Watchdogs or Captured Media?

A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN NIGERIA'S EMERGENT DEMOCRACY 1999 - 2016

EDITED BY Ayo Olukotun

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PREFACE

This project is the product of a grant provided by the Ford Foundation, West Africa office, and warehoused and administered by the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence Trust Fund. The editor and contributors to the book are grateful especially to Mr. Innocent Chukwuma, Resident Representative in the Lagos office and Dr. Paul Nwulu, Head of the Media Desk at the office. The book, consisting of thirteen chapters on various aspects of the media in the Fourth Republic, has its origins in the approval of the Foundation following a proposal sent to it by me to do an extended paper, entitled Watchdogs or Captured Media? A Study of the Role of the Media in Nigeria's Emergent Democracy 1999-2015.

Funded by the Ford Foundation, the paper, published as a monograph, was submitted in November 2016, thereby providing the basis for a full length edited book on the subject. To bring out comparative perspectives from other African countries, it was decided to include the experiences of Ghana, Kenya and South Africa, so that Nigerian readers can both compare and contrast how our experiences since 1999 resemble, as well as differ from the trajectory of State-media relations in these other countries. One of the highlights of the project was the hosting of an international seminar in Lagos on September 5 and 6, 2017 in which all the contributors presented their prospective chapters to a panel of scholars, serving as peer reviewers for the purpose of refinement and cross-fertilization of ideas. The conference was rewarding in that it helped to syncronize, as well as clarify ideas, providing a common ground, from which the contributors could proceed to finalize the

outcome of their researches.

What is contained in these pages, therefore, is the updated version of the contributions, following the criticisms and valuable suggestions at the Lagos conference. The contributors sought to answer the question to varying extents of the degree to which the Nigerian media in its print, electronic and digital forms had kept the traditions of a watchdog media alive or whether it had been captured by the political class through the familiar spoil-sharing arrangement, which characterize much of Nigerian politics. It is my hope that we have done justice, reasonably, to the enterprise of illuminating the role, changing profile, record and orientation of the media in the context of Nigeria's wobbling semi-democracy.

Those who have contributed to shaping the ideas and perspectives set down in this book are too numerous to mention. It is important, however, to mention the coordinating role of Mr. Lanre Idowu, supervising Trustee of DAME for providing the stimulating atmosphere under which the work was begun and completed. Of course, the editor and panel of contributors bear responsibility for the weaknesses and shortcomings of the book.

Professor Ayo Olukotun

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Department of Political Science
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FOREWORD

Gentle Giants in a Wild Jungle

This is a project of extensive institutional and intellectual collaboration at various levels: between the grant giver (the Ford Foundation) and, on the other hand, the "middle man" (Diamond Awards for Media Excellence), as well as the recipient (who is also the distinguished editor (Professor Ayo Olukotun) of this important volume, and his eleven indefatigable collaborators. This is a commendable project, attesting to what respectful collaborative efforts can accomplish.

Watchdog or Captured Media? A Study of the Role of the Media in Nigeria's Emergent Democracy, 1999-2016 is an extraordinarily impressive book, pitched to enliven the horizon of an African readership. It draws on the vast experiences of scholars and practitioners, thus giving the book its breadth and depth, and foregrounds the agency of the Nigerian state along with the excesses of its leadership. In its capacious scope, the book offers us an opportunity to understand Africa's giant nation, provoking our wonder and admiration for dedicated journalists, as well as empathy for state protagonists. Professor Ayo Olukotun, as a very able editor, has a tremendous capacity to bring people together, to distil their different insights into a coherent whole, and to provide a new light on the great issues of the moment. No doubt, he has assembled essays, which constitute these golden chapters to whet the intellectual appetite of media experts and the general reader.

The contributors have been very carefully chosen, as they comprise luminary mainstream journalists, writers, human rights activists, teachers and professors of journalism, scholars, and editors. As distinguished writers, their diversity is very much reflected in the rich opinions and analyses on such broad and thematic topic as the media and the state, with chapters that cover various issues. For example, there are comparative discussions of Ghana by Professor Kwame Karikari, former head of Ghana's broadcasting house and a seasoned journalism professor; Kenya by Peter Kimani, another seasoned media expert; South Africa by Professor Abiodun Salawu; digital media co-authored by Professor Lai Oso and Dr. Tunde Akanni; two chapters on the coverage of religious conflicts, one by Dr. Nathaniel Danjibo, the other by Professor Olukotun and Margaret Ayansola Jesuminure; state media relations by Professor Chris Ogbondah; technology and ownership by Olukotun; the Freedom of Information Act by Edaetan Ojo; Corruption in the media by Lanre Idowu; television and democracy by Dr Oluyinka Esan; and talk radio by Funke-Treasure Durodola.

The guiding central narrative of the book is one of power and responsibility: if, as it is assumed, that the media is tasked with shaping society and curbing the excesses of those in leadership positions, how successful has it been? This is an important query as it relates to the conceptual balance of power in society, an informed citizenry, and critical opinions. And as to the specific years in focus—1999 to 2016, the Nigerian Fourth Republic, the period following long interlude of military rule—the connection of the media to which democracy was both critical and crucial. Indeed, the selection of an era brings the essays into focus, whereby the book engagingly informs us of the place of the media in the Fourth Republic, covering its contributions, constraints, and challenges. The competent introduction by the editor, Ayo Olukotun, the scholar-cum-practitioner, places the book in its proper context and, in the final analysis, supplies a useful overview for its readers.

As to the value of the watchdog credentials of the media, there can be no doubt. That, indeed, is why older democracies have treated the media as the Fourth Estate (or Realm), following the

three organs of government. Also, with the media as a watchdog, shocking scandals have to be exposed, while corruption has to be reported in the process, the false claims of politicians have to be ridiculed and, as a result, authoritarian governments do not want these activities in the public domain. Instead, they endeavour to force the media merely to report and praise, falsely pretending that both the media and the government are mutual collaborators in nation-building projects.

The contributions of this book are manifold, but I plan to focus on six aspects that interest me. The first one is that the core query it raises is not ambiguous: Did Nigeria produce a captive media or that of watchdogs in the formative years of its post-military democracy? The answers are more than clarified in all the chapters. In this clarity, the book moves us beyond the narrow conceptualizations of the media around communication tools and policies as well as news gathering. Highlighted are the more critical issues of the forces that shape the media, and what the media itself is trying to shape.

In this symbiotic conception, the second major contribution, the book creates a dialogue among and between media professionals and theorists. The role of the media as a watchdog derives from the expectation of the public that it should hold government accountable: the objectives of setting up private media in relation to the government, as stated in Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution, enjoining the media to "monitor governance."

To be commended is the comparative dimension that the book supplies, the third main contribution. State-media relations are not peculiar to Nigeria, which may have informed the decision to undertake comparative work, including South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana. Can an African model emerge? Is one country better than the other? Evidence is provided on Ghana, Kenya and South Africa to show some similarities with and differences from Nigeria.

Tensions in state-media relations fill the pages of the book; as well as the challenges in reforming various spaces and institutions. This, to me, constitutes the book's fourth contribution. It is right to seek and fight for freedom of information as Ojo argues

in chapter three.While it is a fact that media scholars and professionals criticize themselves, the profession, and content delivery is one of the most significant aspects of the book. For example, Lanre Idowu devotes an entire chapter to corruption. Internal crises within some media organisations and conflicts with the state have brought about some power decline of the media, as we notice in chapter ten on Kenya. The linkages between the media and democracy are acutely represented in chapter 6. Major aspects of governance, especially the core ones of peace and conflicts, are illuminated in notable manners, as in the case of chapters 7 and 8. The media is visible in reporting all major national issues, including the various perspectives of leading figures on a wide range of issues, as well as criticism of state underperformance.

A fifth contribution is the cogent analysis of the problems that beset the media: a combined newspaper circulation that is less than half a million a day; the challenges of living in a failing state where the citizens are denied access to basic human needs; and the media split into competing identities—ethnic, religious, regional—with divisive results. If the nation itself is sliced into identity components, so too do separate media outlets serve Muslims and Christians, Yoruba and Igbo. In spite of these problems, the book argues that the media is taken seriously by those in power, and by the public who respect journalists who are pro-democracy and pro-development. The state exercises forms of control via its ability to grant licenses, and uses its dominance in advertisement to punish newspapers that criticize it. The era was predictably marked by tension as the retired military general who came to power in 1999 not only won an election that did not generate trust, but his mindset was still that of an autocrat. As noted in the book, there were cases of journalists who were arrested, closure of newspaper houses, the shutdown of Freedom Radio in 2006, and one television station had its license suspended.

Following that is the sixth contribution that speaks to improvement, significantly regarding using technology more effectively, and how to deliver news in a media age.

As the very first book on the media during this era, it is a pi-

oneer work that will be referenced in all subsequent books. The future is too hard to predict, but I would like to assume that the media will continue to assert itself, fight for freedom, and speak for the poor and the marginalized. The public will expect both the state and the media to show accountability. The means of disseminating information will become more expansive and digitized. The heterogeneous citizens living in a plural society will equally be served by a heterogeneous media fully connected to various groups. The respected media will not support corruption and enable authoritarianism. State control of the media will give way to privatized ownership with a voice. To draw from the United States especially, the left has shown the pervasive failures of corporate media (in terms of what is called the media monopoly) and even so-called public media (NPR and PBS), and has looked instead to independent media, including community radio, none of which would be considered privatized.

In essence, readers of this impressive book and I have a lot of work to do, which is to empower the media to reform the state. There is a question we need to address: how are we, as marginalized citizens, empowered to empower the media? Issues of accountability and good governance involve not just the media but all of us as citizens. As we live in a mismanaged Nigerian state which, like a jungle, requires being tamed, we have to turn the media into wild dogs that can not only bark but bite. We have to invest the media with positive political influence. We must know the main source from which our people get the news the most, and in the process, to penetrate those to offer critical interpretations of the news they provide. Where the possibility of good leadership exists, the media must be non-corrupt in its internal workings to support accountability. In a plural society, the media must reflect that plurality so that minority and marginalized voices are not suppressed.

In the end, watchful citizens should be able to harness the power they have in the age of social media. Platforms, websites and apps are legion, with university students and teenagers possessing more experience than their parents' generation. Social media

will continue to become part of Nigeria's culture, hence it should reform Nigerian politics and its space. Indeed, social media should force the traditional media to reform itself, and it should provide ideas to reform the country and create the network to offer a more youthful leadership that will revolutionize the state.

Toyin Falola,

The Jacob and Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities

& University Distinguished Professor,

The University of Texas at Austin

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Chris Wolumati Ogbondah is a professor of journalism, and former coordinator of the mass communication program in the Department of Communication Studies, University of Northern Iowa. He has also taught in Nigeria and the United Arab Emirates. He holds B.A. (Hons.) degree in journalism from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; MA in journalism from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Ph.D in journalism from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Illinois.

Chris Ogbondah is the author of *The press in Nigeria: An annotated bibliography*; *Military regimes and the press in Nigeria, 1966-1993*, and *State-press relations in Nigeria, 1993-1998: Human rights and democratic development*. Among the scholarly journals where his articles have appeared are: *Public Relations Quarterly*, *Gazette: International Journal of Communication*, *Political Communication and Persuasion*, *Afrika Spectrum*, *African Issues*, *Africa Media Review* as well as book chapters on media in Africa.

Professor Ogbondah was a member of the survey team of Freedom House, New York that ranks the countries of the world on the scale of press freedom. He was a news reporter and program producer at then WNTV/WNBS, Ibadan, and Director of News and Current Affairs at the Rivers State Television (RSTV), and Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Port Harcourt. Ogbondah was Group Sports Editor and Assistant Editor at *The Tide* in Port Harcourt, and a reporter at six newspapers in the United States of America, including The Grand Rapids Press, Michigan and Lexington News, Missouri.

Professor Ogbondah is a four-time recipient of the American Press Institute Fellowship, and the American Society of Newspa-

per Editors (ASNE) Excellence in Journalism Fellowship. He is a recipient of the State of Iowa Board of Regents Award for Faculty Excellence.

Edetaen Ojo is Executive Director of Media Rights Agenda in Lagos, which works to promote and defend freedom of expression in Nigeria. Mr. Ojo has worked on Freedom of Information, media freedom and freedom of expression, media development, Internet freedom, human rights and democracy issues in Nigeria, regionally and internationally for over 20 years. He is Co-chair and a member of the National Steering Committee (NSC) of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in Nigeria. He also currently chairs the Steering Committee of the African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX), a network of freedom of expression organizations in Africa; and Chair of the Board of Directors of the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), based in Accra, Ghana. He is also a member of the Governing Council of the Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC) in Kampala, Uganda; and a member of the Board of Directors of International Media Support (IMS), an international media development organization based in Copenhagen, Denmark; in addition to many other roles he plays in Nigeria, across Africa and globally.

Abiodun Salawu is Professor of Journalism, Communication and Media Studies and Director of the research entity, Indigenous Language Media in Africa (ILMA) at the North-West University, South Africa. He has taught and researched journalism for over two decades in Nigeria and South Africa.

Prior to his academic career, he practiced journalism in a number of print media organisations in Nigeria. He has to his credit, scores of scholarly publications in academic journals and books. He has also edited three books and authored one. He is a regular presenter of papers at local and international conferences. He is a co-vice chair of the journalism section of IAMCR and a member of editorial/advisory boards of a number of journals. He is rated by the NRF as an established researcher and he is a member of the Codesria's College of Senior Academic Mentors.

Lanre Idowu is a writer, editor, trainer and author with a rich experience and deep interest in the workings of the Nigerian media. He received BA, History, University of Lagos, Akoka, 1979; MA, Public Communication, Fordham University, New York, 1982. A former High School Teacher in Lagos, he was a Staff Writer at *Daily Times*, 1982; Reporter, *The Guardian*, 1983; Assistant Editor, *The Democrat Weekly*, 1984-85; Information Analyst, USIS, 1985-86; Associate Editor, Deputy Editor, Editor and Deputy Editor-in-Chief, *ThisWeek*, 1986-89; Copywriter/Executive Director, Richard Munds Ltd., 1989-91; and Editor-in-Chief, *Media Review* and CEO, Diamond Publications since 1991. For a decade, he has been the spokesperson for the Diocese of Lagos Mainland (Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion).

He is the Author of *The Popular is Seldom Correct: Selected Essays on Governance, Media and Democracy* (2009), *Bridges of Memory: Poems of Lanre Idowu* (2009) and Editor of various books such as *Voices from Within: Essays on Nigerian Journalism in honour of Sam Amuka* (2005; 2015), *Nigerian Columnists and their Art* (2009; 2011), Master of His Age: The Story of Anthony Enahoro (2011), *Watching the Watchdogs: Media Review at 20* (2011), and *The Editor and the State: Perspectives on Media and Governance* (2013). His latest works, *Uneven Steps: The Story of the Nigerian Guild of Editors (1961-2016), Media on my Mind* and *Songs of Childhood: Poems of Lanre Idowu* will be released in 2018.

In appreciation of his training prowess, editing skills and contributions to the development to the Nigerian media, he received respectively the Distinguished Trainer's Award of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (2002), the Fellowship of the Nigerian Guild of Editors (2003), and the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Reporting (2011). He is the supervising trustee of the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence (DAME) Trust Fund, an annual initiative to reward outstanding persons and their works in the media since 1992.

Ayo Olukotun, PhD, is currently distinguished Professor at Department of Political Science, Olabisi Onabanjo University, where he occupies the Oba (Dr) Sikiru Kayode Adetona Professorial Chair

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A journalist and a public intellectual, Olukotun has served as Chairman Editorial Board of several newspapers including the *Daily Times*, the *Nigerian Compass*. He had also been, at different times, a member of the editorial board of the *Nigerian Tribune*, *Daily Independent* and the *Anchor* newspapers. Since 2012, he has kept a weekly column in The Punch newspaper, and was in 2013, named the Winner of the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence (DAME) prize for Informed Commentary. He enjoys wide readership and following through this weekly Friday musing. His articles in *The Punch* have been quoted in several international sources including The USA Africa Dialogue, where his opinions are often discussed and debated.

Olukotun has been a recipient of several international grants from organizations such as the Ford Foundation, Carnegie Endowment and Friedrich Ebert Foundation. He has published over 60 articles and he is author of *Repressive State and Resurgent Media in Nigeria* (Upsalla, Nordic African Institute, 2004). He co-edited *Political Communication in Africa* with Sharon Omotoso, Berlin Springer, 2016. He has also co-edited with Professor Femi Sonaike a book on the media mogul, Babatunde Jose, with the title *Jose: The Ideas Man*. He edited *Foreign Policy of the Babangida Government* under the Murtala Muhammed Times Lecture Series.

Lai Oso is a Professor of Mass Communication at the School of Communication, Lagos State University. He was the Dean of the school between 2011 and 2015. He is the current President, Association of Communication Scholars & Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN).

He attended the University of Lagos (1975-1978) where he graduated with B.sc in Mass Communication. He also holds a Mas-

ter in International Relations from the then University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) and a Ph.D from the University of Leicester.

A former Information Officer during the National Youth Service at the Kwara State Ministry of Information, Ilorin; reporter and later state correspondent with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), he later joined the Moshood Abiola Polytechnic (MAPOLY), Abeokuta as a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication. Whilst there, he rose to become Head of Department, Director of School, Director, SIWES and the Deputy Rector. He has worked in various capacities with many national and international organizations including UNESCO, UNICEF, among others.

Professor Lai Oso has published in both local and international academic journals in the areas of Political Communication, Journalism, Public Relations and Development Communication.His latest publications include *Multiculturalism, Diversity and Reporting Conflict in Nigeria* (edited with Umaru Pate) and "Status of Training and Research in Reporting Conflict, Peace Journalism and Safety Education in West Africa" (with Umaru Pate and Jubril Abubakar, *Journal of Journalism Education, Vol. No. 2*.

Oluyinka Esan holds a doctorate degree in Sociology from the University of Glasgow. She is a Reader in the School of Media and Film at the University of Winchester. Having also taught at the Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos, Nigeria, for almost twenty years, she has a long and varied scholarly and media consultancy experience, from which she addresses her interests in media messages, reception practices and audiences (particularly women and children), and the social relevance of media.

Dr. Esan is the author of *Nigerian Television: Fifty Years of Television in Africa* (2009) and book series editor for the Association of Communication Scholars and Professionals of Nigeria (ACSPN). She has authored several book chapters and journal articles, including, "Appreciating Nollywood: Audiences and Nigerian 'Films'," in *Particip@tion: (on-line) Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* Volume 5, No. 1. Her edited books include *Taking Stock: Nigerian*

Media and National Challenges(2016).

More recently, her research focus seeks to bring non-Western perspectives to mainstream paradigms in the study of media, film, and communication, giving insight into production practices, audience pleasures, and the making of meanings.

Funke-Treasure Durodola is a broadcast journalist, certified media trainer, speech and leadership coach. She is the first female journalist to manage an all news radio station (Radio One 103.5 FM) in the Radio Nigeria Network.

She received training from Thomson Foundation, UK and Radio Netherlands Training Centre. She has worked with the United Nations IRIN Radio as a Country Producer-Trainer. She holds a Masters in Journalism & Media Studies from Rhodes University, South Africa and has received further training at the Poynter Institute, Florida, USA and Pan Atlantic University, Lagos,.

Funke -Treasure is also an author, writer and media strategist. Her books include, *Memories of Grandma* and *Basic Pronunciation Guide for Second Language Speakers of the English Language*. Her academic research, *The Rising Popularity of Pidgin English Radio Stations in Nigeria: An Audience Study of Wazobia FM, Lagos* is available online.

She is a recipient of professional media fellowships and awards. These include the Nigerian Media Merit Award's Radio Production of the Year 2008 and Finalist, Henry J Kaiser HIV Journalism Category, CNN African Journalist of the Year Award 2007.

She is currently the Assistant Director, Programs, FRCN Lagos Operations, overseeing the programme needs of its three FM stations in the city.

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Margaret Ayansola Jesuminure (formerly Margaret Damola Ayansola) lectures in the Department of Mass Communication, Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State and currently undergoing a PhD in Mass Communicaion at Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria. She is a recipient of a number of awards including Next Generation Social Sciences Award granted by the Social Science Research Council, Brooklyn, USA in 2014 and one of Ten Young African Scholars Award by Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, New York, USA in 2015. She has a number of peer reviewed journal articles and chapters in books to her credit.

Dr Peter Kimani is a Kenyan journalist and author of, most recently, *Dance of the Jakaranda*, a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. He teaches journalism at Aga Khan University's Graduate School of Media and Communications in Nairobi and is presently, the Visiting Writer at Amherst College.

Kwame Karikari has been Dean of the new School of Communication Studies at the private Wisconsin International University College in Accra, Ghana since 2016. He had been for years a lecturer, associate professor and director of the University of Ghana's Graduate School of Communication Studies. His professional experience in media work includes serving as director general of the state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation in the 1980s; founder (in 1997) and, until 2013, executive director of the Accra-based Media Foundation for West Africa, a non-governmental organisation for the promotion of media rights and freedom of expression across the sub-region region.

Kayode Eesuola holds a Ph.D. in Political Science, with soft spots for political behavior, political theory and African affairs. Based in the Political Science Department, University of Lagos, Nigeria; Eesuola is a Fulbright Scholar who, at the time of this publication, was a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Politics and International Relations, North West University, Republic of South Africa. He gave research assistance to Prof. Salawu on chapter 12.

Dr. Tunde Akanni is a University of Ibadan's IFRA Fellow. He was in 1998 appointed Visiting Scholar to the Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. A year later, he emerged a distinguished British Chevening scholar, enabling him to enroll for a master's degree programme in mass communication at the University of Leicester in United Kingdom. In 2003, Akanni again made the list of the Netherlands NUFFIC Fellowship awardees, making him emerge as pioneer participant in the Institute's Globalization and Development Programme. In 2007, Akanni also bagged a travel grant from the US State Department to participate in the Michigan State University's Responsible Governance programme. A member of the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition, he is a development activist who has been consistent with the study and use of media for development.

Akanni has served as a resource person for training, editing tasks, stakeholder mapping as well as for long and short term consultancies for local and international organizations including UNDP, DFID, Internews, OSI, NIPR, and Friends of the Earth, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Ayo Olukotun

This section introduces the subject matter of this book, underlines its point of departure, as well as embeds it within historical and theoretical perspectives. As the title of the book suggests, it deals in 13 chapters with the role, changing profile, record and contexts of activities of the Nigerian media in the period between 1999, when the Fourth Republic commenced, until 2016, a year after the historic election of 2015. As known, in 2015, for the first time, an opposition party, the All Progressives Congress, won elections against the ruling People's Democratic Party, which for fifteen years had held power at the centre. It may be of interest to remark that no substantial published work has been written up till this book, with respect to the role of the Nigerian media in their print, electronic and digital forms regarding Nigerian democracy. Hence, the chapters in this book, which had been written by experts and practitioners in the field of communication and cognate disciplines, seek to fill a gap in the literature. The writings also amplify the subject of discourse, which is essentially woven around the extent to which the media have maintained their roles as watchdogs in the Fourth Republic, by comparative case studies from Ghana, Kenya and South Africa, given that these countries have in African terms, substantial media presence.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The Nigerian media, in term of size, are the biggest in Africa, followed by Kenya and South Africa, and are regarded as the epicentre of Nigeria's magnificent civil society. They have emerged as the arbiters of national conversation, partly because of their antecedents in the seminal anti-colonial and anti-military struggles.

Most recently, they played heroic oppositional roles with respect to the brutal dictatorships of the 1990s and are regarded as the vanguard of the crusade to return Nigeria to civilian rule after 16 years of unbroken military rule. Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, observed in the twilight of military rule that:

> The press, and let me seize this very opportunity to stress this, has been magnificent, heroic and one of these days, when there is more pleasure, we are going to erect a statute; I am going to see personally to this, that a statue for heroism of the press is erected at a prominent place in this country, we must never forget (The Guardian, October 17, 1998, p. 5).

As I have argued elsewhere, (Olukotun, 2017a), it is possible to speculate that Soyinka has not yet erected this monument because there is not enough pleasure in Nigeria or in the media, which are increasingly, despite their expansion and increasing digitization, accused by their critics of having been captured by the political class, and consequently, have lost the bite they once had. Illustrative of these critical voices is an article entitled "More freedom, more problems" (Agbaje and Adebanwi, 2003). In other words, even though the media have enjoyed more freedom in the period since 1999, freedom which was deepened by the passing of the Freedom of Information Act in 2011, there are critical doubts whether they have lived up to the billings predicted by their crusading role under the military, when they invented rebellious communication outlets, such as alternative newspapers and a pirate radio to enhance the struggle for democracy. These are some of the main issues that the various contributors to this book have grappled with.

In the next two sections of this chapter, I sketch out topography of the media, as well as conceptualize the political and accountability terrains, including the role of the state in what is often described as a low quality democracy or a semi-democracy.

Topography of the Nigerian Media 1999-2017

Following the Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication, the mass media are conceptualised to include the "various technological means of producing and disseminating messages and cultural forms... to large, widely dispersed, heterogenous audienc-

es" (Chandler and Murdy, 2011:257).

Ordinarily, this would include electronic and digital avenues of communication, as well as books, films, theatre and popular culture outlets. For convenience and conciseness, however, we zero in on newspapers and magazines, as well as television, radio and online news sites.

The media in Nigeria and much of Africa are best understood in the context of their pre-colonial origins in oral narratives and festivals, as well as their colonial and postcolonial identities as enablers of authoritarian rule, at least until the democratic transitions of the 1990s. Bourgault (1995) alludes to the authoritarian legacy in broadcasting, whereby Nigerian journalists conduct interviews for politicians without interrogating or critically appraising what they have to say. On one occasion, as Bourgault narrated it, a television journalist actually slept off while the politician was narrating in a monotone the so-called achievement of government. Broadcasting, despite liberalisation and the growth of a fragile private sector, is largely state-owned. The fact that coup-makers in the years of military rule employed predawn broadcast to announce change of governments meant that a certain apprehension and circumspection continue to trail state regulation of the broadcasting sector. Hence, state radio and television tend to have national reach as opposed to most private broadcasters who have limited reach, although this is offset by their capacity to connect to satellite broadcaster through DSTV; even as at 2016, and in spite of the approval, after a long struggle, of community radios, broadcasting is still tightly regulated while "the decision to grant a broadcasting license remains a subjective presidential privilege".

Other constraints include: High licensing fees, which restrict ownership to the wealthy, as well as restrictive clauses in the broadcasting code, which limit editorial content and programming. Broadcast managers, who test the limit of regulation, have done so to their own regret as the shutdown of the Kano-based Freedom Radio in 2016, and the detention, for 78 hours of the editors of Channels Television in 2008 illustrate.

In the print media, the newspapers especially, there is a tradi-

tion of lively outspokenness, partly because it is private sector-led, partly because of the history of civil agitation dating back to colonial rule and also because Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversities make it difficult for dictatorship to operate since ethnicity and religion can become rallying point of civil agitation by the excluded. Even at that, there are official constraints and persecution to independent newspapers, as I show in a subsequent chapter, advertisers—and government is the largest advertisers--tend to blacklist critical publications, sentencing, in effect, to a short lifespan. Considering that newspapers operate a shoe-string budget and do not print many copies, the subtle denial of advertising becomes important. Of course, when subtle hints do not avail, direct methods are employed. Examples abound in the Fourth Republic of the shutdown of publications such as *Weekly Insider* in 2004, as well as arrest of editors and the seizure of copies of independent newspapers, such as occurred in June 2014 when the Nigerian Army carried out searches, leading to confiscation of copies of *Leadership*, *The Nation*, *Daily Trust* and the *Punch*. The ejection of the State House Correspondent of the *Punch*, Olalekan Adetayo, in 2017 over a story connected to the ill-health of President Muhammadu Buhari followed the same trend.

It should be noted as well, that Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversities are reflected in the media and become obvious in times of ethno-religious conflicts involving opposed ethnic and religious groups. For example, Mahmud Jega, former editor of the Kaduna-based *New Nigerian*, and currently, the Executive Director of the Abuja-based newspaper, *Daily Trust*, argued that:

> As far as I can see, among the biggest national newspapers, such as The *Guardian*, *Punch* and *Vanguard* (all Lagos-based) regional slant is most consigned to letters, columns and editorials. However, in troubled times it bursts out to the front pages and is easily seen in news selection and drowning out of other news (Jega, 2003:18).

The issues arising from dichotomous perceptions of national issues and ethno-religious conflicts are discussed in two chapters in the book. Worthy of note is the fragility of the media despite their visibility and loquaciousness. Newspaper titles appear, disappear and reappear with frequency, a trend also replicated in other Afri-

can countries such as Kenya. Similarly, it is doubtful if any newspaper prints up to a hundred thousand per day, while the combined circulation of newspapers is believed to be less than five hundred thousand per day. Nonetheless, the print media command an influence and prestige, for historical reasons, more than circulation figures would indicate. They are taken fairly seriously by policy makers and appear to have an influence depending on the conjuncture on policy making (Olukotun, 2004a, 2004b; Omotoso, 2018). Nonetheless, the rapid demise of newspapers in the context of the poor working conditions of journalists has accentuated a moral and ethical crises discussed in a separate chapter in the book.

Finally, the Nigerian media, as several observers have noted operate within the free market, capitalist system and do not harbour left leaning varieties as you find in some European countries. In this sense, and as Oyovbaire (2001) noted, it is a status quo media. According to him:

> The radicalism of the media as an anti-colonial and pro-independence vehicle, as an anti-bad governance vehicle, as an anti-military rule and pro democracy institution is really no more than being only radicalism of the right or centre ideology. It is indeed a capitalist press. There is yet to exist in the Nigerian media scene any left wing or socialistically ideological newspaper or magazine of stature or long duration. For obvious reasons, the same goes for the broadcast media – in a real sense Nigeria has only an establishment or status quo media (Oyovbaire, 2001:16).

This is unsurprising given that socialist ideology did not take root in Nigeria, while in the Fourth Republic, ideological debates have been noticeably absent from political discourse. It is interesting that the posture and leaning, largely centrist, of the media have not changed and is unlikely to in the foreseeable future, despite increased internet penetration and the popularity of the social media in a country where youths constitute a preponderant proportion of the population.

Media as Watchdog in a Semi-Democracy

The idea of the media as watchdog of democratic liberties is entrenched in liberal, social and socialist democracies. It speaks to such other ideas and concepts as muckraking, investigative jour-

nalism, exposures of scandals and corruption in high places, as well as being vigilant generally over the conduct of public officials. It is regarded as the bedrock of democracies established or developing. In practical terms, it spans a variety of practices, such as the fact-checking of claims made by public figures, journalists acting as undercover agents in order to collect information that they will otherwise not have had access to, as well as generally, speaking truth to power. This view of the cardinal functions of the media is quite different from those purveyed by concepts such as developmental journalism or journalism of nation-building, which privilege the role of the media as nation-builders or as sacrificing some of their liberties to mainstream national integration and economic development (Coronel, 2010). Of course, there are less glamorous sides to watchdog reporting, such as their alleged tendencies to play the politics of scandals or get the public so inundated with stories of corruption that they are no longer shocked by revelation upon revelation.

Obviously, the role of the media as watchdog is a function of their historical antecedents in any particular country, the media ownership structure, constitutional protection for civil liberties, an attentive public which provides a ready audience and feedback for that role, as well as previous successes or failures of such advocacies. It should be pointed out that in Nigeria, as in most African countries, we are dealing with an authoritarian state carrying a large residue of military autocracy in electoral forms. Regarding Nigeria's transition from military to semi-democracy, Adekanye (1999:10) informed pertinently that "the authoritarian regime from which this country has just transited was not just a military backed one but specifically military in character long entrenched in government and with a surfeit of corrupt interest in hanging on to power".

Nothing illustrates this viewpoint better than the fact that first eight years of the Fourth Republic featured presidency of a retired military General elected to power in elections widely criticised for their imperfections. That apart, retired generals, as well as security forces, have been quite visible in what can be described as

a civilian-autocracy. This situation described by Zakaria (1997) as democratic illiberalizm is replicated in most African countries and often, as Ogbondah argues in his contribution to this book that the watchdog role of the media can only be perpetuated at a cost. Unsurprisingly, therefore, in the period under study, Nigerian journalists suffered peremptory arrests, persecution of critical media, forcible closure of newspapers, such as occurred in September 2004 of *Weekly Insider*, shut down of Freedom Radio in 2006, the suspension from broadcasting of Channels Television in 2008 and detention of its editors, as well as the arrest in January 2017 of the publisher of *Premium Times* over a report critical of the Chief of Army Staff, General Tukur Buratai. As Berger (2012:140) noted:

> Control and repression of mass communications via the media has played its part in preventing the industry from reaching its wider potential. Corresponding to top-down and despotic rule, media is widely treated as a tool by the powerful who (that) have little interest in dialogue with subject populations. While state power in much of Africa is successfully abused by rulers to stay in power- and this includes deployment of state-owned media (often the largest component within the media sector), in other respects dysfunctionality is the order of the day. This latter feature impacts on the infrastructure for media (such as electricity).

In other words, and as I have argued elsewhere (Olukotun, 2013), the Nigerian media are caught between a failing state and a deformed public sphere, to the extent that a predatory state is unable to guarantee the minimal conditions for its medium term survival, and harbour several infrastructural deficits such as epileptic power supply and ineffective protection of citizens including journalists. Another dimension of the problem which impinges on media capacity to effectively play the role of a watchdog concerns the bifurcation of the Nigerian public sphere into ethnic, religious, regional and primordial divisions. Indeed, Adebanwi (2002) has argued that there is no national media in Nigeria but an Arewa media, Nkenga and Ngbati media, corresponding to Nigeria's major ethnic groups. In the same connection, conversation on the internet is characterized according to Sieptulnik (2002) "by frequent postings in in-group linguistic codes, for example, Ni-

gerian English and Pidgin and the formation of splinter listerves and netgroups such as Ananet, the Yorubanet, corresponding to the divided nature of the Nigerian public sphere as it often cleavages along gender, ethnic, regional and political lines" (Spittlenick, 2000:189). Obviously, a divided public sphere suggests that the watchdog role of the media is a differentially perceived across the nation's ethnic and religious fault lines. To put it differently, one man's social crusader is another man's ethnic irredentist.

Equally important, as I show in my chapter on the economic and technological profile of the media, is the fragility of media institutions, many of which appear, capsize sometimes, reappear only to go off the media scene terminally. Although this is not peculiar to Nigeria, and in part reflects a global trend of media volatility and high mortality rate, its Nigerian dimension is remarkable. Taken along with the poor working conditions of journalists and their survival through the prevalent Brown Envelope syndrome, which Lanre Idowu discusses in his contribution, the context of watchdog journalism is far from auspicious.

In spite of these limitations, the idea of the Nigerian media as watchdog of the public space is deeply embedded in Nigeria's media history and ideology. In fact, it finds expression and constitutional recognition in Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution, which enjoins the media to "monitor governance and to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people". Buttressing this entrenched tradition is a senior Nigerian journalist who argued that "the media are charged with the role of holding government accountable and to guard against the abuse of power. Hence, the need to raise countervailing structures of, surveillances to monitor government's activities and stem an inherent disposition towards excess (Oseni, 1995:3).

We find throughout the period under discussion that this role has been exercised by the media on such occasions as the resolute opposition of the media to Obasanjo's 'third term agenda' which would have illegally extended his tenure, to reports of corruption in the Jonathan administration which led to the easing out of a former Minister of Aviation, Ms. Stella Oduah, and to the

exposure of the rot in the Nigerian Police College by Channels Television triggering thereby a national outcry and official redress. So, criticisms of the media as captured and incorporated into the spoils-sharing arrangement of the political elite have some bite, but does not state the whole truth. The watchdog may no longer be as active as it once was; it may even manifest signs of ill health as in the increasing cases of corruption in the media, but it still barks and has proved frequently that it is capable of scaring away intruders and predators. In the concluding section of this chapter, I give a summary of the contributions made by different scholars to the voyage of understanding the Nigerian media in the Fourth Republic.

Section Three: Summary of the Chapters

The chapter by Prof. Karikari narrates the issues through a detailed focus on the Ghanaian media. He throws up the contradiction that, while the 1992 First Republican Constitution grants wide ranging freedom to the media, the performance of the watchdog role is encumbered by a salad of factors such as the influence of proprietors, political and economic patronage, corruption of journalists as well as weak professional norms. Hence, while the media, including the usually tepid state-owned segments, have gone out of their ways to serve as watchdogs to officialdom, there is general feeling that the media could have more effectively performed this role than they have done.

Employing buttressing data from interviews conducted with journalists, Karikari maintained that out of five journalists interviewed, four of them described media performanceof their watchdog role as below average. The overwhelming position that arises from the scholar's empirical data is aptly summarized by one of his respondents who said in answer to a question that:

> "I don't think they (the media) have done well. May be some pockets do a good job. With the coming into being of the Constitution of the Fourth Republic and the liberalization of the media, you would think that when quantity improved quality would follow... But what you find is that most of our journalists are following the ministers, the district chief executives. Our newspapers are filled with a lot of 'he said' stories. Our newspapers are filled with a lot of PR stories. Even business, when

> business is doing something it is the PR side of the business story that is followed. Who is asking the businesses the critical questions?"

If journalists feel this way about their own colleagues, it is unlikely that the general public will feel any better about the performance of the watchdog role of the Ghanaian media. Nonetheless, all hope is not lost given that there are signs here and there of the re-awakening of the media to their core functions as well as redemptive and emancipatory roles.

The chapter by Prof. Lai Oso and Dr. Tunde Akanni on the Digital Public Sphere narrates developments in electronic journalism and the growth of online platforms within the context of the theoretical postulations of the German scholar Jugen Habermas on the Public Sphere. Oso and Akanni argue that social media campaigns on digital platforms such as the one involved in sensitising the public to violence against persons, the increasing political use by public officials of Twitter and Facebook, the widening of the discursive space by online publications and citizen journalism, more than compensate for abuses of digital platforms through the spread of fake news, hate speeches and impersonation. They make a distinction between institutionalised Citizen Journalism, as practised by *Premium Times* and *Cable* and non-institutionalized Citizen Journalism evidenced by such outlets as Linda Ikeji's Blog, Nairaland and the Nigerian Village Square. Although some of these outlets are filled with scandals and sensational news about celebrities, there is a critical mass of outlets that focus on politics and widen the democratic space. That is not all. Oso and Akanni go on to argue that not only has Citizen Journalism deepened democracy, the online media have revived investigative journalism, citing as an example the cases of *Sahara Reporters*, *Premium Times* and *Cable*. They conclude that "Citizen Journalism has deepened and widened the journalism net to embrace more actors and voices. It has further liberalised access to the public sphere."

Two chapters, one by Dr. Danjibo and the other by Prof. Olukotun and Mrs. Jesuminure deal with media coverage of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Danjibo looks at several outbreaks of ethno-religious conflicts such as the Sharia Law Crisis, the Miss

World Beauty Pageant Crisis as well as the Kidnap of the Chibok Girls and the clash between the Nigerian Army and the Shittes in 2015. He makes the point that the Southern newspapers during the Sharia law crisis cast aspersions and demonized Sharia, giving the example of the *Punch* Newspaper (February 17, 2000, p.17) which had a bold caption titled "Sharia: Advent of a Millennium Monster".

Danjibo also alludes to gaps in the training of journalists as well as their poor investigative skills, Citing the example of the Chibok girls' saga in which Nigerian newspapers came up with figures lower than the ones reported by CNN and Aljazeera. In his words " while the CNN and Aljazeera gave the figure of the kidnapped girls as over 270, the Nigerian media, which most of the times are not on the combat field, reported far lower figures." The paper by Olukotun and Jesuminure discusses the way in which the media preponderantly located in Southern Nigeria report and frame ethno-religious conflicts. They employ a case study approach to investigate the extent to which journalists adopt enemy frames to report crises that often break out pitting Christians against Muslims as well as Hausas against Igbos. They take the view that while journalists do not precipitate ethno-religious conflicts, once crises break out; they tend to define the issues in antagonistic terms.

Citing the specific example of the Miss World Beauty Peageant and the crisis that broke out over *ThisDay* reportage, they make the point that in times of crisis, there comes into play a reinforcement of generic cleavages such as North versus South, and the consequent demonization of intra-cleavage differences. On this score, they refer to a statement by a former editor of a southern newspaper, the *Nigerian Tribune*, which suffered collateral damage in the course of the Miss World Beauty Pageant crisis. According to the editor, "Every southern newspaper was taken to be *ThisDay* in the North. Our vehicles could not move freely and our members of staff were afraid for their lives, we lost millions of naira". In other words, the context of play mobilises the existing cleavages in confrontational terms without discrimination about the fine differences. The chapter closes by recommending instructional strategy

through which journalists can embrace conflict sensitive reporting in order not to stoke the fires of ethno-religious crisis.

The paper on changing economic, technological and ownership landscapes by Prof. Olukotun locates the discourse on the watchdog role of the media within the context of factors such as the high mortality of media, protracted defaults on the salaries of journalists, the emergence of a partisan journalistic sphere with the establishment of media institutions by high profile politicians, the emergence of a Netocracy allied to the global public sphere among other issues. The paper maintains that the debate on the watchdog role of the media must be brought down to the capacity profile of the media, shifting technology and demographics as well as the vulnerability of, especially, independent newspapers where mortality rate tends to be high. The paper argues that in the period under study, the watchdog role of journalists tended to assume an irregular character because of the limitations of capacity and the harsh constraints of an economic milieu hostile to business. Hence, while critical and investigative journalism continued to occur, they certainly did not do so in a sustained agenda building manner.

The paper on Corruption in the Nigerian Media by Mr. Lanre Idowu situates the discussion on the brown envelope syndrome within the context of the extant socio-political conditions of the society, the harsh economic milieu and the difficulties of practicing ethical journalism in such a context. He also locates the widespread syndrome at individual, organisational and inter-organisational levels. Hence, despite what he called "occasional flashes of brilliance" on the part of the media, there continues to be manifestations of corruption partly reflecting the decay in the larger society. For example, such practices as pack journalism by beat associations of journalists which operate like cartels, the payment of protection fees by reputation managers of institutions, the granting of awards of dubious credibility to non deserving individuals and organisations are some of the ways in which corruption manifests in the media. Considering the corrosive effects of media corruption, Idowu recommends a clutch of measures which

will include the proper funding of media organisations, upgrading of skills in media management, naming and shaming mechanisms as ways of discouraging ethical infractions as well as a renewed attention to the enforcement of journalistic codes. The vicissitudes of the anti-corruption struggle in the larger society mounted by President Muhamadu Buhari, warn us that combating media corruption requires a sustained systemic, multi-pronged long term struggle, rather than flashes in the pan or insubstantial gestures.

