

“Watchdogging” Versus Adversarial Journalism by State-Owned Media: The Nigerian and Cameroonian Experience

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Abstract— *The private and the opposition-controlled media have most often been taxed by Black African governments with being adepts of adversarial journalism. This accusation has been predicated on the observation that the private media have, these last decades, tended to dogmatically interpret their watchdog role as being an enemy of government. Their adversarial inclination has made them to “intuitively” suspect government and to view government policies as schemes that are hardly – nay never – designed in good faith. Based on empirical understandings, observations and secondary sources, this paper argues that the same accusation may be made against most Black African governments which have overly converted the state-owned media to their public relation tools and as well as an arsenal to lambaste their political opponents at the least opportunity. Using Nigeria and Cameroon as case study, this paper examines the facets and implications of adversarial journalism by the state-owned media. It argues that this adversarial culture has mainly involved the governments of both countries utilizing the state-owned media outlets as their respective mouthpieces and as hunting dogs against any internal and external oppositional voice. The prevalence of such an adversarial culture in these state-owned media has obviously affected their potential to effectively serve as watchdogs; thereby making state-owned media to lose their credibility in the eyes of the general public and international observers.*

Keywords—*Adversarial Journalism, Private Media, Opposition-Controlled Media, State-Owned Media, Watchdog Role.*

I. INTRODUCTION

It is an accepted premise that the (political) media assume the role of watchdogs, whistle-blower, sentinels and lookouts in any given society. This watchdog role places them at a vantage position to facilitate the birth, growth and maturation of (true) democracy and good governance in the society. As watchdogs, the media have complex and multidimensional social responsibilities. They are for instance, not to be docile and passive even in an

environment where totalitarianism, dictatorship and other forms of unjust socio-political strictures reign. They are not to be intimidated or cowed by any aggressive force, to kill stories of political actions which are inimical to public interest. They are rather expected to sensitize and educate masses on sensitive socio-political issues thereby igniting the public and making it sufficiently equipped to make solid developmental decisions. They are equally to play the role of an activist and strongly campaign for reforms that will bring about positive socio-political revolutions in the society. Still as watchdogs and sentinels, the media are expected to practice journalism in a mode that will promote positive values and defend the interest of the totality of social denominations co-existing in the country in which they operate. Okei-Odumakin (2013) is certainly not exaggerating when she associates the watchdog role of the media with the imperative of shaping, sharpening and sharing opinions, views and facts about the coordinates and dynamics of power in a democracy. As she further explains, such a watchdog role warrants the media to “ultimately help [society] to put good politicians in office and help to kick out rotten ones” thereby, strengthening democracy in a country (Okei-Odumakin, 2013, p.4). By playing this watchdog role excellently, the media perpetually put the politician on his/her toes and the latter has no other option than being on his or her best behavior in office; thereby going against his or her natural drives that may be antithetical to the public interest. In view of all the exposition made above, one may rightly conclude that the watchdog role of the media is inextricably and essentially linked to the act of defending public interest or the general good. However, this watchdog role is often interpreted according to varied and sometimes conflicting frameworks.

A good number of critics and media owners (particularly private media operators) tend to define the watchdog role of the media in terms of alliance to political or ideological orientation while others associate this role with being dogmatically antigovernment (Bouchet & Kariithi 2003, Effiom 2005; Idowu 1999). Similarly, some schools of thought enthuse that defending public interest

unavoidably means that the media should strictly avoid “flocking” with politicians and adopting the posture of an “enemy” of politicians. In tandem with this observation, Bouchet and Kariithi (2003) remark that it has become somehow a universal ideal – or a kind of fatalism – that a degree of conflict and incompatibility between politicians and the media be regarded as a pre-requisite for public interest to be guaranteed in a polity. Taking the example of the relation between the legislative and the media, they succinctly opine that:

Striking the right balance in the relationship between Members of Parliament [politicians] and journalists often proves a difficult act. Though some argue in favor of a total separation between the two, or for the relationship to be limited to the MPs and journalists accredited to the Press Gallery, most would agree that a good working relationship between them is essential if they are to be able to fulfill their duties to their constituencies. Nothing is gained by a systematic adversarial relationship between them just as the interest of the public is not served when the two sides become too close or friendly. (Bouchet and Kariithi 2003, p.12)

