

CODESRIA



12th General Assembly
Governing the African Public Sphere

12e Assemblée générale
Administrer l'espace public africain

12a Assembleia Geral
Governar o Espaço Público Africano

ةي عمجل ةي مومعلا ةي ناثلا رشع
حكم الفضاء العام الإفريقي

Press Freedom Repression in Nigerian Democratic Dispensations

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07-11/12/2008
Yaoundé, Cameroun

Introduction

Press organisations constitute vibrant and restive institutions, which provide platforms for powers negotiations in the public space. They set stages for public discourse of popular issues and enjoy wide readership. Essentially, the principal features of press organisations include critical independence, democratic constructiveness and commercial viability (Bruns 2008; Oyeleye 2004; Kuper and Kuper 2001). The state's fear of press organisations' power and their immense contributions towards the defence of fundamental human rights serves as popular justification for censorship. To what extent have press organisations taken public interest into consideration and what are their contributions to the development of democracy in Nigeria? How has the suspension of Freedom of Information Bill (FIB) affected press freedom in Nigeria? What are the measures needed to make the FIB become Freedom of Information Law (FIL) in Nigeria?

This study addressed the above questions using primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered through questionnaire and in-depth interviews conducted among 440 members of sixteen press organisations selected from print and electronic media in Lagos and Oyo States respectively. Secondary data were generated from peer reviewed articles and official documents. This study is necessary given the importance of free press in the development of democracy and a long history of press freedom repression in Nigeria. Several attacks, intimidation, and arrests of journalists have been reported in Nigeria, a country with probably the most animated media setting in Africa (Tettey 2008). The historical role of the press in Nigeria has oscillated between staunch support for national unity and a democratic culture as well as vehicle for the propagation of ethnic, religious, and sectional interests (Oyeleye 2004).

The press remains a cornerstone of democracy and popular participation worldwide. In his statement on the last World Press Freedom Day, Bush (2008) mentioned that press freedom was enshrined in the first amendment to the United States' Constitution to make speech freedom a necessity for a free society. Similarly, Nigerian governments made constitutional provision for press freedom. Section 24 (1) of the Nigerian 1960 Constitution states that: 'every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference' (Akinola 1998). Also, Section 39 of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution states the right to freedom of expression and of the press (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999). The philosophical notion that the press is an important factor in the

democratic environment (Merrill, 1974) played out within different cultural and ideological forces affecting press freedom in Nigeria. Abati (1998) disclosed that the prevailing political system in Nigeria determined the scope of press freedom it guaranteed. Conversely, democracy has opened up spaces for survival of press organisations across the world.

In Africa, the media landscape showed significant shifts with tremendous expansion in the number of press organisations as democratic dispensations replaced dictatorial regimes (Karikari 2004). After the fall of the Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003, press organisations in Iraq witnessed a remarkable growth in number and diversity. Based on in-depth interviews with 22 Iraqi journalists working in the country, Kim and Hama-Saeed (2008) found that prior to the Western invasion of Iraq, press organisations in Iraq became poignantly subjective and operated under various Iraqi government's restraints and pressures from political parties and religious groups. They also found that terrorists and militants constantly threatened Iraqi journalists. Sustainability of the fledgling Iraqi press organisations however depends on the interplay of the political turmoil, sectarian violence, and foreign interventions in the country.

Like the Iraqi situation, the transition from military to civilian administration in 1979-1983 and since 1999 resulted in increase in the number of press organisations in Nigeria. There were 2 government controlled television broadcasting stations, 14 licensed private television stations, 82 AM radio stations, 35 FM stations and 11 short-wave stations in Nigeria as at 1999 (Hudgens and Trillo 1999). Symbiotically, democracy depends on effective communication systems channelled through the press (Jacob 2002). However, press organisations, which are expected to promote democracy and be promoted with democracy, may be deployed to protect elites' interests at the detriments of the larger society. Stemming from the foregoing background, this study covered different sections including the study problem, brief literature review, an overview of the press situation in Nigeria, the study areas, methodology, results and discussion. The conclusion of this study came last with a description of policy implications and recommendations.

The Study Problem

Nigeria is not yet a free and open society despite the availability of expressions diversity flowing from abundantly remarkable numbers of press organisations in the country. Several press

organisations established in Nigeria lack complete freedom due to censorship, multiple power centres and volatile political institutions (Agbaje 1992). The proliferations of press organisations notwithstanding constitutional provisions for press freedom have not been fully enforced. Military regimes and civilian administrations violated constitutional rights to press freedom in Nigeria. Sustainability of Nigerian democracy is at stake without complete press freedom. A political scientist stated that ‘...democracy is not just about rights. It is equally about participation, interest representation, and contestation’ (Aiyede 2000, p.17). Lack of full recognition for the press is a major political constraint and constitutional aberration in Nigeria.

Apart from political constraints, other factors such as commercialization and decline of journalists’ professional ethics principally caused by the daily strife for survival in a highly competitive but limited market, affected the role of the press as the fourth estate (Adjovi 2002; Abati 1998). The danger of press freedom repression in democratic dispensations is the principal concern of this study. People in a democratic society lacking complete press freedom are at risks of falling victims to violence. Members of the press especially journalists and editors who struggle against forces that seek to suppress press freedom were brutalized. Nigeria, China, Cuba and Eritrea were among the countries with high prevalence of arrested and jailed journalists in 2007 (Bush 2008).