The chapter by Edaetan Ojo on the Road to The Freedom of Information Act and beyond, chronicles in elaborate detail the over a decade struggle by journalists and other civil society actors to ensure the passing into law of the Bill. Ojo, whose organization, Media Rights Agenda, was in the forefront of the crusade, documents the long drawn struggle which began in 1999 for the passing of the Bill. He traverses a diverse and complex terrain, which includes the advocacy strategies of civil society activists, countless meetings with legislators, as well as media campaigns on radio, television and print media sustained through the vicissitudes of struggle. Apart from these, there were letter writing campaigns, short message service or texts directed at the mobile phones of legislators, signature campaigns in which MRA assembled several hundreds of signed petitions to galvanize support for the Bill, as well as the dissemination of educational and enlightenment literature. In the end, the advocacy paid off with the signing of the Bill, thus opening another chapter, as Ojo narrates, in the chequered efforts by journalists and civil society to use the Bill as a tool of good governance.

Peter Kimani takes a look at the rise, fall and rise of the independent media in Kenya. He does this by doing case studies of the 2007 and 2013 General Elections when the media, the print media is his focus, in his words, "capitulated under pressure from inside and outside". The study traces in detail, the ethnic and political battles fought by the media, as a section of them enlisted in the political fray, which the elections represented. For example, during the 2007 election, the Nation was faced with a crisis occasioned by political division. As Kimani saw it, there were two camps in

the newsroom, one supporting President Kibaki an ethnic Kikuyu, while the other supported opposition Chief, Raila Odinga, an ethnic Luo. The case study illustrates the emasculation of the watchdog role of the media because of partisanship and the penetration of the media by ethnic and political struggles. Interestingly, three newspapers: the *Nation*, the *Standard* and the *Star* became, for a season, the site of these political and ethnic battles. Broadly, the same picture prevailed during the 2013 election, when major newspapers tended to fracture along ethnic lines. Overall, he scores the media a pass mark in terms of their watchdog role.

In his chapter, entitled Elections and The Media, Comparing the Experiences of South Africa and Nigeria in 2014 and 2015, Professor Abiodun Salawu analyses the watchdog role of the media of both countries through the prism of their roles in facilitating electoral participation, as well as civic discourse and engagement. Based on an empirical survey, he reaches the conclusion that in both countries that the media, including the new media, were in the forefront, increasing political participation among citizens. Of course, there was a higher level of media-led participation and discourse in South Africa than Nigeria, because of what he calls, the lower use of the media in Nigeria because of electricity shortage and other deficits. Hence, there was higher reliance on the new media in South Africa for political information during the elections than Nigeria, where there is a lower level internet penetration. In both countries, the study established that the media, new and old, performed vibrant watchdog roles and, therefore, increased political participation during the period of the election.

In her contribution entitled, Television and Nigeria's Democratic Aspiration, Dr Oluyinka Esan discusses through a selection of media text, the role of television in stimulating participation and civic engagement in the years under study. She analyses issues dealing with contents, changing technology and globalization, as they affect the role of television. Of interest is the role of private television such as Channels TV with 90 minutes "Sunrise Daily" programme. According to her, the programme is "anchored by a panel of three hard-nosed interviewers noted for their adversarial"

style. In other words, the reach and focus of television, is increasingly broadening attention outside of government officials to take on issues that affect the everyday man and woman. She also mentioned in the same connection, greater audience reach because of the use of indigenous languages, as well as programs targeted at youths and lovers of sports. Hence, it is now possible for the media through television to build, what she called, "the informed citizenry required to make informed decision."

To complement Esan's discourse focused on television, Funke Treasure-Durodola looks in detail at such features as "Talk Radio", "Phone-in Programmes", "The President Explains", all of which mainstream the participatory and civic engagement dimensions of radio. Treasure, a senior radio journalist, argues that such interventions as radio magazines like "Kubanji Direct" on Radio Continental, Raypower's "Political Platform" and "Fact File", as well as "Wake Up Naija with Funke-Treasure underline the democratic and informative potential of radio as an instrument of engagement.

In his chapter on state media relations, Professor Chris Ogbondah shows that in spite of the formal structures of democratic rule in the period since 1999, there are continuities between the military years when the Nigerian media struggled against a tight leash and the period of formal democracy. True, some of the repressive laws by which the military persecuted the media have been removed and journalists are no longer under the jackboots of the generals. Better still, there is a Freedom of Information Act to empower journalists and civil societies in their struggles for accountability. Nonetheless, as Ogbondah demonstrates, there still remain many more miles to be covered in the search for a free press. In this connection, the author draws attention to such violations as media closure and confiscation of publications, threats, physical assaults and killings, the use of strategic criminal libel and seditious suits, as well as the political control of the media through financial constrains, such as the manipulation and high cost of broadcasting licenses. Overall, however, there is a better climate for journalists to carry out their legitimate functions, but now and then there is a reversion to the years of impunity and outright

persecution.

CONCLUDING NOTE

As the preceding narration suggests the scholars have looked in fairly considerable detail at various aspects of the role, orientation, performance and constrains of the media in the context of Nigeria's emerging democracy. Obviously, no one book can do complete justice to such a complex and variegated topic, but what is available here adds up to a substantial examination of the topic. For example, we do not deal with dimensions and genres of media, such as films, theatre, video and indigenous orature, but it is our hope that we have sought as a monitor of media performance in the context of the question posed at the outset, namely, to what extent have the media acted as watchdogs, and to what extent can they be described as captive media? I return to this question in the concluding chapter of the book. But, it is a delight to have contributed in some meaningful way to filling some of the lacuna in the literature on media studies in Africa. As is well known, most of the books and publications on media in Africa have been preoccupied with such concerns as newsgathering, the status and role conception of media workers, as well as changing communication policies in various countries. We jettison these rather narrow perspectives in order to capture, as Jakobowicz (1995:129) suggest "a series of processes and institutions, such as economic forces, international relations, the state and political movement". It is our view that this is a more productive approach to the evolving conversation on the impact of the media in a transitional democracy, bearing in mind that there has not been enough cross-fertilization of ideas between democratic theorists, comparative politics scholars and students of communication in Africa. We hope that these chapters have gone some way in bridging this gap as well as opening up possibilities of further and deeper enquiries into the abiding issues and challenges.

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1

STATE-MEDIA RELATIONS: Constraints on Freedom of the Media

By Christian Ogbondah

> *"In 13 years of democratic rule, the culture of democracy is still far from taking firm root in Nigeria. Its tenets are breached with sickening regularity…." (The Guardian*, January 15, 2013).
>
> "Since the return of democratic rule in 1999, the Nigeria police have scarcely shown that it is willing to play by the rules of democratic norms. It still applies bare-knuckle tactics where it is not called for." (*ThisDay*, January 30, 2007).

Introduction

The above passages from the editorial commentaries of *The Guardian* and *ThisDay* respectively, epitomize what many Nigerians believe to be the state of the democratic order in the country since May 29, 1999 when Nigeria transitioned from military autocracy to civil democracy. Following the transition, many Nigerians hoped that arbitrary detention of journalists, closure of media houses and confiscation of media products that characterized the era of military dictatorship would be committed to the dustbin of history. They hoped that the new democratic state would be the prime mover of democratic values especially media freedom i.e.

the right to disseminate diverse views and news without governmental interference. The *Daily Champion* reflected this hope in its editorial of October 11, 2004 when it said, "For a nation that has just come out of…years of military dictatorship – bruised, broken and battered – the event ushered in much hope for the people." *The Guardian* reiterated this view in its editorial on May 29, 2013: "With the return to civil rule, expectations of Nigerians were high. Against the background of the impunity of the past, they expected the rule of law….Against massive human rights violations; they expected the veneration of rights."

The Guardian underscored this view in another editorial titled, "Citizens and torture," on October 20, 2014: "Human rights violation which was once a routine under military rule in Nigeria was expected to have come to an end with the inauguration of civilian democratic rule in 1999."

Nigerians anchored these hopes on the belief that the worst form of democracy is better than the most benevolent dictatorship. Ironically enough, however, human rights violations especially restriction of media freedom seems to endure under the [new] democratic formation. Notably, the state utilizes the same repressive institutions – Nigeria's brutal police force, the dreaded State Security Service (SSS) etc. – used by past military regimes to restrict media freedom. This is why in its editorial of May 29, 2013, *The Guardian* said: "The return to democracy after many years of military rule…has not brought much of the desired change. If anything, the system has changed, but not the attitude. The personnel have changed, but the vices continue."

The objective of this chapter is to make a critical analysis of the obstacles on media freedom in Nigeria within the context of state-press relations from May 29, 1999 to 2017. To achieve its objective, this chapter will first make a brief description of state-press relations during the era of military rule. This will help provide the context for understanding state-press relations since 1999. After that, it will make a detailed examination of legislative and constitutional reforms aimed to create the enabling environment for media freedom in the post-junta era. Next, the chapter will highlight the ma-

jor obstacles on media freedom -- problems that seem to persist for the media in Nigeria, and therefore ought to be solved as part of the on-going [re]democratization in the country. The chapter concludes with recommendations on how to mitigate these obstacles in order to catapult Nigeria to a vibrant democracy.

Overview of State-Press Relations Under Military Rule

Nigerian press did not enjoy a sweetheart relationship with the state during the periods of military rule that lasted for nearly thirty years. State-press relations during those periods was tenuous as noted by several scholars, including Adekanye (1997), Ibelema (2003), Pate (2011; 2002), Adeyemi (1995), Agbaje (1993), Ajibade (2003, 1999), Aboaba (1979), Oreh (1976) and Onyedike (1984). Others who made this point are Utomi (1981), Dare (1972), Ogbondah (1994; 2003), Youm and Ogbondah (1990-1991), Seng and Hunt (1986) and Hunt and Seng (1988). However, Jose (1975) and Ekwelie (1979) claimed that the press was [relatively] free during the Yakubu Gowon regime. But Ogbondah (1991; 1989), Onagoruwa (1977) and Olorunsola (1977) have fiercely challenged this claim with analyses of the Amakiri case of 1973. The Amakiri case arose when at the instruction of a state military governor's Aide de Camp (ADC), a reporter of the *Nigerian Observer*, Minere Amakiri, was dealt 24 strokes of a "horse whip across his bare back, his head and beards shaved with a pocketknife and detained for 27 hours in an unused toilet.

During the periods of military rule, the state annulled the nation's constitutions. It promulgated numerous press decrees, institutional measures and arbitrary actions to minimize the ability of the press to disseminate pluralistic views and news. The more obnoxious of those decrees as well as institutional measures and arbitrary actions are described here to provide the background for understanding the nature of state-press relations since 1999. The measures included: **1**) The State of Emergency Decree of 1966; **2**) The Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decrees No. 1 of 1966 and 1967; Decrees No. 1 of 1984 and No. 17 of 1993;**3**) State Security (Detention of Persons) Decrees No. 3 of 1966 and 1967; Decree No. 2 of 1984 and Decree No. 11 of 1994; **4**)The Morning

Post and Sunday Post (Prohibition) Edict of 1967; **5**) Newspapers (Prohibition of Circulation) Decree No. 17 of 1967and Decree No. 12 of 1978; **6**) Armed Forces and Police (Special Powers) Decree No. 24 of 1967; **7**) Police Act Decree No. 41 of 1967, and **8**) Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Decrees No.11 of 1976 and No. 4 of 1984. Others were: **9**) Newswatch Decree of 1987; **10**) Offensive Publications (Proscription) Decree 35 of 1993; **11**) Newspapers Decree 43 of 1993; **12**) Newspapers Etc. (Proscription and Prohibition From Circulation) Decree No. 48 of 1993; **13**) The Concord Newspapers and African Concord Weekly Magazine (Proscription and Prohibition from Circulation) Decree No. 6 of 1994; **14**) The Punch Newspapers (Proscription and Prohibition from Circulation) Decree No. 7, of 1994, and **15**) The Guardian Newspapers and African Guardian Weekly Magazine (Proscription and Prohibition from Circulation) Decree No. 8 of 1994. Momoh (May 1985), and some of the writers mentioned have described detailed provisions of these press decrees.

The enforcement of those decrees resulted in the detention of many journalists as described by Aboaba (1979), Adeyemi (1995), Agbaje (1992), Ajibade (2003; 1999), Akinkuotu (1999), Anyanwu (2002), Ekwelie, (1979), Jakande (1979), Ogbondah (1994), Olukotun (2004a; 2004b; 2002a; 2002b; 2000), Olorunsola (1977), Onyedike (1984), Oreh, (1976) and others. Security agents also arrested and detained scores of political critics without trials documented by Onanuga (1999), Charles-Obi (1999), Ofeimun (1999), Olorunyomi (1998) and others. The enforcement of the decrees further resulted in the closure of media houses – just as junta officials arbitrarily confiscated newspaper and magazine copies at newsstands Agbese (1989), Ogbondah (1994; 2003). Some journalists were murdered, including Dele Giwa, editor-in-chief of Newswatch. Others were physically tortured (Abati, 1999; Ekpu, 1999; Ajibade, 2003; Ogbondah, 2002; Orji, 2003). Kudirat Abiola, wife of Moshood Abiola, presumed winner of the June 23, 1993, presidential election, was among the political critics who were murdered. All these actions as well as the absence of due process created tenuous state-press relations throughout the periods of military

rule. With the transition to civil rule in 1999, Nigerians hoped that these extra-legal actions against the media would be relegated to the past.

State-Media Relations, 1999-2016

Since 1999, the National Assembly has enacted noteworthy legal reforms for the media. It has abrogated at least one anachronistic press law. Unlike the military era when soldiers governed, using decrees and edicts, the country is today governed through constitutional rule. Due process and rule of law have replaced arbitrariness, impunity and extra-judicial actions. All these reforms described below are intended to create the enabling environment for media freedom.

1. The 1999 Constitution

The 1999 Constitution provides for freedom of expression. Section 39(1) provides that, "Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference." Section 39(2) provides that, "…every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions." Section 22 empowers the media to hold the government accountable: "The press, radio, television and…the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the… accountability of the Government to the people." According to Section 15(5), one of the responsibilities and objectives of the state is to "abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power." The media, therefore, have a constitutional obligation to criticize, and hold the government accountable for abolishing corruption. It is important to underscore this obligation because attempts by the media to carry out this constitutional duty, and the government's reactions to attempts by the media to do so underpin the [tenuous] nature of state-press relations. In one word, the effort by the media to fulfill the constitutional obligation of holding the government accountable is the key source of tension in state-media relations in Nigeria.

2. Freedom of Information Act

Another legal reform enactment is the Freedom of Informa-

tion Act (FOIA). Enacted on May 28, 2011, the FOIA affirmatively guarantees members of the press and public access to government-held information, upon request. Section 1(1) of the Act states: "...the right of any person to access or request information, whether or not contained in any written form, which is in the custody or possession of any public official, agency or institution howsoever described, is established." Section 1(3) guarantees requesting entities the right to institute proceedings in the court to compel public institutions to comply with the provisions of the law. Section 2 of the law mandates public institutions to ensure that information and records of their activities are kept, and in a manner that facilitates access to a requesting entity. Section 10 criminalizes willful destruction or altering of information before it is made available to a requesting entity. Section 12 enumerates categories of information that may not be disclosed.

3. African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

In addition to the above-mentioned legal provisions, is the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (also known as the Banjul Charter), an international human rights instrument intended to promote and protect human rights and basic freedoms in the African continent. Article 9 of the Charter, which Nigeria is signatory to, provides for the right of media freedom.

4. Human Rights Commission

The establishment of a Human Rights Commission charged with the duty to promote and protect human rights, including media freedom, is another recent legal reform. It came into being by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Act, 1995, as amended by the NHRC Act, 2010. It serves as mechanism for the enhancement and enjoyment of human rights, including media freedom. The NHRC was established in 1995, following the enactment of Decree No. 22 of 1995 by Sani Abacha's military dictatorship. Few Nigerians knew it even existed because it did not make any substantial impact on human rights. It was set up as part of the late dictator's white-wash effort to counter international criticisms of the regime's woeful human rights record.

5. Abrogation of Newspaper Amendment Act of 1964

A notable reform for the media was the abrogation of the obnoxious Newspaper Amendment Act of 1964 on February 4, 2003. The law impeded journalistic practice for forty years as it made libel, a civil crime, punishable by a one-year imprisonment or a fine of two hundred pounds (Elias, 1969). Its full provisions are contained in the Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette of September 5, 1964.

Obstacles on Media Freedom

Despite the enactment of these legal policies, there are still enigmatic problems (obstacles) to media freedom. There are two categories of these obstacles: i) external, and ii) internal. External obstacles include legal constraints, arbitrary actions, extra-judicial and institutional measures exerted on the media by the state and anti-media entities. Some of these constraints have been documented by Akinsiku (July 15, 2014), Ogbondah (2011; April 29, 2013; 2004; 1997), Olukotun (2002b; 2004a), Joseph (1997), Oso (2011), Tete (2001), Harry (2015), Udeze (2012) and Pate (2011). Unethical behavior by media professionals constitutes internal threats to media freedom.

External Obstacles

The weaknesses in certain sections of the constitution and other legal policies are part of the external obstacles to media freedom. They include the following:

(i) Derogable Measures and Claw back Clauses

Section 39(1&2) of the Constitution provides for the right of freedom of expression. But that right is derogable as Subsection 3 states that:"Nothing in this section shall invalidate any law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society -(a) for the purpose of preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, maintaining the authority and independence of courts or regulating telephony, wireless broadcasting, television or the exhibition of cinematograph films…." Further, Section 45(1a) states: "Nothing in sections 37, 38, 39, 40 and 41 of this Constitution shall invalidate any law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society – a) in the interest of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health…." This means that media free-

dom is subject to certain conditions as noted by Mapuva (2016) and Nyamnjoh, (2005). Hansungule (1995) observed that majority of African countries have adopted the practice by which press freedom is enshrined in the Bill of Rights while at the same time allowing, in the same clause, for the lessening of that right by state action. Hansungule (1995) further notes that even "in those constitutional frameworks in which it may not be derogable, it is still, nonetheless, subject to claw back measures which, if put in practice, could end tearing up the protection and, therefore, rendering the right vulnerable" (p. 14). What this means is that a claw back measure reverses or limits the rights provided in the Constitution. Ogbondah (2002; 1997) argued that derogable and claw back provisions take with the left hand what the Constitution has given with the right hand. The exercise of the right of expression is therefore, limited ab initio by such clauses as "provided that individuals abide by the law," "within the law," "in the interest of public safety" etc. Michaelsen (2012) highlighted the problematic nature of claw back clauses in the current era of international terrorism. The problem with claw back clauses and degrogable measures in Nigeria can be seen from how the Court of Appeal upheld the obnoxious Public Order Act on March 10, 2016, citing Section 45 of the Constitution.

(ii) FOIA Controversies

There have been contradictory court rulings (in Ibadan, Enugu, Abuja and Lagos) on the question of whether the FOIA is binding on the 36 states of the federation. Justice S.A. Akinteye, presiding over an Oyo State High Court in Ibadan in 2013, held that the FOIA applies to the entire federation, and therefore does not need to be "domesticated by any state before taking effect in all the states across the federation." Justice D.V. Agishi, presiding over a Federal High Court in Enugu in 2014 made a similar ruling. But the Federal High Court in Lagos presided over by Justice Okon Abang, ruled on October 31, 2014 that the FOIA is only binding on the Federal Government and its agencies and not on the [36] states because it was enacted by the National Assembly. The question is yet to be resolved. It seems the question will make its way to the Supreme

Court for final adjudication. The controversial rulings collectively constitute an obstacle in the ability of the media to access government-held information at the state level. As the *Daily Independent* said in its editorial on Nov. 13, 2014, "Any impediment in enforcing FOI Act nationwide would negate the essence of the law."

(iii) Antiquated Laws

Another problem is that the FOIA [silently] co-exists with the anachronistic Official Secrets Act of 1962, a child of the colonial era. With the 1962 Act, all government-held information is classified as "top secret," creating an impenetrable veil of secrecy that makes it difficult for journalists to obtain information from state officials. Elias (1969), Osinbajo and Fogam (1991), Aihe and Oluyede (1979) and Okoro and Okolie (2004) have described the provisions of the law. Although some government officials have said that the FOIA supersedes the Official Secrets Act, those verbal pronouncements are not enough. There ought to be a written legal policy that speaks to supremacy of the FOIA over the Official Secrets Act.

(iv) Extra-Legal Actions

The chronic use of arbitrary actions and extra-legal measures by the state in its relationship with journalists constitutes another category of obstacles on media freedom. They include the following:

(a) Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions

Since 1999, state security agents have arrested and detained scores of journalists and media personnel without any court orders. Three editors of the *Insider Weekly* magazine - Osa Director, Chucks Onwudinjo and Janet Mba-Afolabi - were arrested on November 24, 2003. A report in the *Newswatch* of December 1, 2003, noted that security officers arrested the editors for allegedly publishing a false report titled, "Aso Rock Oil Bunkering Scandal."They were subsequently charged with sedition even though the Federal Court of Appeal had declared sedition unconstitutional in Chief Arthur Nwankwo v. The State, a 1983 case that has become a *locus classicus* in sedition cases in Nigeria. On September 4, 2004, security officers went back to the *Insider Weekly* maga-

zine, and arrested its production editor, Raphael Olatoye. Others arrested between 2002 and 2005 included the editor of *Global Star*, Isaac Umunna, and Ben Adaji of *The News* magazine.

In June 2006, security officers arrested Mike Aruleba of the African Independent Television (AIT), and Rotimi Durojaiye of the *Daily Independent* in connection with a story that questioned the age and cost of a presidential jet that the Obasanjo government purchased. The state brought a charge of sedition against them. The then general manager of *Leadership*, Abraham Nda Isaiah, was arrested in January 2007 in connection with the paper's report about the health of former President Umaru Yar'Adua, an issue the government wanted to keep secret (Henry, January 10, 2007). The publisher of *Abuja Inquirer*, Dan Akpovwa and its editor, Sonde Abbah, were also arrested and charged with sedition in 2007 for the publication of an article, "Obasanjo-Atiku Face-Off: Coup Fear Grips Nigeria." The government abruptly dropped each of the sedition cases brought against the media. Ogbondah (April 29, 2013) has described some details of these cases. Four editorial staff members of the *Nation* – Yusuf Ali, Yomi Odunuga, Lawal Ogianegbon and Dapo Olufade – were arrested and detained on October 11, 2011 in connection with a front-page story, "Obasanjo's Secret Letter to Jonathan Stirs Anger: Ex-President Seeks Sack of PTDF Chief, Four Others." In February 2013, police officers arrested and charged three journalists at the Wazobia FM radio station in Kano with defamation for airing a show that said polio immunizations in the predominantly Muslim city were an anti-Islamic Western conspiracy. Dapo Olorunyomi, publisher of *Premium Times*, was among the prominent journalists arrested in 2017 (Ibemere, January 19, 2017). One citizen, Isiaka Yusuf, was arrested and detained for posting on the Twitter, pictures of a jailbreak by suspected members of Boko Haram jihadist sect.

(b) Media Closure and Confiscation

Since May 29, 1999 several media houses have been shut down by the state. Broadcast stations have been shut down more than the print media. This is in sharp contrast with the era of military rule when the print media bore most of the brunt of media clo-

sure. During the period of military rule, there were only a handful of private broadcasters. The NBC closed down AIT and RayPower 100.5 FM stations for about 12 hours on October 24, 2005, and Freedom Radio 99.5 FM, Kano, on March 28, 2006 (Madu-West and Ajakaye, March 30, 2006). Then, on May 14, 2006, SSS officials ordered the stoppage of an AIT live broadcast in the National Assembly and confiscated the tape of the program titled, "A documentary on tenure elongation" (Akunna, May 15, 2006). The state closed down Channel Television in September 2008, following its broadcast of a hoax attributed to the News Agency of Nigeria. On May 10, 2009, the NBC shut down Adaba 88.9 FM Radio Station in Akure, Ondo State (Alake, May 18, 2009; Sowole, May 18, 2009). On April 27, 2015, the government barred the AIT from covering the activities of the then President-elect Buhari because of "security issues," in the same manner it expelled the *Punch* State House reporter, Olalekan Adetayo, from covering the Presidential Villa in Abuja in 2017. Then on November 7, 2017, a number of media houses, including the *Premium Times*, were barred from entering the National Assembly to cover President Buhari's presentation of the 2018 budget. Earlier in 2015, the NBC barred at least 18 songs from being broadcast by television stations in the country. The NBC said that the songs contained vulgar lyrics, obscene scenes and violence, and promoted ostentatious lifestyle, drug trafficking and indecent exposure. Ironically, those songs are played on web sites and in nightclubs in the country. For example, when the Kano State government banned Hausa rapper, Ziriums' satirical song, 'Girgiza Kai,' ("Shake Your Head"), he began to use online sites to distribute his songs.

(c) Threats, Physical Assaults and Killings:

Threats and physical attacks on media houses as well as assaults and killings of journalists seem to persist in Nigeria. On October 14, 2003, for example, angry members of the National Assembly threatened to sanction journalists who graphically reported allegations of a N54-million bribe against two senators. On August 30, 2003, [the then] Vice President, Atiku Abubakar's security officers assaulted a photojournalist of the *Daily Independent*, Akin-

tunde Akinleye, while covering a public event in Lagos. Since 1999, at least a dozen journalists have been murdered in Nigeria. But it was the killing of Godwin Agbroko, head of the editorial board of This Day, on December 22, 2006 that many remember. Another victim was Ogunbayo Ohu, assistant news editor of the *Guardian*. He was murdered on September 21, 2009 (Agha, September 22, 2009). The April 26, 2012 simultaneous bomb attacks on *Thisday* newspapers in Abuja and Kaduna, and the offices of the *Sun* and the *Moment* by suspected members of Boko Haram in what is now known as the "Black Thursday for the Nigerian Press," are among the attacks against the press that will be remembered for a long time to come.

(d) Strategic Criminal Libel and Seditious Suits (SCLSS)

The state utilizes charges of criminal libel and sedition strategically to intimidate, harass, and discourage journalists from criticizing the avalanche of corruption in the government. For example, in November 2003, the government filed a charge of sedition and criminal libel against three editors of the *Insider Weekly* magazine mentioned earlier. In June 2006, the police brought charges of sedition against Mike Aruleba of the AIT station and Rotimi Durojaiye of the *Daily Independent*. The same charge was filed against Imo Eze, the director of the *Ebonyi Voice* newspaper, and one of his journalists, Oluwole Elenyinmi. Then in October 2007, the Akwa Ibom State Government brought a charge of sedition against Jerome Imeime, a newspaper publisher in the state for an article that accused the then governor, Godswill Akpabio of corruption. Another case of sedition was brought against the editor of *Leadership*, Abraham Nda Isaiah, in 2007 for reporting on the health of the then President Umaru Yar'Adua which the government was keeping secret (Henry, January 10, 2007). In 2014, a journalist with the *Sun*, Ebere Wabara, was charged with seditious publication against the then governor of Abia State, Theodore Orji.

Charges of sedition were also preferred against political critics. For example, sedition was preferred against the former Senate president, Iyorchia Ayu, Paul Ofana and Timi Frank during the presidential electioneering campaign in 2007. In all these,

the state abruptly dropped the charges or it showed little interest to prosecute them conclusively. For example, Ayu, Ofana and Timi appeared in the court sixteen times in their trial, while the prosecution appeared only three times (Muraina, May 21, 2009). They eventually won their case. The Federal Government similarly "abandoned" a libel case that President Muhammadu Buhari brought against DAAR Communications. The court disposed the case on December 6, 2016 because according to Justice John Tsoho "no representations from the parties have been entered since the matter was assigned to the court." The state knows it will hardly win a sedition case. However, it continues to bring the charge against journalists in order to harass, intimidate and discourage them from holding the government accountable for the mammoth level of corruption among state officials. These may be compared to the Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP) cases in America that big corporations use to discourage whistle blowers.

(e) Financial Constraints

Many Nigerian media houses are in the doldrums, financially. Some broadcasters cannot take off in the air due to financial constraints. Ogundimu (1996) noted that the NBC issued 114 licenses in the first four years of the liberalization of the sector. By 2017, the NBC had issued 402 licenses. As Onwumechili (1996; 2006), Dokpesi (1997), Ajia (1994) observed, many are yet to go on air due to financial difficulties. Some are unable to renew their licenses. For this reason, by March 2017, the licenses of 54 broadcast companies were revoked for failure to pay the license fees within the stipulated 60-day period. The financial health of the print media industry is also down. No newspaper today has matched the circulation figure of 500, 000 copies of the *Sunday Times* in the 1970s. Today, the daily circulation of all Nigerian newspapers combined, including evening titles, is not close to that highest-ever figure mentioned earlier. With the abysmally low circulation figures, and given the high cost of major raw materials – newsprint, ink and plates, computers, cameras, press maintenance, circulation costs and newsgathering expenses, most newspapers and magazines

struggle to break even on sales. It is due to financial difficulties that many newspapers are unable to pay the salaries of their workers for several months, leading to intervention of the government in state-owned newspapers. For example, the *Triumph*, Kano State government-owned newspaper, was shut down in October 2012 due to financial difficulties. It resumed publication when the state government intervened with a N50 million subsidy (ANON, October 4, 2002). This type of state intervention interferes with media freedom because as the old adage says, "He who pays the piper dictates the tune."It is also as a result of financial difficulties experienced by many media houses that their reporters accept "brown envelopes," payola, transportation fees, "family support" etc. from news sources to make ends meet. In turn, accepting brown envelopes potentially leads to conflict of interests. These constitute internal threats to media freedom.

Internal Obstacles

Unethical practices among many Nigerian journalists constitute internal threat to media freedom. Agbaje and Adebanwi (2003), Ogundimu (2003) and Sonaike (2000) highlighted this problem in their analyses of the problems created for, and by the press in the post-military era in Nigeria. Kukah (1996) noted that unethical practices can erode public confidence in the press. Unethical behavior on the part of journalists can constitute the greatest threat to media freedom under the current political formation. This is because unethical behavior on the part of journalists can provide the excuse for the state to enact press censorship laws. For example, in 2006, SSS officers invaded Rhythm 93.7 FM radio station in Port Harcourt, and arrested its news editor for broadcasting untrue news report that a bridge in Choba had collapsed.

Some journalists are guided by ethical considerations on their jobs. Many are not. This has created a moral crisis today in Nigeria's media industry. What the former Speaker of the National Assembly, Ghali Na'aba, said about the press epitomizes the dilemma of the [moral] crisis facing many journalists and the media. During the Nigeria Union of Journalists Press Week in Abuja in 2000, Na'aba told media professionals that the Nigerian press is

willing to let ethnic and tribal sentiments supplant its commitment to professional values. The former Attorney-General of the federation, Kanu Agabi, even accused the press of being balkanized and pushed into "championing ethnic tendencies." Some Nigerians have attempted to illustrate the media's tendency to championing ethnic sentiments with the coverage of the allegations of forgery and perjury involving four prominent politicians from different ethnic groups. They were Chuba Okadigb, the first Senate President of the Fourth Republic; his successor, Evan(s) Enwerem; Salisu Buhari, former Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Bola Tinubu, former governor of Lagos State. Olukotun (2004a), Ogundimu (2003) and Sonaike (2000) have analyzed media coverage of the scandals. In the aftermath of the media coverage of the Enwerem, Buhari and Tinubu scandals, many Nigerians said they developed low opinions about the media. In a commentary titled, "The limits of investigative journalism," in the October 1, 1999 issue of the *Guardian*, Levi Obijiofor, a journalism instructor in Queensland, Australia, argued that the Nigerian press, with its most influential papers located in the southwestern part of the country, relentlessly investigated allegations of forgery and perjury against Buhari and Enwerem. Paradoxically, argued Obijiofor, the press did not investigate similar allegations against Tinubu who comes from Southwestern Nigeria, a conclusion that Ogbondah (2000) also made. One Nick Dazang, writing in the October 5, 1999 issue of e *Vanguard*, said:

> Consider: the South-West press was the most shrill and clarion in the Salisu Buhari and Evan(s) Enwerem scandals even though they did not entirely unearth the two scandals in the first instance. Incidentally in the Bola Tinubu scandal, which bears hues and colorations as the Buhari one, the South-West press was eloquent and deafening only by its silence. The upshot of this strident silence is that suddenly there are two standards for measuring villains – one reserved for those who hail from the privileged South-West zone and the other for the lesser citizens who hail outside it. Arising from this rather unhappy and topsy-turvy situation, there is this impression that the media in Nigeria can no longer be trusted to be responsible to discharge their constitutional duty of holding public officers accountable to the people.

Dazang concluded that, "There are people, who in the after-

math of the obvious bias in the reportage of the Tinubu scandal, who no longer consider the Nigerian media credible." Another Nigerian, one AbdulkareemYakubu, from Maiduguri, reiterated this perception about the Nigerian media in a September 1999 issue of the e *Vanguard* titled, "Selectivity of the media." Yakubu said:

It is really ironical that the same media that helped to bring down Buhari is silent over this Tinubu affair. And there seems to be some kind of conspiracy among the southwest media to cover up the Tinubu affair instead of investigating further on the case. They seem to be mute on the issue….Anyone that has been following Tinubu's case will know that the southwest media do not want to write about it. This goes to show that some of the media houses in the country are under the control of some individuals. This becomes glaringly clear when you read Salvator Amadi's account of his encounter with Tinubu and his men in the *National* magazine of September 13, 1999 (Ogbondah, 2000).

The perceived partisan press coverage of the three scandals raised the fear among some Nigerians that the press is out to protect certain individuals on the basis of political clout, ethnicity or patronage. Yet, the code of conduct of the Nigerian press requires the media to present truthful, accurate, fair and balanced news reports, a requirement that is strongly articulated by The Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947), Merrill (1997; 1989), Black, Steele and Barney (1997), Gordon and Kittross (1999) and Momoh (2004).

Another form of unethical practice among many journalists is the acceptance of financial favors from news sources. Stephen Farris highlighted this problem in an article in the European edition of *Time* magazine of April 15, 2002. He said, "Bribery is just one of the challenges Nigeria's press faces as the country makes the difficult transition from dictatorship to democracy." Adebanwi (2003) underscored this point when he said, "the incidence of corruption in today's Nigerian press has become alarming" (p. 95). All these have contributed significantly to the low opinions that some Nigerians have about the media in their country. This is in sharp contrast with the recent past when Nigerians held the jour-

nalism profession and journalists in high esteem. They respected journalists for their ethical standards. This was reflected in the top national leadership positions held by writers and newspapermen such as Herbert Macaulay, Ernest Ikoli, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Anthony Enahoro, Peter Enahoro, Lateef Jakande, Tony Momoh etc.

Inability of journalists to uphold ethical standards in news reports can provoke lawmakers to draft repressive press laws to enforce moral probity on the part of journalists. The enactment of such laws can incapacitate the ability of the press to carry out its constitutional obligation to hold the government accountable. At the same time, the failure of journalists to uphold ethical principles can erode public trust and support for the press. During the periods of colonial rule and military dictatorship, the press carried the public along in its crusade for the introduction of democratic norms. But lack of ethical applications in news coverage can constitute a serious threat to public support for the press. This is because the public can always rally around the press when obnoxious laws are enacted, and when journalists are attacked by the state. But, the public will not rally around the press when it fails to be ethical i.e. when it fails to be fair, impartial, balanced, objective, honest, truthful and balanced in its news reports. Unethical behavior on the part of journalists can lead to loss of confidence, trust and respect for the press by the public and government officials and loss of public interest in media products can affect the industry's financial stability and existence.

It is mostly because of these obstacles that the Nigerian press has never been ranked as free by either the New York-based Freedom House or the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the two organizations that rank freedom of the press in the world.

Rationales for Attacks on the Press

Although the government explained that security officers took the actions described against the media in this chapter to maintain public safety and security, the pragmatic rationale for the state's actions against the press was to incapacitate its ability to investigate and unearth the avalanche of corruption, embezzlement,

illegal private capital accumulation, avarice and stealing of public funds by state officials. For example, the state arrested Durojaye of the *Independent* and Aruleba of AIT after the publication of the report titled, "Controversy over age, cost of presidential jet." The report exposed the inflated cost of a used presidential jet ("Tokunbo" in local parlance) that the government said it purchased. The government of Nigeria is weak, and it thrives on corruption. Adebanwi (2012) has made a scholarly analysis of corruption in Nigeria. Below is an infinitesimal description of the colossal level of corruption in the country.

When Nuhu Ribadu headed the EFCC he revealed to the BBC of London that since 1960 when Nigeria became an independent country, successive governments have stolen or wasted more than $380b (Madunagu, October 21, 2006). The chairman of the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption (PACAC), Professor Itse Sagay, revealed to Nigerians on June 5, 2017 that 55 top government officials and businessmen corruptly enriched themselves with public funds to the tune of over N1.35 trillion between 2006 and 2013. Details of the illicit public money enrichment can be accessed at: https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/06/55-top-govt-officials-businessmen-stole-n1-4-trn-obj-yaradua-jonathan/. A huge part of Nigeria's crude oil is stolen in partnership with government officials: about 680,000 barrels daily, or about $7 billion annually. Civil servants defraud the country of N700b annually. In February 2015, the former Minister of Finance, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, revealed that the government discovered 62,893 ghost workers in the federal pay roll, saving the nation N208.7b. At the National Identity Management Commission alone 4,800 of its 10,300 staff were discovered in 2013 to be ghost workers. According to a report in the February 4, 2016 issue of *Vanguard*, the House of Representatives Ad Hoc Committee on Failed Rail Contracts, found 169 ghost companies that registered as contractors with the Nigeria Railway Corporation for projects valued at N1 trillion. Top state officials are frequently owners of the ghost companies.

Top government officials at the state level also use ghost work-

ers to embezzle public funds. For example, in June 2015, Ekiti State Governor, Ayo Fayose, revealed that 809 ghost workers were unmasked in a staff verification exercise conducted that year in the state, according to a news report in the *Nation* of June 26, 2015. In May 2016, the Governor of Sokoto State, Aminu Tambuwal, announced that the state government recovered over N300 million from the payrolls of the 23 local government councils in the state in one month only, following the discovery of thousands of ghost workers. In one local government council alone in the state, top government officials sold 200 appointment letters to a contractor in Zamfara, another state. Lagos State discovered N82 million ghost-workers fraud at different levels of the Local Government in 2012. According to a report in the *Daily Times* of November 23, 2011, the names of two infants -- a one-month-old and a five-month-old) -- were discovered on the payment voucher of a local government council during an exercise to fish out ghost workers in Zamfara State in 2011. Their payroll documents indicated that the one-month-old had an Ordinary Level Diploma (OND) certificate, an equivalent of high school certificate. According to a report in the November 24, 2011 issue of the *Nigerian Tribune*, 725 ghost workers were discovered in Bauchi State that year. The story is the same in other states. For example, Plateau State government discovered a fake commissioner among 5,000 ghost workers. A news story in *Vanguard* of February 18, 2013 titled, "A country of ghosts," reported the figures of ghost workers in some of the states as follows: Kano State, 8,000; Kebbi State, 9,300; Delta State, 7,000 and 8,000 in Rivers State.

In its issue of December 15, 2015, the *Guardian* reported that in the police pension scheme alone, N1 billion was paid to ghost pensioners yearly whereas the amount required was N500 million.. In 2012, a workers' verification exercise at the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) threw up 17,000 fake workers that were receiving regular salaries and allowances on its payroll, amounting to billions of Naira in fraud. There is a mammoth level of corruption at all arms of federal and state governments. Two or three examples may suffice to illustrate the level of graft at the federal

government. In March 2008, the House of Representatives Committee that investigated the scandal of $16 billion expended in the power sector was told that the then President, Obasanjo, inaugurated a non-existent National Integrated Power Project (NIPP) in Cross River State, and illegally deducted money from the Federation Account to the tune of $3.975 billion over eight years for the project. When a commission headed by Ambassador Kabiru Rabiu visited the power project sites to verify what the illegally deducted money was expended on it surprisingly discovered that nothing was on ground at the site of the project inaugurated in 2005, according to reports published in March 21, 2008 issues of the *Nigerian Tribune* and the *Guardian* respectively. At least three Senate presidents and two Speakers of the House of Representatives and many ministers and commissioners and heads of government agencies at the federal and state levels have been removed from office since 1999 on corruption charges. In 2003, an Ad-Hoc Committee of the House of Representatives that investigated alleged shortfalls in government revenue found that over N77.188b was unaccounted for by various revenue-generating agencies of the Federal Government.

The Nigeria Police Force stinks with filthy heaps of corrupt practices. Interestingly, this is the agency at the forefront of attacks against the media in Nigeria. A World Bank and United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-sponsored national survey conducted in 2001 by the Zero-Corruption Coalition, an association of organizations and individuals committed to fighting corruption in Nigeria, found that the Nigeria Police Force is the most corrupt public institution in the country. Police officers extort N20 from commercial vehicle operators at checkpoints, and many a time they fatally shoot those who do not give the N20-bribe (less than 25 US cents). The police force is so corrupt that the courts have convicted many of its officers for graft. The former Inspector-General Police, Tafa Balogun, served about six months in jail for corruption. The court ordered him to pay a fine of N4m in 2005. Balogun's immediate successor, Sunday Ehindero, was also well fingered in a N21m-fraud, N2.5b of police cooperative money

and the source of money for allegedly building eight magnificent houses.

Nigeria is so corrupt that in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2007, Transparency International (TI) regularly ranked it as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Between 2001 and 2003 for example, TI ranked Nigeria as the second most corrupt country, and in 2004, it was ranked as the third most corrupt in the world. In 2005, TI ranked Nigeria as the seventh most corrupt country while the country received a ranking of sixth most corrupt country in 2006. In 2013, Nigeria was the 14th most corrupt country. This paper strongly contends that the pragmatic explanation for the chronic attacks against the press by the state is to minimize the ability of journalists to hold the government accountable and to investigate the avalanche of state corruption. This creates an unending conflict between the government and the media, resulting in tenuous state-press relations.

Recommendations

The National Assembly should undertake a comprehensive review of the entire legal framework in the country with the aim to: a) enact laws that will provide stronger protection for the media; b) expunge or significantly reform antiquated laws that are still in the statute books. This will help to create a more enabling environment for media freedom in Nigeria.

Enact Anti-Censorship Legislation

The National Assembly should urgently enact an Anti-Press Censorship Act that provides against state interference, intimidation, harassment and brutalization of journalists. The law should criminalize the use of extra-legal measures such as arbitrary detention of journalists, closure of media houses and confiscation and seizure of media products and equipment by any security agent. An example of this legal policy can be seen in Ghana. Article 16 of the Constitution of Ghana unequivocally provides against press censorship, governmental interference, control of the media and harassment of journalists. Article 162(2) guarantees that "there shall be no censorship in Ghana." Section 4 of Article 162 provides that, "Editors of newspapers and other institutions of the mass

media shall not be subject to control or interference by Government, nor shall they be penalized or harassed for their editorial opinions and views, or the content of their publications" (Kludze, 1993, p. 140). For a country like Ghana that witnessed the deleterious effects of state restrictions against the press -- as documented by Anokwa (1997), Ekwelie (1978), Hachten (1975), Bourgault (1995), Ofori (1993), Oquay (1995) and Twumasi (1980) -- these constitutional reforms are exemplary. Members of the Nigerian National Assembly should emulate their Ghanaian counterparts and enact anti-censorship legislation that outlaws the arbitrary arrest, detention, harassment, intimidation and physical abuse or torture of media personnel and seizure of media products and closure of media houses.