An overly close relationship between the media and politicians is, in most countries, read as suspicious. Such a scenario most often generates “feelings of the relationship being used for political gain”. Conscious of such a “risk”, politicians and the media naturally swing toward mutual hostility. Based on this premise, it has always been observed that the relationship between politicians and the media has mostly been equated to that of cat and mouse (Bouchet and Kariithi 2003; Nworgu & Amadi 2011). *CrossRiver Watch* founder Jalingo illustrates this reality in a more vivid way when he enthuses that in Nigeria, most politicians (particularly government officials) do not want to be accountable; and so “if you are going to do your job as a journalist, dogging after people’s heels, you don’t expect these people to be your friends” (p.20). This particular conception of the watchdog role of the media has partially inspired the concept or culture of adversarial journalism which has, since the later part of the 50s, been practiced in most black African countries including Nigeria and Cameroon.

Adversarial journalism – otherwise called militant or confrontational journalism – has mainly been defined by African authors and political analysts as a culture which is oppositional to government or government political interests. However, this paper argues that, with respect to the Nigerian and Cameroonian contexts, this phenomenon is more complex and subtle than early African political

analysts may have theorized. Adversarial journalism has been dynamic in the two countries’ political and media ecologies. It has equally included the visible tendency by the government in both countries to mobilize state-owned media outlets as their respective mouthpieces as well as the use of these media as instruments to indirectly or explicitly deal with oppositional political voices. In line with this, the governments of these two countries have been deploying the state-owned media as a lap-dog – if not hunting dog – to government officials, and to systematically lambaste the opposition at the least given opportunity. The deployment of such an adversarial tactic has often been in response to a similar approach (adversarial journalism) by the private media which, in their political reporting, have sometimes been more virulent than the opposition itself.

This paper seeks to illustrate this dominant adversarial culture orchestrated by government in the state-owned media in Nigeria and Cameroon. It frames this adversarial culture as an obvious obstacle to the watchdog role state-owned media are normally supposed to play in these two countries. The paper hinges on the public choice media theory which stipulates that the state-owned media are always made to manipulate and distort information in favor of the ruling party. Such a distortion and manipulation of information have adverse effects on the survival of true democracy in a country as they prevent the citizenry to be better and effectively informed for political decision. The theory equally stipulates that the state-owned media’s manipulation of information seriously inhibits competition among media firms, which guarantees the acquisition by the citizenry of unbiased and accurate information. The inhibition of this competition represents a blow to democratic institutions since competition is a vital component of the check-and-balances system of democracy often referred to as the Fourth Estate.

II. DEFINING ADVERSARIAL JOURNALISM

As earlier mentioned, most critics have tended to associate adversarial journalism – in the Black African context – with the act of dogmatically adopting antigovernment stance in political reporting (Idowu, 1999; Ekpu, 1999; Akinteriwa, 1999; Haijer, 2011). Such a conception of adversarial journalism hinges on the questionable axiom that the government is always suspect in its political action and that, government’s policies are hardly, nay never conceived and implemented in good faith (Idowu, 1999; Effiom, 2005). This imagination is actually questionable on the ground that most government policies are projected by their “engineers” and government’s ideologues as being designed for the (best) interest of the general public. Such a defensive claim

however calls for a more cautious journalistic approach which includes proper analysis of government policies in view of showing their strengths (if ever there exist) and their weaknesses. The political press' analysis of these government policies is definitely to include the policies' immediate and long term effects and possible solutions or remedies to their obnoxious components, instead of exclusively reporting the demonization of the policies by oppositional political formations or critical political analysts.

The tendency of suspecting government's policies and adopting a militant culture in news gathering and reportage is a tradition most Black African media inherited from their pre-independence predecessors. It is sufficiently visible that the post-independent media (including the contemporary media) simply embraced or absorbed the spirit of the nationalist press. This nationalist press viewed no virtue in the colonialists and their socio-political invention (colonialism); and so, they viewed no other genuine mission than censuring and negatively framing any policy and artifice by the colonial administration. With close reference to the Nigerian experience – which is not so much different from that of Cameroon – Enahoro shares corollaries as he concedes that:

[The] Nigerian press has an adversarial tradition deeply ingrained in the roots of its origin. The origin reaches deep into the colonial experience. Most of the papers established by Nigerians during the colonial era had one mission. To fight colonialism. [...]

