

ISSN Online: 2347-7474



*International Journal of Advances in  
Social Science and Humanities*

**IJASSH**

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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Censorship and Its Influence on the Book Industry in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Information is recognized as the currency of the modern age and information is conveyed in a vehicle which is a book; this has to pass through several processes before it can be published and published and displayed for acquisition however censorship in more ways than one seeks to stifle the spread of information. This study examined the concept of censorship and its influence on publishing in Nigeria. It also outlined the challenges of censorship on publishing in Nigeria and proffered some recommendations among others that professional censors should be employed as acquisition editors in book publishing outfits and the security of journalists should be guaranteed especially as they are recognised as the fourth estate of the realm that has a duty to report facts as objectively as possible.

**Keywords:** *Censorship, Publishing, Book Industry, Nigeria*

### Introduction

Books have been the traditional means of spreading, preserving and sharing information and knowledge. They link past and present when memories fail and bring separate cultures together. The written word according to UNESCO [1] serves as an extension of the human mind. Books improve our knowledge of others and of their philosophies and therefore enhance our understanding of the world. They also provide development opportunities for all ages and in particular for the young people as remarked by the Director General of the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2010.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) as cited by IFLA [2] states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

The Concept of Intellectual freedom involves protecting the rights of all individuals to

pursue the types of information they want and to read anything that interests them and it is common knowledge that this information is contained in a book however there is a myriad of activities involved before a book can be published, and distributed to the public; this process is known as publishing. Publishing refers to the selection, preparation and distribution of printed matter-including books, newspapers, magazines and pamphlets. It also involves a wide segment of society not only in terms of the reader, but also as regards the process of taking a manuscript from the author through its production and distribution to its readers.

Contemporary publishing includes the production of materials in digital formats such as CD-ROMS as well as materials created or adapted for electronic distribution (Digital Era Global Services). Publishing has evolved from small, ancient and law or religion bound origins into a vast industry. However, this mega industry is bedeviled by several factors; one of which is Censorship.

In the words of Bogle [3] “publishing is awash with instances of arbitrary censorship”. Intellectual freedom advocates oppose censorship which places restrictive controls on the dissemination of ideas, information or images transmitted through any communication medium” (World Encyclopaedia of Library and Information Services).

Censorship of ideas and information has been present and practised in various forms throughout recorded history and this is also affirmed by Oppenheim & Smith [4]. Today censorship is practised in many ways both obvious and subtle [5] whether it is the suppression of a culture, to stretch the understanding of a reader or to retain power [6]. Censorship is a recurring problem in Nigeria according to Agbaje [7] regardless of the supposed freedoms expressed in the constitution.

Both during periods of civilian rule and military dictatorships, the nation has never experienced a complete assurance of a free press. A free press is critical to the growth and development of any society and to the survival of any democracy [8]. Government philosophy and documents may state press freedoms exist, but in the day to day affairs of life such freedoms fluctuate widely. The study intends to explore the influence of censorship on the book Industry in Nigeria

### Concept of Censorship

As asserted by Achuen [9] the definition of censorship just like any other term has been viewed differently by various people and scholars and as explained by Curry (1997) cited in Moody [10] that censorship is a difficult term to define because it changes over in time with changes in attitudes of the communities in which it operates.

The argument by Molz [11] and Oppenheim & Smith [4] is that there is no agreed definition for the term censorship because censorship is difficult to delimit. Censorship in modern times could be the examination of radio programmes, news reports and other communication media for the purpose of altering or suppressing part thought to be objectionable or offensive; which may be considered immoral, heretical, blasphemous, seditious and injurious to the society.

Wikipedia sees censorship as “the suppression of speech or other public communication which may be considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive, politically incorrect or inconvenient as determined by a government, media outlet or other controlling body. It can be done by governments and private organisations or by individuals who engage in self-censorship. It occurs in a variety of different contexts including speech, music, book, films and other arts, the press, television, and the internet for a variety of reasons including National security, to control obscenity etc.

