

**MAXIMIZING THE ROLE OF MUCKRAKING JOURNALISM IN THE ANTI GRAFT WAR
FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

The height of nepotism, tribal jingoism, religious bigotry, black-propaganda, misappropriation of public funds, bad governance and the outright embezzlement of public funds with almost total impunity by some deviant government officials are rising astronomically hence need muckrakers in the vineyard of the media to minimize these anti development idiosyncrasies and unearth these deviant characters and their misdeeds in the corridors of power which are bedeviling the political and socio-economic growth of Nigeria in order to lift Nigerians from the present quagmire of insecurity, economic woes, hunger, financial impropriety, political mistrust, etc. Against this background, this paper aimed to optimize the powers of muckrakers in re-engineering democratic structure and governance for a better Nigeria. This paper is anchored on the conspiracy theory to give this work a sound theoretical framework. The paper adopted desk research design because of its relevance to this academic exercise. Consequently, the paper observes among others: The growing conspiracy among some deviant government officials to overturn the contractual agreement between the government and the governed towards the provision of people-participatory-governance. The paper also found lack of adherence to national ethics by some key government officials as one major cause of bad governance and corruption in Nigerian polity. The paper equally found lack of motivation for muckrakers as worrisome. Sequel to these, the paper advocates for a legal framework to empower muckrakers to carry out their constitutional mandate as enshrined in Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Government should also encourage muckraking by creation of assurance policy for muckrakers in the event of unforeseen circumstances and to salvage Nigerian nation from the hands of kleptocrats and their kleptomaniacs in government. The paper also advocates for a paradigm shift among some government officials in the planning and implementation of government policies and programmes to improve the well being of the citizenry as this would promote good governance in Nigeria.

Key Terms: Muckrakers, Anti Graft War, Optimization, Good Governance

INTRODUCTION

In every responsible and healthy democracy, the mass media have a vantage place to occupy in order to check the excesses of those in the corridors of power. The mass media equally have avalanche of roles to play in every democratic government. Some of these roles are manifest while others are latent. To give credence to the power of the mass media in a democratic government, the 1999 Constitutional of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended empowers the mass media to play the watchdog role in order to protect the democratic institutions and bring government officials to the track of good governance.

The provision of the aforementioned Constitution as enshrined in Section 22 reads:

The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility of the government to the people.

But how has the press and other agencies of the mass media been able uphold the fundamental objectives contained in the aforementioned Chapter (II) and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people?

Again, to what level have these channels of mass communication promoted Section 39 Sub Section (1) of 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended? The Section reads:

Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference.

Subsection 2 of the same Section of the Constitution (39) reads: "Without prejudice to Subsection (1) every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions". Is it true that the establishment and ownership of media industry in Nigeria is as easy as that?

In the same vein, how have the mass media fared in the promotion of Section 23 of the same Constitution? The provision of the Constitution reads:

The national ethics shall be discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self-reliance and patriotism.

In the same spirit, Section 24(b) of the Constitution reads: "It shall be the duty of every citizen to enhance the power, prestige and name of Nigeria, defend Nigeria and render such national service as is required" while Subsection (d) of the same Section 24 holds:

Every citizen shall make positive and useful contribution to the advancement, progress and well-being of the community where he or she resides.

In view of the above, it is clear that the conventional media practitioners have not made appreciable progress in the promotion of national ethics of Nigerian. It is equally true that the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media have not been able to carry out their constitutional mandate of upholding the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.

Therefore, the call for urgent invitation and deployment of special journalistic force to combat the anti development idiosyncrasies of those in government such as kleptomania, nepotism, embezzlement of public funds, promotion of religious jingoism, tribal bigotry among others becomes sacrosanct.

This is because no nation can achieve her target socio-economic goals when those saddled with the leadership position are beclouded with economic and political corruption hence the role of muckrakers in fighting the societal malady of "wealth without work" as observed by Mohandas Gandhi and cited in Mbah (1999) becomes inevitable.

According to Gandhi, other societal maladies or blunders are:

Pleasure without conscience Knowledge without character Commerce without morality Science without humanity Worship without sacrifice Politics without principles and Arum Gandhi has added rights Without responsibilities as the Cankerworms that eat all the fabrics of the society deeply.

