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Sycophancy and Corruption in Journalism Practice in the Nigerian Landscape

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Abstract

The paper critically examines the shades of corruption in the Nigerian media, the causative factors and the way forward, premised on the fact that journalism is expected to be a noble profession where incorruptibility is highly demanded but, unfortunately in Nigeria, it has become a figment of the prevailing social decay riddled with bribery and corruption. Journalism in Nigeria thrives on pettiness and corruption at the expense of professional ethics. Sensationalism, bribery or the brown envelope galore, sycophancy, moonlighting, Afghanistanism, misinformation and all what not have become recipes of the profession. These unwholesome journalistic practices have been attributed to poverty occasioned by the poor and delayed pay of journalists' salaries. Media ownership as well as media's crave for advertising profits due to commercialisation of news have also created much impetus for media sycophancy, thereby justifying the dictum "He who pays the piper, calls the tune".Media sycophancy has been blamed for the loss of integrity and credibility of journalists as well as the poor performance of political office holders in Nigeria. Adherence to professional ethics, improved pay package for journalists among others have been recommended as solutions to the prevailing corruption in journalism practice in Nigeria.

Keywords: Media Corruption, Journalism, Sycophancy, Brown Envelope Syndrome and Ethics

Introduction

The power of journalism in deepening democracies of nations cannot be over stressed based on the simple fact that democracy without a free press is unrealisable. Again, freedom of the press is not an end in itself but a means to the end of achieving a free society (Frankfuter qtd.in Silha, 2003). This was established as early as the 17th century, when enlightenment theorists had argued that publicity and openness provide the best protection against tyranny and the excesses of arbitrary rule (Holmes, 1991, cited in Coronel, 2014). In the early 1700s, the French political philosopher Montesquieu, raging against the secret accusations delivered by palace courtiers to the French king, prescribed publicity as the cure for the abuse of power. English and American thinkers later in that century had agreed with Montesquieu, having recognised the power of the press in making officials aware of the public's discontents and allowing government to rectify their errors and failures (Coronel, 2014).In this context, instead of the government checking the media, it is the responsibility of the media to the society to check the government for various lapses and excesses, so that the masses will decide whether to accept or reject a particular government and its policies (Sambe, 2005).

Since then, the press has been widely proclaimed as the "Fourth Estate," a co-equal branch of government that provides the checks and balances without which government cannot be effective. For this reason, democrats through the centuries have tended to take the Enlightenment's instrumentalist view of the press. Thomas Jefferson, for all his bitterness and resentment against journalistic criticism, celebrated the press arguing that only through the exchange of information and opinion through the press that the truth would emerge (Coronel, 2014). This was the central rationale for the America's First Amendment when Justice Hugo Black averred in the Pentagon Paper case that:

In the First Amendment the founding

> fathers gave the free press the protection it must have to fulfill its essential role in our democracy. The press was to serve the governed, not the governors. The government's power to censor the press was abolished so that the press would remain forever free to censure the government. The press was protected so that it could bare the secrets of government and inform the people. Only a free and unrestrained press can effectively expose deception in government (Cowan, 2017).

As the watchdog of the society, the media are vested with the responsibility of policing the affairs and policies of the government and reporting same objectively to the masses to make their informed judgments on such government policies. These journalists are expected to guard the public interest and to protect it from incompetence, corruption and misinformation (Odugbemi & Norris, 2010). There is a consensus that a free press helps in curbing corruption as well as improving citizens' accessibility to information which in turn makes it more difficult for politicians and public servants to get away with corrupt behaviours. In particular, the media plays a surveillance role in exposing corruption and raising general awareness of its detrimental effect upon society, as well as promoting integrity and accountability norms, values and practices in society (www.transparency.org). In their performance of this fundamental role, the media are expected to adhere to the tenets of the profession which serve as the guiding principles in the discharge of their duties. They are expected to remain above board in their reportage considering the fact that they are the mirror through which the society views happenings around the world.

