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Abstract: The Section 22 of 1999 of Nigerian constitution stipulates that the Press, Radio, TV, and other agencies of the Mass Media shall at all times free to uphold the responsibility of the government to the people, function as a watch over the activities of the government as and when necessary, making it difficult for the government unaccountable to the populace. This constitutional role of the Mass Media is far from being realized. There were often divergent and conflicting positions of the Media vs Government on the task of monitoring the implementation of the good of the publics, as well as the relationship of the press with Nigerian political leaders. The paper exposed the efforts of Nigerian Press before and after independence till date; the trend in the suppression of the Mass Media in Nigeria. And suggested ways to tackle the challenges. The paper also emphasizes on how Nigerians have had politicians/military more than the civilians. How they sought various way to curb and constrain the press through legislation, decrees, physical repression, incessant cases of suppression, muzzling, sanction, imprisonments, assigations, closure of the Media stations etc., as a result of the absence of express constitutional provision for Press freedom. It recommended that Journalists must encourage the populace to respect media men as true professionals, by performing professionally, that way the self-esteem of our calling, the credibility of the media and their relevance to the society will be enhanced.

Keyword: Transition, Press and Press freedom

INTRODUCTION

Transition have been a recurrent feature of Nigeria’s political history, this is because “the history of independent Nigeria have been the main history of Military rule, while Nigerian’s political leaders since 1966 have been almost exclusively the generals. For examples are: Gen. Ironsi, Gen. Gowon, Gen. Muhammed, Gen. Obasanjo, Gen.Buhari, Gen. Babangida, Gen. Abacha and so on.

A true political transition in our context is about a movement from the culture of unquestioning obedience of military rule to the engaging challenge of participatory democracy” (Odunewund). The media were strong part of the struggle for freedom from colonial rule up to date. The Nigeria media, is more than 101 years older than independent Nigeria, have been a key part of the nation’s history and have had more than any other profession “to bear such brunt ” of the struggle of Nigerians for a better society. It’s worthy to view the relationship of the press with military rulers and their commitment to transition programmes in Nigeria, to enable one understands the different political transition programmes, and the factors for their success or failure.

The fact remains that there have been drumming all the land, drumming that speak of marginalization, cornering of power by the privileged, and domination of arms of government by people from one part of the country to the discomfiture of others . There have been beating of drums of aggressive ethnic groups; such as Ndigbo, Arewa and Oduduwa, and so on. It is very disappointing that many of our young people even undergraduates and graduates know very little of the history of Nigeria. Many have not heard of the coming of the British, especially Sir Fredrick Lugard. The amalgamation in 1914. The colonial agenda that give assurance that there was unity of administration of the people’s customs and cultures. The deliberate attempt to bring the geographic components of Nigeria together, where deliberate policy was exploited by the British to separate the peoples of the North from those of the south, vice versa in Nigeria.

Before 1900, there were communities, most of these communities were fiercely independent, in that when ethnic and inter-ethnic war raged, the conquered communities had to pay tributes to the conqueror, which was the rule of the game then. By 1899, British started to take over the administration of Nigeria from the companies that run it. In 1904, three countries emerged such as colony of Lagos, protectorate of southern Nigeria and the protectorate of Northern Nigeria, while in 1906- 1913, the three countries were reduced to two, the protectorate of southern and northern Nigeria. In 1914, Sir Frederick Lugard amalgamated Nigeria into one government, conforming them under one policy for easy co-ordination and to foster the moral and material advancement of Nigeria as a whole.

After independence in 1960, through combined effort of Nigeria Media especially Nigeria Press. It was rightly said that Nigeria’s transition from colonial rule to independence was brought about by the combined forces of politicians who became journalist and journalists who became politicians. So, Nigeria politics was shaped by journalism just as journalism itself was shaped by politics. The book MAKING THE NEWS, by Peter Golding and Philip Elliot supported the assertions by saying that “Nigerians journalism was created by anti-colonial protest, baptized in the waters of colonialist propaganda and matured in party politics”

Now, the colonialists had been driven away and Nigerians
had taken over government in 1960. No doubt,  
indigenous people who fought the colonialist would take 
over power. The Euphoria of independence gave way to practical difficulties of creating a democratic society. How to unite a nation with 250 and more tribes and cultures in a democratic setting becomes a difficulty issue. There were disintegration among the people, the center can no longer hold “corruption set inn and grown wings”. Elections were boycotted or rigged. The politicians were getting impatient with the press for reporting the political malfeasances of the time.

