Sudanese Newspapers and "Fourth Estate" Role: Impacts of Censorship on Anti-Corruption Campaign

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Abstract

Logically censorship or self-censorship is always detrimental to any media whose ambition it is to be free and independent. self-censorship though exists in law, but when it is practiced it undermines the freedom of the press as the "fourth estate". The first role of a watch-dog or "fourth estate" is severely restrained by self-censorship, lack of resources and political parties intervening in journalists' work. It is further undermined by the economic dependence on business and political parties. Though Sudan has many local and national newspapers, still not enough attention has been paid to issues of censorship impact on corruption. In view of this, this study examines how censorship affects Sudanese newspapers' practice fourth estate role especially in the fight against corruption. To achieve this, the study adequately probes into how ownership pattern affects Sudanese newspaper to perform their watchdog role in Sudan. Based on the analysis therefore, it was discovered that censor hip which is the outcome of ownership influence affects Sudanese press negatively in the "fourth estate" role more importantly restrained its fight against corruption. Therefore, for Sudanese newspaper to contribute usefully to fight corruption and promote good governance efforts should be intensified to free Sudan media from the control of politicians and government.

Keywords: Censorship, Ownership, Fourth Estate, Newspaper, Corruption, Sudanese

1. Introduction

From economical and financial to political, health, social and judicial issues, mass media world over have played a strategic role in shaping the reality. This obviously is not unconnected with the powers associated with the mass media. The research studies in the critical domain of mass media, historically speaking, can be divided into four phases. The first phase, ranges from 1900 until late 1930s, a period that practiced both a war struck strategy and the element of propaganda while reporting the action of the World War I. The result was a deep fear on readership for media messages and an attitude of mental alertness. The second phase, which stretched until 1960s, focused itself on studying how media affected the readership. During this phase, studies reveal that the personal influence on the readership became a major criterion of attitudinal change. In other words, media campaigns alone cannot influence people; it is the strengthening of attitudes that must be obtained as media impact (Klapper, 1960). Klapper also opines that people who change their minds due to campaigns are very minimal. Hence, this phase of media effects in research circles is often tagged as no or minimal effects phase (McQuail, 2010).

The third stage, initiated in 1970s marks a reawakening in exploring media effects (Noelle-Neumann, 1973). This phase which extended for a decade, also marks the rediscovery of powerful media (McQuail, 2010). During this phase, the focus of attention was more in studying cognitive effects of the mass media rather than investigating attitudinal change brought by mass media (Beniger & Gusek, 1995). Finally, the fourth stage (continuing till present) started in early 1980s, is marked by "social constructivism." This phase exposes the relationship between media and its receivers (readership) to understand the exact nature of powerful effects of mass media. McQuail (2010) describes this phase as one of negotiated media influence; De Vreese (2005) points out that mass media have a strong effect when they create social reality through their framing of images of the real world in a predictable and patterned way, which is becoming now an indispensable model for framing reality.

The news published by newspapers is not just a report but established wisdom and that is the reason why often a crime news dominates other stories related to various other stories of social injustice committed either by the state or voluntary organizations. Such stories assume lesser importance and at times fall out of media's attention and from the crime lexicon as understood by people (Muzzatti & Featherstone, 2007). However, the media does not refrain itself from reporting such events that might influence public perceptions and cannot omit them (Muzzatti & Featherstone, 2007) as they potentially create social images and shape people's perceptions. This power of the media in framing issues can be very much be associated with issues of corruption about the purpose of my research.

Corruption is a global threat to state efficiency which is common to both developed and developing countries alike (Delavallade, 2006; Fombad & Fombad, 2015). However, corruption is more evident in

developing countries and its ravaging effects are particularly felt in Africa, which unfortunately has earned the status of the most corrupt continent of the world (Fombad & Fombad, 2015; Lawal, 2007). Corruption lies at the core of poor governance and accountability (Arya & Sharma, 2014) as it hinders budget balance, efficient governance of expenditure and mismanagement of the budgetary functions (Delavallade, 2006) as well as overall delivery of public goods and services (Lawal, 2007). In addition, corruption undermines social values as individuals become more at ease with corrupt practices since they see such as easier means of survival and more lucrative means of wealth acquisition compared with the legitimate means (Lawal, 2007). Corruption has thus led to major setbacks in overall progress of many developing countries in Africa. A typical case is Sudan which, despite rapid growth of its oil sector among several other sources of national wealth, is classified amongst the world's most poor and corrupt countries (El-Nafabi, 2010; Fombad & Fombad, 2015; International, 2016; Miller, Kim, & Holmes, 2015).