But then, considering the fact that media wield tremendous power capable of installing or dislodging any government in power, they (media) have always been targeted as antagonists by government officials. So, for the emperors to have peace, they devise divergent approaches to curtail the media men from reporting their administrative and political failures to the public. Sometimes, they use repression, intimidation, brutality, ownership mechanisms and even death when they feel threatened by the unrelenting courage of a journalist. Ownership and control play very strong roles in defining what becomes news in Nigeria. Thus, a well written story no matter how well investigated it may be, may not see the light of the day if it continuously steps on the toes of the government in power or the rich in society who constitute those that place advertisement in the media (Ibbi, 2016).

Again, due to the fact that poverty is a garment worn by most journalists in Nigeria, orchestrated by their poor working conditions and delayed payment of their salaries, those in power use financial and material baits to influence journalists. After all, their salaries are not even enough to take care of their basic needs. In this context, journalists are always on the horns of dilemma from choosing between professionalism and survival. Most journalists in Nigeria consider the "Categorical Imperative" precepts as the best option, believing that "the end justifies the means". Professionalism in this context is sacrificed on the altar of the primordial motives of the journalist. Similarly, since man is naturally mischievous, insatiable and sometimes irresponsible; journalists are sometimes caught in this web of imperfection and corruptibility.

Such materialistic, petty journalists relinquish the cardinal norms of the profession to the dust-bins, thereby singing praises of the powers that be and idolizing the authorities even when there is nothing spectacular to attract such encomiums. According to Duyile (1996), some journalists wear the papal outfit when they have an issue at hand in which they can benefit materially. They look at what they can get from the deal and in this vein become more Catholic than the Pope. They turn a blind eye to journalistic ethics and toe the path of sycophancy, subjectivity, misinformation, political partisanship and all what not. The troubling questions now are, who is the journalist serving? At what cost is this service? What is his conscience

regarding his social responsibility to the public? What is his moral judgment about his professional integrity? It is on these perplexing questions that this narrative is centered. This paper is, therefore, poised to explore media corruption with particular emphasis on the effect of media sycophancy and how it influences the practice of journalism today.

Conceptual Clarification

Media Corruption

Media corruption is a generic concept referring to a sundry of professional malpractices perpetrated by journalists in their course of gathering, selecting, processing and disseminating of news to members of the public. Media corruption manifests in different dimensions ranging from sensationalism, subjectivity, moonlighting, brown envelope syndrome or bribery, sycophancy, Afghanistanism, sexism, plagiarism, non-confidentiality of sources and misrepresentation to mention but a few. Media scholars such as Akabugo (2005, p. 203) and Ekeanyanwu and Obanigwe (2012) have unanimously affirmed that media corruption is chiefly caused by the endemic poverty inherent in the land. Irregular payment of salaries as well as poor welfare package of journalists has been blamed for the corruption experienced in the media. They further reiterated that, because the journalist is a product of a corrupt society, most professional misdemeanors of journalists in Nigeria are a reflection of the prevailing corruptive national milieu.

Sycophancy

Sycophancy is one of the most depressing corrupt practices in journalism practice and governance whose negative impact cannot be undermined. Sycophancy according to Obaze and Fashanu (2006) is a situation whereby a medium or individual journalist continues to praise government or individuals despite ills or incompetence in office. Similarly, Pratt (1998, p. 14) sees sycophancy as false praise of those in power. His view implies insincerity in making people in authority appear larger than life. It is ways of currying favour to make people in positions of authority see such sycophants as loyal servants (Sambe, 2009). In another, but related point of view, Okunna (2003) defined sycophancy as false praise of those in power. Okunna (1995), however, defined a sycophant reporter as that journalist who flatters political leaders, wealthy citizens and owners of media houses who as employers have formidable power over journalists.