Abrogate Antiquated Laws

There are antiquated laws that still exist in the statute books. One of the laws is the Official Secrets Act of 1962. The law enforces a culture of secrecy in the conduct of public affairs. Today, the Official Secrets Act has become anachronistic as it collides with the FOIA. It should be significantly reformed to reflect the principles of the FOIA. Another anachronistic law is the National Archives Act. It should be amended so that the clause that provides for the non-disclosure of state records or documents until after ten years could be formally repealed as it also collides with the FOIA. Sedition, an antiquated law that the court has declared as unconstitutional, is used strategically by the police to harass and intimidate the media. The Federal Court of Appeal declared in Arthur Nwankwo v. Governor of Anambra in 1983 that sedition is unconstitutional. Despite the ruling, over-zealous police officers periodically bring the charge against Nigerian journalists. The National Assembly should follow the Federal Court of Appeal's ruling in the celebrated Arthur Nwankwo case and repeal the law of sedition – if only as a matter of formality. Furthermore, the court should sternly warn the Nigeria Police Force to desist from bringing cases of sedition before it. On its part, the court should decline to hear any case of sedition. As Okonkwor (1993), Onagoruwa (1977) and Ogbondah (1997) have noted, some judges have called

for the abrogation of all antiquated laws in the country.

Expunge Claw back Clauses and Derogable Measures

Claw back clauses and derogable measures in the Constitution should be expunged or reformed. While it is necessary to protect individual rights and societal interests, limitations on media freedom should be determined by the courts and not by the arbitrariness of the executive or other organs and agencies of the state. Schramm (1967) stated this succinctly when he said: "In general, countries in Western democratic traditions believe that there should be a minimum of control on the press and that such controls as there is should rest with…the courts, which we hope will limit their attention to such offenses as libel…." (p. 9). This view is also articulated by Baron (1973), Knight (1968), Emerson (1970; 1966), Gilmore, Barron and Simon (1997), Merrill (1974), Meiklejohn (1979), Levy (1963), Lowenstein (1967; 1966) and others.

Public Order Act

The Public Order Act (POA) that requires individuals and groups to obtain a police permit prior to holding rallies is anachronistic, oppressive and anti-democratic. The law is a colonial heritage used by British imperial autocracy to suppress anti-colonial activism and criticism. It should be abrogated or drastically reformed. Many countries that once had it have expunged it from their statute books or reformed it. In 2007, for example, the Zimbabwean government reformed its Public Order and Security Act (POSA), and Britain has progressively reformed its Public Order Act of 1936 through the Public Order Act of 1986 and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994. There are other [security] problems facing Nigeria such as religious extremism, secessionist movements, Niger Delta crisis, oil theft, corruption, armed robbery, growing availability of arms etc. that pose greater threat to peace, security and public order than political rallies.

One of the problems with the POA today is the unrelenting action of the police to continue to enforce it despite court rulings against the law. In 2005, a High Court in Abuja presided over by Justice Anwuri Chikere nullified the Public Order upon the reasoning that it was obsolete and a neo-colonialist. The judge specifi-

cally stated that the law collided with Section 40 of the 1999 Constitution. Then, in December 2007, the Court of Appeal in Abuja presided over by Justice Rabiu Danladi Mohammed unequivocally declared that the law was alien to the nation's democracy, and therefore "null, void and of no effect." The Court declared that public protests and rallies are part of the freedom of expression and association guaranteed by Sections 39 and 40 of the 1999 Constitution and Articles 9 and 11 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. Regrettably, the police continue to insist that their constitutional responsibility to maintain public order, security and public peace was not nullified by the judgment.

FOIA

The Legal Defense and Assistance Project should appeal the October 31, 2014 ruling by the Lagos High Court and any similar rulings for further interpretation and clarification on whether the FOI Act is binding on the states or not. It took a sustained struggle for 17 years by different stakeholders, especially the Nigeria Union of Journalists, Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), and the Media Rights Action (MRA), that spearheaded the FOI Bill before it was signed into law. The Nigeria Union of Journalists and other stakeholders should unite to fight what may be the final phase of the battle to entrench the FOIA in all the states and the Federal Capital Territory. Further, it should initiate the passage of the states' version(s) of the FOIA as well as Open Media Access laws by the Houses of Assembly of the respective states. So far, only three states' Houses of Assembly -- Delta, Ekiti and Lagos -- have adopted the FOIA since its passage. The States' Houses of Assembly should act in the public interest by ensuring that the FOIA is passed in the 33 states that are yet to do so.

Summary and Conclusion

Nearly two decades after Nigeria transitioned from military autocracy to civil democracy media freedom – ability of the media to gather and disseminate information without interference– is yet to be fully entrenched in the country. The state continues to utilize the same repressive institutions – the SSS and the police – that were used by past profligate military dictatorships to restrict me-

dia freedom. The arbitrary closure of media houses and detention and physical assaults of journalists persist. All these are antithetical to government's promises not to tolerate impunity against journalists. For example in his nation-wide broadcast on October 1, 2000, President Obasanjo said. "I have always believed in fundamental human rights and freedom, because I know that these values represent the best expression of democracy." And on November 7, 2017, the minister of information and culture, Lai Mohammed, while contributing to a debate on "UN plan of action on safety of journalists and the issue of impunity" at the 39th session of the General Conference of the UNESCO in Paris, said "Nigerian government does not engage in impunities against journalists and will never tolerate such'' (ANON, November 8, 2017). Security officers continue to charge editors and political critics with sedition in attempts to intimidate journalists and minimize freedom of expression. This is in spite of the court's ruling [in 1983] that sedition is an unconstitutional abridgement of freedom of expression (Ekwelie, 1986; Onagoruwa, 1977; Okonkwor, 1983, Ogbondah and Onyedike, 1991). These were not what Nigerians hoped for, at the dawn of the new democratic order on May 29, 1999.

Although these incidents endure, they have lessened compared with the periods of military rule. The press today has witnessed less crushing brutality in the hands of security officers than it did under military rule. Journalists have not witnessed incidents like that of Dele Giwa, editor of *Newswatch*, who was murdered with a letter bomb in 1986 or the assault of Minere Amakiri, *Nigerian Observer* reporter, who was brutalized in 1973. Further, the Nigerian press has not witnessed the trial – and imprisonment – of journalists by a tribunal like the trial and imprisonment of Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor of the *Guardian* in 1984. As Nigeria has finally made the transition to civil democracy officials of the state must understand that a free press will help to strengthen the pillars of the new democratic society. A free press will help catapult Nigeria to a vibrant democracy.

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2

The Road to the Freedom of Information Act and Beyond

By Edetaen Ojo

Introduction

The idea of a Freedom of Information law in Nigeria was originated at some point in 1993 by three civil society organizations, independently of each other. The three organisations, Media Rights Agenda (MRA), the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) and the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), decided to forge a common front and work together to realize their goals for the enactment of a Freedom of Information Act.

Their common objective was to ensure the adoption of a law which would make documents and information held by government or government agencies and officials accessible to citizens in an effort to make government transparent and accountable to citizens, as well as to ensure that governance was participatory.

The three organizations constituted a team to work on the project, with each organization represented on the team. The team was tasked with developing a roadmap for the realization of the common objective as well as overseeing the campaign.

Media Rights Agenda was designated the technical partner in the project under the arrangement agreed upon for taking the project forward. In keeping with this role, it was asked to produce a first draft of the Freedom of Information Law for consultations.

Media Rights Agenda solicited inputs into the proposed draft of the Law by designing and administering a questionnaire on identified stakeholders, particularly practicing Nigerian journalists.

Based on responses to the question as well as extensive research into such laws around the world, MRA's Legal Director, Mr. Tunde Fagbohunlu, now a Senior Advocate of Nigeria and a partner in the law firm of Aluko and Oyebode, produced in 1994 the first draft of the proposed bill entitled "Draft Access to Public Records and Official Information Act".

The content of the draft drew substantially from the experiences of other countries operating freedom of information laws. But it was also based on some of the suggestions arising from the consultations among the three organizations as well as the recommendations made by the stakeholders on whom questionnaires were administered, particularly practicing Nigerian journalists.

Consultative Process in Finalizing the Freedom of Information Bill

The "Draft Access to Public Records and Information Act" produced by Media Rights Agenda in 1994 became the basis for further discussions and debates on the issue and was subsequently subjected to a series of review exercises involving various stakeholders.

The first of such exercises was a two-day technical workshop jointly organized by the three partner organizations on March 10 and 11, 1995 to examine and revise the draft, taking into consideration the views of other interest groups, which might use the proposed legislation.

Participants in the workshop included human rights workers, journalists, lawyers, university lecturers and representatives of the National Broadcasting Commission and the Federal Ministry of Information.

Chaired by eminent journalist and Nigeria's former Information Minister, Prince Tony Momoh, who is also a lawyer, the main objective of the workshop was to achieve a consensus among the various interest groups that are affected by the availability or otherwise of a legally protected right of access to government held information, on the need for a Freedom of Information Act in Nigeria and the content of such a law.

There was a common understanding among the various interest groups represented at the workshop that the legal regime governing access to government held information in Nigeria must undergo a structural transformation. Their conclusion was that since statutes which permit any sort of access to official information in Nigeria were few, the overall effect is that a culture of secrecy prevails in all government institutions, nurtured and given legal effect to by such laws as the Official Secrets Act and some provisions in the Criminal Code, which make it an offence to disclose certain types of government-held information.

The general consensus at the workshop was that this existing legal regime should be replaced with one in which there is a general right of access to government held information, unless such a right is specifically removed by statute in certain circumstances and to protect specific, statutorily recognized interests.

A Campaigns and Monitoring Committee was established in accordance with the resolution adopted at the workshop to carry out follow-up actions on the campaign for the enactment of the revised draft into law.

However, although getting constitutional backing for the legislation was of crucial importance, and the National Constitutional Conference set up by the regime of then Head of State, General Sani Abacha, was then still in session, it was agreed by the participating groups that it would be inappropriate to lobby the Conference to provide constitutional support for the draft law.

The rationale was that having rejected the Conference as lacking in credibility, a civil society advocacy directed at it would confer legitimacy on it and its work. Therefore, the draft was never submitted to the Conference.

But it was sent to the Minister for Information, and the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice. Members of the committee also met with the then Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Dr. Olu Onagoruwa, to secure his support for the enactment of the draft into law. Although he was in principle supportive of the idea, it was clear that he lacked the political influence within the Abacha regime to push the draft through.

The political situation in Nigeria deteriorated shortly afterwards as the Abacha regime became more repressive and brutal and the law was never passed.

Following the death of General Abacha in June 1998, the regime of Major-General Abdulsalami Abubakar, which took over political authority in the country immediately, embarked on a transition to civil rule program under which elections were held into various levels of government between December 1998 and February 1999.

This development created the necessary political climate to revisit the issue. Another opportunity to review the draft law and its content came up in March 1999 when Media Rights Agenda, working with ARTICLE 19, the International Centre Against Censorship, in London; and the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission, organized a Workshop on Media Law Reform in Nigeria at Ota in Ogun State.

Held between March 16 and 18, 1999, the workshop was attended by 61 representatives of the media, both independent and state controlled; regulatory bodies; the legal profession; international institutions; local and international non-governmental organizations; and other interest groups. Participants at the workshop included the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Dr. Abid Hussain; a member of the European Parliament, Mrs.Glenys Kinnock; Judge John Oliver Manyarara, chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA); Justice Paul Kedi Nwokedi (rtd), the then chairman of the Nigerian Human Rights Commission; Prof. Auwalu Hamisu Yadudu, then special adviser to the Head of State on Legal Matters; Prince Tony Momoh, a former minister of information;

then Senator-elect, Tokunbo Afikuyomi; Ms Bettina Peters, deputy general secretary of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in Belgium; Mr Kabral Blay-Amihere, then president of the West African Journalists Association (WAJA); Ms. Jeanne Seck of the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in Paris, Ms Brigid O'Connor, regional information coordinator for West Africa at the British Council; and Mr. Olisa Agbakoba (SAN). A substantial part of the workshop was devoted to discussion of the draft Freedom of Information law, which was further reviewed.

In The Ota Platform of Action on Media Law Reform in Nigeria, a consensus document, which emerged at the end of that workshop, further recommendations were made on the content of the draft law.

The recommendations include the following:

a. In addition to a constitutional guarantee of the right of access to public information, a Freedom of Information Act should be enacted at the earliest possible opportunity, reflecting the principle of maximum disclosure.

b. The Draft Access to Public Records and Official Information Bill published by Media Rights Agenda, the Civil Liberties Organization, and the Nigeria Union of Journalists should be taken as the basis for discussion on this issue, but its provisions require further review.

c. All legislation, which unduly inhibit or restrict the right of Freedom of Information, such as the Official Secrets Act, should be amended to reflect the principles of the Freedom of Information Act.

d. The cost of obtaining public information should be affordable to the majority of citizens.

e. The proposed Act should contain a provision, which stipulates that, the individual requesting the information need not demonstrate any specific interest in the information requested.

f. Doctoring of public records before they are released to the person, entity or community requesting for them and obstruction of access to public records should be made a criminal offence.

g. In the application of any exemption, there should be a pre-

sumption of access to public information in the proposed Act. Exemptions should be narrowly drawn and subject to a test of actual harm.

Following these recommendation, Media Rights Agenda revised the draft access to information law once again to give effect to the agreements reached at the workshop.

The Freedom of Information Bill in Fourth National Assembly (1999 to 2003)

The legislative process on the Freedom of Information Bill began late in 1999 with identifying sponsors for the bill from among members of the House of Representatives. Hon. Tony Anyanwu and Hon. Nduka Irabor initially agreed to sponsor the Bill, while Hon. Jerry Ugokwe had apparently also decided to present a separate Bill on Freedom of Information to the House.

However, Media Rights Agenda was able to persuade them to harmonize the two versions of the Bill and co-sponsor a single Bill, following a series of mediatory meetings and an offer by Media Rights Agenda to undertake the harmonization process. The Bill was subsequently introduced into the House of Representatives as a private member's Bill and published in the Federal Government's Gazette on 8th December 1999.

On February 22nd and March 13th, 2000, the Bill went through the first and second readings respectively. At the second reading, all the members of the House of Representatives who took the floor, spoke in glowing terms about the Bill and the House thereupon decided that the Bill did not need to go through a public hearing since there was a unanimous decision that it was one legislation that the country needed very urgently. The House thus rose with a resolution that the Bill be referred to the Information Committee, then chaired by Hon. Uche Maduako, for the Committee's review of its contents. The Bill was subsequently referred to the Information Committee on March 27, 2000 after the conclusion of the second reading.

After its review by the committee, a report was presented to the plenary session in May 2001 with strong recommendations that the bill be passed into law. This was done by Hon. Chijioke Edeo-

ga, who had taken over from Hon. Maduako as Chairman of the House Committee on Information.

Here, however, unknown and unforeseen political intrigues came to play as the hitherto receptive members who had lauded the Bill in the first and second readings became hostile and started questioning the process with a clear indication that quite a number of the members of the House present were no longer interested in the Bill or were determined to prevent the House from passing it into law. The situation apparently arose from a falling out between one of the key sponsors of the Bill, Hon. Tony Anyanwu, and the leadership of the House of Representatives with Tony Anyanwu demanding financial records of the House from the leadership, which expectedly set off alarm bells about the kind of use to which the Freedom of Information Bill could be put if it was passed into Law. At the end of the day, it was decided that a public hearing be conducted on it.

With MRA playing supportive roles to see the public hearing hold, such as providing key resources and personnel, paying for media advertisements on the public hearing, paying for the transportation, accommodation and subsistence of all the participants who came from outside Abuja to attend the public hearing or make presentations, providing refreshments for participants at the public hearing, etc, the public hearing was held on 2nd and 3rd October 2001.

The public hearing was a success as all speakers were unanimous in their support for the bill and urged the House to pass it without further delay. However, political intrigues set in again as the report of the public hearing remained undisclosed and the passing of the Bill lingered for close to two years till that National Assembly was dissolved in June 2003 following the general elections of new members in April 2003.

The Freedom of Information Bill in the Fifth National Assembly (2003 to 2007)

When the 5th assembly was inaugurated, the sponsors of the Bill did not return to the National Assembly. However, many newcomers had been elected and so sensitization and enlight-

enment process had to be started all over again, with MRA still leading the advocacy efforts.

However, it was not a totally hopeless process as Hon. Abike Daibri came on board as a new member of the House, with her sterling journalism background in the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) where she had overtly reported civil society and human interest issues made her a natural ally. She pitched her tent on the side of the FOI Bill. She subsequently became the lead sponsor of the Bill and had as co-sponsor Honourable Duro Meseko, Honourable Depo Oyedokun and Honourable Emeka Ihedioha. All four of them were former journalists. The Bill was passed by the House of Representatives with minor amendments on August 25, 2004.

Sequel to the passage by the lower legislative chamber of the National Assembly, the Bill was transmitted to the Senate, where it went through a first reading on November 23, 2004 and a second reading on February 22, 2005. It was thereafter committed to the Senate Committee on Information and National Orientation, Chaired by Senator Tawar Wada and the Bill went through a public hearing on April 26, 2005.

However, when the report was presented by Senator Tawar Wada, chairman of the Senate Committee on Information, for the consideration of the Senate on December 20, 2005, political intrigues came to play again as some senators objected to it being passed just because the House of Representative had passed it, while others saw no reason why it should not be passed.

The debates dragged on and the majority decision was that the Bill be stepped down. An ad-hoc Committee was then constituted to work on the Bill one more time. Members of the committee were Senator Victor Ndoma-Egba (SAN) as chairman, Senator Timothy Adudu, Senator Nuhu Aliyu, Senator Jubril Aminu, Senator Adeleke Mamora and Senator Udoma Udo Udoma.

The ad-hoc Committee in carrying out its work noted that the Public Hearing held by the Senate Committee on Information did not take into consideration the views of some government agencies. The Committee, therefore, organized a hearing on the Bill for such government agencies.

On April 27, 2006, the hearing took place and was attended by 11 of such government organizations namely, the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, the Nigeria Police, the State Security Service (SSS), the Nigerian Intelligence Agency (NIA), the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Immigration Service, Nigeria Customs Service, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), National Agency for Food, Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), and Corporate Affairs Commission, which expressed their views to the Committee. Most of the agencies were in support of the Bill being passed into Law, except the Nigeria Police, which expressed reservations.

While Senate legislative process by the adhoc committee was going on, the advocacy campaign continued within and outside the National Assembly, with many other civil society advocates including Freedom of Information Coalition (FOIC) and the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), playing key roles to lobby members to assent to the Bill. The different efforts yielded fruitful result as the Senate unanimously passed the Bill on November 15, 2006.

With the advocacy now a nationwide campaign, the National Assembly in 2007, constituted the Conference Committee on the Freedom of Information Bill to harmonize the two versions of the Bill passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate. Members of the Committee from the Senate were Senator Victor Ndoma-Egba (SAN), Senator Udoma Udo Udoma, Senator Jibril Aminu, Senator Nuhu Aliyu, Senator Adeleke Mamora, and Senator Uche Chukwumerije. The members from the House of Representatives were Hon. Halims Agoda, Hon. Bunza Farouk Bello, Hon. Abdul Oroh, Hon. Wale Okediran, Hon. Abike Dabiri, Hon. Bala James Ngilari, Hon. Emeka Ihedioha, and Hon. Dipo Oyedokun.

The 14-member Conference Committee which was responsible for harmonizing the two versions of the Bill as passed by the House and amended by the Senate concluded the harmonization of the two versions of the Bill on February 14, 2007 and it was finally passed by both the House of Representatives and the Senate in the first quarter of 2007.

From the legislature, the harmonized Bill was thereafter sent to

the Executive arm of government to the then President Olusegun Obasanjo for his assent. Here again, the efforts got stalled as President Obasanjo claimed he did not receive the Bill. In the waiting game that ensued, a civil society delegation sought audience and met with Obasanjo, who was completing his maximum eight year term as president and was not eligible for re-election.

The meeting took place in April 2007 and was led by Mr. Edetaen Ojo, with the aim of acquainting members of the group with the president's thinking on the Bill which had been awaiting Obasanjo's assent since it was sent to him by the Clerk of the National Assembly on March 23, 2007 through his Special Adviser on National Assembly Matters, Senator Florence Ita-Giwa.

The former President expressed reservations about three areas of the Bill, which he said he was uncomfortable with, namely:

Section 1: The Short Title of the Bill - Freedom of Information Act. Former President Obasanjo said he was opposed to the title of the Bill and would prefer that it should be called "Right to Information Act" because, according to him, "Freedom" is absolute, while "Right" comes with responsibilities.

Of course, the short title of the Bill is hardly of any significance and it was difficult to see how this could have informed his refusal to assent to the Bill.

The long title of the Bill states its purpose quite clearly with no ambiguity whatsoever. It states that it is "A Bill for an Act to make public records and information more freely available, provide for public access to public records and information, protect public records and information to the extent consistent with the public interest and the protection of personal privacy, protect serving public officers from adverse consequences for disclosing certain kinds of official information without authorization and establish procedures for the achievement of those purposes and related purposes."

Section 13(1): The head of a government or public institution may refuse to disclose any record, the disclosure of which may be injurious to the conduct of international affairs or the defense of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The former President said he was concerned that the Bill only excludes from public access records which may be injurious to the defense of Nigeria, but did not also exclude records which may be injurious to the "security" of Nigeria.

Civil society advocates were of the view that the text of the Bill adequately protected Nigeria's potentially sensitive defense records and information.

Besides, the protection of the internal and external security of Nigeria is also covered by the National Security Agencies Act, which is one of the laws entrenched in Section 315(5) of the Nigerian Constitution. It extends to the protection of the documents and other acts relating to the security of Nigeria. The actions of the national security agencies established under the Act are protected from judicial scrutiny.

In effect, the former President's concerns were adequately addressed both under the Bill as well as under the National Security Agencies Act.

Section 13(2) says: However, in the interest of the public the court may override the refusal by the head of the government or public institution to disclose the information applied for.

The former President was concerned that with this provision, the courts would be given the power to review any decision by the head of a public institution not to disclose any information and as such, heads of public institutions could then be compelled by the courts to disclose any information which they would otherwise not want to disclose.

President Obasanjo's view suggested that he did not believe that the refusal of a government institution to disclose any record or document under the proposed Law should be subject to judicial review to determine whether there is a public interest in the information being released.

Such a position is obviously untenable under a democratic form of government. One of the cardinal principles of the doctrine of separation of powers is the inherent powers of the courts to review administrative decisions not only to ensure that they are consistent with the Law, but also to prevent arbitrariness and abuse

of power. It was the view of the civil society proponents of the Bill that the notion that the decision of a public officer can never be questioned in a court of law has no place in a democracy, particularly where that public officer is elected to serve the people.

This tactically became a dead end for the Bill as the 5th assembly was at that time winding up for another new set of elected legislators to come in. Though Obasanjo's action was widely criticized and condemned, it nevertheless changed the reality that the Bill was once again stalled for another set of legislative process to begin all over with the new set of incoming members of the National Assembly.

The Freedom of Information Bill in Sixth National Assembly (2007 to 2011)

With the stalling of the process by the refusal of Obasanjo to assent to the Bill before the expiration of his tenure, the advocacy for the FOI had sufficiently won nationwide sympathy from many more quarters, locally and international. New independent groups had joined the fray, offering diverse support, locally, nationally and internationally.

Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa had been re-elected into the House of Representatives and maintained her disposition to the Bill and had emerged the new mouthpiece for the Bill in the House, urging fellow members to revisit the Bill.

In ally with her, was the deputy Senate leader, Senator Ndoma-Egba who also was clamoring for the Senate to similarly revisit the Bill. He, along with 24 other members, co-sponsored the Bill in the Senate to sail through its first reading in October 25, 2007.

Senate Ndoma-Egba had reasoned that since the Bill was not signed into law by Obasanjo and his veto was not overridden by the last National Assembly, it was imperative to re-introduce the Bill and allow Senators the opportunity to properly debate it before passing it.

Following this also, the federal government under President Musa Yar'Adua, also made overt pronouncements to dissociate itself from the position of the past executive arm, declaring that it was disposed to the FOI law being in place. The then Secretary to

the Federal Government, Ambassador Baba Gana Kingibe, had indeed disclosed on October 26, 2007 that the Umaru Yar'Adua-led government was committed not only to stamping out corruption but also institutionalizing transparency in the country.

Similarly, as the support for the passage of the FOI Bill grew, the House of Representatives had also said that it was not against its passage. Speaking on a media interview on January 7, 2009, the Chairman, House Committee on Media, Hon. Eseme Eyibo, explained that the passage of the FOI Bill was on top of the House agenda in the year, noting that the Bill was central to good governance in the country and as such could not be discarded by anybody even as the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), the Guild of editors, the Nigeria Union of Journalists and other stakeholders in the media industry had expressed dissatisfaction over the continued delay of the passage of the Bill, and were generating several comments, reports and editorials in the media on the issue.

Also in support of the Bill, the then Minister of State for Information and Communications, Mr. Labaran Maku, on August 20, 2010 described the FOI Bill as institutional to the media. He had noted that the Bill was not about individuals; but about ensuring that a democratic government is run as a public institution and that it is about the future of the country.

However, despite the wide clamor and support being generated for the Bill, majority of members of the House of Representatives, many of whom were first timers, still refused to allow the Bill to be introduced, a situation which made Abike Dabiri-Erewa, the MRA, the NGE and the emerging frontline advocators to continue sensitizing and 'lobbying' members of the House. Abike Dabiri-Erewa reportedly told her colleagues in December 2010 that the FOI Bill would actually ease their work as legislators as they wouldn't have to be making lengthy explanations on issues that are readily available to the public to access the information. "Let us have a change of perception as a parliament and pass the Bill because the FOI Bill will deepen democracy and ensure accountability and transparency in public service. The Bill is not harmful in any way; it is either

we want to pass it or we do not," she said.

The pleas and sensitization notwithstanding, majority of members of the House of Representatives remained adamant to passing the Bill. Earlier on in April 29, 2008, the report of the House Committees on Information and National Orientation and Justice on the Bill had been rejected by the House. Also on January 21, 2009, the majority of the members forced the Speaker, Mr. Dimeji Bankole, to stand down consideration of the Bill as they kicked against it after a vote to negate the motion.

Hon. Ita Enang, the Chairman of the House Committee on Business and Rules was also shouted down on December 16, 2010 in a move to resuscitate the Bill. Enang had in a motion requested the House to refer the Bill to the committee on information for consideration before bringing it back to the House but as soon as he moved the motion, majority of members, kicking against the Bill, shouted No! No! No! to his request.

Intervention by Deputy Speaker, Bayero Nafada, to save the motion proved abortive as he was forced to stand down the motion till another time as there was difficulty getting a member to second the motion. In the ensuing drama, the Deputy Speaker, Alhaji Usman Nafada, who presided over the session, had called on some lawmakers to second the motion but they declined.

However when Hon. Peter Linus indicated his intention to second the motion, he was not allowed to, as shouts of 'put the question, put the question' were heard from all directions in the chambers, an indication that the motion would not be passed thus forcing Honourable Nafada to stand the Bill down.

Many members of the House of Representatives belonging to the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) complained that it was inappropriate for a proposed legislation as important as the Freedom of Information Bill to have as its lead sponsor a member of the minority party in opposition, in objection to the Honourable Abike Dabiri of the now defunct Alliance for Democracy (AD) being the lead sponsor.

Meanwhile, as the Bill lingered on, different stakeholders continued efforts to influence the National Assembly members, indi-

vidually and collectively towards passing the Bill. These influences were to dramatically play out as the House of Representatives, in plenary presided over by the Deputy Speaker, Hon. Usman Bayero Nafada, reversed its decision on the Bill on February 10, 2011 mandating its Joint Committee on Information and National Orientation and Justice seven days to conclude work on the Bill.

The decision was sequel to motion by Ita Enang and 20 others entitled "Rescission under Order 9, Rule 1 (6) of the Standing Order of the House of Representatives: Freedom of Information Bill, 2007" which asked the House to resend the Bill to the joint committee for fresh consideration.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Dimeji Bankole, subsequently assured that the House would pass the Bill and then mount pressure on the executive arm to assent to it. The Bill was subsequently passed by the House of Representatives on February 24, 2011.

As advocacy pressures continued to build, the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) also stepped up efforts to lobby the senate leadership through a courtesy visit to the office of the Senate President, Senator David Mark, to present their case for the early passage of the Bill by the upper legislative chamber. The NPAN team, which was led by its president, Chief Ajibola Ogunsola, chairman of Punch Newspapers; included Mr. Nduka Obaigbena, chairman, Leaders and Company, publishers of THISDAY newspapers; Alhaji Kabiru Yusuf, chairman, Trust Media Limited; Mr. Sam Amuka, chairman, Vanguard Media Limited and Alhaji Isa Funtua. The visit alongside initiatives by others was to yield fruit as the Senate on March 15, 2011, commenced the clause-by-clause consideration of the Freedom of Information Bill ahead of its third reading. Consequently on March 16, 2011, the Senate passed the Freedom of Information Bill.

Following this, and in compliance with the Standing Orders of both chambers, a 12-man committee of the National Assembly was constituted to harmonize the two versions of the Freedom of Information Bill. Each of the chambers has six members in the harmonization committee. While the Senate named its Conference

Committee members on March 16, 2011, the House of Representatives designated its members on May 11, 2011. The Conference Committee was made of : Senator Ayogu Eze, (chairperson); Hon. Henry Seriake Dickson, (co-chairperson); Senator Victor Ndoma-Egba (SAN), Senator Adamu Talba, Senator Anthony Manzo, Senator Kamorudeen Adedibu, and Senator Otaru Ohize. The others were Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, Hon. Ahmed Wadada, Hon. Mohammed Sani Takori, Hon. Patrick Ikhariale and Hon. Nkem Abonta.

The committee met on May 19, 2011, and harmonized the differences between both versions of the Bill. While the harmonized Bill was presented before the Senate by Senator Ayogu Eze, chairperson of the Conference Committee, the Bill was presented before the House of Representatives by the co-chairperson of the Committee, Hon. Henry Seriake Dickson. After considering the reports of the committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives respectively, the Senate, on May 24, 2011, approved the harmonized version of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill.

Subsequently, President Goodluck Jonathan who had been sworn in as President by the Chief Justice of the Federation following to the death of President Yar'Adua, signed the Bill into law on Saturday May 28, 2011.

Advocacy and campaign strategies employed

Over the course of the 12 years that the advocacy for the adoption of the Freedom of Information Act lasted, a series of planning meetings were held by the core group of advocates to forge or revise their strategies for the campaign. However, as each plan of action was executed, new challenges emerged and new plans had to be designed. As the advocacy advanced and the challenges grew bigger, there was the need to device multi-pronged approach strategies. Of the three partners, which started the efforts to secure a Freedom of Information Law for Nigeria in 1993, only Media Rights Agenda remained throughout the campaign and others became exhausted by a prolonged, exhausting and bruising campaign.

In the general context, the strategies involved in the advocacy

drive for the enactment of the FOI law in Nigeria entailed a combination of different methods, beginning with the action point of making the first draft in 1994, then to the review meetings, the stakeholders sensitizations meetings/workshops, legislative advocacy (including official correspondence through letters, one-on-one visits, parleys, telephone calls, text messages, etc) and media publicity.

Others, which included personal and discreet interventionist strategies such as private meetings to principal members of the house of assembly, facilitated by administrative aides and assistants to such principal officers as well as strategic alliances built amongst different stakeholders both within the civil society fold (beyond MRA's initiatives) and within the National Assembly, also played crucial roles. Critical also is the different strategic roles played by different funding/donor organizations as well as by principal members of the National Assembly who became advocates for the Bill.

A major challenge that the advocacy for the enactment of the Bill encountered when the movement started was how to broaden the constituency for support for the campaign, especially among civil society organizations. Although the civil society was united in their desire to enthroning democratic rule, not many fancied the idea of a clamor for an access to information regime, because at that time, it didn't look like a priority issue. This was especially so with all the turbulence associated with the democratic future of Nigeria at that time.

So before 1999, only very few civil society organizations understood and shared MRA's goal of clamoring for a society where the freedom of expression and information operates. In fact, very few partner organizations bought the idea and initiative to embark on follow-up activities or sought to introduce Freedom of Information public enlightenment components and campaigns into their core projects and activities. This made MRA to become the lead advocate organization for the Nigerian FOI advocacy process.

In the process to bring in more stakeholders, MRA had to keep on the drive whilst at the same time creating niches for interested stakeholders to buy into the advocacy process. One of the activities embarked on in relations to this was to print sensitization materials and provide documentation on the FOI, and its operations in other lands. This, MRA extensively did in year 2000. The reach-out drive also included giving sensitization talks in forums on how a society that operates a freedom of information policy aids development.

To break the barrier of being the only organization driving the campaign, a multi stakeholders' forum was convened in September 2000 with the objective to identify various stakeholders in a freedom of information regime, and agree on how the different stakeholders can support the campaign for the enactment of the Bill into law, amongst others. The meeting was attended by representatives of various interest groups, including the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the NUJ, the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN), the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), humanrights NGOs, the media, the legal profession, international organizations and agencies, etc.

This strategy for a stakeholder forum paid off as several individuals and organizations emerged as advocates for the passage of the Bill from the parley, under the group, 'Freedom of Information Coalition (FOIC) that was subsequently formed. From this also emerged the need to have FOIC coordinators for the campaign at local levels and this got many more actors involved both at individual and organizational levels as state and zonal coordinators of the FOIC across the country. Instrumental to further achieving this was the creation of an internet listserve for the group through which members were being added and correspondence and view on issues bordering on freedom of expression and free press were being discussed.

Over the years, the FOIC internet listserve grew to having membership base of about one thousand five hundred (1,500) enlightened persons and civil society organizations, most of whom have

emerged as notable advocates of the FOI, both at individual, organizational and institution capacities. The FOIC listserve, managed by MRA, is still very much active, discussing daily, related issues on the FOI.

Media Campaigns

Media campaigns played a crucial role throughout the advocacy program, and formed the channel through which the issues were brought to national prominence. The strategy for the media advocacy was with the primary purpose to keep the issue alive in the public domain and create a groundswell of public opinion in favor of a regime of access to information to act as a further pressure for legislative action by the National Assembly.

The activities under this strategy included visits to media houses to meet with journalists, editors and columnists to solicit support for the campaign through the publication of articles, editorial comments and stories on the freedom of information issue.

It also entailed issuing periodic press releases and press statements to highlight developments on the issues; granting of press interviews on the issue; facilitating publication of feature stories and opinion articles, production of briefing packs for journalists containing materials and information about the Bill and freedom of information issues generally. The strategy also included organizing sensitization workshops for journalists.

As a result of these efforts, virtually all Nigerian newspapers published several editorial comments in support of the Bill. Others published news and feature articles, opinion articles, and cartoons on the Bill. The text of the Bill was also published in full in several newspapers as paid advertisements in order to ensure wide spread awareness about the Bill and its content. Many radio and television stations held numerous discussions and other programs where guests appeared to promote the Bill and explain the principles behind it.

Some of the broadcast stations in which MRA personnel, collaborating partners and other guests appeared to promote the Bill and explain its principles include the African Independent Television (AIT) in Lagos and Abuja, in its "Kaakaki" program, a popular

breakfast program; the sister radio stations, RayPower1 and 2, Minaj Broadcasting International television (MBI), the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Channel10 in its Morning Ride programme, another breakfast programme; the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria in Kaduna; the NTA in Kaduna; Murhi International Television (MiTV) in Lagos; Radio Lagos, Degue Broadcasting Network (DBN) television in Lagos, Channels Television in Lagos,etc.

It's worthy of note, however, that the fact that the MRA and the leadership of its partner organizations were manned by former journalists was instrumental to the success of the media advocacy as their media skills were the assets used in mass communicating the issues.

An Unwilling President

Prior to approaching individual members of the National Assembly to sponsor the Freedom of Information Bill, Media Rights Agenda had explored the possibility of getting it passed into Law as an Executive Bill. By some coincidence, in his inaugural address on assumption of office on May 29, 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo identified corruption as "the greatest single bane of our society today" and promised that under his administration, "all rules and regulations designed to help honesty and transparency in dealing with government will be restored and enforced."

In addition, shortly after the inauguration of the new government, President Obasanjo announced his plan to present to the National Assembly for consideration and enactment into law, an anti-corruption Bill.

Against this background, Media Rights Agenda felt that the time was right to also introduce the Freedom of Information Bill to the National Assembly and that it would have an easier passage if it was sent to the National Assembly by the President as an Executive Bill.

On June 10, 1999, Media Rights Agenda wrote to President Obasanjo expressing support for his commitment to fight corruption in Nigeria and his plan to present an anti-corruption Bill to the National Assembly.

MRA observed that accountability and transparency in Govern-

ment were crucial to any meaningful anti-corruption crusade, arguing that accountability and transparency could not be possible if citizens have no right of access to information held by the State or its agencies or if no mechanism exists for giving practical effect to the right to freedom of information.

It therefore requested President Obasanjo to also present the draft Freedom of Information Bill to the National Assembly as an Executive Bill for consideration along with his anti-corruption Bill and support efforts to secure its enactment into law.

The request was borne out of the organization's realization that Executive Bills would usually receive more serious and urgent consideration from the legislators than private members' Bills.

Media Rights Agenda also wrote letters to the then Minister of Information, Chief Dapo Sarumi, and the Minister of Justice, Mr. Kanu Agabi (SAN), apprising them of the existence of the Bill, its contents and soliciting their support for its speedy enactment into law.

However, by a letter dated July 19, 1999, signed by his personal assistant, Mr. Ojo A. Taiwo, President Obasanjo declined to present the Freedom of Information bill as an Executive Bill and, instead, advised Media Rights Agenda to send the draft directly to the National Assembly.

Similarly, several months after its letter to the Justice Minister, on March 29, 2000, Media Rights Agenda received another letter dated January 20, 2000, from the Legislative Drafting Department of the Federal Ministry of Justice, in which reference was made to the organization's June 10, 1999 letter to the President.

In the letter signed on behalf of the Federal Attorney-General and Minister of Justice by Mrs. Christie Ekweonu, she said that she had been directed to inform Media Rights Agenda "to properly channel your cause through the Federal Ministry of Information which is the relevant governmental body that regulates the practice and dissemination of information. Your case will be duly considered if it originates from the relevant Ministry."

Ironically, at the time Media Rights Agenda received the letter from the Federal Ministry of Justice, the Freedom of Information

Bill had already gone through the first and second readings before the House of Representatives in the National Assembly and was already being considered in greater detail by the Information Committee of the House.

Legislative Advocacy at the National Assembly

The defining stage for the enactment of the Bill was at the legislative chambers of both the House of Representatives and Senate in the years from 1999 to 2011. The entry of the Bill into the House of Representative was via an international forum organized by UNESCO in Abuja to which MRA's Legal Officer, Maxwell Kadiri had gone to speak as a resource person. It was in that forum that Hon. Tony Anyanwu and Hon. Nduka Irabor got introduced to the Bill. With further interaction, Hon. Anyanwu resolved to push the Bill to the House and requested a copy to be sent to him, as well as to other members of the Houses. That disposition, created the inroad for MRA to introduce the Bill to members of the houses, and with Hon. Anyanwu's assistance as well as that of several others, the legislative advocacy process began.

This process was to include several visits to members of the house in form of door-to-door enlightenment campaigns both in their offices in the National Assembly in Abuja and in some other parts of the country, and at their homes in the Apo Legislative Quarters in Abuja. Despite undertaking several advocacy visits to the National Assembly, it was realized that it would be difficult to meet with all the members through such one on one meetings especially because the window for such meetings was often very narrow as members usually had series of other engagements during intervals between their sitting period at the National Assembly and the period they leave for home or other activities.

There was, thus, the need to devise ways of meeting with a large number of the members in one venue to plead the cause of the Bill. In trying to solve the problem, MRA was advised to consider organizing a function for all the legislators at which issues concerning the Bill would be discussed in a relaxed and informal environment. Acting on this advice and ahead of the scheduling of the Bill for First Reading, Media Rights Agenda, with support from

ARTICLE 19, organized a cocktail reception for members of the House of Representatives. The event took place at the Abuja Sheraton Hotel and Towers. It was attended by about 250 legislators.

The advocacy work at the Senate included meetings and parleys with Senators, either in their offices or homes, depending on which venue they preferred. However, it should be pointed out that unlike their colleagues in the House of Representatives, most of the Senators were not favourably disposed towards members of the advocacy team meeting them in their homes to hold discussions focused on the Bill. As a result of this, a majority of the meetings took place in their offices at the National Assembly complex.

These advocacy visits, like the previous ones carried out in the House of Representatives, were done in phases. Consequently, during the first phase of this advocacy exercise in the Senate, the advocacy team from Media Rights Agenda met with 30 Senators in all. Of this number, except for a few of them who were non-committal and preferred to wait until the Bill was referred to them from the House of Representatives, all the others expressed their willingness to support it. They included Senator M. T. Mbu, Senator Martins Yellowe, Senator Adolphus Wabara, Senator Fajimi, Senator D.Saror, Senator Femi Okurounmu, Senator Rowland Owie, Senator Matori, Senator Ishaq Mohammed, and Senator Tokunbo Afikuyomi.

In fact, Senator Owie, the only Senator that agreed to meet the advocacy team at home, and who was then the Chief Whip in the Senate, promised to use his leadership position and close contact with Senator Tafida, the then Chair of the Senate Rules and Business Committee, as well as with the then Senate President, Senator Chuba Okadigbo, to get the Senate to give the Bill accelerated hearing. The level of support received by members of the advocacy team from this first time discussion with the respective Senators was quite impressive, contrary to the negative public perceptions about the Senate.

The Role of Donors and Funding Partners

The advocacy campaign was greatly enhanced by the support

received from funders and donor partners. An instance of a crucial moment when this came to play was when the House of Representatives indicated that it did not have funds to conduct a public hearing in 2001 and the MRA, had to confer with the Nigerian office of the International Human Law Group (Law Group), then headed by Dr. Jibrin Ibrahim, to convert funds earmarked for advocacy activities to part-sponsor the Public Hearing.

Through funds provided by the Law Group, MRA substantially funded the Public Hearing by covering the cost of the production and placement of advertisements in national daily newspapers and weekly newsmagazines to announce the Public Hearing, paying for the transportation,accommodationandsubsistenceofalltheparticipantswhocamefrom outside Abuja to attend the Public Hearing or make presentations, providing refreshments for participants at the Public Hearing, etc as well as production of radio and television jingles to publicize the Public Hearing. Others included the cost of an independent legal consultant engaged by the Committee to produce an independent report on the deliberations at the Public Hearing.

Other advocacy activities were funded by the Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI), the European Union, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) of the British Government, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through PACT Nigeria. Overheads covered included frequent travels by MRA advocacy team partners from other civil society organizations from Lagos to Abuja, the activities of the Freedom of Information Coalition including workshops, meetings and seminars, production of campaign materials, production of radio and television jingles, production of radio and television documentaries, etc.