Alikor (2013) argues that until muckrakers are at work, the society will continue to face malgovernance and economic sabotage. Therefore, the roles of muckrakers in combating the

maladies of corruption bedeviling the growth of Nigerian nation cannot be overemphasized especially where the mass media are gagged and their contents fettered. This genre of journalist strives to dig down to the root of every matter he perceives as the bane of the development of the society perpetuated by the deviant characters in government and the business environment and bring it to public knowledge.

Alikor further opines that muckrakers in journalism or media world enforce the norms and values of the modern society and ensure that people live within the ambit of good morals. Muckraking journalism aims at confronting evils in the government and the society at large. It fights the societal blunders of our contemporary generation. Against this background, a muckraker is more or less a police without official uniform to investigate societal blunders. But he or she is not without powers to function optionally. A muckraker wields the pen power that is mightier than the sword. He or she serves as an agent of change and good governance in our contemporary society (Alikor, 2013). Muckrakers publicize scandal about public figures or high profile personalities. Muckrakers are the conscience of the nation. Ekwelie (2005) discussing muckraking journalism, argues that muckrakers are comparable to policemen without warrant to arrest and bring to the media house for interrogations. They are like "moral policemen" who seek to dig out hidden secrets or facts of public interest and set agenda on them irrespective of whose ox is gored.

Keeble (2006) states that muckrakers enjoy a high reputation with the public. Keeble further observes that muckrakers along with war correspondents have become mythologized as titans of journalism profession, fearless noblemen, dogged reporter, glamorous and always on the side of the public. They are adventurers. They risk their lives to save the society or nations from the hands of kleptocrats and their kleptomania in the corridors of power and business (Alikor, 2019, p.121).

Alikor further notes that muckraking journalists use para-police method or intelligence gathering in unearthing the misconducts which someone wants to suppress or remain hidden from the sight of conventional journalists and the public.

Ogunwale (2008) citing Odunewu argues that if African media houses have had in place a unit or department called "Investigate Desk", where muckraking activity is encouraged and funded, most of the stealing that virtually grounded the social order, with it all the sinews of welfare for the citizens would have been exposed by muckrakers trained for the job".

Ogunwale further argues that one way of building a reputation for any media house whether print or electronic media is to accord muckraking news its rightful place. According to Ogunwale, muckraking is not day-dreaming. It is not speculation. It is not star-gazing. It is not mere investigation of frauds but conscious journalistic efforts to save the society from the hands of operators of kleptocracy and their kleptomania.

CLARIFICATION OF KEY TERMS

Some terms are defined in this paper according to their usage to ease undertaking of some professional jargons or terminologies. Among which are:

Muckrakers: Muckrakers are journalistic espionages saddled with the responsibilities of spying into the lives and wealth of public figures or high profile personalities to ferret the financial and political maladies committed against humanity and hidden beyond the knowledge of conventional journalists and the public. These are professional journalists trained on the mechanics of unearthing societal maladies perpetuated by the deviant characters and hidden beyond the sight of a conventional journalists and the general public.

Muckraking: This is a genre of journalism that is concerned with using quasi police detective techniques in unearthing the financial misconducts and other immoral activities negating the societal growth perpetuated by those in the corridors of power in any nation. It is a branch of journalism that is concerned with uncovering economic and political crimes committed by government officials and captains of industry and hidden beyond the sight of conventional journalists and the public.

Anti-Graft-War

This is a conscious act of fighting and diminishing financial crimes in the society by the adoption of muckraking journalism techniques to unearth the maladies in the interest of the public.

Good Governance

This is a kind of government that strives to meeting the yearnings and aspirations of its citizenry by the provision of basic social amenities or infrastructure including creation of employment opportunities. It is a genre of governance that stimulates the

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is anchored on the conspiracy theory of politics and governance because of its relevance to the study. Conspiracy theory is an explanation of an event or situation that involves the conspiracy of two or more persons to conspire against the state or citizenry to do that which is not legal, moral or legitimate but for their own personal aggrandizement. The ideology or idiosyncrasies of the conspirators are against the consensus of the right-thinking people. The conspirators’ actions and inactions negate societal development. In democratic governance, their idiosyncrasies prejudice good governance and promote self-serving ideology.