Sycophancy is inevitable in any society where powerful and lasting bonds of group and cohesion are grossly eluded. Sycophancy is rather a strong and derogatory concept which conjures grotesque images and mental pictures of negative social attitudes and deviant behaviour. Sycophancy as Ayodele (n.d) observes thrives mainly where the unbridled wielding of political, social or economic power and authority by only a few, over the large majority, is strong, perpetual and seemingly unchallengeable. Sycophancy in the Nigerian media leads to sensationalism which eventually leads the media to deviate from their primary responsibility to the public of informing, educating and entertaining. Taking recourse in the second principle of the International Code of Ethics, Okunna (2003) contends that:

> The foremost task of the journalist is to serve the people's right to true and authentic information through an honest dedication to objective reality whereby facts are reported conscientiously in their proper context, pointing out their essential connection and without causing distortions, with the deployment of creative capacity of the journalist so that the public is provided with adequate material to facilitate formation of an accurate and comprehensive picture of the world in which the origin, nature and essence of events, processes and state of affairs are understood as objective as possible.

Despite the above stated creed to be followed by all journalists, they (journalists), more often than not,

deliberately beam their torch of relevance on trivial issues or personalities who deserve no such prominence, and by doing this, affirms Obi (2000), they (the journalists) sometimes relegate the truth to the backwaters. This has underscored the reason sycophancy should be chastised as it affects the ethical concerns of journalism profession.

Bribery or "the Brown Envelope Syndrome"

Money is the heart and soul of capitalism. But the love of it, as the good book says, "is the root of all evil." Still, we love money. Money seems to be present in all cases where human beings have problems with their conscience (Agbese, 1996).Over the years, ethical issues revolving around acceptance of brown envelope by Nigerian journalists have continued to attract endless scholarly contentions. In simpler terms, brown envelope can be referred to as collecting a gift or any gratification for performing journalistic duties. Whenever received, brown envelopes have the potency to influence the judgment of a reporter to distort the definition of news (Onyisi, 1996; Akabugo, 2005; Nwabueze, 2010). For Okunna (1995), brown envelope is a monetary bribe handed out to an unethical journalist to pressurise him or her into doing what the bribe giver wants. She further reiterated that once accepted, monetary bribes and other gifts tie the hands of journalists who then become incapable of being objective in reporting events and issues involving people who give the gifts.

The case of a journalist Mr. Nicholas Ibekwe of *Premium Times* comes to mind whenever the issue of brown envelope inducement is discussed. Amidst the ills of prevalent corruption in the media, this journalist exonerated himself from such pettiness. In 2014, the founder of the Synagogue Church for All Nations, Pastor T.B. Joshua invited journalists to come and inspect the collapse of his guest house, which happened mysteriously leaving many people dead including foreigners. After the inspection, he offered each journalist the sum of (₦50,000) thousand naira. But Mr. Ibekwe surprisingly declined the offer. Pastor T.B. Joshua then asked the journalists who collected the "egunje" what they were going to write with respect to the collapsed building. All the reporters who collected the money chorused that they will write whatever he wants them to write (Ibbi, 2016). Charley Boy quoting George Owells with reference to the incident stated that "the further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those that speak it." He further addressed such monstrosity when he said:

> How hard service must be in a decadent society like ours where words like credibility, honesty, honour, truthfulness, professionalism and integrity are fast becoming extinct and rapidly being replaced by corruption, greed, sharpness, evil, materialistic lust, the list is endless, that's how deep the rot is (*Daily Post*, 2014).

In the richer societies of the West, Ganiyu (2004) affirms that journalists rarely receive gratification, especially cash, for covering events. They receive freebies, such as tickets to theatre, or from an airline or public relations pack which may include things like branded T- shirts, pens, jotters and the like, but not cash. But the situation is quite different in Nigeria where journalism is practiced in pain and anguish. The issue with journalism in Nigeria is that journalists are not only poorly paid but they often go for months without getting their meager salaries. In such a circumstance, it may be difficult to remain incorruptible.

The origin of brown envelope in Nigeria as Nwabueze (2010) observes is traceable to the culture of presenting kolanuts to visitors as a mark of hospitality. As such news sources consider giving incentives to journalists who visit them for coverage of news and information as a sign of appreciation. The irony observed in the scholar's viewpoint is that "a visitor doesn't request for kolanuts to mark his hospitality; he is rather offered the kolanut willingly. We may be at variance with other scholars here because most journalists do request this 'kola' which is against the African tradition as claimed.