Funds were also provided to MRA and other civil society organizations for freedom of information advocacy activities over the years by ARTICLE 19, The Public Affairs Section of the United States Embassy, the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC), in Lagos, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization(UNESCO), Action Aid International Nigeria, the Global Opportunities Fund, and many others.

Advocacy Training Workshops, Seminars, Sensitization Workshops

MRA organized and held several seminars, workshops, training and sensitization activities at various levels and venues to sensitize different sectors of the Nigerian society to the FOI Bill, its underlying principles and benefits. Sensitization meetings were held for journalists, editors, civil society organizations, including community based organizations, faith based organizations, and grassroots organizations; government information officers at Federal and state levels, etc. These meetings served to enlighten Nigerians on the Bill and enlist their support for the passage of the Bill.

Letter Writing Campaigns

Media Rights Agenda and the Freedom of Information Coalition wrote hundreds of personalized letters to various individuals and organizations, including all the members of both chambers of the National Assembly, all the Ministers in the first cabinet of President Olusegun Obasanjo, other presidential aides, religious leaders, political parties, media organizations, etc.

In November 2002, MRA wrote formally to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Umar Ghali Na'Abba, and the Chairman of the House Committee on Information, Honourable Lawan Farouk. MRA reminded Alhaji Na'Abba of his commitment to ensure the speedy passage of the Bill and to express concerns that the Bill may not be passed as the administrative term was drawing to a close.

In the letter to Honourable Farouk, MRA reminded him that the Public Hearing on the Bill on October 3 and 4, 2001 attracted impressive participation and contribution from stakeholders with a general call for the passage of the Bill. MRA expressed concern that despite this, no word had been heard or action taken on the Bill thereafter. It appealed to Honourable Farouk to ensure that the Committee's report was submitted as soon as possible so that the Rules and Business Committee of the House could slate the Bill for the Third Reading.

MRA also wrote to the 30 registered political parties, prior to the 2003 general elections seeking to get them make a commit-

ment to supporting the passage of the Bill. The letters written in April 2003 on behalf of the Freedom of Information Coalition were sent to the chairpersons and secretaries of each of the political parties as well as their presidential candidates.

The letters asked them to make the campaign to secure the right of Nigerians to have access to public records and information a cardinal policy of their parties as well as asking them to support the enactment of the Freedom of Information Bill into law.

Along with the letters, MRA also provided the parties and their candidates with materials on access to information, including copies of the Bill, a number of documents giving background information to the Bill and a document entitled "The Public's Right to Know", published by ARTICLE 19, which sets out the ways in which governments can achieve maximum openness in line with the best international standards and practices.

The import of all these letters was that they served to introduce the draft FOI Bill to these important stakeholders who hitherto may have been unaware of the draft Bill. The letters also ensured that the FOI Bill remained in the legislative agenda and was not consigned to the archives without passage. Through the letters, MRA also presented these stakeholders with copies of the FOI Bill and educational materials on the Bill to enlighten them and get their support for it.

Short Message Service (SMS)

Short Message Service (SMS or text messages) was also used effectively as an advocacy tool at various times. To ensure the effectiveness of the use of SMS as an advocacy tool, MRA initially assembled the mobile numbers of the members of the two chambers of the National Assembly. These were broken down according to their Chambers: Senate and House of Representatives; the constituencies of the legislators, and the committees they belong for effective use.

The FOI Coalition broke down these numbers according to the constituencies of the legislators and distributed them to its members in the various geo-political zones for targeted advocacy.

Text messages were, therefore, sent from the FOI Coalition Sec-

retariat and from all over Nigeria to the members of the National Assembly at critical points in the legislative journey of the Bill. Text messages were sent when there was a Reading of the Bill in any of the chambers, during Public Hearing, during committees' sittings and during harmonization by harmonization committees of the two chambers.

SMS/Text Messages ensured short, appropriate and targeted advocacy messages are delivered to the appropriate legislators. During First, Second and Third Readings, it ensured that a specific chamber was targeted as well as during the harmonization processes, it ensured that only members of the harmonization committee were targeted. Responses from these text messages have served to help MRA gauge the acceptability of the Bill in the two chambers. MRA got some inspiring and encouraging responses from these text messages; of course it also got responses in which legislators expressed their opposition to the Bill. This helped to identify opposition to the Bill and to know where to focus future advocacy efforts.

Using the Internet for Advocacy

The Freedom of Information campaign also took advantage of the rising use and effectiveness of the Internet to further the FOI advocacy efforts. In this area the internet was used to widen the advocacy efforts and to generate ideas for better advocacy from all over the world. Three internet forums were used to advance the advocacy work, namely the FOI Coalition listserv, FOI Coalition website, and the MRA website.

Following one of the action plans of the Second Stakeholders' Meeting on the FOI Bill, MRA created and managed a listserv: FOICoalition@yahoogroups.com. It served as a platform through which information on the activities of the coalition and developments regarding the Bill were shared by members. They also used it to suggest new strategies for the advocacy. Even after the passage of the Bill into law, it has remained vibrant and relevant in being used to share information on openness, transparency and accountability, and good governance as well as freedom of expression, media development and related matters. But through

the listserv, only subscribers could be reached hence the registration, design and development of a website for the coalition. The Freedom of Information Coalition and the MRA websites served to complement each other by disseminating information on the progress of and activities around the FOI Bill around the globe. The FOI Coalition site www.foicoalition.org was used to disseminate information about the odyssey of the Bill while MRA's website, www.mediarightsagenda.net was used to disseminate information on the activities of MRA as well as on the FOI Bill.

Internet advocacy around the FOI Bill ensured that the Bill acquired international status and recognition. It became not just a Nigerian Bill for Nigerians but a Bill that attracted global attention and interventions from individuals and groups from all over the globe. Internet advocacy guaranteed that the FOI Bill got rich inputs that ensured we have the quality of FOI Act that we have in Nigeria today.

Signature Campaign

At a time when progress on the passage of the FOI Bill into Law appeared to have stalled, a signature campaign was embarked upon to get signatures from all over Nigeria and from around the globe to support a petition asking the National Assembly to pass the Freedom of Information Bill into law before the end of 2007.

The coalition aimed to secure at least one million signatures in support of the petition from Nigerians across the country and in the Diaspora. The petition was meant to be presented to the National Assembly on September 28, 2007, on the year's "International Right to Know Day". Launched on September 11, 2007, the campaign secured several hundreds of signatures from Nigerians scattered across the globe.

Although the FOI Coalition could not get the one million signatures it sought and so could not present the signatures to the National Assembly, it was worth noting that eminent Nigerians, including then Governor Gbenga Daniel of Ogun State signed the petition. It also galvanized widespread support for passage of the Bill and continuously kept the Bill in the legislative agenda.

Production and Dissemination of Educational Materials

Crucial in all the advocacy efforts for the passage of the Bill was the production and wide distribution of information, educational and communication (IEC) materials on the FOI Bill.

With funding support from the International Human Rights Law Group, Media Rights Agenda, in August 2000, printed campaign materials aimed at creating awareness and soliciting public support for the Freedom of Information Bill. MRA printed color posters, handbills titled: "What You Should Know About the Freedom of Information Bill", and three different types of color stickers.

The posters contained messages promoting the values and benefits of an open and transparent government to the democratic process and the economy. The handbills gave highlights of the Bill, explaining in more detail its content, purpose and benefits. It contained information about the Bill such as "What is the Freedom of Information Bill?", "Current State of Access to Information in Nigeria", "Benefits of the Freedom of Information Bill", "Who Can Benefit?", "How Can Nigerians Support the Bill?" etc.

It provided contact information for members of the National Assembly, advising members of the public to write to their representatives in the National Assembly or telephone them with a request that they pass the Bill. The stickers contained messages of support for the bill and transparency in governance generally.

The materials were distributed in major cities in southeastern, south western and the northern parts of the country. These campaign materials complemented other efforts employed by MRA and the FOI Coalition to spread information about the Bill and to enlighten Nigerians about it and its benefits to them. Nigerians considered them so useful that after distributing what they have, the coalition members still requested for more from the FOI Secretariat.

Beyond the FOI Enactment

The level of usage of the FOI Act by journalists and the media generally has not been commensurate with the level of interest and efforts invested by the media community in ensuring the enactment of the FOI Bill into Law.

Agbese (2016) laments that I am unable to reconcile this apparent ne-

> glect to use the law on the part of our news media with the sweat that marked the struggle to birth the law. Since the Bill became an act of parliament, there has been no major demand, if indeed any, major or minor, by the news media on the government and their agencies to give them access to the loads of information kept out of the reach of the Nigerian public. The worst thing you can to do a law is to let it gather dust, half remembered and half forgotten.

Similarly, Olumhense (2013) had earlier wondered:

> Why are more citizens and organizations not taking advantage of the FOI? If the press truly understands that its role is to reveal, not conceal, why is it not waving the FOI flag at every public door?

Few journalists and media houses are known to have made use of the FOI Act to request information from public institutions. However, there have been a few exceptions. The *Daily Trust* newspaper moved very early in the life of the Law to test its efficacy, beginning in late 2011 when it started using the Law to seek information from various public institutions. It has been one of the most dogged media users of the Act in Nigeria. *Premium Times*, the online investigative media outlet, is also known to have made vigorous use of the Act in seeking official information from government bodies and has indeed opted for the litigation option in enforcing compliance by public institutions which failed to grant its request for information.

Beginning from December 2011, *Daily Trust* wrote at least 12 requests for information to 11 different government ministries, departments and agencies asking for a variety of information but only five of them responded, although none of them granted access to the information requested. The others simply ignored the newspaper's request.

The ministries and agencies that *Daily Trust* sent FOI requests to are the State House, Abuja; the Office of the National Security Adviser, the Office of the Attorney General of the Federation, the Ecological Funds Office, the Public Complaints Commission (PCC), the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), the Office of the Inspector General of Police, the Federal Civil Service Commission, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the Nigeria Prison Service and the National Assembly.

Of the five agencies which responded to *Daily Trust* newspaper, two said they would not give the information requested; one asked the newspaper to be more specific in its request while the other two were evasive in their responses. The office of the Attorney-General of the Federation and the State House ignored the newspaper's requests which merely asked for basic information.

On December 8, 2011, *Daily Trust* wrote the Code of Conduct Bureau, asking for copies of President Jonathan's assets declaration details. After several follow-ups, the Bureau, in a letter dated February 20, 2012, responded saying a provision of the Constitution has "precluded the Bureau the liberty" to give such information. In the letter signed by its secretary, Alhassan Ibrahim, the Bureau said it needed the National Assembly "to spell out the conditions and terms" upon which it would make available to the public information on assets declaration by public officers.

Daily Trust also wrote a letter to the Ecological Funds Office on December 8, 2011, asking for information on amounts of money disbursed to states for ecological projects as well as the names and locations of such projects. But the newspaper never received any response from the office even after several follow-up visits.

On December 12, 2011, *Daily Trust* sent an FOI request to the Inspector General of Police seeking information on the existing framework on personal firearms possession, the number of people granted personal firearm licenses and the number of certified firearm dealers in the country. The Police did not respond to the newspaper's request. On April 12, 2012 *Daily Trust* again sent the same request to the new Inspector General of Police with a reminder but there was no response.

On January 7, 2012, *Daily Trust* through a Freedom of Information request to the Federal Civil Service Commission, sought to know the total number of staff in each ministry and their states of origin. The commission did not respond to the request.

On March 1, 2012, *Daily Trust* wrote the Public Complaints Commission seeking information on the number of complaints received and handled, and budget releases in 2011. On March 27, in a letter with reference number PCC/HQ/ADM.16/74 and signed

by Mr. C. Nwosu, the Commission said the "information you requested are not yet available." Instead, the Commission gave the newspapers its reports for 2009 and 2010.

On March 1, 2012, relying on the FOI Act, *Daily Trust* wrote to the Nigeria Prison Service, requesting information on the number of condemned prisoners, which prisons they are held, the number of hangmen and number of gallows available. The service wrote back on March 14, 2012, asking the newspapers to send its inquiries to the office of the National Security Adviser (NSA).

On March 27, 2012, *Daily Trust* wrote a similar request for the same information to the the National Security Adviser, referring the NSA to the response it received from the Prisons Service.

On May 3, 2012, the Prison Service, by a letter signed by Babatunde Owolabi, provided general information, warning that the data "may be sensitive and injurious" to the service if used inappropriately. The agency did not give *Daily Trust* the number of gallows available or prisons where condemned inmates are held as it requested.

On April 20, 2012, *Daily Trust* wrote the National Assembly requesting details of contracts for the procurement of Jeeps for Senators and Toyota Camry cars for members of the House of Representatives for their committee work. But rather than provide the information, in its reply the National Assembly demanded the specifics of the contracts referred to.

Daily Trust also wrote another FOI letter to the National Assembly asking for the Hansard of specific sessions of the Senate and House of Representatives. This request was ignored.

Daily Trust wrote a letter to the State House on April 20, 2012 asking for details on the number of people who were on the President's delegation during his trips to Australia, Ethiopia and Germany. Initially, officials refused to accept the letter because, according to them, Daily Trust used a wrong nomenclature for the addressee. The paper wrote another letter the way they suggested, to the permanent secretary, State House; this was accepted but there was no reply.

The Ministry of Justice also failed to respond to *Daily Trust*'s let-

ter sent to it on April 20, 2012, seeking a copy of the White Paper on the Galtimari-led Presidential Committee on Security Challenges in the North East Zone

On July 12, 2012, *Daily Trust* wrote to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), requesting details of a recruitment exercise that it had just conducted at that time, but the NNPC denied the request through a letter dated July 17, 2012, with a reference number CSLD.1099. The letter, signed by NNPC's legal adviser, Mr. Anthony C. Madichie, claimed that the provisions of FOI Act did not apply to the corporation. It claimed that the NNPC is a "statutory corporation" and that section 31 of the FOI Act precludes the application of the FOI Act to it.

In July 2017, *Daily Trust* wrote to the NNPC requesting information on turn around maintenance the corporation had carried on the plants in the last 20 years including expenses for them.

In response to the *Daily Trust* request, the NNPC's lawyers, Omale O.B & Co., said the corporation could not grant the request because the information sought was a "trade secret" and confidential information that may "cause harm." It said it could not also give the information because section 31 of the Act excludes it from granting such requests.

On June 1, 2015, *Premium Times* newspaper, through a Freedom of Information letter dated the same day, requested from the Central Bank of Nigeria complete data on the deposits and withdrawals from the Excess Crude Account; revenues from oil and gas exports with dates deposits were made; and deposits from the revenue proceeds accrued from signature bonuses from the award of oil blocks, royalties on awarded oil licenses/leases, and petroleum profit tax/penalties from January 2005 till date.

The newspaper, through another FOI letter also dated June 1, 2015, requested from the NNPC complete data on oil and gas production from January 2005 till date; revenues from oil and gas exports with dates deposits were made to bank accounts from January 2005 till date; deposits from the revenue proceeds accruing from signature bonuses from the award of oil blocks, royalties on awarded oil licenses/leases, petroleum profit tax/ penalties;

and complete data on the deposits to the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) and Excess Crude Accounts.

Neither the NNPC nor the Central Bank responded to the newspaper's request.

In 2013, Atiku Sarki, then reporting for the *New Nigerian* newspaper, made seven FOI requests to various public institutions for which he got two responses which were mere promises to get back to him. None of the institutions supplied the information he requested. Atiku Sarki requested from the Accountant General of the Federation information on how much had been spent by the office on the new Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS) and how much had been saved as a result of the introduction of the system.

In another request to the Office of the President, Atiku Sarki asked for the minutes of the meeting of the Federal Executive Council (FEC) held on Wednesday, June 19, 2012 at which the council approved the resumption of payment of subsidies to marketers which was suspended following the probe in the sector.

From the Federal Ministry of Power, the journalist requested information on the amount spent in the last two years [2010 and 2011] for the procurement of spares for the repair of Egbin and Ughelli Thermal Stations. The ministry responded asking him to direct his request to the Thermal Power Stations with the excuse that the information he requested were not with the ministry.

Atiku Sarki's FOI request to the Corporate Affairs Commission, dated September 19, 2012 sought a breakdown of the Commission's annual revenue generation from January 2008 to August 2013. The Corporate Affairs Commission responded only to say that it would get back to him with the information, but it never did.

But it has by no means all been doom and gloom in the usage of the Act. While some of the media organizations and individual journalists who have attempted to use the Act have faced some challenges, there have also been successes recorded by both the media and other civil society organizations in either the information that they have been able to obtain with the Act or the positive judicial pronouncements that have emanated from the courts as

a result of the efforts of those that have challenged the action of public institutions in denying them information.

Indeed, Malami (2017) had this to say: "It is noteworthy that the bulk of FOIA requests since 2011 have invariably originated from these organizations (i.e. civil society organizations) that by dint of such requests have kept Public Institutions on their toes and also enhanced understanding of the practical aspects of the FOIA."

Although the FOI Act is not yet where a lot of people projected it would be it has nonetheless moved Nigeria from an era of secrecy onto the road to transparency and accountability. In the space of six years of the existence of the FOI Act, thousands of FOI requests have been made to various public institutions at the federal, state and local government levels on various issues like public procurement, health, water, road, education, budget allocation, implementation of projects, and so on.

Some of these requests for information have resulted in full access to the information sought while some have only brought about partial access. Without doubt, a lot of others have been denied with no justifications for denial. From the denial of the FOI requests, court cases have sprang up which have expended the frontiers of the Law by giving positive interpretations to many of the provisions and thereby advanced the implementation of the Act.

The Freedom of Information Act and Its Prospect for Media Practice in Nigeria

Prior to the enactment of the FOI Act, a major challenge for most journalists was the difficulty in obtaining information from government bodies, among others, through legitimate channels. The situation was worsened by the absence of any legal protection for journalists' confidential sources, which created additional challenges for journalists and the media to persuade sources to give them information unofficially. Without access to information, journalism practice was extremely difficult.

The Act, if effectively implemented, can change this situation drastically. With the coming into force of the Act, media professionals now have a real possibility of legitimately obtaining much

of the information they require to do stories that will be of interest to the public and impact governance. In addition, public officials who provide them with information of public interest unofficially will also be protected against any adverse legal or employment related consequences.

Using the law, journalists can approach virtually any public institution and where necessary, some private bodies, to request the information that is relevant for their work. If the law works well, journalists, like other members of the public, should be able to get the information within seven days on average.

In addition, civil servants and other public officials who are privy to information which show a violation of any law, rule or regulation; mismanagement, gross waste of funds, fraud, and abuse of authority; or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety will now be encouraged to come forward voluntarily to reveal such information to the media or to the public through other channels without fear of reprisals.

Obviously, the responsibility for implementation and ensuring compliance with the Act rests with a variety of stakeholders. But the media will be a critical stakeholder in this regard.

Some of the key stakeholders with responsibility for enforcement and ensuring compliance will have to be prompted or prodded to perform their roles for the law to be effective. The media is ideally placed to do the prompting and prodding.

These media and individual journalists can contribute to the effective implementation of the Act, in the following ways:

- Enlightening and educating themselves about the provisions of the Act
- Publicizing and popularizing the Act
- Using the Act to obtain information from public institutions and relevant private institutions.
- Complying with the provisions of the law
- Ensuring that the law is working by monitoring its implementation

Journalists can enlighten and educate themselves about the provisions of the Act by reading the Act to ensure that they are

sufficiently familiar with and fully understand its provisions to be able to discuss it in detail; to enable them ask pertinent questions about the Act; and to enable them challenge any misinformation or inaccurate representation of the provisions of the Act.

They should also try to read up as many materials as possible about access to information issues generally. Unless journalists have a good knowledge and understanding of the Act, they will not be able to write or talk knowledgeably and authoritatively about it; they will not be able to ask intelligent and pertinent questions of public officials and other individuals about the Act; they will not know how to use the Act to obtain information themselves; they will not know what to do or how to bring themselves into compliance with the Act; and they will not be able to monitor its implementation as they will not know what is required to be done under the Act by public institutions and relevant private bodies.

Journalists and the media in general, evidently need to use the Act to obtain information in the course of their work as public records and documents are invaluable assets to journalists and the media as a whole. They are important in ensuring that the media have accurate and reliable facts; in helping the media to correctly report events that may have escaped public attention when they happened or where the full facts are not known.

There are a multitude of records and documents covering a wide variety of issues and subjects, generated daily and stored by various government departments and agencies as well as private bodies. Public institutions, whether at federal, state or local government levels as well as private entities utilizing public funds, performing public functions or providing public services hold a vast amount of information that would constitute a treasure trove for the journalist and the media, whether print or broadcast.

The Freedom of Information Act is a powerful tool through which the media can gain access to these public records and documents. Since government officials are inherently wary of releasing documents which do not favor them to journalists, the Act becomes indispensable as it can be used to compel them to release such records and documents.

Individual journalists as well as media organizations and corporate entities can make an infinite number of applications to any public institution and any private body covered by the Act in an effort to obtain almost any type of information, except the limited categories of exempted information, which can themselves also be obtained where an overriding public interest can be demonstrated.

By so using the Act, the media can itself contribute towards a new culture of openness and transparency as the public institutions get more and more used to being asked for information and begin to develop the practice of giving out information.

Government-owned media, whether owned by federal, state or local governments, are themselves public institutions within the meaning of the Act. They will therefore have to fulfill all the obligations of public institutions required under the Act.

Private media organizations which may be said to be utilizing public funds, performing public functions or providing public services, will themselves also be subject to the application of the Act. They will also have to fulfill the relevant obligations under the Act.

However, for individual journalists and private media organizations that do not fall within the scope of the application of the Act, they nonetheless need to respect and comply with the requirements of the Act and the procedures specified in it in seeking to obtain information under it.

Strict compliance with the requisite procedures outlined in the Act will also enhance their chances of obtaining information under the Act and successfully challenging any denial of access to information. Whenever they fail or neglect to comply with the provisions of the Act, they may unwittingly be providing grounds, justification or excuses for public institutions or relevant private bodies to deny them access to information.

Journalists and the media also have an important role in ensuring that the Act is working by monitoring its implementation. They can do this in two principal ways, namely:

- By submitting requests for information to public institutions and private entities covered by the Act, and thereafter

documenting and reporting on their experiences on how many relevant institutions satisfy the requirements of the Law.

- By a systematic assessment of the level of compliance by public institutions with various actions mandated by the law and issuing reports of their findings

Since all public institutions and private bodies covered by the Act have numerous obligations under the Act, journalists and the media have a lot of work to do in monitoring compliance with these obligations.

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3

Corruption in the Nigerian media: The brown envelope syndrome

By Lanre Idowu

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The question, "Is the Nigerian media corrupt?" may well be met with a reply: Is the color of the sky blue? Nigeria, alongside many other states, is grappling with the developmental challenges of corruption to good governance, transparency and accountability. For much of the period of this study, 1999-2016, corruption was a constant challenge for the four administrations that occupied office. In recognition of its reality and menace, reformatory institutional organs were established during this period to curtail the spread of corruption by punishing culprits convicted through due process. The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) are two of such bodies established to fight corruption. Important legislations such as the Freedom of Information Act, the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Public Procurement Act were also passed during this period in the effort to throw light on hitherto murky terrains that promoted corruption. As an outcome of this anti cor-

ruption fight, EFCC Chairman, Nuhu Ribadu told the BBC in 2006 his agency had recovered more than $5bn between 2004 and 2006 and successfully prosecuted 82 people (BBC, 2006).

Ten years later, in 2016, Nigeria's Attorney General Abubakar Malami told a conference in Abuja on financial fraud, cyber crime and other cross border crimes that Nigeria recovered $2 trillion or N400 trillion in twelve years. Of this sum, $2 million was attributed to military dictator, General Sani Abacha in 1998. Malami disclosed that a Nigerian government report in 2013 revealed that between 2001 and 2013, N20.6 trillion or $33.14 billion was tracked as illicit funds flows into Nigeria's financial system of which $7.4 billion were proceeds of corruption and embezzlement (Vanguard, 2016).

The extent of corruption and other social vices in any society often reflects the room or latitude given to it and the attendant consequences. Mismanagement, avarice, poor legal framework and weak enforcement have all combined to crown corruption as a way of life and give Nigeria an unflattering reputation. Not surprisingly, as the media do not operate in splendid isolation from the rest of society, corruption by various accounts also thrives in the media. "Corruption in the Nigerian media: The Brown envelope syndrome" is, therefore, a declarative statement that recognizes there is corruption in the Nigerian media, which is decorated in protective garb (of a brown envelope) and is so rife that it has become a pattern.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

In examining our key words, "Corruption", "Nigerian media", "Brown envelope" and "Syndrome", our concern is not esoteric pontifications about corruption being real or imagined, homegrown or imported, but the desired need to set the tone for a deeper understanding of a phenomenon that has shaped media performance and will continue to do so for more ill than good for some time to come. We agree with Skjerdal (2010, 307) that:

> On the basis of informal accounts and an increasing number of media commentaries addressing the dilemma of brown envelope there is legitimate reason to believe that this phenomenon and other types of informal incentives and bribes are common in African media practice.

Nigeria being an active and big player in African media practice, our interest recognizes and shares three broad focal areas as germane to understanding the phenomenon of "brown envelope" journalism. They range from the socio-political factors guiding daily living in Nigeria, to the economic realities constraining media practice, and the interest in seeing journalism as a profession and occupation with its own codes of ethics. In weighing the clash of these factors and the resultant impact on media practice, this essay brings to bear the perspectives of a journalist, who has been on the field as a reporter and writer, an editor who has deployed journalists to various assignments, evaluated and interrogated their submissions, a media ombudsman with extensive experience. It adds the insights of a trainer who has interacted with participants on issues of professional practice, and a spokesperson that has experienced, firsthand, journalists and some of their antics in relation to the subject of discussion.

Corruption

Globally, corruption is a vile word that describes dishonesty, bribery, fraud, sleaze, vice and racketeering. It is a development issue akin to debilitating diseases for which the world is struggling to find a panacea. It navigates the corridors of power relations and wealth distribution. Corruption is not a stranger to the contests to access power, position and privilege, wealth, especially public wealth, and influence. Corruption is driven by the quest to have an edge over others using public resources for private gains. It is about appropriating to self what belongs or should belong to the commonwealth.

Arising from poor records of governance and a skewed notion of public service in its first four decades of existence as an independent country, Nigeria as stated has earned an unenviable reputation as a corrupt state where might was seen as right, and impunity enthroned as acceptable way of life. The media being part and parcel of society reflect the morality and behavior prevalent in society (Yusha'u: 2009, p.167) and (Omotoso, 2017). Even as various news media organisations are making honest efforts to stay above board and monitor governance on behalf of the public, the

lure of corruption explains why the media as watchdogs of power and governance have not always lived up to the constitutional and societal expectations of holding government accountable to the people. They have not always maintained the professional detachment that is critical to even-handed assessment of happenings in society. In not paying sufficient attention to their professional, social and constitutional responsibilities, they, alongside political and business leaders, share some responsibility for the poor image cultivated for Nigeria in its first five decades of existence.

Acts of corruption in the media can be seen at three different levels involving the individual, the organization and across organizations. Because of the odious images attached to corruption, it is usually done discreetly; its modus operandi known only to the initiates or the observant. A discussion of the lexicon of terms applied to corruption in the Nigerian media explains its growing prevalence and the rising sense of entitlement that accompanies it. The debilitating impact of corruption on the national economy dictates that it engages more than a passing attention. There have been some efforts at addressing it. Luckily, the government of the day holds the war against corruption as one of its three pillars of concern; the other two being insecurity/terrorism and the depressed economy. Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari was not being alarmist when he declared in 2015: "If we do not kill corruption in this country, corruption will kill Nigerians" (The Nation: 2015, March 13).

Nigerian media

By Nigerian media, we refer to the media of communication employed to reach out to, or communicate with, a mass or vast audience in a plural society like Nigeria. It is differentiated from person-to-person communication although messages obtained through a mass medium are often reinforced through person-to-person communication. The media are channels and platforms to engage, share messages, and receive feedback. They may come as the traditional media of print (newspapers and magazines), electronic (radio and television) or the digital media of using the internet superhighway to reach audiences on websites or

in the social media. The Nigerian media came into being in 1859 as a missionary effort to promote news-reading. From that initial missionary effort, the Nigerian media developed into an economic tool of sharing community and trade news, and morphed into an organ of raising social and political consciousness, even if their performance on this score has been irregular. The Nigerian media now cover newspapers, magazines, television stations, radio stations, and online publications.

Brown Envelope

Brown envelope is a euphemism for bribe; it refers to the purchasing of favorable mention in the media in the short term or cultivating favorable relationship in the long term through cash and/or material gifts. As Skjerdal (2010, 369) perceptibly observes, it has three ingredients: it is personal, confidential and contractual. It is a pact between a giver and receiver, a buyer and a seller. It attempts to confer legitimacy on the medium by building on the time-honored practice of exchanging correspondence with individuals or corporate bodies through letter writing. The envelope confers some respect on the addressee as worthy of special and confidential attention from the addresser.

Syndrome

This refers to a condition, pattern, disorder, and symptoms of a larger problem. In the context of the news media, it refers to the growth of corruption into an acceptable pattern, a tolerated condition, and a disorder that indicates a larger societal problem about the scourge of corruption.

Our task then is to examine the existence, indeed, the prevalence of corruption in the Nigerian media for which the much talked about brown envelope merely illustrates, and establish what consequences this disorder has for the professional health of Nigerian journalism and what could be done to strengthen the capacity of the Nigerian media to play its watchdog role much more effectively.

UNDERSTANDING THE NIGERIAN MEDIA, THE THEATRE OF, AND ACTOR IN THE DISORDER

The Nigerian media owe their origins to the town of Abeokuta,

capital of present day Ogun State, where missionaries from the Church Missionary Society of England had established a mission in 1846. Freed Nigerian slaves who had been quartered in Freetown, Sierra Leone, had repeatedly implored the missionaries to establish the Yoruba (Abeokuta) mission in their desire to reunite with their kin back home and extend the liberating message of Christianity. The freed slaves' clamor finally resonated with the CMS who thereafter dispatched three missionaries to Abeokuta through Badagry in December 1842 first on an exploratory mission and later in 1846 as a definite mission. In a setting that saw Christianity as a redeeming theology and education as crucial to its appeal, it was not surprising that a Caucasian missionary, the Rev Henry Townsend (1815-1886) introduced *Iwe Irohin* fun awon Egba ati Yoruba (The newspaper for the Egbas and Yorubas) which emphasized the need to develop a pool of readers who can be reached through the pages of *Iwe Irohin*. Townsend's expressed objects of establishing the paper, *Iwe Irohin* (The Newspaper) in December 1859, thirteen years after the establishment of Nigeria's first primary school and six months after the founding of the first secondary school, was to stimulate in the people the habit of seeking information through reading, promote the virtues of the written word, and the empowering influence of information on commerce and politics (Idowu, 2017).

Shape

The Nigerian media, today, come in all shapes, sizes, formats, and guises. For the print media, they range from the handy, sensationalist tabloids, to the sober, wannabe broadsheets. Various magazines, basking in the colors of the rainbow, adorn the newsstands; all struggling for a limited market share. Numerous sites abound on the digital sphere, all in search of audiences.

Color and Tone

The media parade all sorts of players from the trained to the untrained; from the purpose-driven journalists to the gatecrashers, the ethical and the whimsical. They discuss all manner of issues: the puerile, salacious, ennobling and useful, the enervating and the elevating. All manner of subjects is covered from politics

to economy, religion, sports, real estate, music, fashion, lifestyle, to horticulture, agriculture, energy, the environment, oil and gas etc.

Scope

It is a vast world across different platforms: newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations, online publications, blogs and chat-rooms and across various offering in the social media. Access to information is vast. Mobile telephony is ubiquitous. Internet access continues to grow in Nigeria with disruptive consequences for the old order of information dissemination and management. From a paltry figure of 200, 000 in 2000, there are now 93, 591, 174 internet users in 2017, which represents a 146, 637% growth rate. This figure further represents a population penetration of 48.8% of Nigeria's 191 million people, which is close to the world average of 49.7%. Facebook holds the widest appeal with 16 million users or 10.9% of Africa's 146.6 million Facebook users (PWC, 2015). Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn are other popular platforms. The emergent picture of this growing connectivity of Nigeria to the digital public sphere is one of enhancing the prospects of participation, engagement and citizenship (Olukotun, 2015, p.19). Excessively filtered stories in the mainstream media are giving way to other outlets, even if the gate-keeping function of the media is increasingly compromised with worrisome consequences for the integrity of the information shared and the speed it is disseminated.

The newspapers are experiencing mixed fortunes with the growing importance of the digital media. Nonetheless, there are 58 regular newspapers discussing, politics, economy, and lifestyle issues (*Media Review*, 2015).

There are at least 43 regular online newspapers and magazines with Premium Times, The Cable being household names (Iyare, 2015).

The National Broadcasting Commission lists 332 radio stations, and two national networks, one belonging to the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria and the other to Ray Power, Nigeria's first licensed private radio station. In addition, there are 40 Internet

Radio stations (Wikipedia).

There are 112 television stations with the Nigerian Television Authority and the African International Television providing network services.

Geopolitical ownership/presence of the Nigerian media

Table 1.0 Major Newspapers

South West: *Nation*, *Punch*, *Tribune*
South South: *Thisday*, *Vanguard*, *Independent*
South East: *New Telegraph*, *Sun*
North Central: *Authority, Blueprint, Leadership*
North West: *Trust, People's Daily*
North East: *Trust*

Table 2.0 Television (112)

South West: TVC, MITV, Galaxy, LTV, OGTV
South South: AIT, Channels, Silverbird
South East: ABS
North Central: PRTV
North West: Abubakar Rimi TV
North East: Gotell
Network: NTA (public-owned)

Table 3.0 Radio (332)

South West: 94 Radio Continental, Inspiration FM, Star FM
South South: 56 Cool FM? Ray Power FM, Rhythm FM
South East: 47 Classic FM, Wazobia
North Central: 42
North West: 51 Radio Freedom
North East: 24 Gotell
FCT: 18
Network: FRCN and Ray Power

The Nigerian media remain vibrant, diverse with mixed participation of various tiers of government, private, religious and educational ownership interests. Even as there is positive growth of private media organs in the north, especially in newspapering,

there is still noticeable gulf in ownership between the north and south. Technological advancement has seen rising influence of new media in overcoming spatial boundaries, providing a more intense media reach, that is as liberating as it is disruptive. The speed and ends to which the new media allow content to travel remain a current challenge for the industry in terms of the legal environment in which the media operate and the ethical waywardness that envelopes journalism practice.

GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE NIGERIAN MEDIA

Political, Noisy and Confrontational

Owing to the pattern of growth and development over the years from the days of missionary activities, to the era of colonial administration, the period of nationalist struggle for independence, the effort at self rule, to the collapse of the First Republic, the period of military rule, and subsequent efforts at civil rule, the mainstream Nigerian media have cut the picture of a political, noisy and confrontational instrument of constructing social legitimacy (Agbaje, 1992, Olukotun, 2002). Ownership often comes to define tone and content with ongoing uneven efforts to professionalize news content. The politics of the land is easily discerned in media content as often media ownership is another way of playing politics.

The media remain veritable platforms for contesting ideas and influence. Major ownership in newspapering tends to be private, with pockets of pronounced politicians owning media organs and sympathizers directing affairs at others. Broadcasting remains largely in the hands of the public sector even as its operations increasingly tilt to commercial broadcasting in the search for more funds to run the stations beyond the grants from the owner-governments. The core news content and programming, however, tend to reinforce the interests of the current occupants of public office, with the opposition given limited media access even when they offer to pay to be heard.

Politics remains the main staple of the Nigerian media. *Media Review*'s Annual Top Ten Stories published in the Nigerian media as determined by Top Ten Editors for the period 2001 to 2006 showed politics as the main focus. In the 2006 survey of stories

conducted January 2007, for instance, seven of the Top Ten stories were on politics. They ranged from the gale of impeachments, to the conflict between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar, spate of political killings, reinstatement of Oyo State Governor, Rasheed Ladoja, the declaration of state of emergency in Ekiti State and the sacking of Chris Ngige as Anambra State governor (Idowu, 2009, p.174-175).

Event signalers

Generally, the media tend to generate more heat than light. They are adept at signaling events, sensationalizing on current issues to catch public attention. In the Top Ten Stories survey for 2003, Media Review noted the following as elements that guided Nigerian editors' news judgment: conflict and controversy, shock and unusualness, disruption and destruction, criminality and grandstanding (Idowu, 2009, p.139). Trend reporting of development-oriented issues has never been the strength of the media, with focus on big political and business figures with elite interests/ clashes framed as public issues.

Between Reporting of Issues of Public Interest and Issues in the Public Interest

The quality of content especially on issues of corruption remains concerning. As previously noted, a lot still needs to be done in the news judgment and management of our media personnel.

> Beyond the general excitement generated in the media, what's the quality of reporting generally? How often do the media break corruption stories? How do the media cover corruption-related reports? Is their focus long shot or close up? Are the reports of public interest or in the public interest? Are they excitable watchdogs or docile lapdogs? (Idowu, 2009, p.186).

The Nigerian media's underbelly is in follow ups, tiebacks and nuanced interpretations. Too much focus is paid to the immediate, the here-now, and to issues of public excitement, which are not necessarily those that are in the overall public interest. Attention is usually too fleeting and flighty before something else comes into the picture. The intrepid and crusading journalism that defined a section of the media's principled opposition to military rule in the 1990s is now a rarity. The result is the steady diet of the

predictable and commonplace and the dearth of the rigorous, the investigative and the revealing. This enthronement of the ordinary and the glorification of the safe and instant materially-rewarding journalism results from the corruption of social values. It is a toga the Nigerian media need to shed for a more assured future.

Occasional flashes of Brilliance

To be sure, there have been instances since the return to civil rule that the media have discharged themselves creditably on issues of (public) corruption. The exposure that led to the resignations of the first Speaker of the House of Representatives, Salisu Buhari in 1999 and the first Senate President, Evan(s) Enwerem in 1999/2000 on dodgy academic credentials epitomized the media's moral outrage that leadership must be above board. The muted campaign on similar charges related to the former Governor of Lagos State, Bola Tinubu, however, suggested double standards on the part of the crusading section of the media that contributed to the ousting of the legislative duo at the centre. The media campaign in 2014 that culminated in the resignation of Aviation Minister Stella Oduah over questionable expenditure on bullet proof cars also stands out to the credit of the media. So did the assault on the Goodluck Jonathan administration's prevarication on the issue of corruption that resulted in the president's faux pas that "stealing is not corruption." The short-lived enterprising example of NEXT newspaper deserves commendation. When the health of President Umaru Yar'adua was failing, it was NEXT that alerted the country to it and the attendant intrigues of a cabal ruling in the name of a prostrate president. The exposes on the sweetheart deals in the oil sector under the watch of petroleum minister, Dieziani Madueke were also refreshingly different.

Partisanship is visible

Although every successful publication must have a defined editorial focus, the professional evenhandedness that should accompany news treatment is not always present. It is not uncommon to find several publications not agreeing on the basic facts of a story. Often, the editorial position of Nigerian publications is defined by ethnic, religious and geopolitical considerations and the

pressures of the commercial place to outdo the competition. The good news is that diverse ownership provides some cancelling out of the overt prejudices.

> Because the country is diverse and the newspaper ownership is diverse too, no government can say it controls the media. If one or two newspapers are supporting a government, there are others, who by virtue of ownership structure, will do otherwise (Bello, 2017).

But poorly served is the news consumer who relies on only one source. What remains constant is the uneven fidelity to ethics by our news media, which in some cases are driven by naked corruption arising from greed and insufficient homework and latent considerations such as the corruption of values, fostered by the socio-political climate and the economic realities facing the individual journalist or media organization concerned.

Elite and Hampered Media

Notwithstanding the diversity in ownership of the Nigerian media, organs of the media have over the years served as instruments for the contestation of power and ideas (Agbaje, 1992). Much of what is prevalent in the body politic finds expression in the media. Corruption has been a cankerworm in Nigerian politics. It is not surprising that corruption finds bold expression in the media as media access in the traditional remains elite-centered, expensive, and limited in reach. This unevenness of media access is in itself corruptive and provides a development challenge. Much of the publishing model in the country relies on commercial advertising for sustenance. The advertisers are usually the elites with the ad capital. Their focus is on the inner cities which hold the spending capital. In the face of a troubled economy, the advertiser has grown more powerful with enhanced capacity to shape media content, which increasingly is not the product of independent media judgment but the induced preference of the commercial advertiser.

The result is growing disconnect between perceived reality by the public and professed reality of the commercial persuaders on the one hand, and widening gulf between the urban and rural communities, on the other hand. It is a continuing contest for ad-

vantage between elite groups. And because the media owners are usually political/business interests, access is usually restricted to fellow soul mates or those with the financial power to purchase it. The result is predictable content, limited flow of ideas, and constricted space for balance in public discourse. The cherished role of the media giving a democratic vent for the sharing of public intelligence and consequently fostering development is thus compromised. Rather than vigilant watchdogs the emergent picture for a large section of the media has been one of co-opted partners or compromised lapdogs.

The parlous economy that has seen progressive devaluation in the national currency between 2000 and 2015 has also constrained the economic power of the media with dire consequences. In particular, since the fall in oil prices of mid 2014, growth has slowed down. Whilst there was 6.3% economic growth in 2014, it fell to 2.7% in 2015. GDP contracted by 2.2%. By 2016, inflation had doubled to 18.8% from 9.6% in 2015 (World Bank). For the media, between 1999 and 2016, many titles like the *Sketch*, *Concord*, *Post Express*, *Anchor*, *Tempo*, *National Interest*, *The Comet*, *New Age*, *Spectator Weekly*, *Westerner*, *Newswatch*, *Next, New Nigerian*, *Nigerian Compass* and *PM News/The News* have disappeared from the newsstand (Olukotun, 2015, p.36-37).

Since then, the *National Mirror* has joined the list. *Tell* and *Champion* are occasional publications making cameo appearances when they strike luck with advertisers. For many others, the word is "surviving" not thriving as circulation remains static and advert patronage is limited. Business models of publishing are being reviewed with several migrating online even as the means to make online publishing profitable remains a present challenge. Where the media are not free and strong enough to discharge the expected responsibility to society, it is a matter of time before that influence begins to be eroded. That has been the lot of a good section of the Nigerian media in the 4th Republic. They have resorted to all sorts of schemes to keep afloat in the stormy sea of publishing with unpleasant consequences for the media's ability to carry out investigative reporting on which depends such con-

cerns as transparency, accountability and good governance.

With some knowledge of the theatre of media practice, the shape, size, scope of the media and the general underpinnings that drive content as useful background, it becomes necessary to examine more closely the subject of corruption in the media.