Colonialism was defined as evil and the nationalist press was expected not to tolerate evil. This fundamental view of the polity held that the institution of government should not be trusted. That is what has come down to us meaning that the institution of government should not be trusted. The nationalist press during the colonial era was militant and never saw anything good in the colonial government. That doctrine engendered a fundamentally confrontational attitude which became the foundation inherited and which governs the tradition of military and instinctive hostility towards government which has survived till this day. (as cited in Idowu 1999, p.94)

Though the act of always suspecting government is indisputably objectionable, it must be emphasized that a number of political irregularities, inherent to most Black African countries' governance mechanisms have justified, inspired or fuelled such suspicions. It is still observable that, over the years, some – nay most – Black African leaders have upheld the political culture of subtly or

overly being dictatorial. Some of them have even audaciously adopted the tradition of running their governments as personal estates, inflicting terrible hardship on their people. In the same line of argument, some African governments have designed vicious political instruments to rule eternally and/or to maintain their citizens under perpetual subjugation. No doubt, scholars such as Oladipupo (2011) and Uadiale (2010) equate most Black African states with forces that are predatory in nature and that exist mainly for the oppression and exploitation of their own people.

Most Black African states do not actually enjoy a meaningful relationship with their people and so, it can be said that there is a serious chasm between most of these states and their respective people. As clearly noted by Oladipupo (2011), “the African state is an entity that is not only set apart from the people, but exercise enormous and unchecked power over the people, apart from being entirely on its own as far as the organization and functioning is concerned” (p.6). This has caused the people of most Black African countries to increasingly distance themselves from the workings of the state and to generally exhibit political apathy, especially during election periods. In Cameroon for instance, masses have been blaming President Paul Biya and his government for the high prevalence of poverty and corruption in the country as well as for political stagnation and high incidences of unpunished resource-plundering by high government officials (Ntaryike, 2011). In the editor of its issue No.348 titled “Mr. President Stand up”, the Christian tabloid *L'Effort Camerounais* illustrates this popular apathy. It derogatorily censures Mr. Biya presenting him as “a heartless, egocentric man and a traitor to the cause of people who have placed their confidence in him”. The tabloid goes further to describing the Cameroonian President as “one [who is] insensitive to the misery of his people” (cited in Endong 2014, p. 26).

All the above cited indexes have inspired masses, political analysts/critics and media owners/founders from Black African countries to equate the watchdog role of the media to the imperative of confronting government and representing the “last hope of the people” or what is commonly called the “voice of the voiceless” (Efion 2005, p.97). *CrossRiver Watch* founder and editor-in-chief Jalingo (2013) succinctly captures this position when he notes that the media are expected to be “the voice of the people, [...], a platform where the people [...] will always run to, anytime they have issues they need to deal with government. A platform that will defend the people” (p.21). Jalingo's perspective on the watchdog role of the media perfectly illustrates the journalistic school of thought which views a dichotomy between African politicians' personal interests and those of the

general public as a somehow eternal reality. This school speculates constant/perpetual marginalization of the masses by politicians (particularly those in government). It equally envisages that the media must always be ready to “fight” for the (helpless) masses, by uncovering and denouncing the “faults” and sins committed by the politicians and affecting the life/progress of the citizenry. Despite the fact that most Black African critics attribute adversary journalism to the private media, this paper hinges on a definition of the concept which carefully avoids to attribute the practice to a specific socio-political force. This means that the paper views adversarial journalism as a journalistic culture which may be manifested or proffered by any quarter of the press or any social force, irrespective of political or philosophical affiliation. The paper therefore partially adopts Momoh’s definition of the concept. This definition stipulates that, “adversarial journalism is the journalism in which one voice is dominant, in which there is active denial of reaction to publications that distort facts. It is journalism of speculation without factual grounding, of unguarded comments based on opinions” (as cited in Idowu 1999, p.93). As shown in the definitional illumination given above, adversarial journalism should not automatically be confined to the journalistic approaches of a specific political force/denomination. It will be more appropriate to anchor the definition of the concept on the semantic sphere of the epithet “adversarial” which, according to the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*, means “involving people who are in opposition and who make attacks on each other”.