Likewise, Sudan was classified with 0 points and occupied the bottom position along with Sao Tome, Democratic Republic of Congo and Equatorial Guinea in the Seifert, Carlitz, & Mondo (2013) conducted with Sudan and 84 other countries, The factors which contributed to this state of corruption and abuse of public funds in Sudan included the lack of efficient governance and control in managing public financial system, absence of transparency in government's performance, lack of law enforcement and regulatory bodies, lack of checks and balances on procurement of funds, untrained and unskilled staff to keep accounts and maintain audits and above all poor wages of public sector workers (El-Nafabi, 2010; Logune, 2006). As pointed out by Lawal (2007) however, once corruption becomes entrenched in each society, its negative effects continue to increase. This suggests that the several factors contributing to corruption in Sudan will create more avenues for corruption to continue to multiply and thrive in the country. It therefore becomes of utmost importance for concerted efforts to be targeted at addressing corruption in the country. Just as it is important to have the knowledge of factors causing corruption, the investigation of ways of combating corruption is equally imperative (Bojanic & Madsen, 2014). Studies have identified government transparency and accountability as well as media sensitization, press freedom and citizens' rights to information as some of the major ways of curbing corruption (Arya & Sharma, 2014; Bojanic & Madsen, 2014; Riak, 2013). Given the role of the mass media in framing social reality, the present study focuses on the coverage of issues of corruption by the Sudanese Press as means of examining their effectiveness in combating corruption. Sudan got its independence in 1956, and ever since then the country has been suffering from evils of civic war as well as economic, religious and ethnic upheavals.

There was a prolonged civil war in Northern and Southern Sudan which can be termed as political and military failures. The bloodless coup of 1989 resulted in Colonel Omar al-Bashir holding power and four years later declaring himself President in 1993. The new government made promises to end financial, administrative and political corruption; however, it ended up with establishing a most suppressive rule (Integrity, 2006). In the name of progress, the new government dissolved the parliament and all employment unions, prohibited formation of political parties and silenced every free source that raised its voice (Stiftung, 2016). As a result, Sudan's human rights index declined ranking it among the nine most countries with worst human rights conditions and citizens under suppression (FreedomHouse, 2011). The only positive development was the termination of the civil war in 2005 between Northern and Southern Sudan through a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which ensured a six-year independence to Southern Sudan. In 2011, a referendum took place on continuing the independence of Southern Sudan and an independent South Sudan came into existence. But despite these developments, the country continued to suffer political unrest and continued to face corruption challenges resulting in regional instability and insecurity and undermining the efforts being made to build a peaceful nation (FreedomHouse, 2011).

1.1 Sudanese Media Operations: Issues and Gaps
According to Freedom House (2016) which has surveyed nations for imparting political and civil rights and freedoms, to its citizens, including freedom of the press, Sudan is classified as "worst of worst" among the worst 12 countries of the whole world.

Media contributes largely to the success of democracy in today's world. They carry a large database of information, along with their content and analyses, which could be a useful source for law makers to legislate laws and policies and for voters to choose their governments (Besley & Burgess, 2002; Dunaway, 2008; Lippmann, 1922).

Moreover, media is renowned for playing a crucial role in helping people fight against corruption. They can organize countrywide anti-corruption campaigns to educate people about corruption, develop awareness about its causes and suitable remedies. Media can also assist prosecution agencies in the investigation of corruption incidents (Sowunmi, Raufu, Oketokun, Salako, & Usifoh, 2010) popularly known for their "four estates" functions, media thus can contribute usefully to fight corruption and promote good governance (Odugbemi & Norris, 2010).

According to Fardigh (2013) there are relatively few empirical studies on the relationship between media

freedom and quality of government and those that exist have mainly used the level of corruption as the indicator of quality of government.