To suppress the Press Freedom, two major laws were enacted during the 1st republic, which considerably hampered press freedom, such as, the official secret Act of 1962, and Newspaper Act of 1964, these buttress the beginning of the problems, and the challenges, between the media and Nigerian Political leaders in Nigeria. There were often divergent and conflicting positions of the media and the government on the task of monitoring the implementation of the transition programme, and to bridge the communication gap between government and the media for good of the public(s).

The Profile/Efforts of Nigerian Press before Independence 1960:

Nigerian Newspaper has had the distinctions right from the colonial days, even from transition from colonial rule to independent status could be attributed to the effort of the print media in Nigeria. For example, IweIroyin being the first Nigerian Newspaper published by the church missionary society in 1859 which dealt with the political, social and cultural affairs, but its limited objective was as result of its intention to promote the interest and welfare of Lagos and its people only.

Anglo-African being the first English Language Newspaper in Nigeria was founded in 1963 by a Jamaican of mixed blood called Robert Campbell. Its limited objective was as a result of its intention to promote the interest and welfare of Lagos and its people only.

Lagos weekly Record was one of the leading Newspaper that gained prominence during the electioneering campaigns for the 1922 democratic elections conducted under the Clifford constitution, because it raised the political consciousness of the people.

Lagos Daily News was established in 1925 with EnesteseOkoli as its first editor, was owned by business community in Lagos and colonial administration, the paper was biased because of the quest to protect the interest of its patron. The, West African pilot in 1937, founded by Dr NnamdiAzikwe, an American trained journalist. The pilot was seen as trenchant and militant in its attack on colonialism while in 1944, Zike founded a political party (NENC) national council for Nigeria and the Cameroon, and pilot became its mouth piece for political mobilization.

Is rightly said that Nigeria’s Transition from colonial rule to independence was brought about by the combined forces of politicians who became journalists and journalists who became politicians, therefore Nigeria politics were shaped by journalism, just as journalism itself was shaped by politics. The book “making the News” supported the assertion “Nigeria journalism was created by anti-colonial protest, baptized in the waters of colonialist propaganda and matured in party politics as-said earlier. The colonialist had been driven away and Nigeria had taken over government in 1960. No doubt that the indigenous people who fought the colonialist would take over the power.

The Euphoria of independence gave way to political difficulty of creating a democratic society. How to Unit a nation that made up of 250 and more tribes and culture in a democratic setting became difficult. Corruption set inn and grown wings. Elections were boycotted or rigged. The politicians were getting impatient with the press for reporting the political malfeasances of the time. Two laws were enacted during the 1st Republic which considerably hampered press freedom: official secret Act of 1962 and Newspaper Act of 1964 was directly targeted at the press which is direct or indirectly suppressing the press freedom. As a result of corruption and confusion in the system, led the intervention of the military coup on January 15, 1966, which had an ethic implication.

The Challenges of the Press in the Political Terrain in Nigeria:

In 1966, The Aguiyi-Ironsi the military general took over government from the civilian ruler by coup de tat. Ironsi government suspended the Nigeria constitution and declared a state of emergency but he left sections 24 and 25 intact, which dealt with fundamental human right, freedom of expression and conscience, yet Ironsi government suppressed the press, by promulgating the circulation of Newspapers Act No 2 of 1966.

In July 29, 1966, Gowon's government took over power, a bloody coup that claimed not only Ironsi life, but also the lives of several officers. During his tenure he co-operated with the press during the events that led to the civil war but ran into foul weather several times after the war, a case in point is, Minere Amakiri, the Nigerian observer correspondent in Port Harcourt, who was flogged and had his hair barbed with a broken bottle on the order of State Governor.

Gowon’s government showed a sign of frustration on the press which showcase itself on August 27, 1974, when the inspector-General of police kamSaleru addressed the press, thus stated “The Federal Military government might be compelled to take drastic and unpleasant measures to curb the excesses of the press and some cranks who profess to be journalist, and Gowon’s inability to deal with excesses of the state military governors.

In July 29, 1975 Gowon was thrown out of office by Muritala Muhammed. Immediately Murita’s Govt, set in motion machinery for transition to democracy but was assassinated six months later, his successor Olusegun Obasanjo who has faithfully implemented the transition programme to its logical end. He indeed kept his word by returning the country to civil rule. Obasanjo’s government had a few bruises with the press which lead to the enactment of public officers (protection against false accusation (Act Cap II of 1976) that lead the ban of New-breed magazine in 1978; the enactment of the Nigerian press council Act (Cap
31 of 1978, as a means of regulating media practice and the takeover of the privately owned daily times. Though, he succeeded in installing Shehu Shagari into office as elected president, the civilian government that never lasted beyond four years.