CORRUPTION IN THE MEDIA

Corruption as we have noted is a vile word, which conjures negativity. Corruption is about dishonesty, bribery, fraud, sleaze, vice and racketeering. Dishonesty may entail barefaced lie, an act of cover up, the practice of looking the other way because favors have exchanged hands or will exchange hands.

Bribery is inducement to act in a way that one would not ordinarily do, or in a way that is unusual, irregular and conflicts with acceptable social norms and practice. Fraud is a scam, a hoax designed to deceive and deprive a party of something they would not part with ordinarily.

An act of sleaze is sordid, ugly and repugnant to a community's or society's ethos. Its ugliness is in its baseness as something to be avoided or done in extreme secrecy because there is nothing edifying about it to bring it out in the open. Vice is an undesirable quality; an act that is bad and without merit. It is the antonym of virtue. In religious terms, it is sinful and requires atonement for forgiveness to follow. Racketeering is an organized means of scamming or depriving the public of something that is rightly theirs.

In totality, corruption is abusive in character; it is taking undue advantage of public office or privileged position for private gain. Globally, it is frowned upon. The Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists (1998) expressly decries corruption under Article 7 (i) on REWARD AND GRATIFICATION: "A journalist should neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information." It explains in 7 (ii) "To demand payment for the publication of news is inimical to the notion of news as a fair, accurate, unbiased and factual report of an event."

Using the definition of corruption by Transparency International as the "abuse of entrusted power for private gain", corruption in

a news media setting can be interpersonal between a reporter and a news source in the exchange of money or favors for private gain. It can be intra organizational where an editor directs reporters to slant stories to fit a preconceived agenda, notwithstanding facts to the contrary. It can be inter-organizational where the organization arranges with another a stream of favorable reports for a consideration. Corruption obtains in extortion where news subjects are blackmailed to part with money/favors for news to be suppressed by individuals and organizations. It dovetails into racketeering as a non transparent way of funding the media through undisclosed/invisible support such as behind-the-scene sponsorship by government, private or commercial interests to guarantee steady stream of positive reporting disguised as independent coverage.

The Lexicon of Corruption

Corruption's prevalence in Nigerian journalism is betrayed in journalist's wordlist for it. "Awoof" is an age-long word for a windfall, an extra earning. It resonates so well with West Africans that it has been employed as a product name for various sales promotions by telecom giants, MTN and Airtel and a top bank like the United Bank for Africa. When journalists talk of awoof, the reference is to undocumented income, a gift for services rendered or expected to be performed.

"Better life" is an endearing term that sees a bribe as an investment in a better life for the journalist. It is a parody of a program started by Nigeria's first lady, Maryam Babangida, during the Ibrahim Babangida military presidency (1985-1993). She had launched an empowerment scheme termed "Better life for Rural Women", which promoted agriculture cooperatives and mainstreamed women's plight to national attention. In full, "Better Life" meant Better Life for Nigerian journalists through an informal practice of cash and or gifts for positive news coverage. Others call it "BTA", an acronym for Basic Transport Allowance, a perquisite for journalists in the period spanning 1980 through 2000. A cash gift from a news source at a news event, for example, qualifies for a BTA, which journalists had come to expect as part of the freebies of the job. It is seen as a token of "thank you" for attending the event.

"Communiqua" is another parody of the word, communiqué. Journalists are not unfamiliar with communiqués being issued after major conferences and seminars. Aside from obtaining these official pronouncements at the end of such meetings, corrupt journalists also expect their own communiqua as their individual takeaways. They rationalize it as akin to the honoraria resource persons take home from such parleys.

"Family support" or "handshake", is also deceptively attractive. It is no more than a description of untaxed income as welcome gift in the course of the job. The same is true of "pay as you go", a term borrowed from the advent of global system for mobile communication (GSM) in Nigeria in 2001. The prepaid bouquet as distinct from postpaid product offering was termed pay-as-you-go for uninterrupted access to service. In the same token, continuous payment of bribe by news sources to journalists qualifies in their lingo as "pay as you go" for regular exposure or coverage.

Corrupting setting, Corrupt Media

Corruption is a malaise that afflicts all societies. Since Nigerians are human beings and humans are susceptible to the vice of corruption, Nigerians are not immune from corruption. In a developing country, especially one with weak institutions where the processes of transparency and accountability are still in infancy, corruption ranks as one of the ills that mark out the underdevelopment of such societies. There are certain practices among various ethnic groups that make up Nigeria, that unwittingly predispose the people to some corrupting practices. Among the peoples, common values are prevalent. There is respect for age, position and authority. Elders are respected, if not venerated; authority figures and positions are highly regarded. Acts of hospitality expressed in extending gifts to visitors are also important to Nigerians. It could range from the offer of water or carbonated drink to a guest to a whole meal and material gifts when the visitor departs. It is not a one-way traffic. Visitors, too, are known to bring gifts to their guests as a hospitable gesture. Some journalists have been caught in this vortex of not being able to differentiate between what is a gift or bribe; between what is a hospitable

or compromising act. Consider a situation where a reporter, after interviewing a subject, takes his leave and is offered some money to supplement his transport fare. His gentle protest not to take the gift can be frowned upon as disrespectful.

(Oshunkeye, 2011) quotes Lekan Otufodunrin, an editor with the Nation as narrating the story of Prof. Itse Sagay, a lawyer, who gave a journalist a cash gift and reprimanded him (the journalist) as being rude for wanting to reject the gift:

> Somebody was telling me recently about a reporter from The Guardian who went to interview Professor Itse Sagay, one of Nigeria's foremost constitutional lawyers who just turned 70. When he was leaving, he was given some token, but the journalist refused to take it and the Professor got angry and insisted that he must take it. 'If I want a favor, I don't have to talk to you,' Sagay was quoted as saying. 'I can talk to your boss. I know your MD and I know your editor. So, if I give you money, it is not because I need a favor from you.' The Professor also reminded him that it was even rude for him to reject something from someone that is old enough to be his father.

Yet the Code of Ethics of Nigerian journalists under article 7 (i) forbids a journalist to "neither solicit nor accept bribe, gratification or patronage to suppress or publish information."

HOW CORRUPTION MANIFESTS IN THE MEDIA

A 2017 Focused Group Discussion (FGD) involving ten journalists, seven print and three broadcast, five men and five women, with a mean experience of eight years, provides useful insights into the phenomenon of corruption. Their views will be interspersed with other findings in this section. All agree corruption in the media is prevalent and systemic; all admitted being conversant with the code of ethics of Nigerian journalists. All agreed that one common area where journalists are exposed to direct bribery is at press conferences where a news subject addresses the press on issues the subject wants the press to consider as important and also fields questions from the press. I begin with a personal example.

At Press conferences

My first encounter with media corruption was at an event in Ijebu Ode hosted by the Nigerian Agriculture, Commerce, Industry

and Manufacturing Association (NACCIMA) in 1983. I had been assigned to cover the association's luncheon, which included a visit to its patron, Chief Adeola Odutola (1902-1995). At the luncheon, I noticed that about six of us—journalists from various media houses—were on the same table. Midway into the lunch, a man clutching a folder, brought out some envelopes and placed one before a journalist before moving on to the next. When he placed one before me, I asked what it was. He answered: For your transportation. I opened it and saw it contained Naira notes. Then it hit me; it was the notorious bribe money I had been warned against. So, I said to him: Thank you very much sir, but I cannot accept this. I came with my car and my organization is responsible for the fuelling. He looked surprised, and said I should keep it as it's provided for by his organization. I pushed it to him and noticed the quizzical expression on the faces of two journalists whose acquaintance I had just made. One whispered to me; 'take it, it's yours.' I insisted the man, who I later learnt was a PRO (public relations officer), must take his envelope and he did. After the event as I headed back to Lagos with one of the journalists I met there, the PRO accosted me, saying he respected me. We talked for about two minutes and I told him I understood he was doing his job but he should appreciate I was doing mine also. We parted on a good note and I made my way back to Lagos.

Such assignments as a lunch incorporating a press conference are desired by some journalists who see them as lucrative events to go home with some extra salary benefits. Nkereuwem (2012) speaks "of the shame that overwhelms me when I see my colleagues rushing for the Brown Envelope that are usually on offer at press conferences and other events."

Such journalists can be seen milling around after events in the expectation that some envelopes would be shared. Where such expectation is taking too long to meet, some bold ones are wont to ask: "Anything for the press?" or suggestively inform: "We want to go back to the office to file our reports." Where the host is hard of hearing, some journalists try other means. "Oga (master), we want to go and work on your story but can you help us with trans-

port money?" For good effect, some may even add; "We haven't been paid for some time, but because of the importance of your event, we had to make private arrangements to be here…" They usually leave the sentence hanging, hoping the message would sink in.

A colleague's experience in 2016 when she invited a female reporter to an event illustrates this point:

> She told me that she had come to cover an event to which I invited her only because of her regard for me as she had to hire a camera because all cameras had been assigned for other events that day. She mentioned a figure and left it hanging that I should refund the 'cost' so that the story could be aired. I had to pay her.

If the news subject does not play ball, then it is not uncommon to black out the interview as it happened back in 1988 to the then Primate of the Church of Nigeria, Rt. Rev Abiodun Adetiloye. The cleric had spoken to some journalists at the Murtala Muhammed Airport, Ikeja on a number of national issues. The journalists, however, blacked him out because he did not give them "transport money" (Idowu, 1996, p.198).

One story that illustrates the corrupting appeal of press conferences or arranged interviews with newsmakers remains the August 14, 2010 midnight meeting of former President Ibrahim Babangida with as many as 40 journalists at his Minna home in Niger State. Babangida, military president from 1985 to 1993, was positioning himself for another shot at the presidency, this time through the ballot box. His publicists had arranged this midnight parley with senior journalists, including editors, to learn, first hand, of Babangida's planned return to office. An online news medium, Sahara Reporters, reported that Babangida had not only gathered such a large crowd of journalists to his Minna home at that strange hour but each journalist went home with N250, 000 or $1666 as transport reimbursement.

Although the news pages of Nigeria's mainstream newspapers kept mute about the development, two critical commentaries at that time on its consequences for the health of the Nigerian media are relevant here. Idowu (2010) in IBB, Sahara Reporters, and the Press, decried the growing practice of journalists receiving money

to publish stories and explains the appeal of corruption:

> Too many things are taken for granted in Nigerian journalism that the strange has become the accepted. Many journalists see nothing wrong in accepting money to publish stories. Take for example the age-long practice of facility tours when Governor 'A' or Company 'B' invites the media and pays for the journalist's passage and accommodation in expectation of coverage. While the facilitators see it as opening doors to better media access, the journalists, sadly, find such trips augmenting if not guaranteeing their pay for the month. In their thinking new contacts have been cultivated; new horizons are waiting to be explored. The result is a pattern of tainted reporting far from the envisaged professionally processed news served to the public.....Receiving monetary gifts in the name of transport reimbursement, no matter how popular it is, compromises the integrity of news.

Olatunji Dare, in his column of September 7, 2010 in *The Nation*, accused the editors present at the chat of indiscretion:

> They unwittingly stultify themselves when they lend themselves to that kind of usage and invite the kind of speculation that has attended what was clearly a misadventure, however, noble their intentions.....(dismissing midnight as)....hardly the most auspicious time of day or of night for transacting serious, honest-to-goodness business.

So far, we can say "Brown envelope" remains inducement given by individuals and organizations desirous of positive mention in the media. It thrives because it obeys the law of supply and demand. There must be a giver and a receiver and for as long as there are people willing to pay there will be those ready to accept. The third point is that such episodic public assignments attract a breed of journalists.

Pack Journalism

Corruption is the name of the game where journalists operate like cartels by encouraging pack journalism. Those who practice this find it beneath them to hanker for envelopes at public events. Theirs is an effort to deodorize an odious practice. In full bloom, pack journalism operates with appointed coordinators to negotiate their fee for covering their 'clients' events. They usually work under the guise of beat associations of reporters and correspondents. The client's contact person deals with the coordinator, who, in turn, shares out what is due to the respected participants. These

participants are also graded with "A" publications/organizations earning more than the "B" or "C". Sometimes, also, the promised coverage guides the fee charged. A straight news report on the front page carries higher reward than an inside story. An extensive feature commands more gravitas than a short news report. Usually the coordinator arranges the slant of the reporting and plants similar write-ups in the selected publications. Pack journalism helps in suppressing stories and promoting particular viewpoints. The money does not go to the organizations but the individuals for whom it remains a windfall.

The failure of previous efforts to control, ban, or eradicate pack journalism through outlawing beat associations shows the extent of the problem facing the media. In 2002, the trio of Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) and the Newspaper Proprietors' Association of Nigeria (NPAN) under the umbrella of the Nigerian Press Organization (NPO) banned journalists from belonging to beat associations in reaction to the widespread perceived corruption of the associations. As I noted then:

> They (associations) are accused of operating like cartels, which rather than foster competition among members, encourage pack journalism. Members, upon pain of exclusion, reportedly share reports from the pool and agree on angles to play up in their reports for reasons that are hardly altruistic. The result is that members' reports to their various media are beginning to sound, read and appear too similar (Idowu, 2009, p.122).

The desperate action was not expected to put the corrupt practice out of business and it did not. As I warned:

> Banning these beat associations does not mean they have ceased to exist. The directing minds may well choose to be subtler about their operations. Truth is solving a problem has created another. In saying that reporters cannot freely join an association, their right to free assembly is being short-changed. In slapping a blanket ban on these associations, the NPO is adjudging all guilty before trial. This is hardly an ennobling statement about our emerging democracy (Idowu, 2009: 124).

Many years after, the problem remains ingrained into Nigerian journalism practice.

Protection fee

Some well-heeled reputation managers of some organizations also support their media contacts through regular payments of money into their accounts as a way of maintaining their relationship of mutual benefits. The money is paid to the contacts to watch out for negative reports and snuff them out before they grow into public nuisance or disturbance and also as an expression of goodwill for regular use of their reports. This may not be tied to specific events but qualifies as a protection fee payable regularly, sometimes at festive occasions. In this regard, a racket is put in place to exploit the traditional virtues of hospitality to seduce and compromise the media.

No matter the veneer the institutional persuaders may apply to the practice, corruption is the name of the game where news managers offer protective news coverage to clients in exchange for regular pay. Olukotun (2002, p.79) cites the example of an offer to a senior journalist at the Daily Times in the early 1990s by a top management staff of the paper to write "pro-government articles in order to attract allowances outside his salary from security agencies."

The practice was not limited to security agents. Private individuals, especially politicians, also promoted it. Nwabauni (2015) gives an account of a top politician who pays protection fee to editors regularly. In one of her contributions to the BBC Letters from African journalists' series, she says of the politician:

> I know a top Nigerian politician who goes beyond brown envelopes to listing a number of editors on his payroll. As he disburses his staff salaries monthly, he also makes payments into the editors' bank accounts. This ensures that whenever he has any "news" to disseminate, it gets published in several media without any questions asked or facts checked.

Looking elsewhere and Passing off

Corruption also resides where compromised journalists ask irrelevant questions when faced with opportunity to grill opinion leaders. Usually, a big name is lined up for an interview with great expectations that some earthshaking disclosures will emanate. Instead of grilling the news source, the journalists revel in asking soft

PPA
FRA
FOIA
ICPC
EFCC
COMMUNIQUA
BTA
PAY AS YOU GO
BROWN ENVELOPE
AWOOF!
PROTECTION FEE
OCCASIONAL TIMES
NOISY TIMES

questions that do little justice to the occasion. Biodun Oduwole, a past president of the Nigerian Guild of Editors, in (Idowu, 2018) explains that whilst trying to fund the Guild's activities during his tenure of office (1993-1996) his executive was forced to rely on public office holders:

> We had a program that brought experts in government to come and address us. I remember one of such incidents; we went to Kaduna and we asked the governor to come and talk to us. I invited Wada Maida (also a past president of the Guild) and I asked him about what the man had done that we could ask questions about. Wada told me he had done nothing. The event turned out a big embarrassment because after the man had addressed us, we started asking question based on the information we had and the man was overwhelmed. But there was a limit to which we could go, because the man was our host. And in that situation, there was nothing we could do? You just have to look for sponsors and because many corporate organisations were not interested in what we do, we had to look towards political sponsors**.**

In other words, the Guild could not grill the governor much so that they would not come across as ingrates who whilst enjoying his 'benevolent' sponsorship of their meeting were also embarrassing him with hostile questioning. So they settled for looking elsewhere, moving on to other safe subjects.

By extension the obsessive practice of seeking state sponsorship of professional and industry activities which is common to media organizations predisposes them to being beholden to such sponsors. It is an admission of the organisations' ill preparedness for creative solutions to challenges of their trade outside of the watchful and approving gaze of state sponsorships and endorsements. Over time, it blunts their journalistic pens and detracts from the weight and impact of the media in the democratic process of holding government accountable to the people.

Dubious Honors

Corruption drives the popular practice of media houses conferring dubious honors on office holders whose activities they are supposed to monitor. Such titles like: "Most Media-friendly Governor", "Best performing Senator from the South South", "Most Gender Sensitive CEO", "Best News Source", "Most corporate socially responsible Bank etc without clear parameters betray an attempt

to confer undue honor and advantage on news subjects, contrary to the notion of reporting as a fair and balanced account of happenings in society. It is no more than a fraudulent attempt to pass off such persons in borrowed garbs.

> When reporters begin to crown news sources with questionable awards, one needs not be clairvoyant to know that the critical faculties that good journalism needs would become blunt over time (Idowu, 2009, p.123).

The tragedy is that what was deemed a shortcoming of beat associations in 2002 has since been taken over by media organizations who now organize all sorts of awards for their clients, with many of them beholden to the sponsors.

As one of the FGD participants observed:

> Today, you have newspapers giving awards. Even NUJ (Nigeria Union of Journalists) gives awards. If you get money from such enterprise, it is not very likely that you would do very balanced stories (on your patrons).

Indeed, news organizations have been known to confer awards on all sorts of characters with questionable antecedents without any sense of shame or remorse.

Deceptive Content packaging

Corruption is at the heart of the practice where the news media present sponsored special section stories as news features. It amounts to non full disclosure and shortchanges the audience. Corruption is promoted where the media unduly sensationalizes, where the headline has little bearing on the body of the story. It is a depraved and short-lived attempt to hoodwink the consumer into patronizing media products that are otherwise undeserving. Corruption is inherent in the use of undue adjectives such as "leader of thought", "opinion leader" to qualify news subjects to whom journalists have a less than professional association. Such stories are said to smell of patronage such as a bottle of beer in bygone era. These days, it refers more to exchange of money. Public relations practitioners speak a lot of many press releases published in the media today only seeing the light of day when supported by pecuniary or material gifts.

Appearance fee at briefings

Some journalists, usually the senior ones, also receive what is known as appearance fee when they attend high profile briefings by politicians or corporate big guns. Sometimes expensive gifts are preferred to cash and this set of journalists has been known to receive high end laptops, I-Pads etc.

WHAT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CORRUPTION?

As stated elsewhere, factors responsible for corruption in the media range from the economic to the political and the social.

> **Economic:** Poor branding, Sliding sales, limited advertising, erosion of appeal by social media, impaired ability of employers to meet obligations—late salaries, inability of staff to discharge their responsibility, pressure to moonlight to make ends meet
>
> **Political:** Inability to differentiate between political sympathies and loyalty to professionalism. Dwindling influence of the media, which are seen as irritants and barely tolerated in political circles.
>
> **Social:** Playing catch up in the face of sweeping social media impact (accompanied) by a sense of professional inadequacy ((Idowu, 2015).

At the heart of corruption is an opportunity for extra income of the illegitimate or difficult-to-justify type. It is not wrong for journalists to want to augment their income as multiple streams of income remain valid, provided they do not arise from situations that conflict with their professional and ethical obligations. The problem arises where the source is hazy, shady and difficult to justify in the open.

Irregular and Poor remuneration

Irregular or low pay can sometimes be a factor in stimulating corrupt practices in journalism. The industry has never been high paying, but the matter is compounded when the low pay is not forthcoming. Journalists resort to moonlighting to make ends meet. Such legitimate outlets as speechwriting, teaching, and research provide additional opportunities for journalists to hone their skills and earn extra income. Others embrace options that provide quicker returns but are less honorable. Journalists of this mould engage in racketeering. In more recent times where the distressed economy has impaired employers' ability to discharge their obligations, journalists have received added boost to indulge in unwholesome practices.

Nkereuwem (2012) provides the depressing salary compensation for Nigerian journalists as ranging:

> Between N20, 000 and N40, 000 ($124-$247). One or two pay about N70, 000 ($432)--these ones are the high flyers. It is therefore conclusive that more than 80 per cent of the journalists in the country do not earn enough to pay their basic bills.

Such reality, says Oshunkeye (2011), provides justification for unethical behavior:

> As long as we continue paying journalists slave wages, as long as media owners continue to pay wages that hardly take journalists home, so long would the roots of corruption in the industry deepen. So long would mediocrity continue to thrive in the industry, and so long would the consuming public continue to doubt products that the media churn out day after day. If the journalists happen to come from organizations that are struggling, or if they work in a media where they are being owed four or five months' salary, it becomes so easy for them to rationalize their decision to accept the offer of 'brown envelope'. And the easier it becomes for them to adulterate the truth they know. And this often puts the society in great jeopardy in the long run.

A female participant at the FGD discussion cites the example of NEXT, an enterprising newspaper, which vanished after two years in the market:

> When (Dele) Olojede started NEXT they were paying well until they couldn't sustain it, because the company could not service their loan. Some of their reporters who were not collecting bribes initially had to start collecting it because they stopped paying. There is a particular case of one who had refused on one occasion, but had to go back to collect it when he realized he had bills to pay.

Greed

Greed has always been a motivator for those without self contentment. The corrupt journalist can be found in the league of those who covet that extra income from unacceptable means that is undisclosed to employers and hidden from the state. It is driven by the desire to keep for oneself what otherwise would have been shared with employers or taxed by the state. It is this factor that appeals more to Nkereuwem (2012) than poor or late pay:

> As much as we may argue that journalists are prone to taking bribes because of their poor remuneration, the truth is that it is greed and the desire for more than we can legitimately acquire that pushes journalists

> to take bribes. If a person cannot take a gun to rob another person because he does not have enough, he ought not to take a bribe because he does not have enough. Both are criminal acts; if you are religious, both are sins.

Low ethical values

Improper conduct is at the heart of corruption. It is the "conscienceless appropriation of the commonwealth for private gain" (Idowu, 2009: 183). At play is the self above the common good. Whilst the common good is about a journalism that informs and educates, that empowers the citizen with useful information and commentary to guide conduct, the corrupt journalist is concerned with self interest and the accruing private gain. While public journalism crows about the journalist's independence of action in selecting the news fare to process and disseminate, corrupt journalism imprisons independent judgment in the court of vested interests. While the service delivery of public journalism is committed to common good if tinged in parts with elements of enlightened self interest, corrupt journalism is about naked self interest. In ruling out poor pay alone as a corrupting factor, Agu (2008) alludes to poor ethical values in journalists as also propelling corruption:

> The remuneration system is bad. Although it has improved in a number of media houses, there is still room for improvement. This, however, does not mean that a good pay alone is a panacea to the prevalent level of corruption. Some people who are well paid are still very fraudulent. There is the need to dwell more on ethical training, history and philosophy, so that the role of the journalist as a trustee of the public and the society becomes internalized as an article of faith.

An environmental journalist who participated in the FGD recalls how his strong ethical values prevented him from succumbing to the lure of lucre:

> In 2014, I did a story on environmental degradation as a result of cement production. The moment we got to the community, the people told us they would not talk to us because other journalists had come at different points but did not do the story. We promised them we would be different. As we continued the story, the company got wind of it and they offered us N10million, but we rejected it. They threatened us on several occasions and got people to talk to me. On another account, they went to my school to report me to the HOD. If you are the type

> that loves money, don't go into journalism.

Wanting to be like Joneses

Journalists get drawn into corrupt acts when they fail to understand the difference between journalism and other sectors of the economy such as banking and energy. Whilst it is true that journalism does not have to sentence its workers into penury, it is unrealistic now to expect basic reportorial duties to command the same pay as an executive in any of the above mentioned sectors. Journalists who become disgruntled because they cannot match up with their relations or friends in these sectors are prone to corruptive acts. Whilst those with strong moral fibre may engage in other legitimate endeavors to augment their income, the morally weak or those with personal sense of inadequacy may readily recourse to accepting invisible income to keep up with the Joneses.

A print journalist at the FGD speaks to the problem when she observed:

> If you want to play according to the rules, you have to be comfortable. What stops me from earning as much as anybody who is any industry? Until people realize that we have a duty to make the democracy work, they won't pay attention to the challenges in the media.

Lack of sufficient Interest

There are many in journalism that are mere birds of passage; they see the occupation as a stepping stone to other things, and lack any passion for it. For such people whatever they can make from journalism and however they make it adds up to the mission of exploiting the job for the immediate rewards it brings. According to the duo of Jimi Disu and Taiwo Obe in the July 9, 2017 edition of The Discourse on Classic FM 97.3, the culture of the newsroom has changed from what it was in the 1980s when they were foot soldiers in the newsroom. The passion of news hunting, they say, has yielded way to journalism as a meal ticket with few news organs showing zero tolerance for corruption.

Conflict of interest

Inability to differentiate between the role of a public interest journalist and special interest publicist is also a common problem for journalists. Many find it difficult to maintain an emotion-

al detachment from the stories they investigate and report. They become so involved they soon wear the garb of a sympathizer and publicist who crosses over from the professional reporter to the unofficial spokesperson that manages the reputation of the organization they are paid to monitor and report on. Because they are so involved, they begin to suppress some unpalatable stories about the organization. They do not need to be paid for the services being rendered. The corruption is inhered in the fact that they have unwittingly started to shortchange their audiences by giving incomplete accounts of what is happening in that sector. It amounts to what I have described elsewhere as "attempting to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds" (Idowu, 2002), (MR, June), 5 2009, p.123).

Ethical ignorance and Poor articulation of Editorial philosophy by Corporate Bodies

There are journalists who are deployed to the field with little grounding in the ethics of the job. Some do not know they are not expected to collect gratification from news sources. Some see it as perks of the office and are acculturated by despicable seniors to see it so. They grow up with a false sense of entitlement with great injury to their individual sense of worth and the soul of the profession. At a seminar for maritime journalists in June 2015 (Idowu, 2015) of the 30 participating journalists, half confessed not being conversant with the code of ethics of Nigerian Journalists, which was adopted in 1998 and a follow up to the Formal agreement of 1978 (NPO). At another seminar for journalists, this time an in-house seminar in a Lagos media house in 2014 (Idowu, 2014), seven of the twenty participants struggled to articulate their organization's editorial policy; a clear indication that many work almost mechanically without a robust understanding of their place within their organization's larger editorial mission. In such situation fidelity to the journalist's pact with society becomes a mere lip service; the watchdog role of the media, clearly understated.

Skills Deficiency is another

Many people lack sufficient knowledge of their job and the required dedication to pursue the long route of cultivating needed

understanding with their contacts on the type of material useful for publication. So, rather than invest in building that relationship, they resort to the short course of inducing media access. A male FGD participant captures the situation:

> One of the problems confronting the industry is inadequacies on the part of several stakeholders. The PR man who wants his material published knows that some of his material are not worthy of being published, so he seeks to influence the media. Rather than just send their invitations and count on the media to use their discretion, what they do is to tout. And when you tout, you pay, knowing that stories compete for attention. PR practice in Nigeria is largely media-driven and they know it.

Poor Branding, Inadequate Capitalization

This poor articulation also speaks to the erosion of the brand identity in the market place, which fuels poor performance as reflected in poor sales and inability to cope with the changing business mode, and which in turn impair employers' ability to pay their workers in due season. Bello (2017) of *Thisday* offers an interesting perspective:

> The media has always been badly funded. We have investors who think the media is what you get into and reap immediately, forgetting that it is expensive with high cost of running and as such profits take time. When they realize this, they stop funding and the workers are left to fend for themselves. There are also investors who go into media business for politics. The readers and stakeholders out there are very discerning. The moment they see that this particular media is for political promotion and it is (being) done in an unprofessional way, they will not buy. When this happens, you will not have a market share or make enough money. That is where the problem begins.

The cumulative result of poor funding, product packaging and market research is that both the organization and the employee resort to desperate measures to stay afloat with dire consequences.

> The result is a dance of survival, which leaves many with broken limbs and sprained ankles, which translate to inability to discharge their responsibilities such as paying salaries on time. In this pitiable condition, individual practitioners find ready excuse to resort to dishonest means to make ends meet and corporate players become mincemeat for capricious interest groups. The public's right to as full a picture of the

> course of events as possible becomes compromised (Idowu, 2002:5, 2009, p.123-124).

Survival

In full realization of the reality of publishing as big business and the deflation of promoters' outsized ego, many publishers become contractor-publishers ready to do the bidding of the state and other vested interests by turning their media to grateful lapdogs for patronage. Many journalists convert their identity cards to extortion licenses in emulation of what the publishers do. Nwabauni's well known example brings a chilling reminder:

> My friend, who was a reporter with one of Nigeria's popular newspapers, said her boss often justified his non-payment of salaries by saying: I've given you a platform to make money. Use it.

This survival mentality accounts for the dent in image when the media was fingered as a beneficiary of slush funds from the amount budgeted for fighting the Boko Haram insurgency in the country's Northeast. Nowhere in recent history is the underwhelming state of the media in matters of rectitude publicly displayed than in the Office of the National Security Adviser's (ONSA's) slush fund that was paid to keep the media quiet following a brazen seizure of newspaper copies from distribution vans and newsstands in June 2014. Government agents had justified the action under the guise they were looking for arms and ammunitions. Expectedly, the move attracted media condemnation, more so when these seizures did not unveil any of these deadly weapons for arms and ammunitions. In the uncertainty of the time, normal operations were disrupted. Issues begging to be addressed ranged from whether the raid was a prelude to renewed assault against the media as was the case under military rule. Some of the victims threatened to sue the government. Some called for a trenchant opposition to the administration.

Spotting an opportunity to resolve the impasse, the newspapers under the aegis of the Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) resolved to dialogue with the government. A meeting was arranged with then President Goodluck Jonathan in Lagos, who apologized for the embarrassment caused NPAN members. An agreement was reached to settle the matter out of court. A

sum of N120 million was agreed to be shared among twelve (later 13) newspaper organizations affected: *Blueprint, BusinessDay, Guardian, Independent, Leadership, Nation, New Telegraph, Nigerian Tribune, People's Daily, Sun, Thisday, Trust, and Vanguard*. Each organization was to pocket N9 million and the balance of N3 million, given to the NPAN secretariat. By the time the scandal broke out at the probe panel instituted by the government of President Muhammadu Buhari, eight of the beneficiaries had collected their allocations. The deal became a scandal in the public space when it was established that the slush fund was from the money earmarked by the previous administration to fight the Boko Haram terrorist insurgency in the Northeast of the country. The circuitous manner in which the payment was routed through the account of a company that was alien to the NPAN under the dodgy expense head of energy consultancy showed the untidiness of the deal. When it became clear, the media coordinator of the deal, NPAN's President, Nduka Obaigbena, also secured additional sum of N550 million for his organization ostensibly as compensation for the bombing of his newspaper's Abuja office in April 2012, the image of the media nosedived.

The NPAN scandal epitomizes grand corruption where the organized media agreed to collect public funds secretly from the government as compensation for earlier infractions against the media. It was not wrong for the media to reach an out of court settlement. What was odious was that it was done secretly; it was an abuse of entrusted power for private gain, which prevented the media from establishing the principle for the general good that in a democracy all actions by the government and the people must be rooted in respect for the rule of law. By shielding its agreement with government from the public, it made a mockery of the media's cry for free access to information, promotion of transparency and accountability in governance. It failed in making the public know that the law is no respecter of persons and governments.

The immediate consequence as Fatade (2015) observes is the crisis of legitimacy it creates for the organized media:

> It remains doubtful if the present crop of media owners and journalists

> can superintend Nigeria's democratic journey to the Promised Land based on what we have seen so far. We cannot also continue to pretend that all is well with our profession by refusing to speak out against corruption that is incapacitating us from playing our watchdog role effectively. Of course I support the argument that we might not expect the media to be different as corruption permeates every area of our lives but with the self-assigned and constitutionally-guaranteed oversight functions of the media, Dasukigate offers us ample opportunity to review our activities and how we have succeeded in throwing the profession to the dogs.

CONSEQUENCES OF CORRUPTION ON THE NEWS PROCESS AND SOCIETY

The immediate challenge resides in the nature of corruption and its erosion of the fidelity attached to news as the balanced, professional and independent processing of information into news of value for the consumer. Journalism's role in society is to guide public understanding through a fair, balanced portrayal of happenings. It is a professional task, which presupposes that to every issue there is more than one side and demands journalists should evaluate the issues at stake, leaving no stone unturned before presenting findings the public can trust and act upon. After all as Dennis (1991) quoted in Idowu (2015, 5) says:

> The public is buying a communication system, they are paying for public communication, and it stands to reason they want the resulting information to be competently gathered, accurate and useful to them.

Where what is presented as facts are no more than procured or manufactured alternative facts, a credibility problem arises. Where the public cannot trust the media, a great pillar of democracy becomes weakened and the constitutional role of holding government accountable to the people compromised.

Redefines the Concept of News

Because corruption is deceitful and amounts to the enthronement of self interest above communal good, it ends up eroding standards. As previously observed:

> Rather than an unvarnished picture of happenings in society it becomes a tainted account for special interest groups. Rather than the forum for ventilating useful ideas, the integrity of news becomes compromised and a steady and dangerous disconnect between society and its com-

ponent parts is set in motion (Idowu, 2013, Media Review March/April 2013).

Takes the audience for granted

Corruption insults the intelligence of the audience by purporting to give them a tainted and fractured picture of reality. It makes a mockery of the 'truth'-searching function of journalism, which should propel journalists to dig and unearth the many sides to an issue in the effort to get as near a complete picture of an issue as humanly possible. This enterprise is expected to be guarded jealously as it gives both the reporter and the news medium advantage over others. That is the contract journalists have with society, not the enthronement of pack journalism, which promotes conformity and not divergence.

Ultimately Damages Media credibility

Nothing makes a medium gasp for breath early than one that is lacking in credibility (Idowu, 2015: 9). When what a medium is publishing is at variance with what the public is experiencing, the medium soon slides into irrelevance because rather than be a long distance runner it loses steam early as a sprinter. Withdrawal of patronage is the punishment an abused patron can visit on a medium that takes delight in calling the patron a fool. The saying that you can fool the people sometimes but not all the time underscores the relationship between a medium and its patrons.

Corrodes the notion of public service and compromises standards

Corruption lowers standards and corrodes the public service meaning of much of serious journalism. It results into a situation where the people look up to the media to play out its agenda-setting role but in exchange receive a diluted coverage, full of fury without substance. Where they get a docile lapdog instead of a vigilant watchdog, the notion of public service is corroded, standards become compromised, and negative values are enthroned (Idowu 2013).

Underreports important areas of the economy/society

A situation where progressively, the media deploy cloudy lens to monitor society results into the media ignoring some important

areas of society thereby imperiling and weakening society's reliance on the media as a faithful barometer of public opinion and happenings in society.

Corruption encourages the media to promote the asinine at the expense of the deep and developmental. The World Bank in a publication on how corruption impacts development, says:

> Corruption is bad for development. It leads governments to intervene where they need not, and it undermines their ability to enact and implement policies in areas in which government intervention is clearly needed.

It can be said that corruption is bad for journalism. Development issues, which may not bring immediate bread and butter benefits such as associated with the political and economic news beats, tend to suffer. Corruption leads media organizations to elevating pseudo events into big events and emphasizing issues that do not justify such attention. It has the capacity to undermine the robust concern for the socio-economic transformation of society as envisaged in Chapter II of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution on the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy, which cites concern for the environment, provision of jobs, food and shelter for the citizenry as urgent state duties.

Ethical disservice

Corrupt reporting compromises the editorial independence of the journalist, which is one of the cardinal professional ethics, in that what is published becomes what is procured not what is significant. It undermines the media's ability to independently examine society, and pick areas truly deserving of media attention. It makes a mockery of the maxim that He who comes to equity must come with clean hands since tainted conscience and compromised hands cannot see corruption as a national war to prevent the conversion of commonwealth to private pockets.

COMBATING CORRUPTION

In fighting corruption in the media, efforts must be made to promote awareness of corruption by connecting its menace to real life situations. Journalists must also be reminded of their quadruple mandate of responsibility to self, the profession, the state, and

their organization. The notion of responsibility needs to be developed first in the individual for it to be imbibed and practiced. The ethical concerns of journalism emphasize its truth-seeking function in the concern for such principles as accuracy, fairness and balance. The constitution of the land assigns a watchdog role to the media, enjoining a vigilant oversight of freedom to uphold the responsibility of government to the people. Finally, every self respecting medium must nurture and defend its credibility before its publics. An increasingly professionalized media can only be useful to an organization if it is useful to society since no medium exists just for itself. So, a number of measures are needed to be able to stimulate the desired change in media environments.

Produce media managers (beyond reporting)

The training of mass communication professionals needs strengthening in the area of media management. What currently obtains emphasizes the reporting side of training with scant attention to the management side. More courses in the fields of economics, business administration/management and marketing need to be integrated into the training curriculum of mass communicators with the ultimate goal of allowing specialization in media management. Too many promising publications have simply disappeared because of marketing and management problems. Using the travails of *Newswatch* magazine, which resulted into a takeover, as reference, I had noted in 2011:

> The financial difficulties experienced by Newswatch are being replicated in many newspapers across the country. In many instances, accomplished writers do not necessarily make successful managers. In the long term, media training curricula require that closer attention be paid to media/business management than has hitherto been the case. In the short term, we, media managers need to rethink our business models, bury our egos and seek for help if we are not to supervise the untimely interment of our enterprises or hand them over to publishers with questionable credentials. (Idowu 2011, NEXT, May 11).

Fund media operations and Pay journalists better

Improved business management should make a difference in the fortunes of the news media with vital areas of marketing, distribution, engagement, penetration, reporting and editing being

run by specialists. In such a situation, needed funds will be available for improved compensation that can reduce the temptation for journalists to moonlight to make ends meet. Whilst poor pay is not sufficient reason for corruption, it does alongside irregular payment provide incentive for receiving sop.

Eniola Bello, managing director of Leaders and Company, publishers of *Thisday* titles, is unequivocal on fair and timely payment of wages:

> The first thing is to ensure there is proper funding. Pay well and pay on time. For instance, why would a journalist leave his job where he is a core staff and go to work in banks where he is a support staff? It is certainly not because they enjoy the job, it is about resources. The organizations send them on funny errands, and even request to see their press releases in some instances. I give you a funny example. When I was the editor, a journalist-turned public relations executive came to my office and complained that I used a photo where his boss was frowning. I sent him away.

With proper funding media organizations should be able to pay their staff better, invest more in investigative reporting through which the capacity of media to connect more with their audiences, impact on governance, and promote change would be better enhanced. With a more credible media, standards and patronage will improve and journalists better remunerated.

Ground journalists in the rudiments of the profession

Deploying journalists to the field without adequate grounding is counterproductive. Many have not imbibed the corporate philosophy sufficiently well before being assigned to corruptive environments where bad behavior is easily copied. When the abnormal appears normal, it becomes almost a mission impossible to make them unlearn their bad habits. A situation where journalists are unfamiliar with the ethics of their profession is dangerous. Not only should they be exposed to its contents, periodic in-house and external seminars will help them deepen their understanding of the challenges of their trade, help them to compare notes with peers and prepare them for better professional engagement. As I noted elsewhere:

> The combined import of the codes is to have the media act rationally,

> fairly, sensibly, and responsibly in the public interest. The pursuit of truth through honest, fair, factual and balanced account of significant happenings in society is at the heart of the watchdog and gate keeping functions of the media. When that trust in the content of what the media serve the public is missing, journalism becomes at best fiction writing, and at worst, a danger to the society it purports to serve. So codes are useful, regulatory guides to shape professional conduct.
> They distinguish the profession of journalism from a free for all trade without standards. They recognize the power of the media for good or ill to shape society and seek to reassure the public that media responsibility is something taken seriously, not only as a constitutional duty, but indeed a personal, professional and organizational responsibility (Idowu, 2015B).

Retrain journalists regularly

Journalism is a knowledge-based activity which requires updating of practitioner's knowledge to be able to inform the public appropriately. It is a craft that requires constant honing of skills. Regular training and retraining remain pivotal for it to play the role of a pathfinder and educator in society.

Move journalists round beats periodically

Part of what predisposes journalists to undue familiarity with news sources is prolonged stay on particular beats. Whilst experience helps in cultivating contacts and servicing networks, journalists' overall professional development is helped where there is wide exposure to other fields. Promoters of pack journalism can be found largely in the rank of journalists covering specialized fields.

Develop reward schemes to encourage professional journalism

Awards remain useful barometers for benchmarking and assessing professional output in the media. They spur journalists to greater productivity and generate healthy competition. They bring recognition that opens wider opportunities for professional development and remain a cherished tool to enhance professionalism. Examples of such media awards in Nigeria include the Diamond Awards for Media Excellence (DAME), which has run annually from inception in 1992 to date, the Nigeria Media Merit Award (NMMA) and the Wole Soyinka Investigative Awards (WSIA). Such platforms need to be strengthened by development partners, media owners,

corporate bodies committed to excellence so that they can continue to be fountains of encouragement for ambitious journalists who want to be acclaimed for professional excellence.

Provide journalists with outlets/forums to discuss professional challenges

Media owners need to devote more attention to ethical challenges and provide outlets for regular assessment of media performance. Internal and external ombudsmen are necessary to interface regularly with the workforce to provide timely feedback on performance and stimulate discussion of challenges faced on the field. Media NGOS and professional associations also require more encouragement in this area. If journalism is to continue to remain relevant and impactful, there must be sustainable interest in discussing the challenges of the profession.

Punish infraction of journalistic codes through naming and shaming mechanisms

The organized media must come to terms with the need for media regulation as a public trust-building mechanism to enhance media credibility. Too much energy has been dissipated on whether a statutory or voluntary regulatory body is desirable. Experience has shown that both models are problematic. The Nigerian Press Council, first established in 1978, rechristened Nigeria Media Council in 1988, and renamed Nigerian Press Council again in 1993, is distrusted by the organized media who see in it a ruse for government control. The government, on its part, through inconsistency, has fuelled this distrust. The media's preferred alternative, the Independent Ombudsman mechanism, remains a fine idea in print, which is yet to get the public's buy-in since its establishment in 2009. The statutory model is underperforming having had most of its assigned responsibilities adjudged incompatible with provisions of the 1999 Constitution by a federal high court. In the face of no serious attempt to challenge the court's judgment, a hybrid public-private mediatory body that is jointly funded may offer the most promising future. It will require men and women of good faith admitting failure and expressing desire to start de novo for a new partnership that will result in an inexpensive mediatory

council where ethical breaches can be addressed and regular pronouncements on media infractions made. Such declarations will have the salutary effect of using moral suasion of naming and shaming to moderate media behavior. There is no point having codes of ethics that no one is examining periodically. The growth of professional practice is best assured where the media as an institution is prepared to submit to the peer review of fellow professionals operating independently in such a council. The example of Media Review as an independent, private effort has shown that it is possible to subject the media as an institution to regular analyses for self improvement. If such a model could run for a quarter of a century years, a better funded version by a committed public-private partnership should be able to improve on it.