Conspiracy theory explains what happens when two or more people conspire to do that which is not of public interest but driven by selfish interest. It is a secret plot by the power mongers and conspirators to run down a legitimate government to achieve their selfish goals. In Nigeria, the activities of the kleptocrats in government are liken to conspiracy theory. The level looting of public funds with almost total impunity can best described as conspiracy against the masses at the highest order.

Conspiracy theory is widely believed to be invented by America Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and popularized by the agency to discredit conspiratorial believers, particularly critics of the Warren Commission by making them a target of ridicule.

In his 2013 book titled “Conspiracy Theory in America,” Lance Dehaven-Smith opined that the term conspiracy entered the dictionary of everyday language in the United States after 1964, the year in which the Warren Commission published its findings on the John F. Kennedy’s assassination, with the New York Times running five stories that year using the term, conspiracy theory (Warren Commission, 2013).

MUCKRAKING AND THE STATE OF NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY

Nigerian democracy has become deficient in many areas. Institutions are failing from their responsibilities and many in the corridors of power are promoting kleptocracy rather than democracy. On many occasions, appointments into key government positions are based on nepotism rather than meritocracy. Funds are either misappropriated or diverted into private pockets leading to failure of government projects and programmes, sometimes abandoned or done without specifications.

Nigeria is a country indebted to many countries without the prove of the use of the monies or proceeds from the loans to better the welfare of the citizens. Discussing Nigerian’s problems

(Emenajo, 2003) in one of his books as cited in (Ndimele, 2016), "The Boat is Sinking" lamented in the following ways:

Nigeria is a country that runs a ruthless and unrepented capitalist economy;

A giant of Africa in search of her nationals;

An evergreen land peopled by hollow, greedy and evil men;

A land of giants where there is a perpetual movement and yet, there is no motion; A country with continuous change of policies without continuity;

A country suffocating, ailing and artificial amalgam of different tribes and cultures whose regional loyalties are not only deep-seated but also are of a more paramount than to the government at the centre;

A country at war with itself and characterized by frequent ethics or group agitation for self-determination; A country where good ideas are deliberately frustrated or killed; A country peopled by overly conquered, impoverished and naïve electorate; A country where there are plethora of directorates yet there is no direction; A country where the blind and the deaf have always led the healthy persons; A country where empires end up as vampires; A country where rulers believe they are leaders; A country where ceremony of excellence is drowned and evil is greatly celebrated and reward, etc.

Again, Emenajo (2013) outlines some of the indicators with which a failed state is assessed. Some of which are bad governance, kidnapping, hunger, poverty, disease, neglect, lack of transparency, homelessness, illiteracy, unemployment, inflation, etc. Emenajo argues that Nigeria has them all. He further argues that: Nigeria is a crawling nation;

The darkest country in dark Africa and in the world;

A dirty country with a dying people; A rich nation with very poor citizenry; A country in distress; A country at war with itself; A country awash with clueless, barefoot and counterfeit leaders; A country where 95% of private wealth both the legitimately acquired and the stolen are exported and hidden in overseas banks without injecting some into the local economy to create jobs; A country where smaller thieves are hanged while full time and bigger thieves are celebrated and given honours; A country where prison officials steal money meant to buy food for prisoners who stole even smaller amounts; A country whose virgins are helplessly forced unto sex labour and the lads into armed robbery in desperation to make ends meet; A country where nothing good seems to work and where meritocracy is slaughtered at the altar of mediocrity; A country that runs a diluted, home-bred, monstrous and scandalous presidential system of government; A country where polling stations have become battle grounds and innocent electorate who come to exercise their franchise are often gunned down and A country where the ceremony of excellence is drowned;

Who has done these to Nigeria and Nigerians?

Where did they orchestrate this plan?

How can Nigeria come out of this quagmire?