It is an accepted premise that in the sphere – or game – of politics, the government and the opposition make attacks on each other. It is therefore possible – and visible in some Third World countries – that the government also embarks on adversarial methods (including adversarial journalism through state-owned media) to down play or respond to the “political offensives” initiated by its political opponents (Lauria, 2012). This is clearly observable in most Black African countries as shall be illustrated in the subsequent sections of this discourse. It is in line with this that adversarial journalism is universally defined as an investigative form of journalism which is done in an antagonistic way. It is not the preserve of the private or opposition press. Additionally, it is mainly characterized by politically biased reportages, abusive language, screaming, finger pointing and accusation and counter-accusations among others (Helmer 2015). Simply put by *A Dictionary of Media and Communication* (2015), adversarial journalism is “a model of reporting in which the journalist’s role involves adopting a stance of opposition and a combative style in order to expose perceived wrongdoings. This style is

sometimes criticized as being aggressively antagonistic or cynically divisive”.

III. GOVERNMENT OWNED MEDIA, PUBLIC INTEREST AND WATCHDOGGING

It will be expedient, from the outset, to provide a brief conceptual definition of public interest. According to Bouchet and Kariithi (2003), the concept is very elusive as it always varies from one culture to another and is most often ill or insufficiently defined. As they succinctly put it, “it is argued that people will disagree on what constitutes public interest because it is in the eye of the beholder, making it often unclear how it can be judicable” (p.11). However, we may be pardoned to define the concept as a cardinal journalistic principle which warrants the media to expose the citizens or general public to all shades of opinion, irrespective of whether this hurts the sensibilities of some specific quarters. Public interest principle also stipulates that the journalist’s primordial loyalty or commitment should be for the general public [the citizen] (Akodu, 2009). In tandem with this, public interest is said to be served exclusively in a scenario where conflicting or minority opinions are voiced through the media and also protected, so as to enable the citizenry to make informed choices during political exercises notably during elections. We therefore see an inextricable link between the necessity to respect public interest and the upholding of impartiality and political pluralism in the media landscape, particularly in the government-owned media. Bouchet and Kariithi (2003) clearly corroborate this position as they contend that there will be a clear violation of democratic principles wherever a government utilizes the resources of the state as a strategic tool “to control or interfere with state-owned media in an attempt to promote its own partisan interest” (p.19).

In principle, state-owned media are to serve the interest of the general public (that is the interest of the totality of the citizenry in a democratic polity). They are expected to expose all shades of opinion, irrespective of the possibility that some of these strands of political opinion are offensive to some schools of thought including the political convictions of the party in government. They should, therefore, provide information that will be free of commercials and any form of political or state influence. This is so as, in theory, they are considered to be the general public’s propriety, given the fact that they most often function grace to national tax payers money and public funds. They technically belong to the government and government belongs to the people. As Pe-Myint (cited in Lynn, 2016) insightfully observes, state-owned media constitute “a people’s media service”; and as such, they are, under normal circumstances, expected to include opinions from all members of the public, irrespective of

political affiliations. "Such a service would enable people from every corner of the country to freely express their views about issues and concerns in their areas, including those involving local authorities. It would also enable experts and think-tanks to express their different opinions on politics, the economy and social issues and to criticize government policy" (As cited in Lynn, 2016, para. 6)

However, if we adopt Webster's (1992) view of state-owned media as media outlets "which are controlled financially and editorially by the state", it will not be an oddity to envisage them (state-owned media) to some extent, as tools that are predestined or predisposed to predominantly serve the government, to the detriment of the public interest. As clearly observed by Kjackov, McLiesh, Novena and Shleifer (2003), whatsoever the country, "the assumption of benevolent government [that will defend public interest in approach of news reporting] often stops at the doorstep of the media" (p.343). According to Njackov and his colleagues, the public choice media theory is the most observable in the world. It therefore goes without saying that in theory, "watchdogging" (the watchdog role function of journalists) will be less accentuated in the government owned media than in the independent media, whatsoever the country (Kohen, 2013; Nworgu & Amadi 2011). We hasten to stress here that there may be exceptions, particularly in some well established democracies such as the U.S.A., Canada, Britain and Sweden among others. However, there will always be high probability for the government to relatively influence state-owned media editorially thereby influencing their watchdog performance, whatsoever be the country. As insightfully stressed by scholars such as Silverblatt and Zlobin (2004) and Rozumilowicz (2016), state-owned media are hardly totally independent from government editorial influence. They are mostly calibrated to serve the political interest of the governing party. Such a party often censors their contents deemed unfavorable to government while encouraging a political reportage that severely and wantonly cracks down on the opposition.