Encourage plural ownership and commit owners to ethical journalism

Media pluralism in a society as diverse as Nigeria along lines of ethnicity, religion, gender, class remains not only desirable but imperative. Media owners need to be encouraged to see their investments as public trusts that require credibility for them to be useful to even the owners. Media businesses should be nurtured along sound business principles and less as ego trips for longevity in the market place. To encourage public interest journalism, funding models need to be reviewed in light of the digital disruption that continues to alter the old ways of doing business. The alternative will be slow, painful death of their businesses. Whilst strong media organs are necessary, government, through the legal environment, should also put in place antitrust measures to ensure that what should be a democratic and liberating industry is not reduced to a monopolist, restrictive agenda-setting sector.

Last Word

There is hope for the future but a lot will be expected of people of goodwill from owners to managers, workers, and professional bodies to take the necessary internal cleansing steps within the media. From the governments, there is need to provide positive legal framework to encourage responsible journalism to thrive such as strengthening antitrust laws to discourage media oligop-

olies. There must still be room for Public service journalism especially on public owned electronic stations. Everything cannot be abandoned to the whims of commercial journalism as there remain legitimate public concerns and developmental issues that commercial journalism cannot adequately serve if our media must be seen as watchdogs and our democracy endure.

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4

Changing Economic, Technological And Ownership Landscapes

Ayo Olukotun

Introduction

The Nigerian media have come a long way from their incarnation as traditional outlets, manifested in orature, festivals, town criers and village square assemblies through the rudimentary print journalism and pamphleteering of the colonial period and the analogue format of newspapers and television in the post colonial period, to the more recent digital innovations and the hybridized structures intermeshing electronic formats with more familiar forms (Olukotun, 2002, 2003 and 2013). It has been argued by scholars such as Kerr (2011) that the new media with its bloggers, internet chatrooms, citizen journalists and social media recall the

dialogic and bottom-up horizontal communication modes of the indigenous African media, and therefore, are all the more participatory and democracy enhancing. There is of course, a contrary point of view, which alludes to the rise of a Netocracy, populated by young urban professionals with access to the internet and its global spinoffs, as opposed to an underclass that, in a metaphor employed by Castells (2000) are switched off from global currents.

This chapter discusses issues of changing economics, technologies, ownership and production in the period between 1999 and 2016, in order to assess the capacity profile of the media, with reference to their abilities to carry-out their roles as watchdogs. Obviously, the capacity of the media to act as healthy watchdogs, which has a long ancestry in Nigerian media history and culture, is a function of such issues as ownership structure, changing technologies, production modes, governance structure as well as shifting perceptions of audiences who consume media products. Hence, despite the fact that many Nigerian newspapers have crusading titles, such as *Vanguard*, the *Punch*, *Nigerian* Tribune and the Champion, their performance of the watchdog role which is also stipulated by Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution, is a matter to be determined less by a militant press ideology than their strength or weakness as players in the economic and technological market place. That point is put differently by Coronell (2010: 13), who argues that "The journalist as watchdog therefore, is a role defined differently across countries and cultures. That definition is fluid often contingent on the existing social, political and economic conditions and a reflection as much of the historical moment as it is of preexisting structures and media cultures."

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the watchdog role of the Nigerian media in the period understudy has been enhanced by the emergence of a diasporic online media, typified by the investigative Sahara Reporters, which has often provided stimulation and actual corruption stories for the local media which are increasingly inserted into global news flows. Another example of the impact of changing technology of the Nigerian media is provided in the early days of the Fourth Republic by *TheNews* magazine, which broke

the news concerning the fake credentials of the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Salisu Buhari. While reporters of TheNews carried out investigations within the country, the American angle of the research, which required a verification of Buhari's claim to have attended the University of Toronto, Canada was conducted by Dapo Olorunyomi, who had lived in the United States on exile in the twilight of the military years, as well as Kunle Ajibade, another founding director, who was also in the United States at the time. This transnational collaboration, checking of data, as well as the use of internet facilities gave a robust mien to the expose, which led to the resignation of the former Speaker. As a postscript to one of the finest moments of that magazine, it is interesting to remark that the vicissitudes and hardship, which surround media production, occasioning the closure of several newspapers, has turned TheNews into an occasional and irregular publication which exists mainly as an online medium, mirroring a global trend in the decline of newspapers.

The rest of this chapter is divided into three sections, namely: the global backdrop, changing economic and technological profiles of the Nigerian media as well as the concluding section which ties the issues together.

2.1 The Global Backdrop

The media, in their variegated genres, are central to globalization and indeed to civilization. There is no doubt concerning the pervasiveness of media demonstrated by the widening spread of internet penetration, the use of personal computers, cellular phones, as well as the reach of Cable News Network (CNN). As Castells (2000) reminds us, political leadership and much of the substance of politics have become inseparable from the power of the media to draw, and to fix images in the public consciousness. Nigeria and much of Africa remains a backwater, recent changes notwithstanding, in an information age, in which the United States and a handful of countries including China are dominant. For example, 'platform imperialism' by which it is meant the hegemony of the United States on social networks, search engines and smart phones leaves Nigeria at the margins of these transforming devel-

opments.

As Jin (2013,145) informs:

> The hegemonic power of American-based platforms is crucial because Google, Facebook, iPhone, and Android have functioned as major digital media intermediaries thanks to their advanced roles in aggregating several devices. The U.S, which had previously controlled non-Western countries with its military power, capital, and later cultural products, now seems to dominate the world with platforms, benefitting from these platforms, mainly in terms of capital accumulation.

Table 1: List of 20 most popular Web sites (2017)

Site	Domain	Alexa traffic Rank (As of April 3, 2017)	Similar Web Top Web-sites (As of May 2017)	Type	Principal country
Google	google.com	1	1	Search engine	U.S
You Tube	youtube.com	2	3	Video sharing	U.S
Facebook	Facebook.com	3	2	Social Network	US
Baidu	Baidu.com	4	11	Search engine	China
Wikipedia	wikipedia.org	5	5	Encyclopedia	U.S
Yahoo!	yahoo.com	6	4	Portal and media	U.S
Reddit	Reddit.com	7	27	Social news and entertainment	US
Google India	google.co.in	8	9	Search engine	India
Tencent QQ	qq.com	9	36	Portal	China
Taobao	Taobao	10	65	Online shopping	China
Amazon	amazon.com	11	14	Retail	U.S
Tmall	tmall.com	12	74	Online shopping	China

Twitter	twitter.com	13	6	Social network	U.S
Google Japan	google.co.jp	14	20	Search engine	Japan
Sohu	Sohu.com	15	204	Portal	China
Windows live	live.com	16	7	Email.web services and software suite	U.S
VK	Vk.com	17	12	Social network	Russia
Instagram	Instagram.com	18	15	Photo sharing and social media	US
Sina Corp	sina.com.cn	19	110	Portal and instant media	China
360 Safeguard	360.cn	20	85	Internet security software	China

Source: Alexa.com, July 23, 2017.

As table 1 above shows, the domination of platforms by the United States is moderated slightly by the emergence of China as a notable global player. Hence, what we have is the carrying forward and strengthening of the preeminent position of the United States in information, cultural, and now platform imperialism. The significance of this for Africa, and Nigeria in particular is that the emerging global public sphere, is as Curran (2000:13) informs "developing in a lopsided, uneven way which is clearly connected to wider inequalities of power and resources in the world". This information asymmetry is reinforced by the global dominance of news agencies located in the United States, and Europe, as well as the increasing concentration, through vertical and horizontal integration of media in a few hands. This results in the efficient transmission of Western, especially cultural perspectives and the dominance of a neoliberal world view. Franklin and Love (1998) are substantially correct, therefore, when they see the global media dominated by the United States as agenda setters for Nigeria, Africa, and the rest of the world.

Another trend worth mentioning is the decline of newspapers, and their uncertain future in the form in which they have existed for centuries. Particularly hit by the downturn are newspapers in the United States and Britain, where the digital revolution has been reshaping the industry. The Bloomberg QuickTake in a report on May 19, 2015, entitled The Fading Newspaper informs that in the United States:

> Industry's revenue has fallen by more than a third since 2005, its best year, when sales reached $60.2billion. Newsrooms are shrinking and most papers are printing less news. Today, newspapers employ roughly a third fewer professionals than they did at their peak in 1989... Since2011, prominent papers like the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Chicago Tribune* have started digital subscription plans in hopes that readers would pay to preserve traditional news gathering.

In the United Kingdom, according to The Audit Bureau of Circulation, between 2001 and 2014, the circulation of the ten major national newspapers declined from 12.6million copies sold on average each day, to 6.89million copies. The predictions and prospects for growth or recovery in that country and several others in Western Europe are not too bright. This decline, though real, appears not to have diminished the political influence of newspapers since it doesn't take account of online readers, as well as their power to set agenda for television, and the online media.

As Harvard Professor, Norris Pippa (2000) warns, it is possible to make too much of the narrative of newspaper decline, which has been frequently espoused before the challenges posed by the internet. It also understates both the popularity of newspapers and their ability to connect or adapt to changing modes of production and distribution (Pippa 2000). There is also a counter narrative to the story of decline in Asia and Latin America. In India for example, newspapers are booming in the face of growing internet penetration. An article, in the *Huffington Post* (May10, 2015), informs that despite 214 million internet users in India, the newspaper business is thriving with 94,000 registered newspapers, up from 14,000 in 2011, and strengthened still by increasing circulation for several newspapers.

Before zeroing in on Nigeria, it is important not to erect the

examples of the United States and Western Europe into a typology that fits all cases. It is also interesting to observe as Thussu (2007) has documented, that global media flows, dominated by the United States are also countervailed by contraflows from developing countries, some of which like South Africa and India, are increasingly global players.

Nigeria, still at the margins of this development, has already entered the global market place with Nollywood, and the emergence of a diasporic online media such as, *Sahara Reporters* which are accessed globally. As Thussu (2000,18) correctly observes, on this score "In this era of globalization, the one way vertical flow, has given way to multiple and horizontal flows as subaltern media content providers have emerged to service an ever growing geo-cultural market". For example, Hollywood, and Nigeria's growing entertainment industry, estimated to be worth 55 billion dollars, and increasing annually, is rated in some quarters as one of the most profitable businesses internationally, thus providing a clear example of lucrative subaltern contra flow.

2.2 Changing Economic and Technological Profiles

The period between 1999 and 2017 witnessed phenomenal expansion in the media industry as a result of the liberalized political space, the exigencies of political competition warranting the replication of media outlets; as well as an economic boom riding on unprecedented increase in the price of oil in the world market for many of these years. Nigeria's oil boom produced a new class of billionaires, and economic players, several of whom invested in the media industry. The period consequently, reinforced Nigeria's position as the country with the largest and most vibrant media industry in Africa, followed by South Africa and Kenya. The number of publications is put roughly at 120, several of them founded in the period since 1999. To give an idea of the expansion of the media industry cutting across several types, the former Director General of the Nigerian Broadcast Commission, Emeka Mba, informed two years ago (Punch, September 1, 2015) that Nigeria has the biggest broadcast sector in Africa, as it boasted of 133 federal television, 122 state radio, 68 state television, 51 multi-chan-

nel, multi-point distribution services, 97 private radio, 43 private television, 63 federal radio, and 27 campus broadcasting stations. Obviously, therefore, the country is well covered in terms of the electronic media with the majority of them owned by the state.

In a trend mirrored across the media, many of these outfits are rudimentary and exist at the margins of survival. The breakdown provided by Mba did not include community radios, 17 of which were approved by the federal government after many years of struggle and agitation by civil society organizations. It should be noted that the broadcasting sector is trapped in relative obsolescence as a result of the failure of the country to undertake the switch over from analog to digital broadcasting. This implies that Nigeria will continue to broadcast analog signals until it is able to migrate, hopefully at the end of 2017.

As mentioned, over 120 newspapers, not counting community publications survive in the Nigerian market; although many of these are shoestring enterprises which can capsize and sometimes reappear without notice. For example *National Interest* staged a comeback in 2003, after it was rested for six months only to go off the streets terminally three years later. Circulation figures remain contentious because of the failure of the effort made to revive in 2008, the Audit Bureau of Circulation, which had been comatose for years.

An important development, mentioned earlier, is the growing number of Nigerians who are able to access the internet and social media networks, thus resulting in better engagement and participation of citizens in democratic discourse. Significantly for example, the elections of 2011 and 2015, as well as social outbursts such as the anti-fuel price increase of 2012 and President Muhammadu Buhari's health travails in 2017, were attended by interesting if occasionally frightening conversations on the social media. According to the Nigerian Communication Commission, the number of internet users on the Global System for Mobile (GSM) Communications Network jumped from 76,322,802 in 2014 to 81,892,840 by January 2015. It should be mentioned that the increasing use of social media platforms and internet application is a direct conse-

quence of the continuous rise in the number of people who subscribe to the mobile telecommunications networks. The National Bureau of Statistics put the figure of subscribers at 86 million for 2016; up from 2.3million subscribers in 2002.

Access to the internet, has obviously been of tremendous value to professional journalists as well as citizen journalists, in view of the abundance of information and the opportunities to connect with national and global discourse. The problems associated with patchy networks, breakdown of computers, fitful electricity notwithstanding, journalists are increasingly information technology savvy, a situation that did not obtain at the beginning of civilian rule.

As Kperogi (2012) observes, pertinently, the *Post Express* blazed the trail of online journalism in Nigeria. According to him:

> By the close of the 1990s, a few other newspapers, notably the (Nigerian) *Guardian*, *Punch*, *Vanguard*, and *ThisDay*, had websites where they episodically republished selected contents from their print editions. By early 2000s, almost all the legacy newspapers in Nigeria had some Web presence aided in part by the aggregation and distribution of their content, along with those of African newspapers, by the AllAfrica.com, the Washington DC-based multimedia content service provider widely recognized as the world's largest Africa-centered site (Kperogi 2012:447).

To be noted too, is the fact that the majority of Nigerian newspapers can be read online and maintain active websites. Kperogi (2011) insists, however, that their online activities and presence are limited to interactivity, and does not, for the most part, include the latter stages of multimediality and hypertextuality. As he put it, "the websites of Nigerian homeland newspapers failed the requirement of Duze's multimediality and hypertexuality and seem to be stuck in Pavlik's first stage in the evolution of online journalism." (Kperogi, 2011, p.123).

Kperogi recognized, even as at 2011 that several newspapers such as *Leadership*, *Daily Trust*, *Punch*, and the *Nation* had moved on beyond the first stage of online journalism; although he is correct to say that hypertextuality, whereby newspapers can update content as news breaks, as well as stream video and audio is still a rarity, while hitches with website functionality were frequent.

Nonetheless, the situation is rapidly improving, and the vitality of online journalism has been increased by the addition to the media space of such online news publications as the *Cable* commenced in April 2014, *Premium Times*, started in October 2011, and *Eagle online* started in January 2012 and *Bounce* commenced in March, 2017. See Table below.

Table 2: Online News Publications

Name of publication	Founder	Date
The Gleaner News Online	Tony Iyare	November 2003
The Cable	Simon Kolawole	April 29th,2014
Premium Times	Dapo Olorunyomi	October 1st 2011
The Eagle Online	Dotun Oladipo	January 9, 2012
Sundiata Post	Max Amuche	September 2013
Global Patriots	Simon Ibe	March 2015
The Rainbow	Chijama Ogbu	February 2013
Freedom Online	Gabriel Akinadewo	January 9, 2015
Newsdairyonline	Danlami Nmodu	September,2008
Real news	Maureen Chigbo	November 19, 2012
Prompt News	Akeem Oyetunji	May 18, 2013
Nigeria Politics Online	Semiu Okanlawon	April, 2010
News Express	Isaac Umunna	August 29, 2012
New Mail	Semiu Salami	September, 2010
The Quick News	Monday Ashibogwu	November 10, 2007
Greenbarge	Yusuf Ozi-Usman	July 20, 2013
Watchdog	Ben-Bright Mkpuma	August, 2009
Urhobo Today	Laba Oghenekevwe	May, 2012
biztejjers.com	Yemi Adeoye	October, 2011
Metro Watch	Collins Edomarusen	November,2013
New Sentinel	Peter Jones	March 2014
The Citizen	Malachy Agbo	June, 2012

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Global village Extra	Taiye Olayemi	2013
persecondnews.com	Femi Soneye	February, 2012
EnviroNews Nigeria	Micheal Simire	August, 2012
World Stage	Segun Adeleye	February 7, 2008
Sahara Reporters	Omoyele Sowore	2006
Sahara Reporter TV	Omoyele Sowore	April, 2011
DigitalSENSE	Remmy Nweke	August 30, 2009
Frontier News	Horatius Egua	November, 2011
You News	Afolabi Odeyemi	February, 2012
Gamji.com	Dr. Ismaila Iro	1998
The Boss	Dele Momodu	November, 2015
Ynaija	Chude Jideonwo	May, 2010
The Simon Ateba News	Simon Ateba	May, 2015
The News Guru	Mideno Bayegbon	October, 2016
Lindaikejiblog	Linda Ikeji	2007
Daily Post	James Bamisaye	March, 2015
Bella Naija	Uche Eze	July, 2006
Bounce	Media 24	March, 2017

Source: Research Notes

The list above, it should be pointed out, includes several sites that are no longer active, or have become moribund, again reflecting a trend in which other kinds of media, in particular newspapers started with gusto, and go off the streets after a few years of publication. Nonetheless, it is conceivable, given Nigeria's youthful population that the number of daily readers of news pages on the web is bigger than the number of those who buy ink stained papers.

Table 3: Top leading sites

Site	Daily time on site	Daily page views per visitor	% Traffic from search	Total sites linking in

Vanguardngr.com	5:55	2.70	17%	13,835
Punchng.com	7:37	3:46	8.60%	8,896
Guardian.ng	4:39	2.36	21.90%	1,114
Thisdaylive.com	4:01	1:92	20:40%	1,692
Sunnewsonline.com	3:57	2.08	14.20%	1,466
Channelstv.com	3:13	1:86	14.90%	891
Tribuneonline.com	4:57	2.26	10.90%	1,947
Pmnewsnigeria.com	7:52	2.61	11.30%	817
Nan.ng	11:04	6:46	5.50%	289

Source: Alexa, July 23, 2017

As the table above shows, an increasing number of Nigerians, mainly the elite, are able to get their news, from either the online versions of major newspapers, or online news sites such as the influential *Premium Times* or diasporic *Sahara Reporters*. Considering that newspapers increasingly source their reports from online publications, a synergy has been created between both forms of media, especially on anticorruption and human rights issues. Social media, in spite of their abuses such as the impersonation of prominent Nigerians like Professor Wole Soyinka and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, as well as recycling rumours and fake news, constitute exciting spaces for civic participation and democratic discourse.

Nigerian journalist, Tolu Ogunlesi alluded to this dimension when he wrote (*The Punch* September 28, 2015) that:

> You also have to remember that this is a country for which most of our history, what one might call truly mass media was in the hand of the government (television and radio until the liberalization that began mid-1990s), and what was passed for private or independent wasn't really 'mass' in its distribution (the newspapers, newsmagazines). It is into that context that social media have landed, offering us something truly liberating: mass media in which we are not only consumers but also producers and distributors as well.

The other side of the explosion in newspapers is the high mortality of titles as a result of a mismanaged economy with severe infrastructural deficits. Hence, the birth of several new titles as well

as the high death rate of titles can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Some of the prominent new titles which have survived include the *Nation* 2006, the *Sun* 2003, *Daily Independent* 2002, *Leadership* 2004, *Daily Trust* 2001, *New Telegraph* 2013, and *Business Day* 2001. Among those that did not survive are; *Nigerian Compass*, *National Interest*, *The Comet*, *Next*, *New Age*, the *Anchor*, *NewsWatch*, the *Examiner*, *Tempo*, *PM News* and others.

The economic climate also affected older titles such as the *Post Express*, founded in July 1996 by businessman Sony Odogwu, but rested in July 2003, the *New Nigerian*, which for many years was the regional voice of the northern part of the country, was finally rested in 2012. The *Champion*, owned by an Igbo businessman, Emmauel Iwuanyanwu, has remained comatose for a decade. The distress was particularly hard on the magazine sector where *Tell* and *TheNews* had to downsize considerably and as at October 2015 were owing their staff several months of salaries. *NewsWatch*, respected for its sober and dignified analysis, was acquired after several years of distress by businessman, Jimoh Ibrahim, who turned it into a daily newspaper, entitled *Newswatch Daily*. Ibrahim also owns *National Mirror*, founded in 2006 but which had become comatose.

Table 4: Some Newspapers Rested Between 1999 and 2016

Title	Year rested
Sketch	2000
Concord	2000
The Post Express	2003
Tempo	2003
National Interest	2006
The Comet	2007
New Age	2008
Spectator Weekly	2008
Westerner	2011
Newswatch	2011

Next	2011
New Nigerian	2012
Nigerian Compass	2012
PM News	2015
Newswatch Daily	2016

Source: Research Notes

As mentioned earlier, the protracted default on salaries is a pronounced feature of these years, with some titles and electronic media, owing as many as 20 months of salaries. News broke two years ago concerning the sealing of the premises of *Daily independent*, by the Nigeria Union of Journalists, which accused the management of owing 23 months of salaries (*The Nation*, October 8, 2015). There was also the celebrated case of *ThisDay* newspaper, against which a former editor, Paul Ibe, won a landmark case in court compelling the company to pay his outstanding salaries and allowances. The paper reportedly owed between 6-8 months of salary arrears, a story that is replicated across a wide stratum of the media.

In this respect, the demise of *Next* newspaper, which excitingly deepened accountability through investigative journalism is typical of the difficulties faced by independent newspapers seeking to make a mark. Adaobi Nwaubani captures this dimension of the problem when she wrote that:

> But revenue soon began to dry up. In Nigeria, established newspapers are paid to keep big stories off the front page. Adverts are supposed to buy silence. Often, *Next* would run a story in its popular weekend edition, only for editors to arrive at the office on Monday to meet an aggravated marketing team- certain big advertisers had terminated their business that morning. After one revelation about corruption in the oil trade, scores of advertisers instantly pulled out (BBC Africa Report, March 5, 2015).

The point being made here is that advertisers exercise indirect veto on editorial content by sanctioning independent private media, which set out to be fearless and daring. Considering that the state is the biggest advertiser, it has often used this pow-

er to skew the media playing field, in favor of state-owned electronic media as well as compliant and complacent, private media. Important as that issue is, it is not the only reason for the rapid collapse of newspapers.

Regarding the escalating cost of input into newspaper production, in most of the years under study, the table below is instructive.

Table 5: Rising Cost of Newspaper Production Input (2004-2016)

N Value

Item	Qty	2004	2008	2012	2015	2016	2017
Black Ink	1 Kilo	380	500	1300	2421	1,300	2,500
Printing Film	1 packet	21,990	33,000	34,000	N.A	N.A	N.A
Newsprint	1 Ton	109, 000	N.A	145,000	185,000	185,000	400,000
Plates	1 packet	N.A	18,000	21,500	94,500	120,000	160,000

N.A - NOT Available ***Source: Research Notes***

As Table five shows, the increasing cost of newspaper production inputs such as newsprint, plates, and black ink put pressure on publishers, many of whose enterprises were undercapitalized to begin with. Another dimension of the problem is the additional pressure that the lack of adequate infrastructure, power and security, brought on businesses, including newspapers and the electronic media. Drawing attention to this problem, Mr. Steve Ojo, President of Galaxy television, a fiercely independent medium argued that:

> Government has not supported the industry; the infrastructural facilities that would ensure that the industry thrives are not there. For example- we supply our own power, water and every other infrastructure we need. Under any circumstance, anywhere (else) in the world, the government provides all these facilities. In Nigeria the reverse is the case. (*The Punch*, April 30, 2005 pg 24)

Noticeable too, is what may be called the return of the north to Nigeria's discourse map because of the rebirth of the Northern media in the years under study. In an ethnically divided country, and given Adebanwi's jibe that Nigeria lacks a national media, but

instead has an Arewa media, Ngbati media and Nkenga media (Adebanwi, 2002), this rebirth is crucial. As backdrop to this development, the lamentation of the former governor of Nasarawa state, Dr. Abdulihi Adamu, on the virtual absence of a northern media from the nation is instructive.. In a 2005 lecture, "Where is the Northern Press?", to the Arewa Media Group, he elaborated:

> Is there something, I wonder that makes it impossible for newspapers to survive in this part of the country? Perhaps, the answer lies in the stubborn refusal to appreciate the role the news media play in the development of societies and in the contest for power, particularly in a democracy. The balance of power or the balance of terror is a stabilizing factor in every society. I do not argue for a press war. I argue for freedom from other people's mass media in order that we may be heard (*Media Review*, July 2005, p26).

At the same time as Adamu made these remarks, the *New Nigerian* had become comatose; it however, did not suspend publication until February 2012. What is of interest is the recent establishment and relative profitability of a clutch of newspapers based in Abuja such as *Leadership*, *Daily Trust*, *People's Daily*, and *Abuja Inquirer*, among others. In this list, easily the most successful are the Trust group of publications, which includes, *Weekly Trust*, *Daily Trust*, *Sunday Trust* and the Hausa language *Aminiyah*, and *Leadership*, founded in 2004 by Sam Nda Isaiah, most recently, a presidential candidate on the platform of the All Progressive Congress in the 2015 election. These independent newspapers appear to have broken the jinx of frequent collapse of newspapers in that part of the country. When you add to these, private television stations such as Desnims, founded by Halifa Baba Ahmed, Gotell TV based in Yola, and the Kano-based Radio Freedom owned by Bashir Dalhatu among others, one gets a sense of the bounce back of a northern regional media. The consequence of this is that of an increasingly level playing field, with regards to the access of diverse ethnic groups to the media. In this same connection, the vacuum created by the eclipse of *Champion* newspapers, has been filled to a large extent by the newspaper chain of former governor of Abia state, Dr Orji Uzor Kalu. The chain includes: the *Sun* and *New Telegraph*. Although these are based in Lagos, they draw a

substantial part of sales and advertising revenue from the South-East and the South-South.

Table 6: Ownership and Location of Major Media Institutions

Name Of Medium	Location	Proprietor & State Of Origin
The Guardian	Lagos	Maiden Ibru (Delta)*
ThisDay	Lagos	Nduka Obaigbena (Delta)
The Vanguard	Lagos	Sam Amuka-Pemu (Delta)
The Punch	Lagos	Ogunsola/Aboderin (Oyo)
Daily Trust	Abuja	Kabiru Yusuf (Kano)
The Nation	Lagos	Bola Tinubu (Lagos)
National Mirror	Lagos	Jimoh Ibrahim (Ondo)
African Independent Television	Lagos	Raymond Dokpesi (Edo)
Channels Television	Lagos	John Momoh (Edo)
The Sun	Lagos	Orji Kalu (Abia)
Leadership	Abuja	Sam Nda Isiah (Niger)

Source: Research Notes

As Table six demonstrates, although nine out of eleven major media institutions are located in Lagos, only three of these, the *Punch*, the *Nation* and *National Mirror* have Yoruba proprietors. Indeed, the emerging trend as shown in the table is a preponderance (five out of eleven) of media owners from the Niger Delta area, a fact that may not be unrelated to the petroleum-driven political economy of Nigeria and the incorporation of the elite from the Delta area into national framework of accumulation and distribution of spoils.

As may be expected, a good number of newspapers and electronic media are owned by politicians across the political spectrum. *Media Review*, in an article, entitled A Peep into Tinubu's Media Empire, mentions that the former governor of Lagos state, Bola Tinubu is a major shareholder in *The News* magazine, as well as a proprietor of the *Nation* newspaper, and the broadcast giant,

Radio and Television Continental, concluding that he is truly one of Nigeria's few media moguls (*Media Review*, April 2012). Tinubu is not the only politician to establish media institutions. The case of Dr. Orji Kalu has already been mentioned; there also is the *Nigerian Compass* and the *Westerner*, established by former Ogun state governor, Gbenga Daniel both of which are defunct. Then there is the *Union*, reportedly owned by Diezani Alison Madueke, former minister for petroleum, and the newspapers of Mr. Jimoh Ibrahim, a member of the People's Democratic Party. Ibrahim owned *National Mirror*, founded in 2006, as well as *Newswatch Daily* which he bought over from the former owners of *NewsWatch* magazine. Gotel Television based in Yola is owned by Atiku Abubakar, Nigeria's former Vice President. Although to some extent, ownership of media by politicians tends to widen the discourse space, it carries nonetheless, the price tags of partisanship and censorship of journalists who work in these newspapers.

It is worth mentioning too that Nigerian Journalists work under far from ideal conditions of employment. As the preceding narration has demonstrated, defaults on workers' salaries are a rampant syndrome, often presaging the collapse of newspapers. Hence, although most newsrooms, following a trend blazed by *ThisDay*, have been updated with computers and other information technology gadgets, widespread abuse in terms of the irregular payments of the salaries of workers has not abated. As *African Media Barometer* (2011,52) expressed it:

> Across the industry, working conditions for Nigerian Journalists and other media professionals are poor. Salaries are low, irregular and in some cases, inexistent. This is not only true of private media organizations even journalists of state-owned media are underpaid and complain of lack of career prospects. Many workers in the state-media are also recruited as casual staff and work under even more pathetic conditions.

CONCLUDING NOTE

The preceding sections suggest that the media in the period under study continued to be vibrant and visible in national discourse despite such downsides as frequent collapse of media, economic distress, and protracted defaults on the wages of

journalists as well as the poor working conditions. Hardest hit are courageous newspapers such as *Next* newspaper, which published major investigative stories of the rot in the petroleum industry. Its assemblage of a fine crop of professionals and state of the art equipment could not save it from the economic blizzard accentuated by state and corporate denial of advertisement from collapsing a few years after it excitingly made appearance on the media scene. In other words, journalists and media organizations most likely to be at the forefront of playing the watchdog role face tremendous pressures, not just from the vicissitudes of the harsh and mismanaged economy, but from being informally blacklisted by the establishment which often penalizes such media organizations. Yet another side to that unhappy story is the active courting by the states and the corporate public sphere of critical journalists, who are often co-opted, and media institutions which have a tendency to throw up subaltern discuss and do daring investigating.

That apart, the instability and the shoestring nature of media enterprise and the hand to mouth journalistic culture suggest that the cost of advocacy can be quite high. A further restraining factor is the increasing ownership of media by high-profile politicians who set them up to equalize what they perceive as a journalistic public sphere skewed against them. The best that one can expect from these political tinged media are exposures or muckraking against political opponents, rather than watchdog journalism of a professional, agenda building kind. In view of these disabling factors, some critics of the media have opined that under the Fourth Republic they have lost their bite and keen watchdog role. For example, Olumhense (2005), a former editor of ThisWeek magazine, who now lives in the United States, bitingly stated on one occasion that:

> On a sustained basis, none of the sordid assorted deals within the National Assembly has been investigated and reported; none of the colossal ethical chaos in the states has been profiled and nothing of the crisis of the unimplemented policies nationwide has resulted in a front page show and tell, none of the unrestrained looting in the states that the federal government unveiled nearly one year ago have been narrowed down to anyone. In other words our corruption stalemate has

> persisted for so long partly because the press has become complacent or became a part of it (*The Guardian*, April 2, 2005).

Olumhense came close to portraying the Nigerian media as a captured institution in the above statement. However, this portrait does not take into account several media-led crusades such as the one cited earlier, which resulted in the resignation of the Speaker; as well as the expose conveying an investigative scoop by Channels Television on the rot in the Police College, which led to temporary redress of the situation. In other words, despite the lean topography of the media, their location, ethnic and regional divisions and the far from friendly economic climate, a few independent media organizations, notably, those begun by media professionals, have kept advocacy for good governance on the front burner as well as redeemed to an extent, the looming decline of the media into a captured Fourth Estate of the Realm.

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5

Democracy and the Digital Public Sphere

By Lai Oso &

Tunde Akanni

> Media institutions and technologies shouldered the burden of extreme hopes, expectations and fears throughout the twentieth century, and this show little sign of abating in the digitised twenty-first .... The persuasive role of mediated communication in contemporary social, political and cultural life is, however, rarely in dispute (Goode, 2005, p.89).

Introduction

In both popular and academic discussions, the central role of the media of communication in the democratic process is generally acknowledged. The importance of the media has led many scholars to theorize the 'mediatization' thesis or media logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979; Hjarvard, 2008; Ampuja, Koivisto and Valiverronen, 2014). Habermas' theory of the public sphere is also an effort to understand the role of the media in the political and democratic processes. The media provide the space to discuss, debate issues, acquire information and knowledge which are essential ingredients for democratic participation by citizens.

Technology has expanded the public sphere, and also our understanding of the mass media. Incidentally, these new technologies and the communication platforms they gave birth to arrived in Nigeria, like in many other African countries, with the wave of political and economic liberalization. In this case, the transformation of the political and democratic processes coincided with the transformation of the media landscape and the public sphere.

While the Nigerian print media have largely been privately owned and offered some level of diversity, Nigeria's genuine road to liberalization of access to public information disseminated through the broadcast media may be said to have begun no fewer than four decades after the pioneer, indigenous broadcast station, especially the television, was established in 1959. Broadcasting, from inception in 1932 till 1992, was owned and controlled by the government at both federal and state levels.

Several countries of the world including Nigeria will continue to remain indebted to the third wave of democracy, which enabled them to belong in the league of democratic entities providing for free speech, free press and allied rights among others as enshrined in the renowned universal charter of rights.

The story began with the need for support from Bretton Woods Institutions in the 1980s during the era of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). Among other conditions was the insistence by the prospective loan providers that Nigeria should begin to consider the processes of democratizing, deregulation and privatization. It was, for instance, required that Nigeria should open

up its airwaves for private participation. Finally in 1992, the incumbent military government under General Ibrahim Babangida, then promulgated a decree which legitimized private ownership of radio and television stations (Mohammed, 1996). The development paved the way for Raypower Radio and African Independent Television (AIT) to enter the media family. The two new stations, owned by an individual, have since been joined by several others which have, in their respective ways, availed different sections of the society limitless opportunities to publicly volunteer their opinions on national and regional issues even as they have also served as veritable sources of information.

The privately owned broadcasters only came to complement the window of opportunities for Nigerian citizens' involvement in public debates. Beyond any government policy, law or even some international pressure, McLuhan's prediction, premised on the promise of technology, of the world as a global village especially via the computer, beyond the realistic television capabilities of his time, has since manifested and changed the world's communication landscape. The globe, according to McLuhan, has been contracted into a village by communication technology and the instantaneous movement of information from every quarter to every point at the same time. He added that the next medium after television, whatever it may be, may be the extension of consciousness and would include television as its content, not as its environment, and will transform television into an art form (McLuhan, 1962; McLuhan, 1964). Not only has this come to pass, the reality today is also that the pre-existing print media genre has become another content accommodated by the all-encompassing internet.

This shared planet for the hitherto delineated genres of the print and the broadcast media has conferred the common feature of enhanced interactivity not only between the electronically served media contents and their audiences but also between the literally wired up audiences taking advantage of substantially blurred physical and social boundaries made possible by digital innovations. This new age of digital interaction has enabled in-

formation exchanges between interested discussants of common issues within whole nations and also transcending geographical restrictions. "We are helping to change the lives of over two billion people, by connecting everyone, raising voices and enhancing participation through the open web" declared Lee, the founder of the worldwideweb in a statement issued to commemorate the 28 year anniversary of the innovation on Sunday March 12, 2017 (http://newtelegraphonline.com/ business/www-28-years). Distance, and to some extent, social barriers, are being eliminated in the new media and communication ecology.

This chapter will focus on the technology-driven public sphere in relation to democratic politics in Nigeria. It will examine the most used digital platforms for engagement with Nigerian issues. It will as well investigate the online activities of what has come to be known as citizen journalism and general online conversations. This study will as well examine the place and interactivity friendliness of two leading online news media namely *Premium Times* and the *Cable* and how they have affected public policy over time.

THE NIGERIAN MASS MEDIA: A NARROW WINDOW FRAME

> "... news as a frame, characteristics of the window, its size and composition, limit, what may be seen ... (Tuchman: 1978, p. 269).

The mass media in their various forms, which now include the digital media, are the main organs of the public sphere. In Nigeria, since the colonial time, the newspaper press has provided the public space for actors in the civil and political society to ventilate their views, discuss national issues and intervene in the policy process. Despite their dwindling circulation figures and even their precarious survival, they remain quite influential especially among the political and policy elite. It seems impossible to talk of Nigeria's political development and democracy without giving a pride of place to the press.

As Olukotun recently observed, "Shining as the role and the record of the media have been, the story contains contradictions and rough patches" (Olukotun, 2017, p.4). In the main, the Nigerian press is accused of being ethnic and regional in orientation,

largely reflecting the ownership structure, location and the pattern of political competition in the country. Another problem is commercial and economic fragility of many of the media organizations. This has greatly affected the professional autonomy of the organizations and their journalists.

The Nigerian press from inception, has always being political (Omu, 1978) and cantankerous. With its base in Lagos which was the seat of the colonial government, the press was largely an instrument of agitation by the educated elite against their exclusion and marginalization by the colonial government. From its small beginning as one-man enterprises, where the owner is also the journalist, the newspaper press has continued to function as a veritable barometer to gauge the political mood of the country. Whether during the colonial period or under the military, many Nigerians credit the press for its role in the country's political and democratic process. The tradition of a highly voluble and political press which, in the main, mirrors the cantankerous nature of Nigerian politicians continues till today. The Nigerian press does not just mirror the character of the Nigerian society and the events happening in it; it is an active participant. Some of the leading newspapers are owned by the politicians and businessmen. It is also important to observe that the newspapers, due to economic pressures, low circulation, competition from the new media, are cutting down on pagination and editorial contents. The highly competitive media market has also led to a lot of sensationalism and entertainment-oriented coverage of events apart from increasing attention being devoted to celebrity news. The Nigerian press is becoming more and more responsive to the dictates of the market in the process of news production. Events that will either increase circulation or generate advertisement are more likely to be captured in the news net than any other. A glaring example of the press' response to market pressure is how the front pages of newspapers are sold to advertisers in the practice known as wrap-around. We can also note that the front pages have been turned to display boards to advertise stories and attract readers' attention to such stories which are tucked in the inside pages.

In terms of representation of the country's diversity, it is generally taken that the Nigerian media are largely urban and elite oriented, and class biased. The media represent very narrow ideological interests, those of the contending factions of the ruling elite. Just as the poor are poorly and marginally represented in the state and its institutions and apparatuses (Ake, 1985), so are they symbolically annihilated in the media. The Nigerian media are pro-establishment and pro-capital. No Left-oriented publication has survived in the country. A prominent member of the establishment intellectual class, Sam Oyovbaire, eloquently expressed the situation some years back that, despite its radicalism, anti-colonialism, anti-dictatorship, the Nigerian press is indeed a capitalist press (Oyovbaire, *The Guardian*, August 29, 2001). The media, both old and new, often serve as ventriloquists of the unruly debates and ethnic cacophony that are the hallmarks of Nigerian politics. There is no doubt that by its architecture, the culture of news production does limit popular participation. This is, of course related to the social inequality and distribution of power in the society.

While broadcasting started as part of the apparatus of colonialism, the political and commercial context under which it operates has not been too dissimilar to that of the newspapers, especially under the prevailing political economy.

Despite the privatization of Broadcasting, government continues to be the dominant player in terms of ownership and control, and regulation. There are about 201 TV stations owned by both the Federal and State governments as against 43 privately owned. The state and federal governments own 185 radio stations while the privately owned ones are 97.

Although broadcasting seemed to have made substantial progress over the years availing Nigerians with multiple windows to ventilate their views, the statutory challenges for it are not any less encumbering especially with regards to regulation, which is still in the hands of the Federal Government.

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), established to regulate broadcasting nationwide, is largely run by government appointees who hardly reflect different shades of stakeholders of

the broadcast media sub-sector. As if to ensure maximum hold on NBC, government appointees to the N.B.C. board include representatives of the State Security Service (SSS), as well as those of the Information and Culture ministry. Even at that, though NBC is the sole regulator for broadcasters, unlike its contemporary, the National Communication Commission (NCC), it does not have the power to approve license. At best, it can only receive and process applications and pass its recommendations to the President.

Most of the TV and radio stations in the country maintain active presence on the internet. This is in addition to their being accessible to audiences across the globe through satellite connection. It is also worth to note that the policy of deregulation, which ushered in commercial and private broadcasting in the country, effectively ended the philosophy of public service broadcasting in the country. The Federal Government-owned Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) have been forced to operate as commercial organizations in competition with privately-owned ones like Channels TV, AIT/Raypower, Television Continental (TVC) and Radio Continental (RC), Silverbird Television (STV), all of which appear to be more popular than any government-owned broadcasting organization in the country.

The inhibitions above notwithstanding, the broadcast media sub-sector in Nigeria has been trendy in performance with a substantial measure of broadcasting being done on the internet, complemented interestingly by the multimedia presence of several Nigerian newspapers. Technology has also enabled many voices to get into the airwaves through phone-in programs, e-mail, twitter and other new devices.

THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The general opinion is that technology has created a new media ecology which has widened the public sphere. With digital technology, journalism can now throw its net wider and deeper to capture more social actors as both sources and consumers, thereby enriching democratic participation.

The idea of digital public sphere is of course linked to the now popular concept of public sphere which came into the front page

of academic discourse with the publication of Habermas' book, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. The central idea is the existence of an open space where citizens can exchange views and ideas like the Greek agora or a town-hall meeting. According to the Habermas, it is "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (Habermas, 1974 p.49). The public sphere is characterized by equal access and participation by all citizens. It is an assembly of individuals, not just as a public or crowd, but as an institution which allows for participation of those involved. To the German theorist:

> Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion — that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions — about matters of general interest.

Although Habermas prefixes it as bourgeois, the public sphere affords "general accessibility especially to information, the elimination of privilege and the search for general norms and the rational legitimation" (Garnham, 1986, p.42).

As an autonomous space, it is independent of both the state and market; it is a sphere "which mediates between society and state" and "has made possible the democratic control of state activities." Through reasoned argument, the state is held accountable and illegal use of power is brought into the open through publicity.

Another feature of Habermas' conception of the public sphere is the role of rational critical thinking; "in which the merits of arguments and not the identities of the arguers were crucial" (Calhoun 1992, p.2).

Beyond providing a forum for debate and exchange of ideas and views, the inclusive and universal character of the public sphere has led to the view that it could facilitate the emergence of a common public culture. The public sphere, the argument goes, should also facilitate "participation in a broader public culture and nurturing a sense of cohesiveness, common identity and belonging" (Hodkinson, 2011, p.176). The idea is that citizens' meaningful

participation in the polity must be based on a shared set of common values, sense of belonging and community (Garnham, 1992). Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities' addresses this function of the media in the construction of common identity and feeling of 'nationess' among people. The media do this by their provision of a common media experience to the people.