Fardigh (2013) asserts that it is uncontroversial to say that free media is a representative of democracy or a prerequisite for an open society. Free media comes with greater transparency, the more informed and involved the citizens, the more responsiveness, accountability, and by its extension, the more democracy, the less corruption and abuse of power, and better government. Acceding to Fardigh the main argument for the importance of media freedom is the "watchdog" role of the news media and free media as a disseminator of information that may serve to empower the citizens. By highlighting policy failures, corruption in the judiciary, exposing maladministration by public officials and scandals in the corporate sector, the news media possess this watchdog role. Thus, the media as a fourth estate can function to promote government transparency, accountability, and public scrutiny of those in power (Norris, 2008: 68).

This paper explores how far the press or media in Sudan can address anti-corruption issues in the country. Though Sudan has many local and national newspapers, still not enough attention has been paid to issues of corruption.

2. Literature Review

The history of journalism in Africa can be traced back to such handwritten news sheets that government news-writers were required to prepare. These news sheets appeared at regular and frequent time periods. These news sheets were sources of information for the state rulers about their empires. It helped them to watch events happening in public, mishaps in societies and any hardships faced by the people, and other related news. Such information helped the rulers to arrive at decisions and ensure good governance. Indeed, this also proved to be a fine established system of surveillance. It was through the newspapers, rulers were promptly updated of maladministration and mismanagement in the social structure. Brutal and cruel governors were removed from the government offices and honest officials were encouraged. In short, the early hand-written sheets proved effective social mobilization vehicle to hold peace and contentment in the empires.

The first Sudanese newspaper emerged in the early twentieth century (in the September 1903), while "Sudan Gazette" appeared in 1092 (Salih, 1965). The first popular biweekly newspaper was Al Sudan/The Sudan Times which was established by a Lebanese-Syrian expatriate company. This newspaper served as a media vehicle for government news in English and Arabic and was widely read. In 1912, another newspaper Sudan Herald with its Arabic edition Ra'id Al Sudan (Sudan Pioneer) was published by Greek expats but it was highly monitored by the government and considered a foreign voice. These few newspapers served for a few years for Sudanese audiences but as the number of educated Northern Sudanese increased they developed a desire to have their own media platforms where they can voice their opinions to oppose the British colonialism and favor unity with Egypt and at the same time show their resistance too for Egypt and raise demands for their country's independence. As a result, in 1919, Sudan's first newspaper, Hadarat Al Sudan (Sudan Civilization), or Al Hadara in Arabic language, started its publication but limited its content for the intelligentsia or the literary elite readers (Spilker, 2012).

2.1 Censorship

Norris (2006) evidences significant freedom of press patterns across the globe and concludes that the most liberal media was found in industrially advanced nations with affluent economies and consistent democracies. Among the highly scoring points in freedom of the press, counties of Latin America and South-East Asia were rated very high highly while the Arab nations rated among the lowest in press freedom.

Prat and Stromberg (2013) emphasize upon the importance of media freedom for good governance and express concern over the absence of any knowledge about the determinants of media freedom itself. It is however a myth that political institutions in democracies determine media freedom. There are evidences that several non-democracies have granted freedom to media more than any democracies. Moreover, it has also been observed that the level of media freedom fluctuates from high to low in many countries though political institutions remain unchanged (Gehlbach & Sonin, 2014).

In the case of media coverage of Putin's third presidential term on the federal television networks in Russia Schimpfossl and Yablokov (2014) discussed issues of censorship, self-censorship and conformism. They have studied the allegation on federal television of imposing coercion upon TV reporters, TV presenters and TV anchors in their broadcasts with the political content. However, their findings that were based on interviews with media personalities proved all allegations wrong, arguing that the Russian federal government need not resort to coerce or throttle journalists and reporters or mandate the editorial staff to exercise self-censorship and support government views. On the contrary, the findings revealed that reporters and other news media enjoy relatively more freedom that is boosting their creativity, and keeping the audience ratings up. However, this article also found out that there was a separate team of TV anchors and reporters, often known as celebrity media personalities, assigned the task of direct promotion of Kremlin policies through their political discourses.

However, whatever celebrity status media personalities enjoy, they must accept and follow "regulatory mechanisms" (usually described as editorial policy) and referred to as Western editorial practices. Which though legitimize Russian media practices, and show their trust for media personalities. Though such renowned media personalities like Mamontov and Kiselev abhor and criticize censorship as such and argue that censorship cannot determine media governance or monitor the daily news agenda on TV screens. In fact, they interpret every discourse that was released by the Kremlin.