Britain's BBC's coverage of the "Irish Problem" is certainly a good illustration of the fact that even in the so-called established democracies, govern-owned media could at some point in time, been editorially influenced by the government. In effect, The BBC has mainly downplayed British aggressive and "colonialist" policies against Ireland in its coverage of the above mentioned crisis. It shied from presenting the Britain as a "terrorist state" even when many indexes pointed to such a situation. Lamenting over such an approach to broadcasting, the online magazine *The Irish Forums* (2014) succinctly notes that "the world now knows the so called Irish "problem" was really a British *versus* Irish

problem. The state controlled BBC at the time clearly went out of their way to not present the problems and violence in Ireland for what it was, as a hangover of British colonialism!"

As earlier mentioned, governments' use of the state-owned media for their personal political interest seems less accentuated in the developed countries. Most governments in Third World and communist countries (notably China, North Korea and Russia) have, on the other hand, made this approach a suitable political tactic. Lauria (2012) makes this observation, with close respect to some countries in the Americas, including Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Bolivia. In such Third Worlds or communist countries with high government influence on the media, the state-owned media corporations generally have as mission to:

- Project the governing party or government, portraying it in a very positive light irrespective of its eventual blunders.
- Lambaste or vilify the opposition through the launching of smear campaigns
- Give skew or no report of the opposition's view on any political issue affecting the state and
- Defend the political interest of the government in power, whatsoever be the context.

In some cases, the state-owned media are made to view themselves as a competing force to the independent or opposition-controlled media on any political issue. In tandem with this, they are often expected to shape their reportage in a way as to counter any negative coverage by the private media, of the political actions of the party in government. All these indexes are observable – in some ways – in Nigeria and Cameroon. The subsequent section of this discourse will seek to demonstrate/illustrate this reality.

IV. ADVERSARIAL CULTURE IN GOVERNMENT OWNED MEDIA IN NIGERIA AND CAMEROON

Conscious of the fact that the private and opposition-controlled media have mainly adopted a militant posture in their approaches to news gathering and reporting, the government in Nigeria – the same as in Cameroon – has subtly converted the state-owned media to its mouthpiece and hunting dog. As the mouthpiece of government, these media seldom tolerate antigovernment reporting by their journalists. They virtually adopt onerous political programming in favor of government; and from many indications, it can be said that presenting government and its policies in a good light has always remained a sacred mission for these media. Also sacred is the mission (they

assume), to lambaste the opposition and refuse it a fair coverage of its political actions, particularly in times of elections. The European Union chief election observer Santiago Fisas corroborates this observation in his assessment of the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria. In a 59 page report, he purports that the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) all two government owned, “primarily served incumbent interest” during the above mentioned elections. He buttresses his observation with the fact that the two media corporations merely “provided extensive exposure of PDP (People Democratic Party) and its officials (the President and Federal Government)” while ignoring the campaigns of opposition parties. “On NTA news, coverage of PDP and its officials totaled 84%, which contrasted with APC’s 11%. A similar pattern was identified in FRCN’s news, and in NTA’s editorial programs. More extreme uneven coverage was identified in some state-controlled radio stations, with over 95% of airtime allocated to incumbent governors seeking re-election” (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2015, p.5).

These observations are not really surprising, given the fact that adversarial attitudes against the opposition constitute a long tradition in state-owned approach to political reporting in Nigeria. In the 2003 general elections organized in the country, the same tendencies were observed by the European Union which posited that state-owned media performance during these elections “was flawed, as it failed to provide unbiased, fair and informative coverage of political parties and candidates contesting the elections. Federal and state owned media were biased in favor of parties and candidates in power” (as cited in Aghamelu, 2010, p.161).

Considering these facts and many other indices, it can be enthused that the state-owned media in Nigeria, are mainly viewed as “megaphones” of the government, fully devoted to spreading government propaganda and neutralizing any critical thinking that may be oppositional to government philosophy or policies. As Effiom (2005) rightly puts it, these government owned media willfully distort and spin information in favor of the ruling party by “only conveying government pronouncements to the public and vice versa, without informed analysis of such pronouncement or policies, and their interpretation with regard to the socio-economic or political impact on the populace” (p.104).