From the above, the two main requirements for the public sphere adequate for a democracy are quality of discourse and quantity of participation (Calhoun, 1992, p.2). In effect, as Schudson has argued, it is not just that people must participate but the quality of such participation and involvement is equally of importance (Schudson, 1992). Dahlgren adds one additional requirement, universality, i.e. the norm that it must be accessible to all citizens (Dahlren, 2001, p.35).

The theory as postulated by Habermas, has been criticized by many scholars as being "not wholly satisfactory" (Fraser, 1992, p.111). Fraser has argued that rather than guaranteeing equality of access and participation, the bourgeois public sphere theorized by Habermas was actually exclusionary; especially on the basis of gender, ethnicity, class and status. Habermas seems to have over-privileged a public sphere inhabited and dominated by bourgeois white male. She also argued that Habermas failed to acknowledge the existence of "other, nonliberal, nonbourgeois competing public spheres" (Fraser, p.115). She was also of the view that the public sphere was "a masculinist ideological notion that functioned to legitimize an emergent class rule." In this context, the bourgeois public sphere was an institution mechanism for hegemony and political domination. The import of Fraser's critique as noted by Mustapha is that "there was never a single public sphere built on rationality, consensus, and accessibility ... but a multiplicity of public spheres and counter publics, built on conflict, contestation, and the containment of "awkward class and groups and their preferred modes of cultural and political expression" (Mustapha, 2009, p.3).

As Habermas noted, the 'unrestricted' conversation in public sphere "requires specific means for transmitting information and

influencing those who receive it." Thus the mass media are the main organs of the public sphere (Habermas, 1974). The mass media are expected to serve "as an instrument or a forum for the enlightened, rational, critical and unbiased public discussion of what the common interests were in the matters of culture and politics" (Gripsrud: 1992, p.89).

But of recent, many scholars have raised a lot of concern about the health and functions of the mass media. It is believed that the mass media have fallen short of public expectations of their role in the democratic process. Whether expressed as 'democratic deficit' (Hackett, 2010) or 'media malaise' (Norris, 2000), journalism is blamed for some of the ills of democracy — low citizen participation, cynicism and lack of trust in political leaders, poor civic engagement.

It is also argued that the media have increasingly become captive instruments of the powerful social class.

The transformation of the media has of course been foreshadowed in Habermas' concept of refeudalisation. Journalism was taken over by organised private interests, an expanded state and the logic of the market. With the establishment of the bourgeois constitutional state, the press was "relieved of the pressure of its convictions ... and take advantage of the earning possibilities of a commercial undertaking, thus the transformation from a journalism of conviction to one of commerce" has begun (Habermas, 1974, p.53). The rational and dialogic character of the public sphere was lost to commercialism. These forces affected the critical edge of journalism. The result is captured by the British media scholar, James Curran:

> Modern media fell under the sway of public relations, advertising and big business, whereas the early press had facilitated participation in reasoned public debate, the new mass media encouraged consumer apathy, presented politics as a spectacle and provided pre-packaged convenience thought. The media in short managed the public rather than express the public will. (Curran, 2002, pp.23-24)

The main argument is that recent developments in the media and the society in general — commercialization, privatization, deregulation, technological innovations, globalization — have

"amplified and broadened the mercantile logic of media operations ..." (Dahlgren, 1991, p.10). The restructuring of the economy, which came in the wake of the ascendency of neo-liberalism in the 1980s, changed the structure, ownership pattern and the operating philosophy of the mass media, especially in broadcasting, in many parts of the world including Nigeria. The mass media have become more dependent on capital and social control of the privileged class.

Colin Sparks (2001) has identified three main ways in which the mass media have fallen short of the ideal of the public sphere. First, the limitations set by the market, concentrations of ownership and dependence on advertising revenue. This factor mirrors the argument of critical political economy (Murdock and Golding, 2005).

The second way is the elite orientation of the media. According to Sparks: "The existing media superserve social elites. The serious press tends to be the preserve of the upper social groups, excluding largely for economic reasons the poor." Lastly, due to their scale of operation and the need to make profit which dictates a high level of professionalism "media professionals effectively ration public discourse in our societies." Hence, "the room for genuine public access is very small ...." (Sparks, 2001, p.78). The two main determinants of news are money and power (McQuail, 2013).

The public sphere has not only become very narrow in terms of access and the voices and interests it represents, it has become depoliticized and depoliticizing. The symbolic absence of women, youth and other disadvantaged groups has been observed by many scholars. The "crisis of public communication" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) has no doubt affected the quality of citizens' engagement in democratic politics.

In the Nigerian situation, the ethnic and regional orientation and ownership structure of the country's media which, as Adebanwi recently observed, rendered "the Nigerian press ... totally captive to ethno-regional and ethno-religious passions and calculations" (Adebanwi, 2016, p.223) has affected their functions as organs of democratic communication. In the main, the Nigerian

press expresses very narrow partisan and parochial interests often clothed in the garb of ethnic, religious and regional interests. Olukotun has observed that the working environment of Nigerian journalists and the fragility of media business, among other factors, limit their role in advancing democratic causes (Olukotun, 2004). As Tuchman metaphorically remarks, the Nigerian media net is for the big fish (Tuchman, 1978, p.21). The majority of Nigerians, due to many factors, are outside the symbolic space offered by the mass media.

THE NET IS WIDER

> There is a long tradition of millenarian prophecy in relation to new media (Curran, 2011, p.99)

It is in that light that many express the hope that the emergence of the digital media offers a discursive opportunity for symbolically marginalized voices to insert the views and ideas in the public sphere and enhance their representation and participation in the democratic process. The role of the social media in the 'Arab Spring' has greatly heightened the euphoria about the power of the digital public sphere to enhance popular participation in the democratic process.

Negrine (1997) notes this age of silicon-chip society makes information processing incredibly easy. This is possible through innovative use of silicon boards in a variety of forms and techniques enabling a revolution in information technology. "As one form of communication is overtaken by another, and yet another, the inherent possibilities of more varied forms and patterns of communication become ever more complex" (1997, 51). Negrine further explains that the convergence of computer and telecommunications facilities signifies the transition from the more traditional and commonplace forms of communication via the wire telephone network to a sophisticated system of communication. This links together three essentials, namely, computers, processors and telephone systems (including mobile telephony and satellite). One result of all these is the collapse of the boundaries between different networks or systems of communication, in what is generally termed convergence. This subsequently makes it possible to

talk about a wider electronic communication infrastructure rather than separate technologies which transmit information. Castells (2000, 46-47) recalls that whereas in 1956, the first transatlantic cable phone carried 50 compressed voice circuits, optical fibres in 1995 could carry 85,000 similar circuits. "This optoelectronics based transmission capacity, together with advanced switching and routing architectures… are the basis of the so-called 1990s information superhighway…" Castells and Henderson (1987) particularly note that the superhighway has since been characterized by what they describe as "space of flows" and "space of places". The new territorial dynamics tend to be organized around the contradiction between placeless power and powerless places, the former relying upon communication flows, the latter generating their own communication codes on the basis of historically specific territory.

Recently, a study by the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia Journalism School has revealed that:

- Technology platforms have become publishers in a short space of time, leaving news organizations confused about their own future. If the speed of convergence continues, more news organizations are likely to cease publishing — distributing, hosting, and monetizing — as a core activity.
- Competition among platforms to release products for publishers is helping newsrooms reach larger audiences than ever before. But the advantages of each platform are difficult to assess, and the return on investment is inadequate. The loss of branding, the lack of audience data, and the migration of advertising revenue remain key concerns for publishers.
- The influence of social platforms shapes the journalism itself. By offering incentives to news organizations for particular types of content, such as live video, or by dictating publisher activity through design standards, the platforms are explicitly editorial.
- The "fake news" revelations of the 2016 American Presidential election have forced social platforms to take greater responsibility for publishing decisions. However, this is a dis-

traction from the larger issue that the structure and the economics of social platforms incentivize the spread of low-quality content over high-quality material. Journalism, with high civic value — journalism that investigates power, or reaches underserved and local communities — is discriminated against by a system that favors scale and share ability.

- Platforms rely on algorithms to sort and target content. They have not wanted to invest in human editing, to avoid both cost and the perception that humans would be biased. However, the nuances of journalism require editorial judgment, so platforms will need to reconsider their approach.
- Greater transparency and accountability are required from platform companies. While news might reach more people than ever before, for the first time, the audience has no way of knowing how or why it reaches them, how data collected about them is used, or how their online behavior is being manipulated. And publishers are producing more content than ever, without knowing who it is reaching or how—they are at the mercy of the algorithm (http://www.cjr.org/tow_center_ reports/platform-press-how-silicon-valley-reengineered-journalism.php)

There is no doubt that technology had always had a telling effect on political communication and the political process in general. For instance, Blumler and Kavanagh note that the emergence of television marked the beginning of the second age of political communication in the 1960s. The third age, which is the current phase, "is marked by the proliferation of the main means of communication, media abundance, ubiquity, reach and celerity (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999, p. 213). This, no doubt, refers to the multiple and diverse communication platforms that have been developed through ICTs during this era of information revolution. Digital technologies have created many internet-based communication platforms that have no doubt changed the media and communication landscape. As a writer has observed, "Whether referred to as cyberspace, the web, the information superhighway or, more formally, the internet, this new medium has linked the

world through a shared, virtual space that brings a whole new meaning to McLuhan's (1964) conceptualization of the global village. (Tedesco, 2004, p.507)

The arrival of the internet led to an enthusiastic acceptance and proclamations of its potential to revive the public sphere and democracy. The role of the internet in the public space is premised on the open-ended and non-controlled nature of communication that it has enabled. Also the lacking of traditional social markings in internet interactions which enables voices which hitherto, have remained silent and unheard to come forward, further enhances its role (Dahlgren, 2001). To the cyber-utopians, or those Cormunello and Anzera labelled 'digital evangelists (2012, p. 462), the internet is the magic wand to cure the media of their ailments and democratic deficit and restore the health of democracy. The internet, to many, is enriching traditional journalism with greater access to sources and information. As James Curran puts it, "... the internet is bringing into being ... an efflorescence of web-based journalism which is compensation for the decline of traditional news media ... the old order of monopoly journalism was a 'desert of MacWorld, now being reclaimed by a legion of bloggers, citizen journalists and proliferating web-based start-ups" (Curran, 2011, p.113). The inherent features of the technology give it the potential and possibility of addressing some of the failures of the traditional mass media. The internet dubbed 'the network of networks' is "revolutionary because it is a hybrid of the largely one-directional print, audio, and video media while offering opportunity for a two-way communication feedback loop. Another feature of the internet is its lack of information control structures or gate keeping that characterize traditional print and broadcast media" (Tedesco, 2004, p.510). The internet has enabled the old and new journalism to converge "in a protean synergy of network journalism" (Curran, 2011, p.113). The vertical and hierarchical gatekeeper model of journalism is being replaced by an "open-ended, reciprocal, horizontal, collaborative, self-generating and inclusive reporting and comment of a kind never experienced before" (Curran, 2011).

The internet offers citizens, notwithstanding their professional

skills, the opportunity for access (in terms of production, dissemination and consumption) to the public sphere and registers their voices, views, agenda and interpretative frameworks. It has been found useful as a tool of advocacy and mobilization by non-mainstream and oppositional groups. In a way with the internet, the monopoly of discursive power hitherto enjoyed by the powerful and media professionals has been disrupted. Barber and his colleagues have summarized the structural possibilities of the internet as follows:

> **(a)** inherent interactivity; **(b)** potential for lateral and horizontal communication; **(c)** point-to-point and non-hierarchical modes of communication; **(d)** low costs to users (once a user is set up); **(e)** rapidity as a communication medium; **(f)** lack of national or other boundaries; and **(g)** freedom from the intrusion and monitoring of government. (Barber et al 1997, p.8, quoted in Tedesco, 2004, p.511)

One does not need to be a new media determinist before agreeing with Castels that "we are in a new communication realm" which, according to him, "... is self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many that communicate with many." (Castells, 2010, p.9)

It is argued that participation in public debates becomes more open, as access to information online media provide the world with diverse information and perspectives about governments, international organizations including non-governmental organizations. This online regime equally avails the citizens with the needed enablement to voice their positions publicly without the interference of gate-keeping activities of formal media organizations and their professional journalists. It is also worth noting that it makes connective action less dependent on large infrastructure and could be hardly restrained by the authorities. Furthermore, given that this production online of the digital public sphere aims at non-market goods by employing non-market means, it has been portrayed as an effective way of circumventing the commercial logic that influences traditional media communication (Schafer, 2015). Also important, perhaps, is the interplay between traditional forms of street protest and social media interventions to direct actions.

Jenkins (2016, 11) recalls that the efforts of Youth and Partic-

ipatory Politics (YPP) Research Network discovered young activists who have overcome enormous difficulties in gaining access to the means of cultural production and circulation. These include "bloggers who did not own their own computers to film makers who did not own their own cameras and who relied on community centers and public libraries for digital access … many of those economically deprived, socially marginalized, historically disempowered-do not."

Many other commentators advise caution, if not total rejection, of some of the celebratory claims of the cyber-utopians. The pessimists hold that in spite of the celebratory disposition of many to the inception of the internet and accompanying offerings, digital divide is still real. To them, online debates hardly reflect diversity as search engines discretionally profile users as they hide filter bubbles leading to what has been described as "echo chamber effect". This is a situation in which certain views are not challenged but rather echoed and consequently justified in online communities (Sustein, 2001). Pessimists also argue that economic interests of online platform operators may also depoliticize the environment and consequently cushion consumerism. The big players among the telecommunication services providers are often concerned with their profit alone in utter disregard for the plight of the people lending so much strength to the claim of the pessimists.

There is also the issue of access. As many scholars (Golding, 1990, Golding and Murdock, 1986) have argued, access to the means of public communication is determined by structure of socio-economic inequality that exists in society. The adoption and sustained use of innovations are related to socio-economic opportunities as they are distributed among the population. Elaborating on this critical issue, Annika Bergström explains that:

> The diffusion of media technology and use of it has proven to be strongly related to socio-demographic factors. Age particularly plays an important role for the adoption of digital technology, and younger persons are over-represented among the so called innovators and early adopters. (Bergström, 2017, p.81)

The idea of digital divide (social and geographical) is real and

multidimensional. It is related to not just having access to computer and/or internet but other factors like availability of social resources, literacy and linguistic skills, economic cost and, in the Nigerian case, power supply. Digital gap also ranges from the global to national and domestic where gender and age stratify access and use (Livingstone, 2010). Many people lack the crucial capitals for a meaningful participation in the public sphere. Purchase of internet facilities is not a one-off thing. The gadgets and software are regularly being updated which requires purchases to keep updating and acquiring the requisite new skills. Norris has argued that the internet, unlike other older mass media whose technologies are more-or-less stable, has a tendency to exacerbate inequalities because of the "chameleon-like capacity of the digital technologies to morph, converge, and reappear in different guises" (Norris, 2001, p.17, quoted in Livingstone, 2010, p.128). Within the African context, there is the fear that the internet may widen the existing gaps between the rich and urban based elite and majority of rural and urban poor (Sonaike, 2004; Oso, 2007). Related to this is the poor state of ICT infrastructure in Nigeria and other African countries.

We may illustrate this position by noting the literacy rate in Nigeria. A national survey conducted in 2012 by the National Bureau of Statistics, puts adult literacy rate at 56.9% "with huge variations between the states" (UNESCO, 2012). For instance, compare states like Lagos (92.0%), Osun (80.0%) and Anambra (75.1%) with Borno (14.5%), Katsina (21.7%) and Jigawa (24.2%). In terms of geographical disparity, urban areas record 74.6% in comparison to rural areas 48.7%. Gender inequality is also reflected as the male population is credited with 65.1% literacy rate to 48.6% for female. The survey also shows that there are 40 million adult illiterates in the country.

Another source (CIA World Factbook) puts the total literacy rate at 59.6% as at 2015 with male literacy rate at 69.2% and female at 49.7%. The age disparity is also reflected in another collation by Koema. According to this source, there are 9.4 million young illiterates in the country compared to 41.2 million adults. Adult

female illiteracy rate is put at 61.4%, while youth female illiterate rate is 62.1%. (https://knoema.com/atlas/Nigeria/topics/ Education/Literacy/Adult-literacy-rate).

Suffice to say that these disparities will be related to access and use of ICTs and even in the ability of the various social groups to participate in the democratic process. While the hype about the so called pervasive influence of the internet in almost all areas of our lives is quite all over the place (Livingstone, 2010), the reality at least in the context of Nigeria and other developing countries, may suggest a lot of cautious optimism and skepticism. One can also detect a form of return to the old and discredited notion of an all powerful media theory; though with a reverse order — the people using the internet-based platforms to influence and change things. Even a notable scholar, Sonia Livingstone, has pointed to "a rising disappointment that many of the much vaunted opportunities — the internet's potential to revitalize democracy, re-motivate learners, overcome social exclusion and enhance global understanding — are far from coming to pass (yet) (Livingstone, 2010, p.123).

Contextualizing the Digital Sphere in Nigeria

As at February 2017, Nigeria had 154,120,484 active telephone lines amounting to 110.09 per cent of the 140 million population according to the 2006 Census figure. The distribution along the available technologies of GSM, CDMA, Fixed Wireless, and VOIP are 99.7 per cent, 0.10 per cent, 0.15 and 0.05 respectively. NCC estimates that as at May 2017, internet users in Nigeria stood at 91,595,319 with 91,565,319 on the GSM network. Meanwhile, based on the projected population of 182,201,960, Nigeria is said to have 53 per cent internet penetrations, while mobile subscription has increased to 81 per cent (Chima, 2017). Of all internet users in Nigeria, 36% of them are women (Web Foundation, 2015). Nigeria also ranks 13th out of 58 countries surveyed on the 2017 Affordability Drivers Index (ADI) showing a decline from the previous year's rating. This may not be far from slow or ineffective policy and regulatory process (A4AI, 2017; Akanni, 2016). Although, Whatsapp seems to have caught up with most social media users

over time, Facebook is credited with whopping share of 93.72% of social media users in the country (Statsmonkey.com, 2015).

These figures may also hide a lot of things;for instance, Nigeria ranks 5th in Africa in terms of quality of internet access. We also know that class, regional and geographical disparities also exist. As in most social services, the urban poor and rural dwellers are poorly served.

Today in Nigeria, a youth-led social media campaign is raising awareness of the link between sexual violence and reproductive health and adding a critical new voice to the national debate over reform of the country's anti-violence laws.

Since 2014 "#Choice4Life" campaign has been engaging thousands of Nigerians online and providing young people, in particular, a space to openly discuss the dangers of unsafe abortion and speak out in support of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) bill pending at the National Assembly. The bill would provide an important legal framework for dealing with issues including rape and female genital mutilation.

As many Nigerians will recognize the "turning point for social media as a tool of political engagement in Nigeria was 2010" (Ogunlesi, 2013, p.20). With the 2011 General Election then a year away, the then President, Dr. Jonathan opened his Facebook page in May of that year. This followed the success of Barak Obama in the US Presidential election where he used the Facebook to mobilize support for his campaign and electoral feat. According to a study:

> Jonathan actively engaged the people on his Facebook page during the campaign. He was able to attract more than 500,000 Facebook fans in daily conversation on many issues of national importance. (Oso, Odunlami and Adaja, 2011).

Other politicians followed Jonathan. Since then, many Nigerians as individuals and groups have maintained active engagement on the social networks for different causes and issues.

In other words, digital media's impact appeared to begin to register on Nigerian electoral process and political campaign in 2011 (Ibraheem, 2014) peaking up in 2015. According to Policy

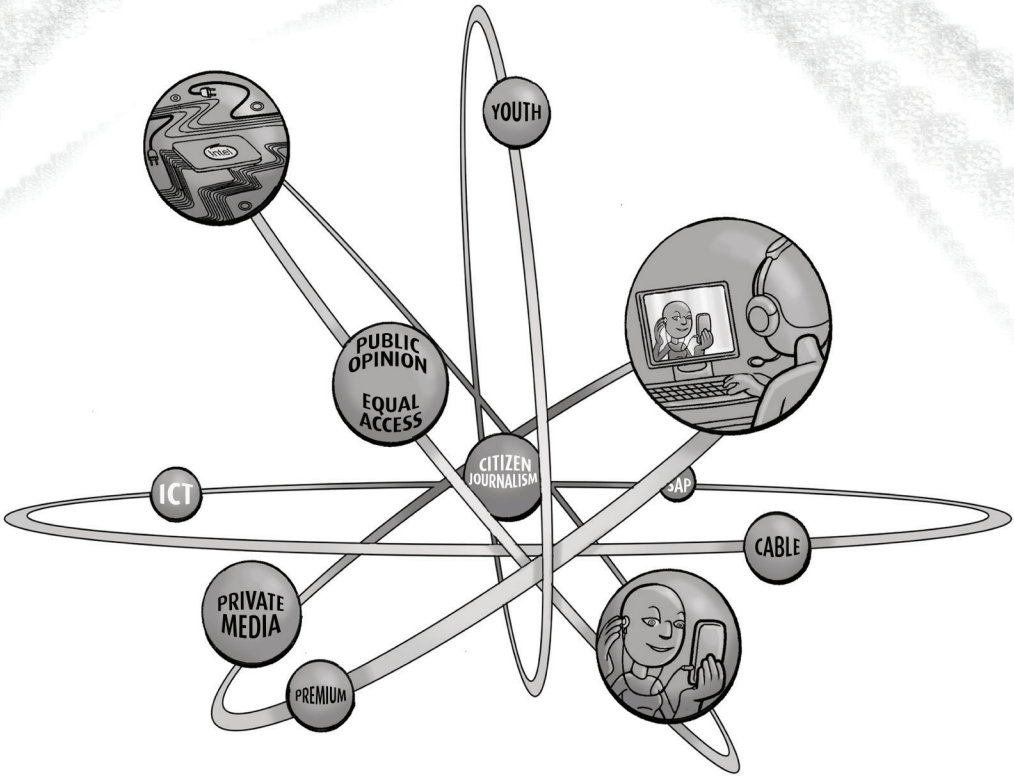
and Legal Advocacy Centre, PLAC (2012) the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) even endorsed this by ensuring regular updating and easing the access of the public to it as fully demonstrated in its collaboration with technologically savvy civil society organization, Enough is Enough (E.I.E.). According to Asuni and Farris (2011), more than 70,000 people were able to contact INEC directly to report incidents and have their questions answered, while the commission also received about 4,000 tweets and 25 million hits on its website in three days during the presidential election alone. INEC's use of social media during the 2011 elections significantly strengthened its capacity to receive and respond to the concerns of election stakeholders during the general elections. The EiE coalition further worked with INEC to set up Facebook and Twitter accounts that allowed for the open exchange of information, ideas and comments between INEC and other election stakeholders. EiE also established a Youtube campaign strategy where videos of important events are shared with the public. It included training citizens to partake in the monitoring of the electoral process by capturing events on their mobile phones and uploading same and making it go viral within seconds. Not the least was EiE's Revoda, a mobile phone application for election mapping. Revoda made it possible for users to register their phone numbers with a particular polling unit, so that reports made about the polling unit could easily be authenticated and followed up by INEC (Asuni and Farris, 2011, p. 2). As at June 2012, Revoda had been downloaded almost 10,000 times. This application made it possible to document logistical deficiencies and fraudulent behaviors during the 2011 elections.

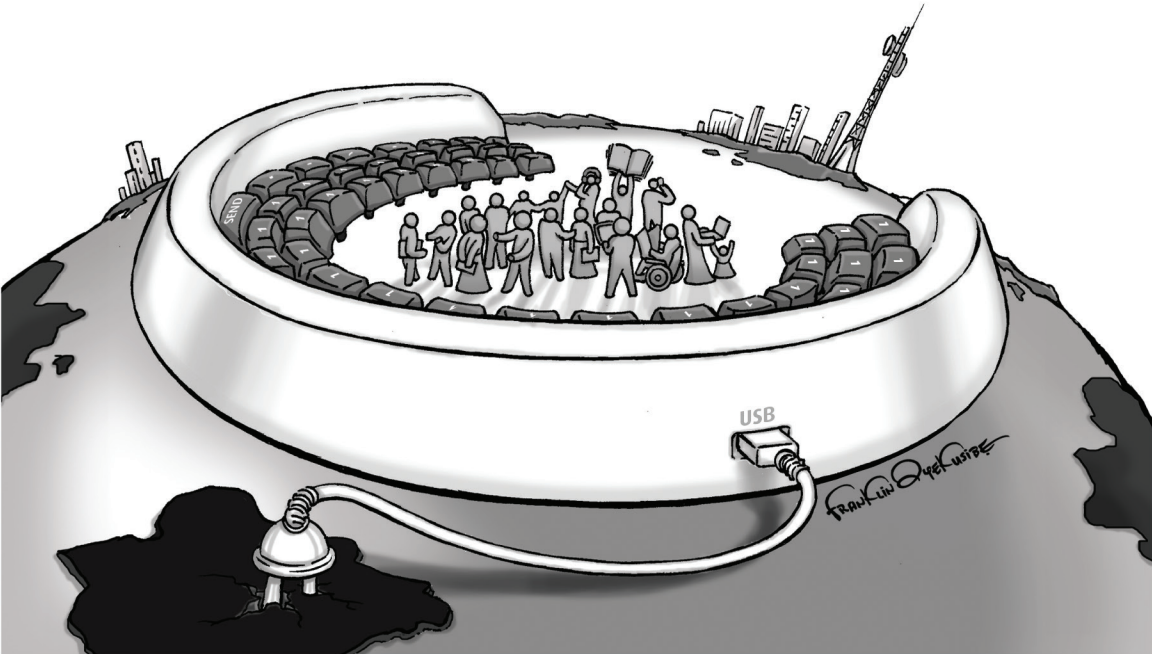
In what was similar to Kenya's Ushaidi internet platform, which came into being after the 2008 election riots in Kenya, Community Life Project in Lagos set up what it called an interactive website called Reclaim Naija. The Reclaim Naija platform enabled citizens to report incidents of violence and electoral malpractices through text messages. The messages so received were to be plotted on an interactive map. Between the National Assembly elections of April 9, 2011 and the presidential election of April 16, 2011, citizen

observers submitted 6,000 incident reports to the platform (Harwood, 2011). The Reclaim Naija platform was also used to report incidents and progress during the voter registration exercise in January 2011. The reports sent through Reclaim Naija were collated in real time and fed back to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This assisted INEC in troubleshooting in many locations across the country. The information was also useful to the media in monitoring and publishing stories on the voter registration exercise, thereby helping to amplify the voice of the people. In addition, the Reclaim Naija website serves as a one-stop online resource for information on the 2011 elections. It features all the polling units, senatorial districts and wards, the Nigerian Constitution, information on candidates, the 2010 Electoral Act, the election timetable, electoral guidelines, certified voters' registration figures, political parties as well as civic and voter education modules (PLAC, 2012).

Significantly, PLAC (2012, p. 8) notes that the use of the digital media by INEC and the civil society bodies must have been encouraged during electioneering seasons, even if indirectly, by the Electoral Act of 2010 which among others, provides:

- Section 154 which empowers INEC to make use of electronic media to conduct civic education and public enlightenment.
- Section 34 which requires INEC to "publish by displaying or causing to be displayed at the relevant office(s) of the Commission and on the Commission's website, a statement of the full names and addresses of all candidates standing nominated", at least thirty days before the day of the election.
- Section 71 which requires INEC to "cause to be posted on its notice board and website, a notice showing the candidates at the election and their scores; and the person declared as elected or returned at the election".
- Section 56(2) which states that INEC "may take reasonable steps to ensure that voters with disabilities are assisted at the polling place by the provision of suitable means of communication, such as Braille, large embossed print or electronic


YOUTH
PUBLIC OPINION
EQUAL ACCESS
CITIZEN JOURNALISM
ICT
CABLE
PRIVATE MEDIA
PREMIUM


USB

devices or sign language interpretation, or off-site voting in appropriate cases".

Unlike the civil society organizations, the political parties, though aware of the digital media and their capabilities, made minimal use of them prior to 2011 elections (Asemah and Edegoh, 2012). This, however, may have changed with the increasing user-friendliness of the digital media and their increasing popularity. In addition to their media advisers who are mostly conventional journalists, many governments including the Federal Government now have new/social media advisers. It, however, appears that political parties still give more attention to the old media than the new media. There is no doubt that the political parties, governments and members of the ruling and corporate elite recognize the power and influence of the new media. They, however, view its existence with a lot of fear and trepidation. Their inability to control the online exchanges may be a factor in this regard. Also is the fact that the traditional media are still regarded as influential.

What appears to be the pioneer internet-related law in the country came in 2015 when Nigeria enacted the Cybercrime Act of 2015. It objectives include providing "an effective and unified legal, regulatory and institutional framework for the prohibition, prevention, detection, prosecution and punishment of cybercrimes in Nigeria... ensure the protection of critical national information infrastructure... promote cyber security and the protection of computer systems and networks, electronic communications, data and computer programs, intellectual property and privacy rights". The seven-part Act focuses on the Protection of Critical National Information Infrastructure, Offences and Penalties, Duties of Financial Institutions, Administrations and Enforcement. The remaining parts are Arrest, Search, Seizure and Prosecution as well as Jurisdiction and International Cooperation.

Strangely, before this Act became a law, the government of President Goodluck Jonathan awarded a USD 40million 'internet spy' contract to an Israeli firm, Elbit Systems. The company was to help spy on citizens' computers and internet communications under the guise of intelligence gathering and national security. Earli-

er in April 2013, researchers at Munk School for Global Affairs had hinted that Nigeria, Kenya and Egypt were deploying surveillance and censorship technology developed by an American company, Blue Coat, which specializes in online security. The company was to enable the government to invade the privacy of journalists, netizens and their sources. Its censorship devices use Deep Packet Inspection, DPI, used by many western Internet Service Providers, to manage network traffic and suppress strange connections. Another USD61.9million was reportedly set aside for 'Wise Intelligence Network Harvest Analyzer System', Open Source Internet Monitoring System, Personal Internet Surveillance System and Purchase of Encrypted Communication Equipment (Emmanuel, 2013).

It is, however, widely known that the Department of State Security, DSS, carries out surveillance of the media and takes action in response to content the government considers inappropriate. It could be recalled that in June 2009, the Federal Government of Nigeria announced a USD5 million plan to support government-friendly web sites and prevent government-critical web sites from influencing Nigerian public opinion. Approximately 50 "patriotic" web sites were scheduled to be launched before the 2011 elections (Open Net Initiative, 2009).

CITIZEN JOURNALISM: POWER TO THE PEOPLE?

One crucial aspect of the new digital technologies, which has greatly altered and expanded the public sphere, is citizen journalism. Through different internet-based platforms and even the mobile phone, ordinary citizens are producing and disseminating journalistic materials (news, features, analyses, comments, photographs, cartoons etc.). Citizens' eyewitness accounts of events are now acceptable to conventional newspapers and television channels as part of their news. Citizen journalism, apart from eroding the gate keeping agenda-setting and framing power of media organizations, have the potential of opening up the public sphere thus enhancing the discourse power of marginalized groups and challenging that of the power elite.

While the members of the political class have found such plat-

forms as Facebook and Twitter ready tools to connect and engage the citizens, citizens on their own have appropriated citizen journalism to promote some form of alternative and sometimes oppositional discourses. Though the definition of citizen journalism has no settled boundaries (Goode, 2009) and continues to prove contentious and even acrimonious at times for reasons shaped by the perspective interests and motivation of the individual or group advancing their preferred definition (Allan, 2013, p.92), it refers generally to "direct news gathering and reporting by ordinary citizens — your neighbor, high school boys and girls, home-makers, corporate middle management — using widely available digital tools — blogs, websites, mobile and social media." (Min, 2016, p.570)

Though it is commonly accepted that citizen journalism is internet-based, Goode has rightly pointed out that "it does not begin and end online or even digital interactive media" (Goode, 2009, p.288). Going beyond the digital technology-centered definition of citizen journalism, Banda defines it as "a rapidly evolving form of journalism where common citizens take the initiative to report news or express views about happenings within their community. It is news of the people by the people and for the people" (Banda, 2010, p.26). As independent citizens, citizen journalists are not so much constrained by the professional concerns of the conventional journalists.

Today, there are at least two registered associations populated by online publishers in Nigeria. The Guild of Corporate Online Publishers (GOCOP), describes itself as "a Nigerian, non-governmental, non-partisan, non profit making organization, borne out of the growing need to ensure that online publishers uphold the tenets of journalism in doing their jobs" (https://www.linkedin.com/company/gocop-guild-of-corporate-online-publishers-) The second, Online Publishers Association of Nigeria (OPA Nigeria), founded in May 2010 assert that "…These discerning group of trustees and founders recognized the shift in the mode and means of social engagement; and understood the shifts, disruptions and changes that may occur which would overlap with current laws

and rules guiding conduct and practice and therefore sought to create a self regulatory body that would provide the means-tested standards for users and practitioners to operate by" (http://onlinepublishersng.com/about_association.php).

Bloggers, indeed, consider themselves 'citizen journalists' and believe they are better suited to provide the diversity that today's democracy needs than traditional journalists**.** They pride themselves on being the 'watch-dog' of the traditional watch-dog media. Beginning in 1990, bloggers are largely self-motivated and today run into millions, ranging from rants by teenagers to loosely disguised product advertising, from political commentary to news reporting (Burkholder, undated).

Jurrat (2011, p. 9) notes that citizen journalism can range from commenting on an existing news piece to publishing an article, podcast, photo or video on a personal blog or on Twitter, a dedicated citizen journalism website like the *Huffington Post* or on YouTube, or on interactive websites that work as extensions to mainstream media, such as Cable News Network's (CNN) iReport. On sites like CNN iReport, editorial gate keeping is left to the audience: uploaded content will be published unedited as long as it is considered news (as distinct from advertising, for example) and respects principles of taste and decency. Other sites, such as the South Korean OhMyNews.com, only fact-check hard news contributions before publishing them; and then there are websites that operate like a traditional newsroom, also called pro-am ventures, such as the *Huffington Post*, where professionals edit all-user-generated content (UGC) before publication.

Politically inclined ones like the renowned Youdecide2007.org provided the enablement to interested individuals to report on local electoral contests in Australia far beyond what the mainstream could do. Most prominent, perhaps, was the visibility it earned political activities and issues in remote areas including the northwest Australian electorate of Kalgoorlie that may otherwise never get featured by the mainstream media. Citing Coleman (2009), only political junkies may likely have the commitment it requires to run political websites such as Youdecide2007.org and myHei-

mat.de typify (Bruns, undated)

There are basically two types of citizen journalism; institutional and non-institutional (Banda, 2010, p.28). The non-institutional places the individual at the center of the content production process, which "readily lends itself to different forms of social networking, where private citizens use a combination of platforms to generate content and disseminate it as widely as possible." The almost free and unfettered access to the cyberspace has greatly enhanced this type of citizen journalism.

On the other hand, the institutionalized variety thrives within an organizational setting with some level of organizational constraints. It must also be noted that these two types could be regarded as polar ideals. A news website could start as a one-man endeavor and over the years, become more institutionalized as it becomes more commercialized and acquires more resources. It is also in this context of the political economy of citizen journalism that Goode has cautioned against restricting this genre of journalism "to sites that are set up explicitly as alternatives to 'mainstream' or 'traditional' journalism (Goode, 2009, p.1289).

The traditional news media run by professional journalists are now involved in some form of citizen journalism through inviting citizens to send stories, comments and pictures which they print/air as part of their normal news menu. In Nigeria, we have examples of the *Punch* newspaper which created a page "for readers to create their own news." The page is labeled "My News.Com (Salawu, 2011) and Channels TV which has I-Report segment on its main news at 10:00 p.m. featuring eye witness accounts of events and photographs from members of the public. *The Nation* has just invited citizens to send in eye-witness reports for publication in the paper (*The Nation*, Saturday, June 10, 2017.

Furthermore, almost all online versions of the main newspapers in the country have features that enable news-readers to comment on stories and/or share such stories through Twitter, Facebook, e-mail, Google etc. The point is such user generated contents enhance the participation of citizens in public discourse which is one of the main characteristics of citizen journalism and

the public sphere. Many readers now read their news online. Radio and television have shed their earlier Yorùbá name of "asòròmágbèsì[1]" as listeners and viewers can now respond to them in real time through the Internet enabled devices.

Some of the country's online newspapers like *Premium Times*, *Cable*, will also fall under the institutionalized citizen journalism category. However, the non-institutionalized type has mushroomed over the years. According to a report, there are about 120 of such sites "based on Nigeria content and largely controlled by Nigerian citizens at home and in the Diaspora by 2009" (Dare, 2011, p.21). In a recent study, Olukotun listed 40 Nigerian online news publications (Olukotun, 2017, p.9). Some that readily come to mind include the Nigerian Village Square, Nairaland and Linda Ikeji which hardly bother about journalistic rules and routines but attract millions on regular basis. The Linda Ikeji variety seems more interested in materials like scandal, celebrity and sensational news that will attract audience and boost their commercial prospects. This category will also include the highly popular and controversial platform, *Sahara Reporters*, which was established in 2006 by a former student union activist, Omoyele Sowore. From the beginning, Sowore never pretends to any journalistic professionalism. He is more of an agitational anti-corruption crusader in the tradition of the muck-raking journalism of old. In the words of Dare,

> Sahara Reporters, as a citizen journalism website, makes no pretence about its philosophy of aggressively exposing corruption, using ordinary citizens as foot soldiers and sources of information and content. (Dare, 2011, p.30)

Of course, like all news organizations, it justifies its existence and style of practice by an appeal to the public interest. Its editorial policy, inter alia, states: "The forum's major aim is to empower all citizens of various African nations to actively demand and defend their democratic rights. Our journalistic mission is to beam a critical searchlight on the people and practices that undermine and subvert the democratic process" (quoted in Dare, 2011). This claim to social service is part of the ideology of professionalism.

Reiterating its commitment to some of the professional ethos

1 The one who speaks without getting a reply.

of mainstream journalism, it declared on the day it was launched in New York:

> It is a unique organization, comprised of ordinary people whose only mission is to seek truth and publish it without fear or favor. This means that apart from the team of professionals running its affairs, Sahara Reporters is also an umbrella for anyone who has something to say and seeks an avenue to say it, as far as what he/she says is verifiable and ascertainable as true and the information there in, is the public interest.

There is no doubt that citizen journalism via the internet has enriched not just democratic politics in the country, but the practice of journalism itself. The online media as exemplified by *Premium Times*, *Cable* and *Sahara Reporters* have revived investigative journalism in the country. In an interview, the Editor-in-Chief of the online medium, the *Cable*, Simon Kolawole, recounted that the conventional media used to thrive on investigative journalism in the 1970s and 1980s. *Sunday Times*, *Guardian on Sunday*, *Newswatch*, *TELL* and several others used to devote resources to investigations. "Online journalism is bringing that back. The height of this was counting *Premium Times* as one of the consortium of global newspapers that won the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting in 2017. Beyond this, citizen journalism has deepened and widened the journalistic net to embrace more actors and voices. It has further liberalized access to the public sphere. For the Editor-in-Chief and Chief Operating Officer of *Premium Times*, Musikilu Mojeed, liberalization of access to information is critical to the building of a better society where fundamental judgments by citizens is based on well-informed state of mind. Liberalization is the most significant value online journalism has added to the "market place of ideas". According to him, information about governance, society and their interaction is no longer the exclusive preserve of the rich and powerful. Online journalism has demystified information sharing, cutting down the cost of information distribution and acquisition while delivering at a faster pace than traditional sources. Such is the extent to which *Premium Times* subscribes to the liberalization philosophy that it has created a WhatsApp group on which it simultaneously shares opinion articles published on its website. This enables members of the group

to comment freely on issues raised without having to reach the website.

Kolawole is also of the view that online is forcing the traditional media to be more creative in news delivery. Most of the stories are broken online every minute so the newspapers have to find new ways of saying the same thing". He further noted that the online media regime's peculiarity of enhanced interactivity has led to i-reporting which is quite helpful especially as there was a limit to which resources available to them could take them. Such is the extent to which the said interactivity had been beneficial that the *Cable* had received e-mail messages that specifically drew attention to certain issues, sometimes hinting on corruption and abuse of office. Some have also alerted them to wrong use of photos or some other inaccuracies.

The liberalizing trait of the internet applies as much to activist organizations as it is to the mass media. Civil society leaders across civil rights advocacy, anti-corruption and digital rights campaigns as well as environmentalists in Nigeria reckon strongly with the digital public sphere that the internet is.

The digital rights campaign organization based in Kano, Centre for Information Technology and Development, CITAD, for instance, has many Facebook profiles dedicated to different aspects of its work. These include "Peace Now" which is dedicated to peace campaign. Another is the "Friends of CITAD", which is a general platform on issues concerning CITAD. A third one is the "North East Education and Development Forum", which deals with CITAD's activities with the education sector in the north east of Nigeria. There are still some others dedicated to various issues such as the organization's mentoring program, the peace clubs, hate speech countering and so forth. CITAD also has at least three Twitter handles. These are @ICTAdvocates that focuses more on ICT related issues; @CITAD3, which deals with peace building and anti-hate speech campaign as well as @NE, which deals with engagement with peculiar issues of the conflict-ravaged north east of Nigeria. All of these platforms according to the executive director, Yunusa Yau, have "helped us get out our messages to the

audience, engage people with what we do and aid our advocacy. For instance, we have a monthly social media peace messaging campaign whose aim is to get young people to send out peace and anti-hate speech messages than just waste their precious time on chatting." CITAD particularly appreciated the immediacy advantage of the online environment because "the immediacy offers a tool to engage your constituents. They tend to feel part of your program because they get to see and listen as they are taking place. This deepens participation and a sense of ownership by constituents to an organization. It also promotes openness that is needed for developing a robust democratic culture in organizations. Multimediality means that conventional media is challenged as whereas before you needed to listen, watch and read before you get a comprehensive sense of event; now everything is available in one medium. Newspapers and broadcast stations with their processing of events and products before they are let out to the public are challenged as more people are looking for more immediate events."

The use of digital platforms has not been any less resourceful for the anti-corruption advocates and environmentalists. Nigeria's foremost environmental group, Environmental Rights Action, ERA, had no fewer than 400 followers on Twitter in addition to 7,272 friends on Facebook, according to its Head of Media, Philip Jakpor. He added that the multiple platforms available online had also helped the organization in maintaining close proximity with different classes and age groups in the society. "We engage with the older people in the society on Facebook and the younger on platforms like Twitter" he added.

For the anti-corruption campaigners, digital media have been particularly delighting for "helping to demystify political elites' exclusive ownership of the media to historically control traditional media through censorship…" declared, Olanrewaju Suraju, chair, Civil Network against Corruption, CSNAC. "These digital platforms are the mainstay of our advocacy for reforms and public mobilization for engagement of government and public space" he added. CSNAC preferred Twitter because it can easily be linked with

Facebook thus providing access to two platforms simultaneously.