Beyond the Russian example, when we turn to Sudan, we find that freedom of the press and expression was guaranteed by the Interim Constitution of 2002 as contained in article 39 written under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). But, subsequently the press and publications act restricted this freedom under the 1991 penal code, the 2010 national security law which allowed government to impose a significant restriction on the press freedom including a ban on publishing such media content that ignited ethnic and religious sentiment's and would potentially incite violence. If such a thing happened, editors will be held responsible for all such content published in their newspaper (FreedomHouse, 2016).

In Sudan, the press law expects every journalist to register with the National Council for Press and Publications (NCPP), a regulatory body monitored by its president, who appoints its members, sand who has the authority to order for a closure of newspapers for three days without a court order. NCPP also conducts a test for every journalist prior to receiving authorization and a license. Licenses are issued by the Ministry of Information Broadcast in a politically biased manner, giving priority to pro government newspapers over private and independent institutions (FreedomHouse, 2016). According to Karikari (2004) the countries in Africa (including Sudan) are still facing huge challenges such as continuous intimidation and repression by journalists. A weak legal system for the independent media and poor regulation from government has further deteriorated the standard of media professionalism in Africa.

Czepek, Hellwig and Nowak (2009) observed in their book that a big impediment in press freedom are the economic factors which have made media more financially dependent on mass markets. For instance, there is a concentration of ownership confined to a small number of powerful media conglomerates which fights between regulation and de-regulation of media. Besides, economic factors, the security issues particularly that deal with the prevention of terrorism, too have a big impact on media freedom in the form of closed circuit surveillance, data protection issues etc. In addition, post-communist states have issues like small markets, and monopolies, political control of the press etc. which are big challenges of the freedom of press.

Gehlbach, and Sonin (2014) recently carried out a study and suggested a model for government control of the media. This model aims at showing the differences in media freedom across nations over a period. In this study, the authors opine that the media bias is greater under state ownership of the media because the government is likely to have a vested interest in immobilizing its citizens and not allowing them to take any actions with political objective. Likewise, in another study, Gehlbach, and Sonin (2014) suggested a theoretical model to explore government control of the media content. It came into origin due to an increase in the media bias and the government's desire to exercise full direct control of the media. This model worked on the principle that bias has two-fold effects: first it reduces the informational content in the news; second it decreases viewership of those who value that information. This model is based on empirical predictions of the relationship between media freedom and various features of the political-economic environment. A few of these will find support in the current study.

2.2 Restrictive Laws

There are numerous laws and regulations all over the world that restrict the ruling government to exercise any limit on media to report and share information with the public. Despite that, several nations have imposed censorship and curtailed the freedom of the press in the form of banning international and national media or imposing dictatorial mandates on domestic news coverage. Eritrea tops this list as it is rated as the country with most censorship followed by North Korea, Syria, and Iran. These three nations have suffered heavily on their geopolitical and nuclear stability and hence necessitated huge restrictions on information sharing and dissemination of ideas through press. Similarly, a few Arab countries also fit into this authoritarian media system model where the governments strongly regulate and control journalists and media personnel, thus creating a press that supports state policies rather than acts as a watchdog.

However, Rugh (Rugh, 2004) disagrees and argues that the authoritarian model cannot be applied to Arab media systems (including of Sudan). He opines that an Arab journalist or an editor is highly sensitive to the political realities of his country. Glasser (2013) joins this argument and suggests that political realities refer to the lack of legal protections for journalists; it refers to such regulatory impediments such as a lack of transparency or leadership pressures that do not sponsor any accountability. Moreover, there is a lack of authentic studies on the Arab laws and how these laws affect journalism in the Arab world (Glasser, 2013).

There are three factors that are responsible for any dedicated research to take place on the Arab world's media laws. First, there is a lack of academic freedom in the Arab region which is a great hindrance to research

on media (Brand, 2007). Academicians in Arab universities, intellectual elites and other journalist's practice a kind of self-censorship for if they articulate any views on "sensitive" subjects they lose their position and are expelled from host countries. Second, language proves a big barrier since in many Arab countries, media laws are written in Arabic without English translations. As a result, English-speaking academics and elite class having more knowledge about international approaches to such laws are unable to examine any source material while the Arabic-speaking native researchers avoid any serious study of media regulation. Finally, there is a general lack of transparency (in all areas including media laws) making it difficult to obtain source materials and other specific information whether in Arabic or English (Duffy, 2014).