In some instances, vital information – which government deems susceptible to grease the opposition’s political machinery – is jealously concealed from the public. A good example is NTA and FRCN’s refusal in the year 2010 to accord life coverage to the debate in the senate over late President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua’s prolong

absence from the country, following his departure to Saudi Arabia to enjoy serious medical attention. This refusal by the Nigerian state-owned media to cover this event and many other related political actions was variously interpreted by the public and the political class of the country (*Sahara Reporters* 2010). In line with this, Abdulazeez (2014) notes that:

Government-owned media in Nigeria only gives us selective information; that is, they choose what to tell the people and what not to tell them as directly or indirectly dictated by their pay masters [government]. Furthermore, when at their best, they only tell the truth half way or they tell it in a systematically partisan and one-sided way to favor the individuals in power and to give people the impression that they are on the right side. They will only tell you the full and detailed truth in matters that do not concern the people in government or in matters which the people in government have no interest whatsoever. Whereas they will jump at any slight opportunity to exaggerate the good works of government or to expose the faults of perceived government enemies. This primarily renders them impotent and incompetent. (para 4)

State-owned media have thus been conceived as a platform which is incompatible with any anti-government criticism. They practically do not constitute a platform for the opposition. Severally have opposition candidates complained of their political messages being excluded from these media programming. In the 2011 elections for instance, the Buhari and Shekarau Presidential Campaign Organization complained that NTA refused airing their political adverts, just because they were deemed abusive to the then President (Abdulazeez 2014; Kawu, 2015). According to Abdulazeez, such impartiality and adversarial culture is more accentuated in the government-owned media operating at the State level. Contrary to their federal counterparts which put forth anti-opposition mechanisms in a relatively subtle manner, these State-based media make no attempt to dissimulate their adversarial posture. As noted by Abdulazeez (2014) no critic would dare “criticize a state governor in a radio or TV station owned by the state government”. These media “spend half of the time which they should have used in airing meaningful programs in singing praises and sycophantic words for state governors and their wives” (para 6).

The situation is in no way different in neighboring Cameroon, where, oppositional voices to the government are not tolerated in the state-owned CRTV (Cameroon Radio and Television Corporation) and *Cameroon Tribune*. In view of CRTV’s programming, any critical

observer will have the impression that the corporation seeks to perfectly reflect government's objectionable philosophy that, state-owned media exists solely for the party in government and that, the opposition is the enemy which must not be given full right to use "government property" to air its view. The editorial policy of the outlet is defined by a 1994 note by former Minister of Communication (Kontchou Kouomeni), addressed to all services under the Ministry of Communication. This note is unequivocal on the definition of the CRTV's function as a pro-government media arsenal. It states that the CRTV personnel should consider themselves as state employees which should not commit the "oddity" or "abomination" of using a state institution to criticize other state institution (Tanjon 2012). With this, CRTV journalists are *ab initio*, "programmed" or "composed" to be anti-opposition and to kill any anti-government spirit in them. This has clearly been visible during election periods with the insignificant air time reserved for opposition candidates and the tremendous efforts the media outlets' journalists have openly manifested, in supporting the CPDM (Cameroon People Democratic Movement), the party in power.

Though the corporation has made some visible efforts to diversify its programming since the deregulation of the broadcast sector in 2000 (integrating or retaining trenchant political programs such as *Cameroon Midi Magazine*, *Cameroon Calling* and *Actualité Hebdo* among others), much of its programming remains centered on praising the government and presenting its policies as breakthroughs and infallible remedies to the country's socio-political development. One concrete adversarial tactic in the CRTV has been its pro-government editorial orientation which has wanted that any journalists who manifest pro-opposition feeling be viewed as recalcitrant and accordingly, be severely sanctioned (through disciplinary transfer to the Ministry of Communication and indefinite suspension from their jobs among other muscled techniques).

The aggressive political environment bred by government in the corporation has motivated some critical journalists to simply resign out of frustration or to face heavy sanctions. In 2007, *Cameroon Calling's* anchor man Tewih Lambiv, fell victim of such a punitive and undemocratic system. He was summarily suspended for criticizing the computerization of the electoral system in the country. Similarly, a number of critical journalists have had no other option than resigning because of the adversarial culture deeply entrenched in the media corporation. An egregious example is Charlie Ndi Chia (present editor-in-chief of *The Post Newspaper*), who non-hesitantly resigned because of the unfavorable political climate in the CRTV. According to Nyamnjoh

(2012), such resignations of "recalcitrant" reporters remain predictable as no conscious journalist – who is eager to play his whistle-blower function – will survive professionally in a system which primordially promotes allegiance to the CPDM than loyalty to the general public. CRTV and *Cameroon Tribune* journalists are therefore left with only two options: (i) accept to be absorbed by pro-government bureaucratic machinery which is antithetical to creativity and talent or (ii) simply resign. The second option has, of course always been a difficult one, given the fact that the corporation remains the most paying employer in the broadcasting sector within the country (Tanjon 2012).