Censorship has also been defined to mean the control of information within a society. The American Association of School Administrators has also defined Censorship as “The removal, suppression or restricted circulation of literary, artistic or educational materials –of images, ideas and information – on the grounds that they are morally or otherwise objectionable in light of the standards applied by the censor”. Moody [10] defined Censorship as those actions which significantly restrict free access to information. There is a common thread running in all the definitions and it is the removal, suppression, or restricted circulation of information which is often contained in a book. While UNESCO in 1997 defined censorship as when a person or group successfully imposes their values upon others by stifling words, images or ideas and preventing them from reaching the public marketplace of ideas.

Section 39 (1) of the 1999 constitution as amended provides that “every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression including ideas and information without interference” One of the forms of expressing ideas and information is in a book. Thus the world over the meter for measuring development of any society is the intellectual freedom of the people as people in order to make rational decisions need to have free flow of information and unfettered access to such information.

### Forms of Censorship

Famous [12] asserted that censorship could be in two forms, prior and post censorship while self-censorship is added as the third form of censorship by the researchers.

- **Prior Censorship:** This is when an information material is being banned, subjected to scrutiny or censored before publication. This may be done by the government or its agencies, publishers, organisations, individuals, religious bodies or other association either by force or by negotiations. An example of prior censorship in Nigeria is as presented. The requirement of the Kano state censorship board is that before an author can publish or distribute any writing, they must first register with the board [13]. This is to enable the board control what would be published.

- **Post Censorship:** This is the censorship or banning of information materials after it has been published. A good example is the banning of Idris Abdulkareem's "Nigeria djagha djagha by the then President Olusegun Obasanjo [12] and also the banning of Newsbreed Magazine in 1977, the Tribune Newspaper in 1984 and the Tell Magazine in 1988 during the military regime of General Sanni Abacha and the banning of the Satanic Verses novel in 1989 written by Salman Rushdie, in which a global death sentence was placed on the author by the late spiritual leader of Iran Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini but the succeeding government of Iran under the leadership of Mohammed Khatami lifted the death sentence [5]. And more recently, the banning by Nigerian Music, Video and Censor Board of Nigerian musician Wizkid's single 'Caro' due to indecency, obscenity and lewdness in the video and lyrics [14].

- **Self- Censorship:** This is when authors, editors and reporters remove or suppress parts of news and stories that they feel is objectionable. Self-censorship according to Yaya, Achonna & Osisanwo, [5] occurs when a librarian deliberately avoids selecting materials that might cause controversy in the community or materials with which they personally disagree.

### History of Censorship in Nigeria

Famous [12] wrote that Censorship and the ideology supporting it could be traced back to ancient times, and to the fact that every society has customs, taboos, or laws by

which speech, dress, religious observance and sexual expression are regulated. Presently the history of censorship in Nigeria is sparse but instances abound on the history of Press Censorship. Examples of this form of silencing the press are found in the late 1970's and mid 1980's where even though the Newspapers and magazines were privately owned, the government prohibited them from expressing their editorial opinions. In 1977, New breed magazine was closed down. In 1984 the government closed down Tribune newspaper and four years later in 1988, News watch magazine was a victim of government censorship and it was accompanied by harassment of journalists.

Press censorship was very obvious during the military regime and almost reached a climax during the late General Sanni Abacha's regime especially in November 1993, when numerous journalists were arrested, detained, tried before kangaroo courts and sometimes summarily executed. From the above statement it could be deduced that censorship is a recurring problem as far as the country Nigeria is concerned regardless of the freedom of expression in the constitution. Censorship has great influence on the authors and publishers. Censorship has the power to deny the populace the right to read particular texts and also has the power to silence authors and publishers.