The issue here is that, whether the 'kola' is offered to the journalist willingly or on demand, it is still unethical. Media corruption is a figment of the corrupt social order which the journalist internalises. To eliminate corruption in Nigerian journalism, it must also be wiped out from the larger society to which the journalists belong.

Review of Literature

Poverty, Media Corruption and Journalism Practice in Nigeria

Man, they say is the product of his society. Therefore, media practitioners of any given society can be best appreciated against the background of the situation in which they find themselves. This as Sambe (2009) observes is more so as the attitudes and inclinations of any particular society to a large extent reflect the type of media practice that will evolve in such a setting. An incorruptible society will demand a media that is responsible and above board at all times. But a society that glorifies corruption, pettiness and trivialities will likewise breed a press that thrives on those unwholesome variables.

Idowu (1996) cited in Folarin (1998)identifies several factors as causes of media corruption ranging from poor technical knowledge as shown in news selection, headline casting, conflicting interests, weak internal regulation, pressure of market to poor pay. Even though the above scholar was able to p, sycophancy and all forms of indiscipline. He further stated that the journalist has a good number of problems to grapple with such as sycophancy, character assassination, pressure from within and in point the above causal factors to media corruption, he also failed to acknowledge the corruptive tendencies of poverty, bribery and sycophancy on journalism practice in Nigeria. In the words of Akabogu (2005), all sorts of media corruption issues abound. They include materialism, bribery outside, confidentiality of sources, Afghanistanism, bribery, sensationalism, plagiarism, sexism, moonlighting, among others.

The government is not left out of this practice of "romancing" the journalist to avoid telling the whole truth. In comparison with foreign governments like the United States, Canada, Germany, France and Britain, which operate an open government of information sharing, one would expect that Nigeria which is regarded as the 'reigns of Africa' would be no different but alas Nigeria's case is that of a closed government riddled with secrets and lies yet run on tax payers money though denying these tax payers the right to sufficient information about the affairs of the state or its leaders. We are constantly reminded of the shroud of secrecy that surrounded the illness and death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and most recently the health status of President Muhammadu Buhari following his delay in addressing Nigerians after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic even when his Chief of Staff, Abba Kyari, tested positive to the virus.

The journalist is part of a society that places much premium on ego and materialism. And since the journalist is also a rational economic being striving assiduously to meet his needs and, in extension, those of his family, he most times becomes entangled in the ethical dilemma of keeping the commandments of the profession or trudging along the path of survival. But the truth is that survival comes first, since journalism practice is not for the dead. Most sympathisers will argue in support of the journalist who compromises standards in a bid to survive, considering the pathetic working conditions they find themselves in. It is quite pitiable today that there is a thin line separating journalists in Nigeria and street beggars. This is rather exacerbated by their unceremonious appearance and the way they conduct themselves at public gatherings. Secondly, they have been relegated to the bottom of the social ladder to the extent that their employers and even their few well-to-docolleagues working in the corridors of power treat them with disdain.

Journalists working full time or as freelancers are overall poorly salaried. Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2012) have corroborated this when they opined that Nigerian journalists were poorly paid in terms of their total welfare package. In most

public media establishments in Nigeria today, the salaries of media workers are not paid for months and even if they are paid, they are not paid on time. According to Nwabueze (2010), the situation is virtually the same today with most journalists, especially those working for privately owned media establishments, earning below NGN 20,000 (less than 110 American Dollars) monthly. In this context, most journalists find it difficult balancing their needs with discharging their duties incorruptibly, whereas journalists are among the five best paid professionals in Europe and America (Ganiyu, 2004).

The journalists in these unfortunate moments choose to cash in on the concept of situational ethics for survival. Situational ethics, according to Akabogu (2005), may justify bribery received by a journalist on the basis that he is probably not well paid and he is faced with a lot of financial constraints within and outside his work environment. Since poverty is the garment worn by most journalists in Nigeria today, situational ethics is often seen as a justification to defend their underhand dealings. They are careless about their profession and would go all out to satisfy the other side at the expense of their professional ethics. However, the spurious contention by some scholars is that some well-paid journalists too are not exonerated from this guilt of being corrupt which renders baseless the hypocritical agitations of the situational ethics. Nwabueze (2010) debunks this in her study when she insisted that poor remuneration may not be the only major reason for the accentuation of journalism corruption because journalists from well-paid media organisations still collect bribe.