Several cases of arrested journalists were reported in Nigeria even during democratic dispensations (The Punch 2008). Generally, state restriction on freedom of expressions and police brutality were regular threats to members of the press in Nigeria. Police raided editorial offices and arrested employees of press organisations including Daily Independent, The News, and The Observer during the 1999-2003 democratic dispensation (The Punch 2008; Onadipe 2002). The police action was attributed to press publications considered critical of the Nigerian government. As such, press power of checking governance institutions has been curtailed with grave implications for socio-economic development in Nigeria.

The recent government’s refusal to pass FIB into FIL is a current case of repression of press freedom in Nigeria. The FIB scaled through legislative approval but the Nigerian President stepped it down during the last (1999-2007) democratic dispensations. It was sent back to the

legislature during the present democratic dispensation, which commenced on 29 May 2007 and has not been given legislative approval. Rejection of the FIB has aggravated the violation of human rights in Nigeria where elites prevent the press from reporting their illegitimate dealings. The elites discourage entrenchment of press freedom to cover up their shady deals in rent seeking, which constitutes an obstacle to sustainable development in Nigeria. This situation has affected the quality of information made available to the public and resulted into decline in public trust of the information in the press. Scholars proved that public trust has a tremendous effect on the quality of public administration and its decline will impose heavy expenditure on the political system (Fard et al 2007).

Unfortunately, elite discourses have captured much of the mediated public sphere in Nigeria. This trend throws up concerns for marginalisation of the majority in Nigerian democratic dispensations. Press organisations' spaces allotted to public opinions are so minute that many people lack opportunities to express their views. Media configuration and their centralization within the contexts of urbanisation and strict gate keeping role of state agents occupied the public spaces needed for public-government partnership (Chan 2005; Bardoes and Haenens 2004; Mitra 2001).

Elite capture of the press driven public sphere portends danger for democracy as it creates multiple voices that produce different versions of various class interests excluding the poor. The economic imperatives behind the operations of many press organisations tend to trump their public service role (Tettey 2008). This situation introduces dilemma in the understanding of the press contributions towards the development of Nigerian democracy. Painfully, expressions freedom and human rights are in a state of siege in Nigeria where journalists are constantly at different repression forefronts as they and their family members are routinely arrested, tortured and detained. The Nigerian situation is among the bad cases of press freedom repression in the world.

More journalists were killed worldwide in 2007 compared with records of journalists' deaths in any year since 1994 (Ellick 2007). Specifically, 64 journalists reportedly died in circumstances linked to their work in 2007 and nearly half (31) of those deaths took place in Iraq, which was

ranked as the deadliest country for journalists for the fifth consecutive year. Most of the killings were targeted attacks, as opposed to deaths in cross-fire. Journalists in Gambia face constant threats to their lives with Gambian government's proclivity for press repression and lack of commitment towards improving living standards of the populace (Jallow 2008; Same 2008).

Recent study showed that the soldier-turned-civilian-president Yahya Jammeh, who seized political power in the 1994 bloodless coup d'état, was voted as president in the third presidential election on 22 September 2006 but his victory had not appreciably moved Gambia closer to a more democratic political culture (Same 2008). In the absence of strong political opposition, the 2006 election resulted into the consolidation of authoritarian rule under democratic government. In light of the above, this study principally examines press freedom repression in Nigerian democratic dispensations.

Brief Literature Review

Accumulated knowledge shows that the spread of democracy, advancement in human rights, and the introduction of neoliberal reforms followed the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War whereas several countries are yet to fully enforce the civil right to press freedom. Few countries have good records of press freedom for which members of the press in many countries including Nigeria are still struggling. On the global press freedom index, Republic of Benin shared almost the same figure as the United Kingdom in 2005 and was ranked highest in Africa (World Bank 2006). The prevalence of free press organisations in Benin was driven by highly motivated local agents of cultural change and collective efforts in the determination of an effective control of government institutions. Private radio stations driven by cross fertilization of foreign and indigenous ideas contributed immensely towards entrenchment of press freedom and promotion of political innovation at the grassroots levels in Benin (Kohnert 2006).

Similarly, community radio stations established in the Democratic Republic of Congo contributed tremendously towards the country's political transition especially by disseminating necessary information to the public including the relatively isolated people in conflict prone areas. Estimates of the impact of private media growth in Madagascar showed that over 90 private radio

stations began operation since the late 1990s (Tettey 2008). Private media improved political stability following the hotly contested 2001 presidential election. The significant roles of the press in democracy include periodic civic education, election monitoring, reporting political activities and disseminating elections' results. Various studies established the extent to which a vibrant media environment affects citizens' engagement with their political system (Fard et al 2007; Karppinen 2007; Kuenzi and Lambright 2007, Aiyede 2000). A study of countries with two consecutive multi-party elections since the early 1990s showed a significantly positive relationship between media exposure and voter turnout in Africa's multiparty democratic elections (Kuenzi and Lambright 2007). Access to vital information affects public discourses and political participation in the society.

