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To cheer or hold power to account?

The news blitzkrieg on outgoing Speaker of Parliament Anita Annet Among, alias AAA, shows no sign of abating nearly two weeks since it started shortly after the swearing in of President Yoweri Museveni on May 12.

Today, it is still long nights and long days! I use the word "blitzkrieg" deliberately because it seems to fit the script that has unfolded in Uganda over the past two weeks.

According to Google AI, "... blitzkrieg, German for 'lightning war', is a military tactic designed for rapid, overwhelming, and coordinated surprise attacks using combined arms—primarily armour, motorised infantry, and air support. Developed by Germany to avoid long, drawn-out conflicts in WWII, it aims to paralyse enemy forces through speed, surprise, and psychological shock, breaking through lines to create chaos in the rear". Clearly, the former speaker has been paralysed by the security and political onslaught, as well as the media—mainstream and social—drubbing.

At this moment, she is seen not only as the epitome of corruption in Uganda—rightly or wrongly—but also purportedly one of the biggest security risks to the country (read government).

Her guilt or innocence is, of course, a matter for the courts, where she will hopefully get to have her day in the dock.

But from a journalism perspective, we may want to reflect on how the "AAA blitzkrieg" as it played out in the "Fourth and Fifth Estates"—i.e. mainstream and social media. Do we see journalism that holds power to account or do we see media that, along the way, is, unwittingly, a cheerleader? Or do we see both?

"Cheerleader journalism" refers to media coverage that acts as a booster for a team, company, or government rather than pro-

Ask about the money, but also ask about other things because, as they say, there are two sides—or more—to every story.



Odoobo C Bichachi
Public Editor

viding critical, objective reporting. It often blurs the line between public relations and journalism, prioritising positive stories that promote, support, or celebrate the subject, often neglecting in-depth analysis or critical oversight."

Yes, great work has been done by the mainstream media in keeping this story alive, bringing different insights from dark political shadows, etc. Social media, on the other hand, has been all fire and water—with the truth somewhere in between.

Journalism's first duty is to the truth and to the public. Journalists must therefore continuously reflect on this as they go about reporting stories.

That said, a few things I stumbled across on the web in relation to accountability journalism vs cheerleader journalism are worth noting.

One: "A 'cheerleader' media fails to ask critical questions, allowing politicians and business leaders to operate without accountability. True journalism requires challenging power, asking questions, not regurgitating its talking points."

Two: "When media becomes a public relations tool for the powerful, it loses the public's trust. Trust is the currency of journalism; a biased or bought media destroys its own credibility."

Three: "Too much of modern media engages in self-censorship out of fear of losing access or being targeted by authorities, acting as 'lapdogs' rather than watchdogs."

Four: "A cheerleader media often suppresses critical information, preferring to avoid rocking the boat or upsetting those in power. This leads to a public that is misinformed."

Five: "Journalism is not cheer leading. It is not war mongering. It is not blind praise. A journalist's duty is to report incidents factually and correctly. Not to fuel emotions. Not to take sides. Not to turn pain into prime time drama. Before going on air, every report must stand on the four corners of EDISA—Evidence, Documentation, Sources, and Accountability. Not assumptions. Not personal opinions. Not loud commentary."

Six: "Cheerleader journalism often prioritises sensation and promotion over fact, leading to the spread of bias or, in severe cases, the regurgitation of propaganda, which can diminish public trust and safety."

Over the coming weeks and months, when the din has quietened, the public could benefit from a more reflective coverage of abuse of public resources and authority. The two are twins and exact the same damage to the public good.

Ask about the money, but also ask about other things because, as they say, there are two sides—or more—to every story.

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