



The Dearth of Investigative Journalism In Nigeria

Journalists are any nations best known gadflies. And like gadflies, they are also best known stingers. They sting the dormant coincidence of humanity until everyone is wide awake to a new concept of reality-perception.

I am not a journalist myself. I am a philosopher by training. There is some symbiotic similarity between philosophy and investigative journalists. Both have one common gene. And that is, investigative curiosity-the ceaseless search for the TRUTH. A true investigative journalist will not rest until the truth has been found and justice served if need be. Comparatively, these group of professionals are like badgers in the sense that they dig deep into shady issues with relentless claws until all the dirt has been pushed out in the open. To the warped-minded, journalists are nightmares, but to the sincere, they are a shining touch.

I do not believe that Nigeria as a nation suffers from poverty of intellectualism in journalism profession. Rather, what I do perceive is this, journalists in Nigeria suffer from three major illnesses viz. fear, laziness and a complex of high inferiority proportion. These three have pushed the discipline in the shadow of ineffectuality. No wonder some staring facts about Nigeria is better understood outside Nigeria. The pathological fear which the military has imposed on the psych of journalism in Nigeria is quite severe. No rational person can deny that military dictatorship ruined journalism in the country. The military's unwritten law of terror was clear-if you write the truth, you die, if you speak out the truth, you die and if you investigate into the truth, you die. Journalist therefore became vulnerable objects of the military barbaric megalomania. Torture, kidnapping, prison, mysterious assassinations, bribery, threat to wife and children and exiles were the tools that killed investigative journalism in country. Even today, in the so called Nigerian democracy, journalists are no much safe than they were in the military era. Nigerian journalists are still being assassinated, arrested, harassed and jailed for attempting to find out the truth.

The second problem with the country's investigative journalism is laziness. The practice of journalism has become less of investigative and rational and more of sensational and reactionary. We all hear comments of how public funds are siphoned to private purses in Nigeria. Where are the facts? where are the figures? where are the names involved? Billion of Nigerian stolen money seat in oversea banks. Who are these foreign collaborators? Where do they live? What are their names? What are the names of these the international financial institutions that help Nigeria launderers and thieves? What dates and times did these shady transactions taken place? Fact-finding are tedious. And Nigerian investigative journalism is still too infantile to handle the



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complexities of the search for the truth. It is easy to presume than to investigate. It is more easy to be sensational than to be rational. It is more easy to preach than to teach. It takes enormous energy, resources, experience, hard work, time, stress, travels, network, patient and even necessary camouflage to get to the root of issues. A good investigative journalist could work a single issue for years yet with stern endurance. Culturally, Nigerians like titles and it is not a surprise that so many people refer to themselves, professionally, as journalists. And my question would be 'apart from commenting on hot political sensational issues what else can you do as a journalist?

Lastly, investigative journalism in Nigeria also suffers from a high level of inferiority complex. Due to a serious lack in Africa's scientific culture inquisitiveness which automatically necessitates quality journalism practice, our investigative journalists are often timid compared to the west. Granted, the west should not be the parameter to measuring the Nigeria journalism competence. However, one would not fail to recognize their level of scientific approach and transparency within the practice. As always, it takes, not the Nigerian journalists, but those from the west to give specific standard reports on the Nigerian human right violation, child abuse, corruption, environmental degradation in the Delta, public mismanagement and so on and so forth. Most of the times, it is after the western professional journalist must have reported on such issue at our own backyard that we even became aware of them and begin the usual belated reactions. It also takes the western journalist to come to Nigeria and make a documentary titled "Welcome to Lagos" to expose the state of dehumanizing poverty all over Nigeria. It is not only Nigeria journalism that suffers timidity complex, it is African journalism as a whole. It is embarrassing that most of the INFORMATION I have about situations in Congo, Rwanda, Somalia, Chad and so many other countries in Africa did not come from African media but from the western media outlets. Granted that some of those reports are presented with biases.

Certain things would never cease to puzzle my mind. Western journalists could come to Africa (Nigeria) and find out facts and report them in the media, but Nigerian journalists can hardly to into investigative field-work to find out facts in the western socio-political, economic and cultural settings. And who said inferiority is not the issue here. How many of the professionals within the practice could travel around the world (to other countries) questioning high profile figures, investigating and reporting on extremely sensitive socio-political, economic and cultural issue of abuse, corruption, environmental damages, corporate greed, medical malpractices and so on and so forth. Majority of the Nigeria (undocumented) immigrants overseas are abused and



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neglected. How many of our professional journalists dare to find out what these stories are. The answer is this, not one journalist. Nigerians have been executed massively in places like Saudi Arabia, Libya, China, Indonesia and so many other places around the world. What are the facts and figures in these cases? How did the government of these countries respect or abuse the human rights of these faceless folks. How were their trials conducted? Did they have a just, free and fair trials? And this tells the world how much does a Nigeria life worth. If investigative journalists brings graphic and disturbing cases in the open, the government even as insensitive as the Nigeria, would react. Details of issues of abuse of Nigerians should be fresh focus for the Nigerian journalism.

Not any person who can write is a journalist. Journalism is a unique discipline. And to claim a journalist means one has undergone a professional training and is competent. The practice of journalism goes beyond writing. And I think there should be a redefinition of journalism in Nigeria or rather a rebirth of the practice to meet up international standards. For a country as diverse as Nigeria, the function of investigative reporting cannot be underestimated in the positive transformation

Author

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Ugwu Hilary Ike

Hilary Ikechukwu Ugwu is a Nigerian resident in the US. By academic training, he is a philosopher. In personality trait, he is thinker. He is an avid reader as a hobby; a prolific writer by talent, and a poet by temperament. He is a Christian. He is also a prospective author of three African novels. He loves revolutionary ideas. He adores great innovators, inventors and creators in all their ingeniousness. He loves creative arts in its diversification as a mode of the expression of the human spirit. He believes in human reason as a resourceful factor/force to improving human conditions. ~When we stop thinking, we start dying.

His forthcoming books all create some sense of revolutionary social movement against socio-economic, political and cultural tyranny, injustice, oppression, enslavement of humans. For when humans do not have freedom, their creative potentialities are not given full expression. Life without freedom is worst than



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death. He strongly upholds that the convergence of human ideas expressed in formidable social movements directed against ills has the bulldozer potentials to uprooting the ills in question.

Hilary believes in the emergence of a new Africa. A single alteration of mass consciousness is what is needed to change Africa in a twitch "if we have potential, then we are not miserable and poor. No society is static, each is constantly evolving. And as thus, our ideas are only contributing chips. So we should live the project of a building the worldopen instead of conclusive. In this way, the next generation would continue where we left. So every informed African should begin to create a mass movement directed towards a continental change and transformation.