Press organisations' contributions to public knowledge have been widely recognised. As a manifestation of their awareness of the East Germans' tactic of mass action against oppressive government, irate citizens of Republic of Cote d'Ivoire (RCI) dislodged the dictator Gue'i who declared himself a winner of an election he lost during the ballot count. The protestors in RCI emulated the militant strategy in the popular revolt against Milosevic who tried to annul an election in which he was defeated in Yugoslavia (Onishi 2000). Earlier study documented a student protestor's remark: 'The mistake Gue'i made was to let us watch scenes from Belgrade' (Bandura 2002, p. 12). In his interpretation of the RCI situation, Bandura (2002) induced as follows:

'These macrosocial applications of media ingenuity in translating social cognitive principles into social practice illustrate how a small collective effort can make a huge difference in an urgent global problem... As nations wrestle with the loss of control, the public expresses disillusionment and cynicism over whether their leaders and institutions can work for them to improve their lives' (Bandura 2002, p.13).

Schaffner (2006) demonstrated that citizens' ability to acquire and utilize information about electoral processes would serve as useful instruments of accountability before, during and after elections. Press organisations are supposed to be the most reliable public information sources but situations in different countries dictate otherwise. Scholars found that several states in the Middle East lacked significant progress in institutionalising procedural democracy and civil liberties

(Spinks et al 2008). They however confirmed the liberalisation occurring among monarchies in the region.

Undesirable threat against press freedom in Paraguay attracted global attentions of press organizations. The Paraguay Union of Journalists described 2007 as a year of struggle, setbacks, and advances for the country's journalists, while International Press Institute stated that journalists, who are exposing activities such as corruption, experienced intimidation and death threats (Swaffield 2008). Paraguay has been labeled as one of the most troubled democracies in Latin America.

In Chad, six private press organisations protected against a decree which placed new infringements and harsh punishments on journalists. They planned launching a newspaper to denounce government resistance to press freedom (Africa Research Bulletin 2008). Many African states have poor records of civil liberties. Within the contexts of post-apartheid South African experience, scholars contended that press organisations emerged as autonomous power centres in competition with other power centers (Kriesi 2008; Jacobs 2002). The case of Nigeria is peculiar given her status as the most populous black nation in the world. Nigerian constitutions are elitist as crafted and imposed on the civil society by colonial masters, military oligarchy and their civilian counterparts (Nwabueze 1997). The elitism of the Nigerian constitutions raises questions of illegitimacy and violation of civil rights with impunity. The next section addresses the extant discourse on the situation of the press in Nigeria.

An Overview of the Press Freedom Situation in Nigeria

Oyeleye (2004) explored the turbulent relationship between the press, the political process and political actors in the contexts of the complex structure of the Nigerian society. The popularity of press organisations in Nigeria began in 1859 when Henry Townsend established the first known Newspaper (Iwe Iroyin) located in Abeokuta, western Nigeria (Abati 1998). In 1863, Robert Campbell established another newspaper (The Anglo-African), which served as a channel for promoting 'the interaction between Britain and Africa' (Dare and Uyo, 1996:2). Both newspapers

set the stage for the emergence of flourishing indigenous press organisations, which began in 1880 with the establishment of the Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertiser by Richard Beale Blaize. The success of Lagos Times inspired the further emergence of several other newspapers. Chief Remi Aboderin established The Punch Newspaper in 1973 followed by the emergence of other press organisations including National Concord (1980), Business Concord (1982), The Guardians (1983), African Concord (1984), African Economic Digest (1988), Hints (1989), Weekend Concord (1989), Tell (1991), Tempo (1993), The News (1993), P.M News (1994), The Week (1994), This Day (1995), and so on (Abati 1998).

Unlike the aforementioned history of early emergence of print media, the electronic media in Nigeria started in the 1950s with the establishment of Western Nigeria Television and subsequently followed by proliferation of radio and television stations across the country. Different press organisations have brought the deplorable state of the Nigerian society to public knowledge. They invoked critical journalism to expose different abnormalities ranging from poverty and crimes to bad roads and embarrassing situations in the Nigerian cities (Ukaegbu 2007). One newspaper vividly captured the plight of commuters on a federal road stating that the hopeless and helpless countenances of Nigerians detained uncomfortably against their will paint a picture of a flock of sheep without a shepherd (Leba 2006). The relationship between the press and Nigerian governments is largely antagonistic. It started from mild restrictions of press freedom during the colonial era and diffused into press freedom repression since the post colonial era.

With the establishments of the state's press organisations and politicisation of press censorship, the Nigerian press became weak, partisan and ethnocentric. Successive governments employed the press as an instrument of propaganda (Abati 1998). The Nigerian Press Organisation attempted to effect changes in the National Mass Media Commission (NMMC) since the post 1999 general election to no avail. NMMC defines lawful information and balanced reporting in light of state interest. Similarly, the Newspaper Registration Decree mandates a non-refundable fee of one hundred and fifty thousand naira (N150,000 or \$2,640) for anyone who wants to start a newspaper. The Nigerian democratic government embraced Decree 2 of 1984, which empowers

the Inspector-General of Police to detain indefinitely without trial any person considered as state security risk.