December 31, 1983, bring to power the unsiling Duo, MuhammedBuhari and Tundeldiagbon. Under Buhari government, tried to instill discipline, sacking many top government officials, and recovering of public funds. Yet, two reporters of the Guardian, Mr. Tunde Thompson and NdukaIrabor were jailed under decree No. 4, because of allegations by the press that N2.8million was missing during his tenure. As Obasanjo’s minister of petroleum resources, promised to tamper with the press, during his interview with the concord Newspaper.

As Ibrahim Babangida took over power, the press jubilated. Babangida’s Government, wiped off the dreaded decree No.4. He threw open the debate and draw up a blue print for democracy. The journalists who were jubilated for Babangida taking over power were still willing to go extra miles in supporting his government. The death of Dele Giwa, first editor of News-watch magazine, on Oct. 19, 1986, through a parcelled bomb alleged to have been sent by government agents, effectively soared the relationship. Six months later news-watch was proscribed and its editor was detained for publishing a report of the political Bureau. Many journalists were carted into detention. The punch and New-breed were shut down for several weeks.

In August 1991, Tony Ikeakanan, editor of observer in Benin was demoted for using an inappropriate photo of the first lady, Maryam Babangida. The photograph in question said to recall the ravishing beauty and the sartorial elegance of her Excellency. The daily times Managing Director, Dr. YemiNdaeyoUko, were erased out of their jobs for publishing a front page story in which Prof. Wole Soyinka had criticized the government's open ballot system of voting. He went further to enact various decrees to clip the wings of the press such as council decree, Decrees 43 and 48.

Then came the June 12 election, which the ABN wanted to mount injunction to stop the election with the help of Humphery Nwosu, the chairman of electoral commission. It became reality that the election which was universally declared to be free, fair and peaceful in which M.K.O Abiola, the SDP presidential Candidate seemed to be the winner, to his greatest shuck, the election was canceled by Babangida Government. As a result of that, public pressure forced Babangida out of office, and into by force retirement without a brass band, a match past of an appropriately impressive ceremony. There were no flags or buntings, no dinners, no farewells, it was a call to a funeral and the journey to Minna was lonely and long.

The interim national government headed by Chief Earnest Shonekan, a former UAC chairman took over power on August 31, 1993. Earnest Shonekan government called for full co-operation and understanding of the press. The press was asked to be objective in their reporting and should seek to promote national and international issues.

On Nov. 10, 1993, the Lagos High Court declared the Shonekan led government illegal

By Nov. 17. 1993. Sanni Abacha moved in to fill the vacuum thereby putting the crown on his own head. Under Abacha’s government in his intent to his self-succession plot, and the press trying to show sign of opposition, his government closed down many media houses, threw petrol bomb into some of them, locking up their gates, and throw some of the editors and publishers into the slammer, but there were still much pressure from various quarters such as: the media, human rights groups, religious groups, but unfortunately sudden death took him on June 8, 1998.

In Abacha regime, credibility of the mass media was seemed at the lowest- ebb. Many media men were detained, and arrested, while some of them, for fear of their lives, took what had come to be known, as the NADECO route, and slipped into exile. Some journalists become rascally foul-mouthed and irrelevant. Some abandoned their professional journalism into the realm of propaganda and pop journalism.

Lastly, the Abdulsalam Abubakar government took over after the death of Abacha and promised to be sincere and transparent by promising to hand-over government to civil rule by May, 29, 1999. The press has a duty to assist and encourage the government to keep its word and the National economic commission (INEC) too to ensure that the government performs its duty fairly, admirably, impartially, so that the night-mare would be fulfilled. He finally handed over government, to Civilian which brought about General Olusegun Obasanjo, into power for the second time under democratic government, in 1999, until 2007, when he peacefully handed over Government to another elected Precedent Umaru Musa Yar’adua.

**The Challenges of Electronic Mediain the Political Terrein in Nigeria:**

The electronic media is basically referred to as Radio and Television, but some authors, included cable Television. Video recording. Fax, E-mail and the internet. This paper limited itself to Radio and TV. And to emphasis on the roles the media played on the political transition and some of the challenges facing them. The mass media was not, left out on the struggle, starting from how Nigeria was chosen as a BBC listening post in1932, and how the establishment of one National Radio in the country has assumed several names, ranging from Radio Nigeria, to NBS, to NBC to FRCN. How the outfit was the first victim of political vengeance.

The Major problem facing the electronic media before and after independent was ownership-Control, and the syndrome of “He who pays the piper- dictates the tune.”

