

Chapter 99

Safety of Women Journalists in Nigerian News Media: Exposing the Hushed Gender- Based Discriminations

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, women journalists' professional safety has attracted an enormous research attention globally and in Nigeria. Interestingly, often similar findings are likely generated by most of the studies highlighting stiff gender-based challenges. This chapter investigated the safety experiences of Nigerian women journalists to identifying the typology of gender-based discriminations and coping strategy affected women journalists used to manage to work in a male-dominated media industry. Employing a semi-structured interview approach, 37 participants (25 women journalists, 10 men journalists, and 2 human resource managers) were interviewed from 12 broadcast media organisations in Northern Nigeria. The data were analysed using thematic analysis and the findings showed that Nigerian women journalists experience different types of gendered unsafety including discrimination in newsgathering and production and sexual harassment; most of the affected women used risky coping strategies such as ignoring; most media organisations lacked policies and frameworks to handle such cases.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, journalism practice in Nigeria is traced back to the late Reverend Henry Townsend of the Presbyterian Church located in Calabar and later relocated to Abeokuta. The first newspaper was published on December 3, 1859, which was written in Yoruba dialect and titled: *IweIroyin Fun Aron Ara Egbaati Yoruba*, meaning a newspaper publication written for the Egba and Yorubas. The primary aim of the establishment of the newspaper was to get people to read (Ajibade, 2003; Tijani-Adenle, 2019). Although the first newspaper in Nigeria was published in 1859, the “emergence of modern Nigeria in 1914” (Omu, 1978, p.39) paved the way for a vibrant media scene, and many nationalists established newspapers for the propagation of self-government, nationalist agitations and to counter the excesses of colonial regimes such as excessive taxation, the repudiation of Nigerian religions, languages and traditional-political institutions, oppression of Nigerians and abuse of their rights among others (Ajibade, 2003). Notable among the nationalists who established early newspapers include Sir Akitoye Ajasa who established *Nigerian Pioneer* in 1914, Ernest Sese Ikoli who established *African Messenger* in 1921, Herbert Macaulay who established *Lagos Daily News* in 1925, Malam Abubakar Imam who established *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo* in 1939 and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe who established *West African Pilot* in 1937, etc. (Ukiwo, 2005).

In Nigeria, like in other parts of the world, the media industry was dominated by print and broadcast media. However, the development of the broadcast media was not as rapid as the print media. Nevertheless, “its establishment and progress is no less political” (Tijani-Adenle, 2019, p.17). Media broadcasting in Nigeria commenced in 1932 when “Lagos began to relay the British Empire Service from Daventry, England” (Uche, 1989, p.36). However, as soon as the three major geo-political regions (Northern, Western and Eastern) were established in preparation for the country’s independence, the indigenous regional governments “swiftly established their broadcasting systems to tackle colonial authority’s exogenous broadcasting policies and to project their regional cultures, policies and political parties” (Tijani-Adenle, 2019, p.17; Uche, 1989).

Largely, “the early Nigerian news media were inevitably political” (Omu, 1978, p.11). The news media served as watchdogs to the colonial administrations and sensitised the people on the need to oppose the imperialists and struggle for self-governance. Unfortunately, women were not key players at this critical point in the history of the media because the social and gender norms in colonial Nigeria did not encourage women to practise the “nationalist and agitational journalism” (Omu, 1996, p.13) that was regarded as “too dangerous and daring for women, who were perceived to be weak, needed protection and expected to tend to the home and children” (Bammeke, 2013). However, despite the overarching predominance of men, it would be wrong to assume that women were completely absent from the media industry in colonial Nigeria. Few notable women excelled although “very little information” (Omu, 1996, p.13) is available about them in the literature. For example, there is a record of a Miss F. Ronke Ajayi who edited the *Nigerian Daily Mail* that was published in 1931 (Omu, 1978, p.67). She was known as the friend of the publisher, H. Antus Williams and “who saw her appointment as a joke” (Omu, 1996, p.13) jeered at her. By the 1950s, women had had a considerable footprint in Nigerian journalism however, most of them were writing features, women content and gossip pages. For example, some of the columns or pages were titled “As I see it” by A. O. Alakija of *Daily Times*, “Women’s Corner” by Eve, *Pilot Newspaper’s* “Milady’s Bower” among others (Falola, 1999).

The era between 1960, when Nigeria gained independence and 1999, when it returned to stable democratic governance after many years of military interregnums was, however, remarkable for Nigerian

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