Ojo (2006) reported that the Nigerian government used Decree 60 to establish the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) in 1999 and charged it with the enforcement of professional ethics. Immediately, the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) rejected the creation of the Press Council because it contained a number of provisions perceived to be inimical to the operation of a free press. NPC was empowered to accredit and register journalists. In applying for registration, publishers were expected to submit their mission statements and objectives and could be denied registration if their objectives failed to satisfy the council's desire. The penalties for practicing without meeting the Council's standard were a fine of ₦ 250,000 (\$2,500) or 3 years imprisonment. The above reviews drive home the significance of theory in the discourse of press freedom repression in Nigeria.

In any democratic environment, the press can be anchored on three basic theories of press responsibility: the libertarian theory, the social responsibility theory and development theory (Abati, 1998). However, John Dewey's theory of public sphere is suitable for this study given its supports for a conceptual model that recognised multiple publics and permeable borders between public and private spheres (Asen 2003). The importance of the theory of public sphere as an antecedent and critical resource for contemporary theorising cannot be ignored. The basic canons of the theory include the role of communication in the formation and reformation of the public sphere.

A major concern in the social construction of the press communication system is the elite capture of the press. The elites may deploy press organisations as tools for ventilating parochial political interests rather than as public arena for robust democratic expressions. The elites' manipulations of press organisations in Nigeria and Madagascar fit the above description. In Madagascar, the wealthy established media organisations and utilised them to articulate their political propaganda (Tetty 2008). In response to the elite capture of the press religious organisations produced publications to contest the Madagascar's public sphere with the elite private press. The Nigerian situation is different from that of Madagascar in that many religious organisations in Nigeria

concentrate more on staging crusades and drawing people closer to God instead of providing parallel press outfits.

Striking a balance between competing concerns (public right to know and the necessity of political stability or national security) is a major challenge to press organisations in Nigeria. Like the regular cases in Nigeria, recent situations in Kenya uncovered the enormity of the dilemma facing press organisations in attempts to produce balanced reporting. Press organisations in Kenya conformed to the Ministry of Information's directive to delay news broadcasting due to post election violence and the importance of national security. Resultantly, different press organisations in Kenya presented to the public incomplete picture of socio-political realities in the country (Tettey 2008). Obviously, neglect of press freedom can aggravate national disaster. Experience in South Africa demonstrated this observation. Danso and Macdonald (2001) asserted that print media's failure to check the veracity of government statements on immigration in South Africa was partly responsible for some of the worst examples of xenophobic rhetoric in the country.

The press contributions to the Nigerian ethno-religious conflicts and civil strives cannot be ignored. Nigerians usually patronise different press organisations, which affect their understanding of local and international issues. Also, press organisations serve as veritable sources of socio-economic information ranging from advertisements, job opportunities, obituary, and public invitation to corporate financial statements and activities of industries in Nigeria.

The Study Areas

The fieldwork for this study was conducted in different press organisations in Lagos and Oyo states of Nigeria. Specifically, this study's sites were limited to press organisations located in Lagos metropolis and Ibadan, the capital city of Oyo State. Lagos and Ibadan were already large cities prior to the advent of colonial administration in Nigeria. Ibadan emerged as a war camp in 1829 following the settlement of migrant warriors from different locations in southwest Nigeria and became a large empire with a city state (Falola 1984), while Lagos State was created through Decree 14 of 1967 during the restructuring of Nigeria into 12 states. Establishment of the University of Ibadan in 1948 enhanced the importance of Ibadan. The concentration of qualified

people increased purchasing power in Ibadan and stimulated rapid growth in commerce and in press organisations. However, Ibadan did not succeed in attracting many big industries (Mabogunje 1968, p. 201) whereas Lagos is generally regarded as the commercial capital of Nigeria.

Until 1970, Ibadan was the largest city in sub-Saharan Africa (Lloyd et al. 1967) and Lagos will be one of the five mega cities in the world by 2015 (Massey 2002). Lagos was the Nigerian Federal Capital Territory from 1967 to 1991 (Obono 2007; Alemika and Chukuma 2005). In the 1980s, the Ibadan-Lagos expressway generated the greatest urban sprawl in Ibadan. Lagos is more cosmopolitan compared to Ibadan. Lagos metropolis comprises 14 Local Government Areas: Agege, Ajeromi-Ifelodun, Alimosho, Apapa, Ifako-Ijaye, Ikeja, Kosofe, Lagos Island, Lagos Mainland, Mushin, Ojo, Oshodi-Isolo, Shomolu and Surulere (Alemika and Chukwuma 2005). The lagoon divides Lagos State into two opposite geographical areas, the mainland and the island. Obono (2007) succinctly described the basic features of Lagos:

Lagos is characterised by high volumes of immigration, high population densities, a migration induced growth rate of 8 percent per year, an average household size of seven, poverty, tremendous concentrations of slums and squatter settlements, and a high youth unemployment rate. Lagos is the financial, economic and business capital of Nigeria and West Africa (Obono 2007: 32).