In his contention, Ajibade (2002), cited in Ciboh (2007), frowned at these abuses noting them as one dehumanising way in which the press is defeating its own essence. He viewed this professional jaw-dropping scenario as:

> A new siege on the sentinel muffling what ought to be strident eloquence. If the journalist who demands bribe openly claim that privation makes them vulnerable, would their top editors and publishers, whose consciences are bought constantly and cheaply by governors, high ranking officials, businessmen and other public figures also give poverty as their reason? The truth of the matter is that because of greed of the worst kind the press is now its own merciles santagonist.

Although Agbese (2001) notes that the love of money and its corruptive influence is part of the problem of all professions and that most professional rules of conduct deal with how best to manage the influence of money, the dominant feeling among practitioners is one of disgust, frustration and anger – anger at a profession which has allowed itself to be dragged into the gutter of corruption, sensationalism, self-censorship and petty rivalry (Okonta, 1991 cited in Ciboh, 2007). Agbese (2001) cited in Ciboh (2007)buttresses his point on the brown envelope which according to him:

> …has tarnished the image of the Nigerian press considerably. Most of us have at one time or another decried this practice with a rather high-minded feeling of hurt. My understanding is that the gratification is now offered in more acceptable colours of the envelope such as, white or blue. A more serious variant of this is practice by some news editors and even editors to ask their reporters to make daily returns to them

This means that media corruption is a figment or a total reflection of the corruption inherent in Nigeria as a nation state from our governors to our priests and all other professionals who demand and receive gratification before they render service for which they are paid. If the Nigerian society should glorify and worship corrupt government officials, then journalists should also be seen as offspring of this social decay. Nwabueze (2010) citing Abati (2008) observes that the journalist is also a product

of the society and if we are in an exceptionally corrupt society, then the media and its men cannot be innocent. They are just as corrupt as the society. It is however pertinent to understand that even though media corruption has become institutionalised, it does not mean it is legal and acceptable. What is bad is bad (Ganiyu, 2004).

Joblessness and hunger have steered some people wrongly into journalism practice as a means of survival. Journalism practice in Nigeria is still an all-comers-entrance affairs, which allows any graduate or non-graduate that can write well to practice in the profession. These quacks have little or no regard to the ethics of the profession. They do not even see journalism as a profession in the first instance, hence the wanton demand for cheap rewards in order to write favourable reports (Ikechukwu, 2014). In a similar contention, Onyeacholam (2002) adds that corruption in the media not only makes adherence to and monitoring of journalistic ethics ineffective but it also attracts the army of fake journalists parading the streets and hijacking assignments at the expense of genuine professionals.

Lack of respect for professional ethics perhaps stems from inability of journalists to draw a good deal of moral authority from being a disciplined, disinterested observer of events. That journalists depend on experts and authorities to make news complete makes them vulnerable to manipulation for various reasons (Ciboh, 2007). Therefore, adhering tenaciously to the dictates of ethics is key to professional excellence. According to Merrill and Lowenstein (1979) cited in Sambe (2005) a concern for ethics is indispensable in the practice of journalism because it instills in the journalist a continuing sensitivity to his every action, to his every decision; it integrates or blends with its total search for truth and it gives him greater awareness of himself, of others, and of the consequences of interpersonal relations. A concern for ethics is the key plank in any journalistic platform; it is the alpha and omega of public communication.