To make things worse, the government has instituted a system which makes promotion or appointment to sensitive posts within the corporation to be largely – nay exclusively – conditioned by the personnel's level of loyalty to government. This has spurred some journalists into indulging in sycophantic "griotization" (praise singing) in favor of the government, in view of (cheap) promotion. As Nyamnjoh (2012) beautifully puts it:

To guarantee that things are done its own way, government appoints to positions of responsibility not necessarily those with merit and professional experience, but those who are politically in tune with the authorities. This practice has given rise to an over-zealous quest for positions of responsibility and other favors in some journalists of the Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) who may go to all lengths to support the regime in place. (p.64)

It goes without saying that the adversarial culture in the state-owned media in Nigeria and Cameroon has had serious implications for the watchdog role and credibility of these media. As has been shown in the preceding lines of this paper, these media concentrate on showing mainly the government's version or perspective on major political issues; while giving the opposition limited or no floor to air its position on these media. This partiality in reporting, has in itself, constituted a form of distortion of the truth, what Adichie (2009) will call "a single story". Unfortunately for the state-owned media, the masses are more and more becoming conscious of their biased reportorial approach, manifested in the presentation of "a single story" in favor of government and occasionally in disfavor of the opposition. As clearly observed by Adichie (2013), the problem with a single story is that it is not totally true, thus somehow incomplete and inaccurate. A single story is practically misleading in that it does not represent all the truth. It illustrates a scenario in which vital sections of the truth have "selfishly" been omitted or totally "effaced" to favor the propaganda intensions of the storyteller.

Today, most Nigerian and Cameroonian audiences are becoming more and more conscious of the fact that exposure to state-owned media is simply exposure to the government's version of any political truth, a version which most often, needs to be triangulated by the news reportage by the private or independent media (Abdulazeez, 2014; Endong 2012; Sahara Reporters 2014, Tanjon 2012; Nyamnjoh, 2012). The state-owned media have thus lost credibility in the eyes of the public particularly on political issues.

V. CONCLUSION

The private and the opposition-controlled media have most often been taxed by Black African governments with being adepts of adversarial journalism. This accusation has followed observations that the private media have mainly interpreted its watchdog role as being dogmatically opposed to the government. Their adversarial inclination has made them to intuitively suspect government and to view government policies as being hardly – nay never – designed in good faith. This paper has argued that the same accusation may be made against most Black African governments which have overly turned the state-owned media in their countries, into their public relation tools and strategic weapons to lambaste their political opponents.

This paper used Nigeria and Cameroon as case study, to examine the facets and implications of adversarial journalism by the state-owned media. It argued that this adversarial culture has mainly involved the governments of both countries utilizing the state-owned media outlets as their respective mouthpieces and as hunting dogs against any internal and external oppositional voice. This adversarial culture is more accentuated during electoral periods. During such periods, the state-owned media overly take sides in its political reportage, exhibiting pro-government analysis of all issues. The opposition is tactically/subtly inhibited from using the state-owned media as a platform to voice its views/perspective on the political issues affecting the country as well as to mediate its campaigns. Likewise, internal voices that are critical of the government are silenced through intimidating, punitive and other brutal/undemocratic tools. The prevalence of such an adversarial culture in these state-owned media has obviously affected their potential to serve as watchdogs; thereby making them to lose their credibility in the eyes of the general public and international observers.

In view of this obnoxious adversarial culture, it is imperative that clear laws be enacted that will totally stop government control of these media. These laws should be conceived in a way as to transform the state-owned media in the two countries from their present state to public

broadcaster, driven by the spirit to defend public interest and to give a chance to the expression of all shades of socio-political opinions. Such laws should establish robust and flexible mechanisms that will protect journalists from any form of intimidation or threat from politician as well as accord full editorial independence to the media houses.

In addition to this, the media outfits should be managed by a board formed through a process that allows representatives from all socio-political denominations and the civil service. Appointment to strategic posts and recruitment policies adopted in the media houses should perfectly be transparent and totally free from political/government influences. Recruitment and promotion in the media outlet should be based on meritocracy and not on journalist affiliation to particular political ideas or movements.

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