Several press organisations were located in Lagos State while only very few were cited in Ibadan. Besides their heterogeneous structure and historic relevance in the archive of Nigerian history, the availability of different press organisations in Lagos and Ibadan make the areas suitable for this study.

Methodology

The study population consisted members of staff of print and electronic media organisations located in Lagos and Oyo states metropolis. Four each of the print and electronic media organisations were drawn from Lagos and Oyo state metropolis respectively. The study was conducted in Ibadan and Lagos due to high concentration proportion of press organisations in the areas. In all, 16 press organisations (4 newspaper organisations, 4 magazine organisations, 4

radio stations and 4 television stations) were pragmatically selected while 480 members of the press (240 each from print and electronic media in Lagos and Ibadan respectively) were chosen purposively based on their work schedule, competence, gender, and availability.

Specifically, 30 members of the press were chosen from each of the 16 selected press organisations. Additionally, one in-depth interview was conducted among the senior members of staff in each of the 16 selected press organisations. The sample was drawn from male and female members of staff within different age categories. The participants were restricted to adult members of staff who had spent at least close to five years in their respective organisations to consider those with relatively sufficient exposure to the wealth of experience and understanding of the intricacies of the press freedom during Nigerian democratic dispensations. In-depth interview guide and structured questionnaire were developed for this study. The in-depth interview was structured based on the outcomes of the questionnaire and basic concepts in the theory of press freedom.

This study's questionnaire was structured into 17 open-ended and 18 closed-ended questions to accommodate different issues including socio-demographic profiles as well as knowledge on press freedom and its repression during Nigerian democratic dispensations. The respondents' perception about the emerging Freedom of Information Bill and the extent of their agreement or disagreement on it was tested. The questions were framed on the expectation that democracy would promote press freedom and considerations that press freedom is the cornerstone of democracy. Eight unpaid research assistants consulted among members of staff in the selected press organisations facilitated questionnaire administration to their colleagues.

The research assistants requested at least two weeks to get the filled copies of the questionnaire back from their colleagues due to busy schedules of members of the press. The researcher followed up and monitored the state of the questionnaire administration through regular telephone conversation with research assistants. Considerable response magnitude was obtained from members of the press four weeks after the date the researcher consulted the research assistants and gave them copies of questionnaire for the selected press organisations. Only 424 copies of questionnaire were filled and returned against 480 copies originally distributed. Thus,

88.3 percent response rate was recorded for this study. All copies of the filled questionnaires were scrutinized for complete response and analysed through the application of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 13). Data obtained from IDI were analysed ethnographically with the aid of ZY Index.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 depicts the respondents' socio-demographic profile. The inference drawn from various statistics in the table was that the press organisations under study were characterised by responsibly matured members of staff by virtues of their marital status, 25-60 years age range and high level of western education. Two-third (66%) of the respondents are male and over two-third (68.2%) were married. At least four out of every five respondents (83%) were Christians and 80.9 percent had First Degree or Higher National Diploma (HND). The majority (61.8%) had worked in the press organisations under study for over five years whereas their monthly income was relatively low at ₦ 40,000 - ₦ 76,000.00 (\$340 – \$650) for over 83 percent of the respondents. Over 50 percent of them were reporters followed by 29.7 percent editors among others including journalists, correspondents, producers/presenters and newscasters.

Table 1: The Respondents' Socio-Demographic Profile

Profile	Values	Frequency	Percent (%)
Marital Status	Not Married	126	29.7
	Cohabitation	9	2.1
	Married	289	68.2
Total		424	100
Sex	Female	144	34
	Male	280	66
Total		424	100
Religion	Christianity	352	83
	Islam	72	17
Total		424	100
Education	ND/NCE/Technical	18	4.2
	First Degree/HND	343	80.9
	Masters	63	14.9
Total		424	100
Age (Years)	< 30	63	14.9
	30-39	180	42.5
	40-49	153	36.1
	50 +	28	6.6
Total		424	100
Job Status	Editor	126	29.7
	Reporter	216	50.9
	Journalist	18	4.2
	Correspondent	18	4.2
	Producer/Presenter	9	2.1
	Newscaster	37	8.7
Total		424	100
Ethnicity	Igbo	36	8.5
	Yoruba	343	80.9
	Other	45	10.6
Total		424	100
Monthly Income (₦)	< 50,000.00	198	46.7
	50,000.00-75,999.00	154	36.3
	76,000.00-100,000.00	54	12.7
	>100,000.00	18	4.2
Total		424	100
Organisation	Newspaper	90	21.2
	Television	91	21.5
	Radio	135	31.8
	Magazine	108	25.5
Total		424	100
Working Experience (Years)	< 5	162	38.2
	5-9	108	25.5
	10 +	154	36.3
Total		424	100

Source: 2008 Survey on Repression of Press Freedom in Nigerian Democratic Dispensations

Press Freedom in Nigerian Democratic Dispensations

Table 2 depicts the respondents' knowledge on press freedom. Three out of every five respondents (59.6%) disclosed that information, education, enlightenment, entertainment and public awareness were the top priorities of their press organisations. Very few (8.5%) noted that advertisements and profit were the top priorities of their press organisations. These divergent views expose the challenges facing the press concerning striking a balance between professionalism and public expectations and keeping the press alive as a business. In their assessment, 42.7 percent, 34 percent and 12.7 percent of the respondents respectively disclosed

that inadequate freedom, poor funding, low remunerations, lack of professionalism and corruption were the major problems facing their press organisations.