Sycophancy as a Menace to Journalism Practice in Nigeria

Sycophancy from time immemorial has been a social cankerworm breeding pettiness and irresponsible journalism. Unfortunately, journalism practice in Nigerian thrives on this unwholesome trending social malady. The journalist who is a product of the society is willingly or unwillingly affected by this pitiable situation. Sycophancy is a spurious ethical problem in Nigeria not just in journalism practice, but it cuts across all spheres of human endeavour. In journalism, it smacks the entrenchment of objective journalism. Again, the effect of this cankerworm on governance is quite overwhelming as it breeds incompetence, underdevelopment, bad governance and corruption.

Barry White, a renowned singer, has one of his lyrics as, 'Practice what you preach'. However, it is one thing to know the right thing and a different thing doing the right thing (Umeogu & Ojiakor, 2012). Despite the fact that journalists preach objectivity in their routine dealings with the society, attaining objectivity in their reportage has been a hard nut to crack. Ebeze (2004), who observed this, stated that journalists have derailed from the objective work they are meant to do. They have ironically dabbled into ethnic reporting, misinformation, sycophantic journalism, and fallacious reporting thereby killing the very essence of journalism in the society.

Uzokor (2000) identifies lack of professional training for journalists, the prevailing social and environmental contingencies surrounding the journalists – when the society is immoral, the journalist dances to its decadent and corruptible tune – and lack of experience on the part of political leaders some of whom for the most fact are too immature to withstand constructive criticism as those in western countries as causes of sycophancy in journalism. To a shallow minded analyst, the latter factor pointed out by the scholar could be termed as the root of sycophancy in journalism. However, Umeogu and Ojiakor (2012) have noted that the scourge of poverty is more biting and could

necessitate sycophancy more than any other thing. The scholars further insisted that "a good name is better than riches". They similarly added that the influx of government owned media is yet another factor that causes sycophancy, hence justifying the dictum "whoever pays the piper controls the tune".

Sycophancy has some colossal distressing impediments on the practice of responsible journalism in Nigeria and beyond. It makes the entire profession to lose its credibility or be irritating to the public who often see through the masks(Sambe, 2009; Omeogu & Ojiakor, 2012). This could be the reason Aljazeera on the foreign scene, TVC and Channels Television in Nigeria are to an extent preferred when it comes to objective news. This is an indication that the audiences are not docile and can determine which station is breezing out with undiluted news. In his contention, Ajayi-Gbadabo (2000) avers that protecting citizens against unfair media reports is the primary responsibility of the press to ensure that citizens are protected from the whims and caprices of the media that can amount to assaults on the sensibilities of the people. Sycophancy in journalism has brought about lack of interest in media contents by members of the public. There is a general public belief that objective news reporting now is for the highest bidder. Studies by the American Press Institute have confirmed that public trust in the press and its field soldiers (journalists) has declined sharply, partly as a result of biased, inaccurate or unfair reports and perhaps partly as a result of efforts of certain interest groups to delegitimise what is sometimes called mainstream media (Cowan, 2014).An ex-newsman, Luedike, quoted in Nwosu (2003) has confirmed this cynicism to media contents when he insisted that:

> The media are the mechanism of reward and punishment, the arbiter of right and wrong, the roving eye of daily judgment. They are capricious and unpredictable, they are fearsome and they are feared because there is never anyway to know whether this time, they will be fair and accurate or whether they will not.

Sycophancy makes it impossible for the journalist to perform his duty creditably. Once a journalist indulges in praise-singing, he loses focus, throws ethics to the dogs and his reasoning becomes clouded. Sycophancy makes a journalist to lose his integrity and expertise to serve the public which he represents (Sambe, 2009). Sycophancy also deprives the public of the rightful information they are entitled to. On the other hand, sycophancy also has negative effects on governance. Praise singing is one of the journalist's worst faults particularly in Nigeria and especially with government-owned media houses. This kind of journalism eulogizes people unnecessarily. It makes heroes out of villains and giants out of dwarfs (Udeze, 2012). The scholar further identified a glaring instance where the Rivers State Broadcasting Corporation and the State Television saw former state Governor Chibuike Amaechi as a saint even when workers' salaries were owed for months and pensioners were languishing in hunger and starvation. The media did not see anything wrong with the various abandoned projects of the administration. The question now is how can there be good governance in the face of this sycophantic journalism?