These critical issues raised by Prof Emenajo regarding Nigerian state need to be muckraked by muckrakers to save Nigeria and Nigerians from being a "Banana Republic"

These Nigeria and Nigerians problems are the threshold of this paper. It is the conviction of the authors of this paper that without the intervention of muckrakers, Nigerian democracy will snowball into a kleptocracy. Therefore, the roles of muckrakers in fighting these societal blunders and maladies as foretold by Mohandas Gandhi and Prof. Emenajo are indispensable to right the wrongs in Nigeria governance.

EXPECTED ROLES OF MUCKRAKERS IN PROMOTION OF GOOD GVERNANCE IN NIGERIA:

1. Ferreting the financial misconducts of those in the corridors of power
2. Serving as aggressive watchdogs on those in the governance of Nigerian nation
3. Raising alarm on financial crimes committed by government officials
4. Making government responsible and accountable to the citizenry or electorate
5. Serving as espionage in governance of Nigerian Nation
6. Serving as journalistic detectives on financial crimes in the interest of the public
7. Probing of illicit wealth of those saddled with leadership position in Nigerian nation
8. Setting agenda on political and economic corruption in the country
9. Purifying the political and socio-economic landscape of the nation
10. Safe guiding the country from being a "Banana Republic" occasioned by the deviant characters in the government
11. Promotion and enforcement of national ethics in workplace, professional and personal life
12. Defend the ordinary citizens against the abuse of power.
13. Unearth scandals in government
14. Defend the oath of national anthem as taken by politicians and key public office holders

Combating societal blunders as observed by Mohandas Gandhi decades ago such as wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, politics without principles, commerce without morality, knowledge without character, worship without sacrifice, science without humanity, etc.

But to what level have the muckrakers being able to carry out the above roles in Nigerian democratic government and how have they fought kleptocracy in governance generally given the level of alleged grafts found in Nigerian polity now christened:

- Ikoyigate
- Farukgate
- Dazianagate
- WEACgate
- Minagate
- Ribadugate
- Abba-kyarigate among others.

CONCLUSION

The level of grafts in all spheres of Nigerian leadership and governance is rising astronomically. Graft in Nigerian governance is becoming systemic and endemic hence needs urgent holistic muckraking approach to instill fears into government officials who are perpetuating financial crimes in the leadership and governance of Nigeria with total impunity.

Until there is an aggressive war against kleptocrats and their kleptomania in governance and leadership of this country, the quest for good governance will be nightmarish.

FINDINGS

The following are the findings of this paper:

1. Muckraking journalism is going moribund in Nigerian polity.

2. Lack of incentives and motivation is one major reason for near to zero muckraking journalism in Nigeria polity.
3. There is high level of political and economic corruption in Nigerian governance and leadership.
4. Nigeria democracy is speedily snowballing into kleptocracy.
5. There is no strong institutional and legal framework backing the practice of muckraking in Nigeria.
6. There is lack of conducive muckraking environment in Nigeria.
7. There is near to absence of the enforcement of Sections 22 and 23 of 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended which is supposed to be championed by muckrakers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sequel to the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be conscious effort by the government to enact laws and institutions to back muckraking journalism in Nigeria.
2. There is an urgent need to encourage muckraking journalism by government, Non Governmental Organizations (NGO), religious organizations and other interest groups to save Nigeria and Nigerians from the hands of kleptocrats.
3. There is need for conducive muckraking environment in Nigeria to reawaken the dying muckraking spirit.
4. Media houses should train and retrain their journalists on the dynamics of muckraking especially in the area of **sting and undercover** muckraking to help strengthen Nigeria democracy and good governance.
5. Federal government should recognize the contributions of Dele Giwa to the introduction of muckraking journalism in Nigeria by posthumous award to him encourage and inspire upcoming journalists to see muckraking journalists as the conscience of the nation.
6. Media houses, philanthropists and non state-actor should initiate "Assurance muckraking journalism.
7. Muckrakers should aggressively set agenda on the enforcement of Sections 22 and 23 of 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in order to promote good governance and healthy democracy in Nigeria.
8. Muckraking institute should be established by media barons and media entrepreneurs to encourage the growth of muckraking journalism in Nigeria.

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