Over 91 percent of the respondents confirmed that press freedom was not fully achieved during any democratic dispensation in Nigeria. This finding reflects several reports on harassment of members of the press and human rights abuse in Nigeria. For instance, the Punch (2008) reported that 22 journalists including an American were arrested and detained in Port Harcourt, River State, Nigeria on the allegation of not obtaining clearance before taking photographs and recording some facilities at the Shell Petroleum Development Company's Gas Plant in the Niger Delta. It was recalled that in 2004 the State Security Service raided the office of Insider Weekly, seized some vital documents and arrested some journalists; in September 2007, two German journalists and a US activist were intercepted and detained for two weeks, while four US documentary filmmakers and their Nigerian counterparts were detained for six days in April 2008 (The Punch 2008). Other media houses including The News, Africa Independent Television/Raypower, Freedom Radio, Kano and Bayelsa Broadcasting Corporation were recent victims of official clampdown. An editorial section of a popular newspaper in Nigeria came up with the following remark:

It is sad that while international standards, which allow journalists to perform their duties without let or hindrance are respected even at war fronts, Nigerian journalists and media houses face intimidation and harassment on a daily basis at home (The Punch 2008, p.14).

Several reasons advanced as evidence of absence of complete press freedom in Nigeria included restriction of press freedom, government refusal to endorse the FIB, censorship, owners' influence, and harassment of officials of press organisations. All participants in IDI corroborated the above reasons. They mentioned that lack of complete press freedom remained a major problem hindering effective contributions of the press to development in Nigeria. More than half of the respondents (55.4%) considered public interests the most important concern for any press organisation whereas 38.2 percent believed that both state and public interests were paramount.

Practically, 72.4 percent disclosed that their press organisations protected both state and public interests, while only 14.9 percent maintained that their press organisations protected public

interests. This finding displays the press position as an intermediary between the state and the public. Thus, it can be deduced that press organisations in Nigeria operate within opposite forces (the state and the public forces). Press organisations face difficulties in the process of maintaining balance between these forces. A participant uncovered the dilemma of the press in a brief statement: ‘the state threatens press organisations, the police harass members of the press and the public does not appreciate the role of the press’ (IDI, 18 August 2008).

In the debate concerning the relationship between democracy and the press, overwhelming majority (87.3%) strongly believed that the press promoted democracy in Nigeria and 85.1 percent stated that without the press the Nigerian democracy would not survive. Only few (6.4%) agreed on the co-existence of democracy and the press in Nigeria. Following different degrees of recognition (48.8%, 21.2%, 15.1% and 14.9%), intimidation, freedom restriction, dangers associated with objective reporting, work hazards and economic hardships came up clearly in the array of risks facing members of press organisations during Nigerian democratic dispensations.

Both awareness and personal experience of Nigerian governments’ hostile relationships with press organisations were very high at 93.6 percent respectively. Obviously, Nigerian governments have succeeded in controlling press organisations in Nigeria given that more respondents (97.9%) disclosed that government opinions were always in the news compared to those (72.4%) in favour of opinions of ordinary people. A close scrutiny of estimates presented in Table 2 shows that state hegemony, private-public struggles for recognition and reconstruction of press organisations within the contexts of neoliberal political economy are separate realities affecting socio-economic development in Nigeria.

Table 2: The Respondents' Knowledge on Press Freedom

Knowledge	Values	Frequency	Percent (%)
Top Priority of the Organisation	Education/Information/Enlightenment/Entertainment	154	36.3
	Awareness	99	23.3
	News	135	31.8
	Adverts/Profit	36	8.5
	Total	424	100
Major Problem Facing the Press	Inadequate Freedom	181	42.7
	Funding/Low Remuneration	144	34
	Self Censorship	36	8.5
	Harassment	9	2.1
	Lack of Professionalism/Corruption	54	12.7
	Total	424	100
Complete Press Freedom during Any Democratic Dispensation	No	388	91.5
	Yes	36	8.5
	Total	424	100
Reason for Complete or Incomplete Press Freedom	Government Refusal of FIB	109	25.7
	Freedom Restriction	144	34
	Censorship/Owner's Influence	81	19.1
	Harassment/Persecution of Press Officials	63	14.9
	Anti-Government Stories without Media Closure	27	6.4
	Total	424	100
Interest Considered Most Important	State Interest	27	6.4
	Public Interest	235	55.4
	Both State and Public Interest	162	38.2
	Total	424	100
Interest Protected by Press Organisation	State Interest	54	12.7
	Public Interest	63	14.9
	Both State and Public Interest	307	72.4
	Total	424	100
Hierarchy of Relevance between Democracy and the Press	Democracy Promotes the Press	54	12.7
	The Press Promotes Democracy	370	87.3
	Total	424	100
Reason in Support of Democracy or the Press	Democracy and the Press Co-Exist	27	6.4
	Without Democracy the Press Cannot Survive	36	8.5
	Without the Press Democracy Cannot Survive	361	85.1
	Total	424	100
Greatest Risk Facing Members of the Press	Danger of Objectivity	64	15.1
	Intimidation/Insecurity	207	48.8
	Freedom Restriction	90	21.2
	Hazard/Economic Hardships	63	14.9
	Total	424	100
Awareness of Problem with Any Member of the Press	No	27	6.4
	Yes	397	93.6
	Total	424	100
Knowledge of Threat If Certain Information Is Made Public	No	27	6.4
	Yes	397	93.6
	Total	424	100
Publication of Opinion of Ordinary People	Always	307	72.4
	Occasionally	117	27.6
	Total	424	100
Publication of Opinion of Government or the Elite	Always	415	97.9
	Occasionally	9	2.1
	Total	424	100