In this vein, sycophancy makes it difficult for those being praised to discharge their duties creditably because the media praise beclouds their vision and effectiveness. It is expedient to say from the foregoing that the under performance and underdevelopment issues Nigerians are experiencing from political leaders can partly be attributed to the flattery such office holders are enjoying from the media. They assume all is well. The status conferral role of the media has been grossly bastardized. It is no longer bizarre to see media establishments giving awards or conferring status on failed and corrupt politicians when there is really nothing on ground to qualify them for such glory. It is even more pitiable with state owned media where such media apparatuses have become propaganda tools in the hands of failed and

incompetent political office holders. In most cases, advisers to state actors at the federal or state level have become satirical artisans of lies, misinformation, professional betrayals and mischief; reporting floods in the desert, elephant projects and falsehood in the name of journalism. They indulge in this unholy professional act to justify the existing symbiotic but selfish relationship between them and those they eulogize. This is "eye-service journalism", practiced by "eye-sore journalists" in a corrupt laden nation where thieves and the most corrupt become saints and dwarfs are made to become giants.

Fearless and effective journalism is critical in fledgling democracies where institutions are weak and pummeled by political pressure. When legislatures, judiciaries and other oversight bodies are powerless against the mighty or are themselves corruptible, responsible journalism becomes the only check against the abuse of power. This requires journalists to play heroic role, exposing the excesses of government officials despite the risks (Corronel, 2014).In a nutshell, all news makers manipulate the journalist to satisfy their agenda – open or hidden. Quite often, in our anxiety and ambition to attain social and material ego, we help to promote lies and misinformation thereby breaching the public trust bestowed on us as journalists. We must be mindful of the hairy hand of money in our operations as journalists to remain above board.

Social Responsibility and the Journalist: A Theoretical Expose

The birth of libertarianism rose in opposition to authoritarianism in the 17th century when ownership and media control was the sole prerogative of the state, and the private use of media during this era was only confined to trusted individuals. Criticism of political machinery and officials in power was highly abominable (Sambe, 2005). This consequently led to agitations for press freedom, championed by Thomas Jefferson, John Stuart Mill, John Milton and John Locke. Libertarianism believes that the press should be accorded absolute freedom to publish what it likes. This unlimited freedom of the press led to arrogation of power as captured in the words of John Acton when he noted that, "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (https://www.phrases.org.uk). The abuse of this freedom as Sambe (2005) posits gives rise to undesirable journalistic practices such as yellow journalism occasioned by irresponsibility, sensationalism and character assassination.

The 20th century was heralded with the clarion call for a free but socially responsible journalism, devoid of impunity and excesses. This was journalism firmly rooted in conscience, integrity, fairness, balance, objectivity, truth and nonpartisanship. As society relies on the journalists to describe, explain and monitor every institution of the society as well as celebrate great achievements and to expose transgressions such as human rights abuses and political or corporate corruption, they are expected to be guided by codes of professional conduct (Cowan, 2014). A socially responsible media lays much premium on the moral and social responsibilities of individuals and institutions that operate the media. McQuail, quoted in Sambe (2005) identifies the theoretical belief of this type of journalism when he states that:

> Certain obligations to society should be accepted and fulfilled by the press; these obligations are mainly to be fulfilled through setting high professional standards of truth, accuracy, objectivity, balance and misinformativeness; in the discharge of their duties. The media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions; the society and the public have a right to expect high standards of performance from the media, and intervention can be justified to secure the public good, since journalists should be accountable to society.

It is expedient from the above excerpts that journalists have certain obligations to perform for

the society they tend to serve. And for the journalist to serve the society faithfully and responsibly in the fulfillment of these obligations, he must work within the confines of the professional tenets of truth and objectivity, ensuring that whatever he reports to the public is the truth and nothing but the truth. He must ensure that facts are sacred. He must not become an artiste by circumstance singing praises and eulogies for news makers to foster his parochial interest. He must be able to discern between what is right and what is wrong. Let the conscience of the journalist form his moral navigation point. Duyile (1996), quoting from the Code of Professional Ethics of Caribbean Association of Media Workers of Barbados, observed that "the right to seek, receive and impart information is recognised as the cornerstone to the rules of professional behaviour of the journalist. For the journalist, freedom and responsibility are indivisible.

