have a healthy regard for the public interest. (Udeze, 2012:139). Ndolo (2011:10) also wrote: There is need to improve the ethical environment of media institutions. The code of ethics for Nigeria journalists notwithstanding, media managers should take the lead in identifying the moral standards of their organization, coding those principles and ensuring that employees understand and abide by them. Regarding the need for news writers to carry out their duty with a sense of responsibility, Ibe (1977:4) wrote that there is, of course, some political importance attached to broadcast news. It is the political importance that makes the broadcast news writer strive for some balance and to always consider the sensitive nature of broadcasting. The writer recognizes that factual mistake, a wrong attribution, a misquotation, or a piece of reporting construed by some interested party as biased, will lead to pressures from important political, social, or economic groups. All this suggests that the broadcast news writer must be a responsible practitioner of the art. This would likely reduce corrupt practices among journalists and create a measure of trust in the eyes of the government.

So, if the governments govern with a sense of responsibility and press write with a sense of responsibility it would likely contribute to better government-press relationship and peaceful co-existence.

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