Source: 2008 Survey on Repression of Press Freedom in Nigerian Democratic Dispensations

Public Contest of FIB and Necessity for FIL in Nigeria

Table 3 illustrates the respondents' knowledge on FIB in Nigeria. All the respondents agreed that the FIB should be passed into FIL. The majority (87.3%) endorsed the FIB with highly positive

remarks, while the rest (8.5% and 4.2%) strongly believed that it would promote press freedom and enhance development of democracy in Nigeria. Almost half of the respondents (46.9%) believed that there would be easy access to information followed by 34 percent with the belief that there would be removal of freedom restriction and press organisations would have access to right information if the FIB was passed into FIL. However, the Nigerian government's refusal of FIB can be described as contravention of Nigerian constitutions, infringement on human rights and indictment on the Nigerian President who publicly declared his intention to uphold the rule of law.

In spite of President Umaru Yar' Adua's claim that his administration was anchored on the rule of law; journalists faced intimidation and harassment in the course of their legitimate duties. In September 2007 a journalist was beaten to stupor when he covered a prison riot in Ibadan. The State Security Staff also arrested several journalists in October 2007 for criticising the governors of Borno and Akwa Ibom states (The Punch 2008, p.14). There was high level of awareness on the reasons for the suspension of FIB in Nigeria as 68.2 percent attributed it to the state attempt to cover up certain government activities away from public knowledge, 19.1 percent believed it was due to government's selfish interest and concern for national security, while 6.4 percent each claimed that lack of governance transparency, corruption and the state's calls for clarification were the main reasons for the suspension of FIB.

Apparently, type of press organisations did not significantly affect the press practitioners' reactions to FIB, which was generally believed to be necessary in the development of the Nigerian democracy. The press serves society in a various ways such as political function, social function, educational function and religious functions. The popular reference to the press as the "fourth estate" points to the capacity of the press to perform the role of a watchdog, monitor those in authority, expose their limitations and provide checks and balances to the three other estates namely: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. The press helps to keep the public informed, it entertains, educates and sets standards and establishes values for public conduct.

Thus, the press is responsible to the society as an instrument of social order construction (Abati, 1998). Unfortunately, there was lack of consensus on the assurance of when the FIB would

become FIL. While 48.8 percent thought that FIB should be passed into law soon, 38.4 percent mentioned that it should be passed immediately and 12.7 percent noted that it would be passed into law during next political dispensation. Concerning the principal effect of lack the FIL on press organisations, 74.5 percent disclosed that it had aggravated the traditional restriction of press freedom followed by 19.1 percent who believed that lack of FIL provided motivation for further struggle for press freedom in Nigeria. The Nigerian public was not neglected in the discourse of the implications of lack of the FIL. Different respondents (36.1% and 32.1%) perceived that the FIL would guarantee public access to right information and easy access to information.

Table 3: The Respondents' Knowledge on Freedom of Information Bill (FIB)

Knowledge	Values	Frequency	Percent (%)
Perception about the FIB	Good/Should be Passed into Law	370	87.3
	Essential for Democracy	18	4.2
	It will Promote Press Freedom	36	8.5
Total		424	100
FIB Benefit to the Press If Passed into Law	Easy Access to Information	199	46.9
	Removal of Freedom Restriction	144	34
	Eradication of Speculative News	54	12.7
	Accountability/Transparency	27	6.4
Total		424	100
Reason for Government Refusal of FIB	Fear of Being Exposed/Corruption	289	68.2
	Lack of Governance Transparency	27	6.4
	Selfish Interest/National Security	81	19.1
	Government's Call for Clarification	27	6.4
Total		424	100
Thought about When FIB Should Be Passed into Law	Immediately	163	38.4
	Very Soon	207	48.8
	Next Political Dispensation	54	12.7
Total		424	100
Effect of Lack of Freedom of Information Law on the Press	Restriction of Press Freedom	316	74.5
	Struggle for Press Freedom	81	19.1
	No Serious Effect	27	6.4
Total		424	100
Major Advantage of Freedom of Information Law to the Public	Access to Right Information	153	36.1
	Easy Access to Information	136	32.1
	Accountability/Transparency	90	21.2
	Patriotism/High Trust of the Press	36	8.5
	Publicly Seen and Heard	9	2.1
Total		424	100

Source: 2008 Survey on Repression of Press Freedom in Nigerian Democratic Dispensations