### Types of Censorship

- **Moral Censorship:** This is the banning of materials because they are morally objectionable to the various or some of the cultural norms in the Nigerian society; knowing that Nigeria is a heterogenous society having numerous sets of norms and values and it is commonly described as "unity in diversity"

- **Military Censorship:** This is the banning of information that tend to expose military tactics and national information; for security reasons. The publication of some media houses especially that of News watch, Tell and the News Magazines were censored on several occasions by the military regimes of that time. A recent case in point is the uproar in America which reverberated to other nations when

Edward Snowden code named the whistle blower a former contractor with the National Security Agency revealed to Americans that agents of the government listened in to every phone conversation; though hounded by the government he once served, he justified his actions thus "I cannot allow the US government to destroy privacy and basic liberties".

- **Political Censorship:** This occurs when the Nigerian government needs to keep secrets from the populace in order to prevent disruption of the workings of the state; though this is an anathema to democracy yet in certain circumstances, it is necessary for the saving of the state, calling to mind that Nigeria has always had a tendency of splitting. For example in late 2013, rumours were rife that the amalgamation of the Country was only for a period of 100 years and that it would break up thereafter, the Presidency had to release statements dispelling such fears. Recently though. The presidency had to release statements to calm tension in the nation that her soldiers were not provided with better weapons and armoury to counter the attack by Boko Haram as against the cry by the Borno state government that Boko Haram was better equipped than Nigerian soldiers were ill motivated [15].
- **Religious Censorship:** In Nigeria there are three religions 50%-Islam, 40%-Christianity and the remaining 10% a mixture of both or traditional religion (Newspaper and Media Censorship in Nigeria). Religious Censorship is therefore the banning of materials because they are religiously questionable. For example the Islamic Sect Boko Haram censored the distribution of Western Education and Christian materials in the North-West region of Nigeria.
- **Corporate Censorship:** Corporations can ban (by negotiations, unless it has monopoly) materials deemed unfitting to them or their partners. In Nigeria, this kind of censorship is rare as there are no more corporations with monopoly. Many of the public corporations are yet under government control hence the only monopoly is the government.

## Purpose of Censorship in Nigeria

The methodology of rule varies among individual countries. however in Nigeria publications that are perceived to be in direct contrast with theocratic or moral standards may undergo book censorship; therefore ideas are suppressed under the guise of protecting three basic social institutions which include: the family, religious institutions and the government.

- **Protection of Minors-** censoring inappropriate language especially when expressed in a book which children are likely to read is one of the reasons why censorship is practised in Nigeria. Censorship also takes place in schools where parents and librarians have a right to challenge some books. For example, the adventures of Huckle Berry Finn written by Mark Twain.
- **Religious Institutions:** Local religious groups may object to certain materials in circulation which does not align with the principles of their faith and attempt to censor them.
- **Government:** Nigerian National Security and defence run very close to the religious impulse as a rationale for the suppression of information [5]. Government is the major producer and user of information as it generates large volume of information daily for its operation yet it plays a major role in suppressing information from circulating to the populace. Censorship exists to some extent in all modern countries both developed and developing countries like USA, UK, France, Japan, Singapore, Australia, China, Egypt and South Africa (specially during the Apartheid regime system of government ) and in Nigeria (especially during the military era) when some media houses were shut down. Another example is the censoring of the book entitled "The Man Died" authored by Professor Wole Soyinka, the first ever Nobel Laureate as denigrating the government of the day. Furthermore Yaya, Achonna & Osisanwo [5] are of the opinion that a government which censors the information available to its people other than in a state of a national emergency (for example a sudden attack by a hostile military force) is a

government which seeks to keep its people in a state of ignorance and should not complain if the people have no loyalty to it.