The media are therefore established to serve the public rather than personal interests. However, the quest for personal aggrandisement seems to have infiltrated the practice of journalism in Nigeria and beyond (Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe, 2012 cited in Salihu, 2017). Therefore, there is a dire need for self-regulation against ethical and social irresponsibility where personal interest has become a threat to this noble profession. In a nutshell, journalism should be practiced according to the dictates of the professional creed. Codes of ethics are, therefore, encouraged as a self-regulatory device to entrench a socially responsible journalism. A responsible journalist in the precept of Merril and Barney (1982) cited in Salihu (2017) is the one who always tempers his journalism with reason, sensitivity and commitment to synchronising freedom, rationality and duty.

Conclusion

Journalism is a noble profession the society holds in high esteem. Journalists are therefore expected to be honourable men of proven integrity. This is pertinent because journalists occupy a strategic position in society. They have the power to start wars and to end them, to make people famous and infamous, and to build communities and tear them down (Torwel & Ciboh, 2012). In their contention to acknowledging the power of journalism, Gibbs and Warhover (2002), quoting Steinbeck, observe that journalism has intrinsic power as;

> The greatest virtue and the greatest evil. It is the first thing a dictator controls. It is the mother of literature and the perpetrator of crap. In many cases, it is the only history we have and yet it is the tool of the worst men. But over a long period of time and because it is the product of so many men and women, it is perhaps the purest thing we have. Honesty has a way creeping into it even when it was not intended (cited in Torwel &Ciboh, 2012).

Journalism is not practised in a vacuum. The journalists depend on news makers for information. And the society also depends on the journalist for undiluted information about happenings in the world. But journalists sometimes derail due to clash of interests. Journalists are expected to be objective and to remain above board. The news makers too need favour from journalists to cover up corruption, incompetence and excesses. The prevailing corruption and poverty situation in Nigeria and other related forces trigger the journalists to renegade the guiding principles of the profession for a plate of porridge. They become sycophants having succumbed to the mysterious power of brown envelope, thereby killing the very essence of development or advocacy journalism. The issues of bad governance, underdevelopment, corruption, and under performance among others are blamed on the media's inability to set agenda on them and report them objectively to members of the public. Political leaders in Nigeria are also relaxed because the consciences of journalists have been traded. The watchdogs are rather engrossed in pursuing their bone for survival. Ethics, integrity, public trust and social responsibility have become orphans in the face of journalism practice in

Nigeria. If the watchdogs have become incapacitated and toothless, being caressed on the laps of political elites for a price, who then would hold the government to be accountable to the people?

Recommendations

1. Journalism is a service to humanity. Public interest should be the overriding principle rather than the personal gain of the journalist. Nigerian journalists should eschew collecting bribe, which is a cardinal determinant of their deviant behaviour.
2. Government and private media owners should understand that a labourer deserves his wages. Media workers in Nigeria should be placed on a special salary scale. After all, Nigeria will not be the first to entrench this in the world, since the take home pay of journalists is no longer taking them home. If journalists are well paid, media corruption will be reduced, if not totally eradicated.
3. Media ownership and usage should not be abused by the government and private individuals who usually use them as propaganda instruments incubating misinformation about elephant projects just to win an undeserved status or a cheap political score. The use of media institutions to eulogize incompetent and unpopular government will rather deepen media corruption, bad governance and underdevelopment.
4. Adherence to the guiding tenets of the profession should be the most desirable navigation point of the journalist. These ethics of the profession will enable the journalist to discern between the good and bad in his judgment. If journalists are guided by the ethics of the profession, they will ensure that they are socially responsible and objective in their reports.
5. Government media aid and advisers should desist from feeding members of the public with lies of unmerited achievements and invisible projects. They should always bear in mind that even if the society forgives them, posterity will not. This is because the evil men do, lives after them.

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