Repression of Press Freedom in Nigeria

Table 4 shows the respondent's knowledge of contemporary exposition on repression of press freedom in Nigeria. There were no significant differences in the reactions of members of staff of electronic and print press organisations to repression of press freedom in Nigerian democratic dispensations. Two out of every three respondents (68.2%) were aware of specific policies that created obstacles against press freedom in Nigeria. Their perceived anti-press freedom policies included Censorship Bureaucracy (37.7%), Decrees and Government Control of Public Media (21.8% each) as well as Official Secret and Classified Information (18.7%). The Nigerian government and police with their tactics including hindrance, intimidation, harassment and arrest were recognised antagonists of members of press organisations in Nigeria. It is no longer in doubt that the state perceives the press as threat and thus restricts press freedom. Thus, press freedom may remain problematic for as long as the thieving class remains in power in Nigeria. Fundamentally, passing of FIB into FIL and upgrading the socio-economic conditions of members of press organisations received massive support during this study.

Table 4: The Respondents' Knowledge on Repression of Press Freedom

Knowledge	Values	Frequency	Percent (%)
Awareness of Policy against Press Freedom	No	135	31.8
	Yes	289	68.2
Total		424	100
Specified Policy Against Press Freedom	Decree(s)	63	21.8
	Censorship/Bureaucracy	109	37.7
	Official Secret/Classified Information	54	18.7
	Government Control of Public Media	63	21.8
Total		289	100
Group that Creates Greatest Problem for the Press	Government	370	87.3
	Police	54	12.7
Total		424	100
Greatest Problem that the Group Can Create for the Press	Intimidation/Harassment	81	19.1
	Hindrance/Freedom Restriction	270	63.7
	Arrest/Persecution	27	6.4
	Unnecessary Bureaucracy/Secretive	27	6.4
	Refusal of FIB	19	4.5
Total		424	100
Experience of Warning or Directive not to Publicize Certain Information	Recently	127	30
	Long Time	144	34
	Never	153	36.1
Total		424	100
Measure for Promoting Press Freedom	Passing of FIB into Law	343	80.9
	Passing of FIB into Law and Adequate Remuneration	63	14.9
	Public Support of the Press	18	4.2
Total		424	100

Source: 2008 Survey on Repression of Press Freedom in Nigerian Democratic Dispensations

Conclusion

A close scrutiny of findings of this study shows that state hegemony, private-public struggles for recognition and reconstruction of press organisations within the contexts of neoliberal political economy are separate realities demanding attentions in the understanding of the Nigerian development perspective in the discourse of public sphere in Africa. The separate realities interlock as this study clearly demonstrated. Press organisations contributed immensely towards the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria whereas the Nigerian socio-political environment has hindered complete press freedom. Constant intimidation and arrest of members of the press in Nigeria is an indication that Nigerian governments lack political will to address development crises in the country.

Different anti-government stories in various press reports featured public outcries of lack of transparency and foul-plays in governance. This study confirmed that the press kept the public informed, entertained, enlightened, set standards and established values for public conduct. Different press organisations in Nigeria kept the local and international public informed on the remarkable socio-economic news and political developments. Earlier studies confirmed that lack of credibility and unprofessional conducts of some media organisations could undermine the

power of the press (Tettey 2006; Sakr 2003). Some journalists in Africa have been accused of unprofessional conducts such as corruption, chasing spectacular headlines and doctoring reports to attract monetary inducements (Tettey 2008).

This phenomenon is popularly known as white or brown envelope syndrome in Nigeria where some members of press organisations have colluded with government officials principally due to pecuniary motives and institutionalisation of corruption. However, the press freedom repression remained progressive in democratic dispensations and will adversely affect investment climate in Nigeria. If the Nigerian government remained adamant on stepping down the FIB, the public would be denied access to correct information and deprived of immense benefits that can accrue from transparent governance. This speculation is not unfounded given the discovery that many Africans lack knowledge of political processes that affect them due to the extensive opacity of government transactions in Africa.

A similar study (Tettey 2008) showed that press organisations assist the public by providing information on various dealings of the government to ensure transparency in governance. Renewed interests in scaling up socio-economic development will not yield positive results until press freedom completely manifest in Nigeria. This pessimism flows from intellectual sensitivity to the flood of current thoughts in global development debates in which the explanatory variables of development have successively moved to institutions from the long held beliefs in access to natural resources, physical capital, the acquisition and sustainability of technology, the human capital as well as the generation and implementation of sound policies (Bonger 2006).

To this effect, press organisations in Nigeria require better ways of upholding professionalism and journalism ethics rather than succumb to adverse influences that water-down the quality of information needed for sustainable socio-economic development. The Nigerian political class should accommodate public opinions and various press reports on the necessity of responsible governance before taking any decision that may be of public interest. The development of the Nigerian democracy largely depends on full recognition of institutional responsibilities including the role of the press in nation building. Therefore, practical steps should be taken towards developing the political environment in Nigeria so that the politics of electoral malpractices and

political terrorism would be drastically reduced or totally eradicated. Additionally, public trust is valuable and should be gained in the movement toward constitutional amendments in Nigeria.

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