Because of these constraints in the environment Arab countries including Sudan has very poor rankings in International Press Freedom Rankings. These rankings are done by a joint committee of two NGOs, the Reporters without Borders (Paris) and Freedom House (Washington, D.C), This committee has a uniform method of ranking applicable to every country: they question experts—practicing journalists, academic researchers, and media observers about the harassment of journalists (including arrests and police questioning), the media's ability to investigate and criticize the government, the level of self-censorship, the financial ownership of media outlets, and the legal framework of each country (Duffy, 2014). According to Freedom house, Sudan classified chosen as the "worst of worst" among the worst 12 countries lacking political and civil rights as well as freedom of the press (Freedom House, 2016). Because of whipping the press in Sudan, newspapers have experienced huge financial losses in the form of low advertisements, frequent confiscations of printed issues of the newspapers from the press and unstable work environment for journalists who are not paid their salaries for months (Doha Centre for Media freedom, 2013).

According to Doha Centre for Media freedom (2013) a new form of censorship of press exists in Sudan. It is the censorship of power, arbitration and confiscation. NISS defines confiscation as a seizure of the entire issue of a newspaper on a day from the press during the night after the completion of the print. Although NISS often convenes a meeting of chief editors in evenings asking them to revise the material published in the newspaper or the paper will be confiscated. In Sudan the new 2013 press laws, considered sterner than those of 2009, have legalized the closure of newspapers and cancellation of the registration of a newspaper or a publishing house. Even financial penalties on newspapers are imposed and journalists and editors are prevented from working for certain periods of time.

Mohy Al-Deen Titawy, the president of the Sudanese Journalist's Union (SJU) reviews the new press laws of 2013 and found that they violate press freedom, and expressed his union's opposition to these laws. Because of this opposition, all these licenses of journalists and media personnel were taken from the SJU and transferred to the National Council for Press and Publications (NCPP), a council that monitors the press in Sudan and is entitled to issue licenses to newspapers or magazines. There is a great regard for NCPP in the eyes of journalists since it is a governmental body with good leadership and comes under the supervision of the presidency, who appoints its secretary-general. Al-Amin views this changeover as a positive one since NCPP is the right body to control the distribution of the press licenses.

There are ample studies in the critical domain worldwide which recognize mass media development as crucial to the anti-corruption program. Specifically, mass media plays a dual role in the fight against corruption; first, it makes people aware of corrupt practices in media, its causes, consequences and possible remedies; secondly, it investigates and reports incidents of corruption of regulatory and prosecutorial bodies (Sowunmi et. al. 2010). However, for media to be effective in curbing corruption, much depends on access to information, freedom of expression and a professional and ethical code of investigative journalism (Stapenhurst, 2000).

3. Conclusion
When we turn to Sudan, we find that freedom of the press and expression was guaranteed by the Interim Constitution of 2002 as contained in article 39 written under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), but, subsequently the press and publications act restricted this freedom under the 1991 penal code, the 2010 national security law which allowed government to impose a significant restriction on the press freedom including a ban on publishing such media content that ignited ethnic and religious sentiment's and would potentially incite violence. If such a thing happened, editors will be held responsible for all such content published in their newspaper (Freedom House, 2016).

In view of the situation in Sudan, it can be concluded that a big impediment in press freedom are the economic factors which have made media more financially dependent on mass markets. Also, the status quo in Sudan can be said to fit into authoritarian media system model where the governments strongly regulate and control journalists and media personnel, thus creating a press that supports state policies rather than acts as a watchdog in the fight against corruption and good governance.

Premised on the situation in Sudan therefore, this paper is recommending that Sudanese newspapers should stand up to play its watchdog role by promoting accountability and transparency. As a step towards economic independence the newspapers and human rights in Sudan should institute a civic forum for political debate that

will facilitate informed choices, and finally as an agenda-setter for policymakers. There are debates and opinions on the national media but there is no evidence of the quality of the discourse and its output. Finally, the role as agenda-setter is turned upside down by the financial dependence of media on business and political parties since media cannot survive without the support of business and political organizations. Such a support is guaranteed at a cost or a condition of media loyalty or keeping the silence.

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