## **Publishing and Censorship in Nigeria**

In the architecture of book publishing, the construction emanates from the acquisition editor operating as a middle man between the author and the publisher. He censors the manuscript and dictates its marked up audience, production, hires relevant professionals in the project area to proof read and edit the script, its marketing and the target prospects, cost implications and finally advises the publisher. However in the Nigerian scenario, this is an abnormally as most authors by-pass this obstacle (acquisition editor) and approach the publisher in the case of self-publishing as against industrial, that is why in some instances, poorly researched and not educational books are churned into the market [16]. The above premise lends credence to an observation made by a Nigerian parent:

"... some books I see in Nigerian Primary School Curriculum these days... books by some of our Nigerian publishers English Language books with grammatical errors? These books are supposed to teach kids good English Language and to teach correct use of tenses but sometimes we see wrong tenses(error) and I wonder, was there no proof reading before publishing and selling these books to schools and parents".

The above quote is in reality a cry of frustration by a parent and perhaps such books would have come out well if they had been properly edited along the way. Censorship has been defined variously and has to do with suppression, restricted access, etc on grounds that they are morally objectionable or offensive to the censor thus Wikipedia enlightens further by adding that book censorship can be enacted at the national or sub-national level and can carry legal penalties for their infraction, books may also be challenged at a local, community level as a result books can be removed from schools or libraries.

## **Influence of Censorship on Publishing in Nigeria**

In May 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan signed into law the Freedom of Information Bill which at that point in time was heralded by all Nigerians as the dawn of a new day, that long awaited law which would usher in a climate of openness in the country.

This Law allows citizens access to public records and information held by public officers or institutions. However in contrast with the above claims Ann Harrison, Programme director of PEN International writers in Prison Committee asserted that the hope for a sea of change in the Nigerian authorities' freedom of information after May 2011 has sadly not been borne out, instead colonial era legislation and Sharia law are used to censor and persecute writers who also face an increasing threat from armed groups.

More than three years later, writers across Nigeria face growing challenges to their right to freedom of expression. In agreement with the above assertion, Jose Borghino, Policy Director at the International Publishers Association explained that as publishers, we respect the right of individuals in Nigeria to choose what they wish to read and we believe that no government should interfere in Publisher-reader relationship and he went further to say that censorship by states in Nigeria conflicts with the Federal Constitution which guarantees the right to freedom of expression.

However, it is the view of the researchers that book censorship should not only be viewed in the negative light as it influences book publishing both positively and negatively. Indeed censorship and intimidation, harassment, death threats from government agents, arbitrary arrest and detention of journalists under repressive laws is against the true ideals of democracy which Nigeria professes to practise but on the other hand low grade educational books would be churned out by authors into the market on daily basis; especially those authors who engage in self-publishing who by-pass the essential services of an acquisition editor. It is also the researchers' point that the normal process of industrial publishing should be strictly followed as books which are the end result will be high

in both quality and content and the vast end users of books would ultimately engage in astute thinking, reasoning and improved spelling skill [16].

### Challenges of Censorship on Publishing in Nigeria

- Inadequate number of skilled personnel to function as acquisition editors
- Insecurity of journalists
- Intellectual freedom is not encouraged to thrive
- Threats to life of journalists, teachers etc by Boko Haram
- The prevalence of Repressive laws such as Official Secrets Act, Sharia law etc curtails the exercise of the right of freedom of expression.

### Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, this study has shown that censorship in Nigeria has both positive and negative impacts on the book publishing industry, as it prohibits the spread and advancement of obscenity, misinformation, etc on one hand and on the other hand precludes the right of Nigerian

citizens to access information freely. Some specific areas in which Nigerian government need to improve upon include:

- Professional censors should be employed as acquisition editors in book publishing outfits.
- The security of journalists should be guaranteed especially as they are recognised as the fourth estate of the realm that has a duty to report facts as objectively as possible.
- Intellectual freedom which is the foundation of developed societies should be allowed to thrive in Nigeria.
- The Islamic sect should be disbanded and her members tried and imprisoned.
- The National Assembly should re-visit these repressive laws with a view to either amending them or repealing them.

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