The Federal Radio lost its glamour and credibility both at the Federal and Regional levels, and its outfits were seen as Federal megaphones. Some Radio Stations were purposely placed on Frequency Medulation (FM) which delivers clean Stereophonic sound. The state and private stations were allowed to use (UHF) Ultra High Frequency where the NTA outfits were using (VHS) Very High Frequency. As a result of that Hajia Yusuf accused the Radio Nigeria of not disseminating accurate news to its public(s). Notwithstanding, Radio Kaduna was seen as the most
creditable medium that seems to be independent among others. It concerns itself with matter of National interest, and unbiased on its new reporting.

Basically, Mass Media in Nigeria tried their best in quest for good governance, but unfortunately the electronic medium seems to be victims of circumstance, due to problem of ownership /Control Syndrome.

**The Role of the Press for National Development:**

In order to achieve the important aim of assisting to give democratic participation ‘meaning’, the press must fulfill a number of roles according to NDUDI ELUMELU, which include the following:

- The Press is needed for continued process of education and enlightenment of the citizens. A scholar once stated that without an informed citizenry, democracy is a mere farce. It is the duty of the Press to ensure that voters are well informed and capable of participating actively in public life.
- The press serves as societal watchdog; it is the duty of the Press to subject politicians and governments to scrutiny and evaluation.
- The press serves as a voice of the voiceless, therefore, is the duty of the Press to express public feelings and provide a platform for exchange and dissemination of ideas.
- The investigative reporting ability of the press has the capacity to assist in building a culture of openness and disclosure, and this has forced the government officials to be more responsible in the management of public trust.
- The Press has the duty to keep citizens engaged in the business of governance by informing, educating and mobilizing the public.
- Is the responsibility of the Press to help build peace and social consensus without it, democracy would be greatly threatened.
- It is the duty of the Press to provide mechanisms for mediation and representations to warring groups so as to settle their differences peacefully.
- The Press is a veritable agent of nation building. Therefore, the Press should not be seen to fanning the flames of discord by promoting prejudices or distorting facts or supporting criminality which sometimes disguise itself as agitations.

**The Roles of Mass Media vs. Society for National Development:**

The roles of the media in achieving reliable, strong and United Nations are the prerequisites for national development.

In general, the relationship between mass media and the society should reflect the following:

- The mass media should serve as provider of information and entertainment, while the society should relate with the media as:
  - Providers of the News events.
  - Consumers of the new, and
  - Sustainers of the media business.

The government and media relationship should be that of partners in development process. Watchdog and the “Dog” on which the media watches, over the activities of the government and relay to the people. The link with a friend, in which the media serve as the bridge between government and the governed. The constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria is explicit about the function of the mass media in relation to the government, especially in the conduct of the day-to-day activities, affecting the government.

Section 21 of 1979 constitution as reflecting in section 22 of 1999 constitution said that the press, radio and television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the responsibility of the government to the people. This section articulates the watch-dog responsibility of the press/media in which it watches over and reports on. It emphasizes that mass media must functions as a watch over on the activities of the government as and when necessary, making it difficult for the government unaccountable to the populace. In order words, the government must be made accountable to the people. This is a responsibility of the mass media and the practitioners as contained in the constitution of the federation called Nigeria.

**Other functions of mass media are:**

- Surveillance of the environment
- Correlation and co-ordination of facts
- Persuasion
- Transmission of social heritage
- Opinion Molding
- Agent of Mobilization
- Projector of self-help development
- Partner in culture/tradition preservation, maintenance and substances
- Educators of a unique kind who give attention to economic, social and political matters

The roles and the functions of mass media are numerous to mention meanwhile, regardless of the situation that the mass media in Nigeria might find itself, it has never been found wanting in performing its functions and responsibilities

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The Press has to be partisan when its fundamental interests are at stake. Infant, if the journey to democracy is to be safe, the media, as a driver, must respect the driving code, the political regulations should not forget that no one will do for the media what the media refuse to do for themselves, according to Akinterinwa 1999.
- Journalists must encourage the populace to respect media men as true professionals, by performing professionally, that way the self-esteem of our calling, the credibility of the media and their relevance to the society will be enhanced.
- The harassment of Journalists by security agents of any government must stop.
- The media should hold the integrity of any government that seems credible and sincere.
- The media should devote “greater space and energy” to exposing the evils of any bad government, and the virtues of popular participation.
- The press should observe with concern the political
tensions in the country arising from injustice to various constituents units, structural inequities and mutual lack of trusts without bias or fret.

CONCLUSION

Since Independence, Nigerian Journalists and politics have had more divergence than convergence, as a result various ways have been sought to curb and constrain the press, such as Legislation and physical repression. Repression of the press arises because politicians fear the press; but notwithstanding, the press must, and should seek the respect of the public rather than their fear.

Finally, the media should and continues to play a key role to democratic rule, though they have been constrained in the discharge of this role, because of the absence of express constitutional provision for press freedom in Nigeria.

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