WhatsApp, however, seems to have caught the fancy of many virtual and real groups availing members with access to information as well as the opportunity to ventilate their opinions. For the intellectuals for instance, examples include the "Proudly Chevening" and the "Network of Seminar Scholars". While the former is exclusively set up for the alumni of the British Chevening Scholarship scheme, the latter is open to Nigerian intellectuals both at home and in the Diaspora.

Although this age of convergence of media genres has heightened citizens' expectations, a number of news media are still struggling to do multimedia delivery of their output. For the *Premium Times*, according to its Editor-in-Chief, "online newspapers such as ours serve a critical role in society as the most effective information bridge to people with lower economic power. This demography represents the bulk of our society and we owe an immediate duty to serve this community with factual stories. Serving this role effectively demands the use of multimedia strategy, allowing readers the opportunity to interact with our stories through different entry points."

The digital media platforms have substantially extended the terrains of the media even as they have enabled the spheres of their engagement with audiences spread around the world to bourgeon almost limitlessly. A global public sphere has emerged through such channels as CNN and the new media. Interestingly, an average news platform available online with the relevant resources can deliver multimedia information materials thus redefining the traditional categorization of media genres along the print and broadcast tracks.

Humanity's seemingly insatiable yearning for information and engagement with issues arising therefrom have become manifest by the enhanced digital technology capacity of the media, by the prompt, self efforts of civil society organizations to constantly bridge up with their members and others as well as the media which used to serve as the only channel of reaching out to their adherents.

A major challenge inevitably deriving from this new era of digital sphere, however, is the crisis of quality that audiences will have to contend with more than ever before and probably beyond imagination.

Between the public sphere of the medieval era in Europe and the contemporary version variously labeled virtual sphere, digital sphere and so forth are far reaching similarities and differences. While the former, as espoused by Habermas (1989), provided for physical relationship between participants, the conspicuous disregard for physical presence in the digital version does not affect participants' involvement except for certain understandable variables. Indeed, the fact that interested participants do not necessarily have to mobilize some unusually tasking logistics beyond the computer hooked to internet to get involved is a lot incentivizing. This situation also helps to nurture whatever form of democracy any society is able to run among those identified by Pinkey (1993). Such is the liberalized access to information, and the consequential engagement with it has been recurrent and unmistakable that they now instigate quick actions and/or reaction from those concerned, both in government and in some other realms.

Perhaps the most interesting in the digital sphere is the extreme extension of the operational terrain of journalism practitioners in which they now face stiff competition from sheer enthusiasts who require little or nothing to publish information. The report of the recent edition of *Columbia Journalism Review* journal cited earlier has manifested most amply in this clime. Commissioned persons and others now share media contents across platforms leaving producers with little or no control thus undermining their verifiability. Worse, the susceptibility of the transmitted and retransmitted information materials to manipulation is highly plausible. The end result of this is the increasing incidence of fake news.

Fake news is probably the most disturbing issue on the internet today as reflected in the concern expressed by Prof. Lee in his statement commemorating the 28th anniversary of the worldwideweb. *Sahara Reporters*, which had its account suspended by Facebook itself, had to contend with a counterfeit version at some

point. Incidents of hijacking of Facebook accounts or unauthorized duplication or replication are also common, thus leaving news media platforms and civil society organizations at the mercy of mindless charlatans who may get away with some havoc before they are found out.

Conclusion

> It is curious that for a nation of normally voluble and verbally talented people, we seldom hold genuine dialogue among ourselves. Threats, recriminations, diatribes, infantile, tirades, hate-suffused ethnic propaganda and summary state clampdown have become the currency of personal and group exchanges as well as the denominator of national dialogue (Williams, 2017).

The inception of the digital public sphere in Nigeria, as in other parts of the world, is a consolidation of some evolving socio-political and technological progress which became more noticeable in 1990s as the continent of Africa endured the third wave of democracy. As the broadcast media opened up to the participation of private players, the internet, cell phone and other ICT platforms came into being to further open the public sphere for wider access and participation by the citizens. The liberalized and pluralized public sphere has no doubt fundamentally altered the environment and instrumentalities of public communication and democratic politics.

Convergence has enabled the conventional media to insert the voices of the ordinary people into the media space. Talk radio has proliferated while most public affairs programs on radio and television now include call-in segments. This has no doubt strengthened the feedback loop in the communication circuit; in a way making the audience more active in the political and democratic processes.

While we acknowledge the potential of ICTs, particularly the internet to enlarge the public sphere and give voice to more people in the society, we deplore any attempt at any notion of technological determinism. The media, both old and new, may be powerful; they seldom act on their own. As Barrie Axford once remarked the fact that all politics now subsists within space or frame of electronic media (Castells, 1996) does not negate the claim that agents are

active in the construction of their own world (Axford, 2001, p.2). To borrow a statement from an American scholar, there is a great distance between the passionate and acrimonious debates in the new media and political action (Schudson, 1995, p.27). He further explains that "Political activity leads people to follow the news. News does not ordinarily lead people to political activity". In fact, the virtual debates and discussions among anonymous debaters and discussants can really become, to borrow Haberman's phrase, "tranquilizing substitute for action" (Habermans, 1991, p.164).

In the euphoria of the moment, many techno-utopians may tend to forget the historical fact that "technologies tend not to be determinative but rather are conditioned by what is going on in the society in which they grow...." (Barber, 1998). Debates and conversations may be required for democracy. They are not sufficient. Talk, as the saying goes, is cheap. Nigerians love to talk a lot and this is clearly evident in the digital public sphere. But as Michael Schudson has aptly expressed it,

> Current preoccupation with the media mistakes the public parlor of loquaciousness for the heart of society. The life of a house is more often to be found in the kitchen or the bedroom. Still, we judge ourselves and are judged by others on the quality and character of talk in the public. (Schudson, 1995, p.24)

This raises the issue of the prospect for social action that internet activism can generate and sustain.

It is unhelpful to unhinge the new media from the social structure and existing configuration of power. The media, either old or new, do not exist in a vacuum. Social and material conditions within which people live their daily lives are crucial in any discussion of the role of the media in politics and society. Media access and consumption are regulated by the existing distribution of power and other social resources. The new media would not be an exception. We must also note the importance of local social context. The media and their possible effect/influence do not operate in a vacuum. While noting the significant role of the social media in the Egyptian revolution, Eltantawy and Wiest, however, observed that "we must consider the powerful influence of outside condi-

tions, particularly the social, political and historical contexts of the movement as well as the availability and interplay of resources (social media and others) and the actors' efficacy in utilizing available resource to meet their goals" (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011, pp. 1218-1219). Likewise, Comunello and Anzera cautioned against technological deterministic framework for contextualizing the role of the social media but rather "we should consider the complex interactions between society, technology and political systems" (Comunello and Anzera, op. cit, p. 465). In this wise, it is unhelpful to consider to conceive the power of the media without taking into account the issue of human agency and other prevailing social conditions. As Warschauer like many critical scholars has also remarked, "technology must be situated within underlying unequal power relationships that exist in society." (Warschauer, 2003, p.209)

For the digital public sphere to fulfill its potential and not fall into the same trap as the conventional commercialized media, the people as agents and social actors must acquire the right type of knowledge and democratic etiquette. For now, the nature of debates and conversations on the new/social media among Nigerians is hardly edifying and democratic. Just like they exist in the traditional media, the conversations and debates are cantankerous, unruly and hardly meet Habermas' criterion of reasoned argument. The divisive and parochial factors; ethnic, regional and religious affiliations that are so evident in media discussions and debates are replicated on line. The character of debate staged in the Nigerian media was appropriately described by a newspaper columnist,

> ... in the best of times, brash and sensational; in the worst, just on thinking, arrayed along ethnic, regional or even religious lines; and in-between and irredeemable lover of sensation, that though push copy sales, retard society (Hardball, 2017, p.48).

Another columnist and journalism scholar, Olatunji Dare has also observed the unruly tone and tenor of public conversation on the Internet. According to him,

> Reading comments on Nigerian news on the Internet sites frequented by Nigerians, you would think the constituent groups are engaged in a

> war of attrition. Nothing is sacred any more. Vileness has become the standard of elocution (Dare, 2017, p.48).

Many scholars have also expressed the fear that the multiplicity of public spheres created by the internet may lead to fragmentation of the public. The internet, it is argued, connects us as discrete units in an electronic coherency, while isolating us socially ..." (Ake, 2000, p.28).

It is argued that if the old media, especially public service broadcasting, through their programming, had centripetal social impact by binding members of society together, the "new media environment is more likely to have a centrifugal impact, facilitating social and cultural fragmentation (Hodkinson, 2011, p.184). The internet is considered a centrifugal and fragmenting medium with a poor chance of offering a meaningful public sphere (Moyo, 2009; Haywood, 1998). The celebrated pluralism ushered in by digital media technologies has led to what Michael Tracey called "retribalization" of society (Tracey, 1998). Elaborating on this tendency, Hodkinson has argued that:

> A ... difficulty with optimistic proclamation of an online public sphere revival is that, at the same time as introducing greater interactivity into everyday use, the vastness and diversity of the internet seems liable to have a fragmentary effect even more concentrated than that of digital broadcasting. Rather than encouraging people to share content with or engage with diverse groups of others as part of broad publics, the ability to choose exactly what or who to engage with seems more likely to result in pursuit of particular interests and association with narrower groupings (op. cit, p.189)

The scholar identified two main implications of this tendency. First, is the possibility for internet users to avoid matters of public affairs and political controversies! According to him, for people with previous little interest in such matters, the internet makes it easier for them to "opt out of the broader public sphere in favor of their existing interests." Second, for those who use the internet to learn about or engage in political discussions, they often "seek out content and other users that cohere with existing perspectives" instead of engaging with "diverse forums oriented towards broad cross-sections of society". This argument echoes the old

argument of the reinforcement effect of the media.

As Oso (2012) has remarked, the anonymity offered by the internet and social media can confer on some people power without responsibility which, as they say, is the power of the prostitute. Such anonymity and the openness of the internet make the new media platforms amenable to being used to manipulate and misinform the public. As McQuail has remarked, "... large scale public support and approval can be bought without much risk of discovery" (McQuail, 2013, p.191). The phenomenon of fake news that is becoming very prominent on the social media is a case in point.

Of recent, the Federal Government and many Nigerians have expressed concern over the use of the social media and other Internet platforms for the dissemination of hate speeches and fake news. For instance, a fake version of President Buhari's speech at the 2017 United Nations General Assembly was disseminated on the same blogs including the popular Linda Ikeji. The threats and counter threats being issued by various agitational and separatist groups mushrooming in the country litter the digital public space.

Certain things must attract our attention about the viability of the digital public sphere. First as many scholars have argued, is the tendency of any 'new' media to go the way of the old after all the initial enthusiasm and euphoria must have settled. This has been the fate of radio and television. This tendency is of course the outcome of the ability of the powerful to incorporate such 'new' media as part of its ideological apparatus. The second thing of worry is the pernicious effect of commercialization. Habermas' idea of re-feudalization addresses this. The commercial logic has the tendency to push the media towards the safe mainstream strand of public debates and in the extreme toward soft/human interest stories and sensationalism that have little or nothing to do with public affairs. While it may be very difficult for the powerful to capture or colonize the digital public sphere because of its peculiar open architecture, the ever expanding impact of commodification and commercialization may render many of the ICT-enabled platforms ineffective as organs of public sphere.

To take full advantage of the digital public sphere, we need to

return to some of the original ideas postulated by Habermas. The public sphere must not just be spaces for ethnic, religious and oppositional politics. This has been the main bane of the conventional media in Nigeria. The digital public sphere must be rescued from going that way.

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6

Television and Nigeria's Democratic Aspirations

By Yinka Esan

Introduction

The attainment of democratic functions has often hinged on features of modern society like the mass media. Members of a democratic society should have a voice and expect to be heard, either directly, or through some form of representation. Democracy requires that public policies and collective actions are not the exclusive preserve of a few. There should be universal participation, so that all members of society have a say in public deliberations, over matters of mutual concern. Both require representation or mediation. Citizens should be equipped to hold accountable

those who are official custodians of power. This assumes that there is openness in society and free flow of information. Modern societies are complex, consisting of large populations. With social distances and isolation, society cannot rely solely on personal interactions that were characteristic of traditional societies to function. Herein lies the importance of the mass media for any system of governance – be it authoritarian or liberal democratic. Ideally, in a liberal democratic system, the media should be free to perform these roles. It is important to examine how well the media adapt to fulfill core notions of democracy as societies evolve. In this chapter, our attention is focused on television broadcasting and what roles it plays in the attainment of Nigeria's democratic aspirations and maintenance of its democratic culture. In discussing this, we consider what mission was assigned to television, how well aligned the mission is with democratic principles. Has it fulfilled this mission, or has it been held up from doing so – by whom or what?

Media and the Democratic ideal

As a mode of governance, democracy works on principles of self-determination. With democracy, it is assumed that **all** members of society, not merely particular elements or groups, are adequately endowed with ideas. These ideas are required to access resources intended for the wellbeing and prosperity of the society. Ideally, democratic societies should offer scope for universal participation. This is the junction where media and mass communication meet with governance.

Davis (2010, 84) provides a summary of the normative ideals set out for media and public communication in democratic societies. They are to provide objective and widely available information, ensure the accountability of the powerful (institutions, organizations and individuals), offer access to a wide range of perspectives and viewpoints, constitute an arena for rational deliberation, and debate on issues of common interest. This space should be as Habermas (1989) had proposed of the public sphere: accessible to all citizens, and conducive to informed, coherent, and rational discussion, without any fear of reprisals. Here, citizens should engage

with public issues, armed with appropriate and adequate information. Quality decisions arrived at in the public sphere are crucial to the stability of society, and without these, development could be stifled. Transparency in decision making, and consequent regard for the consensus of opinion arrived at within groups, evoke confidence and encourage compliance with recommended appropriate actions (Saeed, 2009; Pettit, Salazer & Dagron, 2009). As argued above, such universal participation expected in a democratic society is hardly feasible when information flow is restricted or lopsided. Media professionals have to act as representatives for the wide range of people whom they serve. Guarantees of freedom that apply to citizens should apply to media professionals in greater proportions. The media should be free to operate (access information, seek clarification, raise and contribute to debates) without fear of reprisals.

A structure proposed by Christians et al (2009 cited in McQuail 2013) sets out four normative roles of the media in a democratic society. Media roles are monitorial, facilitative, radical and collaborative. The collaborative role acknowledges the importance of media working with other key social actors, the need for interaction and mutual dependence. The radical role calls media professionals (journalists in particular) to a higher pedestal. By their superior training, they are to recognize imminent dangers, alert and prepare society for such eventualities. Media professionals, regardless of the genre in which they work, are the sentinels or watchdogs of society. In the facilitative role, media provide adequate, meaningful and relevant information as discussed above. They ensure that the various groups get necessary information required to make appropriate decisions about matters concerning themselves and others. The monitorial role involves the documentation of information about current and topical events relating to governments and private individuals whose actions are consequential in society. Such documentation is to ensure that the powerful are accountable. Though it overlaps with the other three, McQuail suggests a primacy of this role, [almost as a precondition] for democracy: "In its fullest expression, the monitori-

al role appears well-suited to the needs of a democratic political system, **provided the conditions of independence of monitors' from power holders are met and there is freedom to express unwelcome ideas and transmit uncomfortable information**" (2013, 108) [my emphasis]. To be effective, the media should be free of all encumbrances. The question then is to see if they are. Has Nigerian television been free to be a watchdog, or has it been captured by the powerful who it should be monitoring? Given that government determines the orientation of service, and parameters of operations, there is a tendency to regard government as being the powerful to be monitored, and state impositions are commonly considered as encumbrances to the media. However, it is in understanding the media performance that further restrictions affecting the media can be seen.

In practical terms, the task of informing, explaining, clarifying, and harnessing diverse views held by members of society is the challenge for media. The media then have to harvest [and advocate for] ideas that are in the best interest of all. The media should facilitate a remembering of past events, and recognition of links between different events and utterances. Without the freedom to do these, the monitoring role is likely to be compromised. The overall burden rests on the entire media system, which consists of a variety of media operating within national settings along with those operating transnationally. The specificities of each society determine what media mix works best and for which particular task. Media systems involve different firms, with different ownership structures and modes of governance; they consist of sectors usually differentiated based on the technology in use, and in some cases, the types of service offered (McQuail 2013, 119–120; Hallin & Mancini 2010, 2004)). Typically, media systems consist of print media and audio-visual forms (terrestrial and satellite enabled radio and television broadcasting,). These remain dominant even though new message forms disseminated through new platforms [internet enabled, online media including video on demand and social networking sites] have gained much ground. These newer media are distinct. Inspite of the massive audiences that they at-

tract, they are largely fragmented spaces constituted around particular interests. Mass media still constitute a broader space for diverse identity groups who are engaging with common concerns.

Radio and television had been saddled with this responsibility since they were deemed to be more effective in cutting across the social spectrum. Informed at the time by an assumed scarcity of airwaves, broadcasting was regarded as a public resource to be strictly regulated. British public service broadcasting was instructive – public interest was paramount, but from its inception, television in Nigeria also adopted the commercial orientation. Though Western Nigeria government, owners of the pioneer station, had foreign partners briefly, ownership of broadcast stations in Nigeria was restricted to government. Broadcast reached far more audiences than print media messages whose audiences had to be literate (hence elitist). Broadcast stations were free-to-air thus more conveniently accessed. Citizens were to be well equipped to participate meaningfully within the public sphere as expected within democratic cultures. The broadcast industry was charged with this task. In the following section, we shall examine how television fared in this mission.

Engaging Audiences

Television, like other mass media, is a feature of modernity. At inception in Nigeria, it was urban-based and professionalized, so service was distant from grassroots audiences. That was the first layer of disconnect but there was another. In a country as populous and diverse as Nigeria, coordinating a range of ideas located at the grassroots in various regions of the nation is a challenge. In the early days, stations were few; each in its designated market had to cater for ethnically, linguistically and socio-culturally diverse audiences. There were inevitable compromises in representation, and once novelty of the new box had waned, the issue of particular identity groups did arise. The challenge of expressing differences was muted by the authoritarianism and unitary command of military rule. Then emphasis was on unity, rather than difference. Not so in the democratic dispensation that resumed in earnest in Nigeria in 1999.

For many voices to be heard as required in a healthy democratic society, a pluralistic media arrangement (or a simulation of this) is desirable. Such a simulation was evident in the British public service broadcasting model. At its inception the BBC then offering only radio service was a commercial entity (product of the cooperation of receiver set manufacturers known as British Broadcasting Company). It became the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1927 when it became a public service broadcaster. There was no domestic competition then, even though signals from pirate broadcasters aroused audience discontent to some of BBC's paternalistic fare. The mission for British public broadcasting service established under BBC's first Director-General John Reith, is often summed up in three evergreen words – inform, educate, and entertain. Yet these have had varied emphasis. In its first incarnation, British public service broadcasting was set to establish standards for society through programming – trust, uniformity in cultural outlook and a distinctiveness that reflects national identity. News and such factual genres may have been appreciated for the impartiality and objectivity, but to some audiences, entertainment fell short compared with the pirate radio service. This was before television which was introduced whilst the BBC maintained a monopoly in British broadcasting.

The monopoly on television gave way to a public service duopoly when ITV was established in 1955. In spite of its commercial operations, emphasis remained on setting high standards. Distinctive service was maintained. Rather than counterprogramming expected in a strict competition, ITV and BBC in the early days juxtaposed similar programs so viewing audiences regardless of which channel they tuned to would be exposed to similar genres / content in society's best interest. With several independent commercial licensees operating in different regions and across the nations –England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, television was brought even closer to the people. Similarly, BBC created its second national TV channel (BBC2); existing BBC regions were reconfigured to improve the challenge of regional representation. Renewal of BBC Royal Charter every 10 years offers opportunities

to review and refine public service broadcasting as service adapted to new social and technological realities, including the current deregulated regime. For example, Channel 4 introduced in 1982 as a self-funded, commercial though not-for-profit public service broadcaster had a remit to innovate, develop the independent production sector and reflect cultural diversity. This helped improve representation of minority groups and others on the fringe.

From the onset, the BBC placed a high premium on quality programs, in order to improve the taste and outlook of the masses. Pluralism had to be accommodated within existing limited channels (Keane, 1991). Statutorily, Britain's public service broadcasters were minded to offer opportunities for inclusion of diverse social groups through a service that sought to be objective and impartial, with a varied diet of programs that catered for audiences drawn from a broad social spectrum. This remained even after revised views on scarce public airwaves as convergence of television with other delivery platforms expands opportunities. Britain continues to review its conceptualization of public service in this dynamic media environment.

Proper pluralism is enabled in the liberalized era. Though commercialized, digital broadcasting allows different groups to aspire to self-expression through dedicated channels. However some argue that these developments jeopardize laudable principles of public service (Cushion, 2012). The jury is out on how desirable it is to have a mushrooming of media channels for diverse interests or groups; the question remains whether the public should engage in these public sphericules or if it is better to convene in a public sphere as national channels once were (Gitlin, 1998).

It is often argued that when media are closer to the audiences, they are more efficient. Proximity can be viewed in terms of physical and cultural location of media operatives to their audiences. Thus, national broadcasters operating at regional or national centers, distant from grassroots audiences, tended to be less efficient. This reasoning is evident in the trajectory of British broadcasting discussed above. Decentralized media were likely to be more faithful in tackling the concerns of local audiences; especially if

close proximity meant that the audiences could easily access or be accessed by stations. It will be even better if the stations were run by those who truly represented their targets, by being sensitive to their cultural or distinct positions.

Initially, high costs and complex technical requirements of operations prevented Nigeria's television industry from being as local as the ideal argued above. Instead service was centralized; stations were owned and funded by regional (later federal and state) governments. This was consistent with views that regarded television as a national (perhaps global) medium (Katz, 2009). Since conditions (technological, economic and political) fostered liberalization in the 1990s, global television service (like CNN, Sky, Disney, DSTV) has become regular.

Television is well suited to delivering national and even global audiences to share media spectacles. Long before deregulation, audiences from around the world joined to watch the moon landing (1969). More recently, global sporting meets (World Cup, Olympics), inauguration of American presidents, wars, and global disasters have graced screens in homes around the world simultaneously. Television has thus lived up to its metaphor as a window on the world. It has always been susceptible to international influences, due to prevalent business models in industry. A good proportion of television programs were distributed transnationally. In the case of Nigeria, the flow was unidirectional, from predictable Western sources (USA, Britain). In 1962, third year of operations on Nigeria's first television station, the hours of transmission were limited yet 75% of entertainment programs were foreign (Ikhime, 1979: 40). So TV audiences were always subject to global influences, though locally produced output in other areas was high - public enlightenment 87.7%, News 100%. The figure for local news production masks reliance on wire copy and newsreels from international news agencies (Paterson, 1998) which showcased the practice of western democracies ostensibly raising aspirations. In this, television was more like a mirror through which audiences could refract their prospects in life and compare with what they could see of others. As noted by Barker (cited in Chadha and Ka-

voori, 2010), stations like this could not contribute to global flow of information. Local producers and audiences alike had always contended with the acculturating impact of international broadcasting. It can be argued that such exposure was good for rousing aspirations for the dividends of democracy, but frustrating for audiences who lived under successive military regimes. In time the balance was altered. By policy, local productions, which articulated concerns of the government and the people, increased. Yet consistent with military rule, government-controlled television was used more as a notice board. There was little room for expression, dialogue or participation as expected in a democratic culture. This varied in different genres of television as will be discussed hereafter.

The summary of the foregoing argument is that the ultimate goal of the media in a democratic society is to foster participation of the different members of society, and enable informed decision-making at private and public levels by citizens, regardless of their physical or social distance to the centre. For the medium to function successfully in the set ideals, television should be organized in such a way as to offer ordered access to receive and generate relevant messages. This argument will be reviewed using a selection of stations and programs, to demonstrate how television attempted to help the nation fulfill its democratic aspirations.

Audiences are here regarded as citizens who exist in a range of spaces—local, national and global. In these spaces, audience identity is still shaped by different markers—education, age, gender, income, and occupation. Ethnicity, nationality, and religion are also relevant. In this chapter, we consider how equitable the prospects of media access are for different groups. We also consider how effective television is in serving these groups, and if it can be a platform for rational debate between diverse groups. In deliberating these arguments, we aim to see if television is able to foster a democratic culture. Does it serve as a watchdog or is it a captive to the challenge of serving a diverse audience.

The broad and multi-dimensional nature of these questions makes it imperative to consider the history and texts of the me-

dia institutions. To properly understand television—a familiar and ubiquitous medium, it must be considered in its context. It is reductionist to conceptualize television as a simple technological device. Similarly it is misleading to focus simply on the social context of its use. As has been eloquently argued (Williams, 1990; Winston, 1995, Winston, 1998), television is as much a technology as it is a product of the context in which it is used, the custodians of the technology (producers), and those who consume the medium (viewers, advertisers). This complex mix of factors within the historical context of the medium must be acknowledged (Kackman, 2011). Already the issue of ownership and authoritarian orientation of the military has been brought into the frame.

Nigerian Television Service – Growth in Context

Nigeria's journey to democracy has been long and arduous. Television was involved in this quest from its inception, if the story is taken from the first republic. The first television service was introduced just ahead of independence, in 1959, by the Western region, an administrative area in Nigeria, and given priority as a strategic medium for communication. By independence in October 1960, the Eastern region had also established a service. Less than two years later, in the first quarter of 1962, the remaining administrative regions—Northern Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory, Lagos, also had their television services. Television is thus a feature of postcolonial and aspirational modern Nigeria, with the quick adoption of television services after independence suggesting that no region wanted to be outdone (Esan, 2009). Television was a novelty—coming after print media (newspaper, magazines/periodicals) and radio (with the rediffusion service), each of which inspired how television was adopted for use.

Newspapers had served the educated elite, who in different ways sustained the newspaper business. Although some were press barons and others were contributors, many elites were merely patrons—advertisers, regular subscribers, or readers who kept the business alive. As it was in the United Kingdom, newspapering in Nigeria was largely within the private sector. Leading political activists involved in the struggle for independence (notably Azik-

we and Awolowo – see Uche, 1989) were newspaper proprietors. Alongside other services rendered in the press, print media constituted the space for the struggle for independence. Anti-colonial sentiments, the merits, schedule, and agenda for independence were debated on the pages of newspapers. Thus, an appreciation of debates and political discourse was established. With this, political activists recognized the power of the pen; newspaper was a space for agitation and Nigerian leaders learnt to place a high premium on establishing newspapers through which they could speak to the governed—establishing unidirectional means for information dissemination.

Broadcasting allowed messages to reach mass audiences across vast distances, in a range of predominantly domestic spaces—usually in the convenience of their homes. Messages were received simultaneously, by far flung audiences, as immediately as when transmitted. Certain messages, such as the news and Grade A shows, were even delivered in real time, as live broadcasts. Unlike radio, which is cheaper to acquire and easier to operate, television is expensive, more elitist, and distant from rural audiences, who constitute the bulk of the Nigerian population. Those visionary leaders who introduced the medium were undeterred by such limitations when they invested in television, even when it was a novelty in other nations. At inception, most television services in Nigeria were extensions of existing radio services, as was the global trend (Katz, 2016). This pattern was replicated in the era of deregulation, as private broadcasters tended to rely on profit from radio operations to keep their television service afloat. The synergy within broadcasting was possibly due to shared technology. Both media rely on the conversion of sound, and light in the case of television, to electric energy, in order that moments can be captured, processed, and disseminated through public airwaves. These similarities in the broadcast process meant that there could be a symbiosis of operations—staffing, administration, programming costs could be shared. The joint management of services helped establish institutional cultures, as did elements within the cultural contexts of the target markets. These institutional cul-

tures, along with ownership are indicators of the power relations behind media messages, and possible impediments to service that foster attainment of democratic aspirations. Key among these elements is staffing and the resource base from which programming is drawn. This addresses questions such as whose stories are told and what language is used. Cultural indicators seen in the education, ethnic origins, gender, and inferred or declared political affinity of the staff, are as important in defining the power relationships within the media organizations, as well as the relationships amongst audiences, between them and the stations. Staff interpretation of their mission is often informed by their loyalties, whether to slavishly pursue an agenda or creatively subvert this, (for example, with their countenance, in jokes, or camera work).

The proliferation of stations that happened after the creation of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) by military decree in 1977 should be regarded as crucial in the quest for democracy. Television was brought closer to more people. It was due to the politicking of the time yet the move was arguably part of plans to consolidate the nation. The political upheavals of the 1960s, especially the civil war (1966–1972), necessitated a reorientation of the mission for television. The new emphasis was to foster national unity, rather than difference (distinction) inherent in the regional services that existed at the onset. Exigencies of national life accounted for more stations being established around the nation. Military rule with its unitary command persisted. New states had been created out of the three-regional structure. Stations had to be established in each state in the federation, and subsumed within a common framework. This policy set the course for proliferation of widely dispersed government funded stations. Stations increased as new states were created to bring government closer to the people. This is similar to the BBC action which increased the number of regional centers in England from four to eight in recognition that the English nation was less homogenous than other British nation-regions – Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (BBC 1969). In this was an acknowledgement that designating market boundaries should consider both technical and sociologi-

cal factors. UK is instructive, though it is not as diverse as Nigeria. Station proliferation made NTA the largest television network in Africa, consisting of stations in closer physical proximity of audiences. Yet there was widespread dissatisfaction with its factual programming in particular. Seen as its master's voice, television appeared to evoke cynicism not confidence.

Television in Nigeria was undoubtedly a critical tool for nation-building. When regional autonomy and rivalry that had characterized the early years gave way to the unitary focus, a federal system with a strong centre emerged in television governance too. NTA central authority determined the thrust of programming. National priorities constituted Grade A broadcasts; stations had to suspend locally scheduled programs to hook up to the national network. Prime time was reserved for national programs. These were centrally commissioned and foreign programs centrally acquired. Representation of federal character was a strategy employed to foster understanding and unity. As priorities of stations were negotiated within the context of the nation, the advantage of their proximity to the grassroots was necessarily compromised. These developments had implications for how well television services articulated voices of different audience groups in the nation and became evident in television's failure to reflect the national mood in years leading up to the third republic. Viewer apathy to news and factual programs from government-owned stations, negotiated readings of media texts revealed audience disgruntlement. Nigerians' disillusionment with military rule and their strong yearning for democracy was attested to by voters' behavior in relation to the aborted 1993 elections. Although this was palpable in the press and on radio, television's role in addressing them was questionable. That existing television stations were within the stranglehold of governments was amply demonstrated through news and government-sponsored public notices. Television sang its masters' tune. Professional call of media managers and audience interests were subordinated to government's (Esan, 2009, p.139). This imbalance was hardly consistent with normative media ideals though in principle service continued to be aligned

with laudable visions of the founding fathers. But while television succeeded in disseminating information, it also generated disaffection towards government, even by its omissions.

Subordination of audience interest was contrary to expectations of the public service orientation. Television's performance in actualizing Nigeria's democratic aspirations was gravely compromised. Government patronage, which guaranteed capital funding, held this medium captive. Nowhere was this more evident than in state-government owned stations which were established during the second republic. Government control in these was as in the NTA which they were set up to challenge. In the case of Lagos Television, for instance, the semblance of independence built into governance of television stations was removed. Rather than being a government parastatal run by public servants headed by a general manager and answerable to a board, the staff are regarded as civil servants, headed by a chief executive (permanent secretary) answerable to the state governor through the commissioner for information.

In no other genre was government stranglehold most obvious than the news – the most privileged and most frequently featured genre. Defined narrowly by operationally shackled television news managers as what important people do, news brought government officials into sharp focus. Audiences were inundated with images of leaders - their private and public lives. They even managed to encroach into lifestyle/entertainment shows. Television remains a mirror on the world, a court of public opinion, purveyor of faiths, and a social diary. Although consistent with traditional lifestyles, the drive for funds amplified the importance of these television forms on program schedules. Since programs (even news) were commercialized, stations relied on the revenue from these shows. Regular scheduled programs would even be shunted in favor of sponsored shows. Pleasures of viewing were thus unpredictable.

Tabloidization – a penchant for gossip, sleek living and celebritification on television was consistent with global trends. The humble social diary, which parades private celebrations of the af-

fluent and the powerful, has been elevated. The genre has since multiplied across television schedules. Bisi Olatilo Show, which prides itself as the leader of the pack, delights in its showcase of quintessential taste and folks with pedigree. This genre is an inadvertent social commentary, an informal (even inadvertent) monitoring of the powerful revealing the incongruence of their lifestyles compared with the reality of the masses. Television helps to expose those living better lives despite biting economic recession. It is thus likely to generate disaffection against the powerful and the media tightly controlled by them. In its failure to properly address these issues, television may be deemed by audiences as agents of frustration – a sentinel that raises alerts, yet is unable to drive away intruders. In this case it is a captive to commercial interests.

Without government involvement and policies in television, the number and location of television stations could have been severely limited. Tested and proven government markets paved the way for the commercial intervention by private entrepreneurs, whose arrival marked the third phase of television broadcasting in Nigeria. This liberalized regulatory regime was also consistent with global trends and with the mood of the nation. The era of global deregulation, entrenched in the 1990s, marked a departure from the stranglehold of terrestrial broadcasting (Hong & Hsu, 1999). The introduction of satellite transmission led to new modes of transnational broadcasting, with the incursion of notable transnational media corporations (TMCs) like BSkyB in the UK, and the global operations of CNN, MTV, StarTimes, and the African-focused DSTV, into sub-Saharan Africa. This was characterized by intense commercialization, sleek aesthetics, competitiveness, and cultural homogenization with the replication of formats, or franchised brands. Although the prohibitive cost of broadcasting in Nigeria was a deterrent for private ownership, the enterprise remained alluring. The statutes were changed to permit private broadcasting in 1993. Private radio was quick off the block. In reality, privately owned television stations only materialized in 1995, with the establishment of Channels TV, the first Nigerian

news Channel. DAAR Communication's Africa Independent Television (AIT) came on air thereafter, in 1996. Several more independent channels have since been established across the nation. Earliest among these were Lagos stations such as DBN, MITV, Minaj, Silverbird TV, along with Channels and AIT. They stood out for their innovation in different aspects of programming – sports, indigenous entertainment, foreign content, local drama, audience participation shows and news. Success was short-lived for some but newer players like TV Continental, and later TVC News now dominate the scene. In its current democratic dispensation (post '98 era), television remains largely urbanized but so has a higher proportion of the population. Since 1960, population density has increased, from 49/km^2 to 297/km^2 in 2017(World Population Review, 2017).Urban centers have also increased and spread widely across the nation, thus justifying television's urban focus. Similarly global migration justifies extension of television service to audiences in the Diaspora. These appear to be indices of a progressive democratic culture, yet it is in the impact of such services that progress should be assessed.

Social impact of Television

Technology and participation

The impact of television in society is driven by a combination of factors - political, economic, social and cultural factors, along with the prevalent technologies in operation. Regarding technology, the first dimension to consider is its intrinsic (technical) properties. The fact that television is an audio-visual medium determines its messages and how they are received. The nature of the audiences, and their social milieu, further commend the use of the medium, which lends itself to a population who would prefer to see, to believe.

The ability to demonstrate action or vicariously transport viewers to witness events and outcomes for themselves, are properties of television that align with the manner in which audience needs can be met, and their values negotiated. Differences in the social context of audiences — their educational attainment, gender roles, domestic situations, and daily lifestyles — affect their disposition

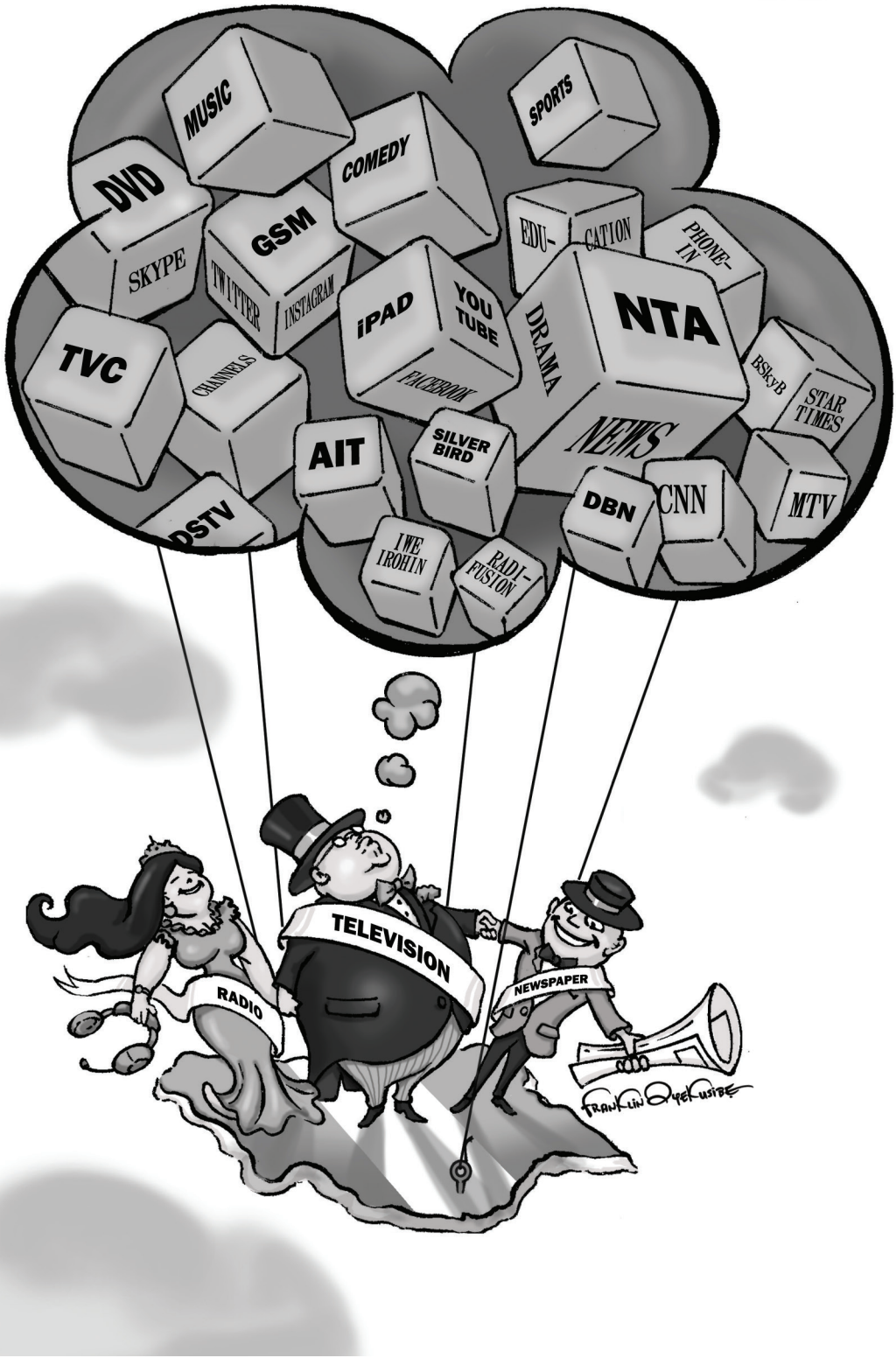
to viewing (Esan 1993). Consequently, the ability to properly decode broadcast messages is also affected. When this ability is not uniform in audiences, television cannot be equivalent of the ideal public sphere. The assumed equality of experience in the sphere becomes a mere illusion. However, its edge in communicating with unschooled audiences remains. Being akin to oral cultures with which they are familiar, broadcast messages communicate better with illiterate audiences. Where the reception facilities are available, these messages reach them directly, whereas newspapers cannot. Even those with little or no educational attainment, received messages that they saw and heard!

Technology is required to produce and communicate television messages. The broadcast chain consists of various components, of which, transmitters are most crucial since their location determines the extent, scope, and clarity of reception, and they are most expensive. Production equipment includes cameras, recorders, microphones, mixers and editing suites. The cost of this hardware, even without reckoning the cost of intellectual property, makes television an expensive mass medium. By far the most visible technological elements in the business of television are receiver sets, the cost of which is borne by the consumers. Television requires the highest investment for information and communication. The cost and capability of receiver sets inform the viewing experience, meanings, and pleasures derived. These technological factors impact on the availability, ownership and access required for democratic culture.

As with other innovations in their infancy, the cost of television receiver sets was higher than the larger proportion of the populace could afford. In the 1960s when television service was new to Nigeria, TV sets were priced out of reach of most citizens. Unlike radio, which was generally more affordable, especially with the availability of low-cost portable transistor radio sets, television was primarily elitist. Ownership of television conferred status; it was a desirable item of furniture, even among the lowly-paid, many of whom went on to acquire sets as soon as their economic circumstances permitted. This was the case of civil servants,

who got an upward review of their salaries made effective retroactively. Known as the Udoji award, this windfall-payment of unexpected salary arrears had a multiplier effect that was felt even in rural areas. Some families acquired TV sets to end the indignities associated with their reliance on sets owned by more fortunate neighbors. An influx of imported and locally assembled television sets helped to make them more affordable, further increasing the number of sets in circulation, and expanding the audience-reach of television. Gradually, the practice of congregating around the neighbors' sets, or watching through neighbors' windows out of necessity reduced. Communal viewing persists in the new millennium for other social reasons constituting sites for discussion of messages.

Another technological dimension affecting television operations and reception is the limited supply of electricity. The issue in the earlier days was that this essential social infrastructure was restricted to urban areas. Distribution of electricity has since been extended to many more communities than in the 1960s, but national electricity supply is sporadic. Households and businesses had to rely on generators at great costs. In television it is a considerable proportion of required operating costs, arguably a distraction from the core business. For viewers, the supply of low cost versions in the 2000s meant more people could generate electricity for their subsistence economic activities. Consequently televisions sets could also be powered from homes and places of work – shops, reception areas, waiting rooms, restaurants - such enterprises conducive to communal viewing. Number of receiver sets in circulation had increased making the medium less elitist. Its ability to reach the teeming population had improved. Riding on the success of the burgeoning music industry and film industry, (Nollywood), which television helped to create, more television programs were created to align with popular cultural beliefs and outlooks. These developments are double edged when considering media's contribution to a democratic culture. Arguably, access to media messages is the first step towards meaningful participation. In that regard, these are progressive. However, there is the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matter of content – do accessed programs constitute a distraction or facilitate quality engagement? Some clues to answering this question lie in other ancillary technological devices.

Key features in television's timeline are development of domestic devices which gave viewers more control, for example time shifting devices like the video (later DVD and other hard disk) recorders. These altered the manner of viewing, reducing enslavement to TV schedules. In other climes, these devices meant that viewers could record their favorite shows in order to watch them at more convenient times, however social infrastructure described above, prevalent lifestyles and time pressures undermined this. In reality though, these devices meant audiences could reorganize their own viewing pleasure. Opting out of terrestrial broadcast, they could watch programs of their choice – home videos or DVDs bought or hired from video clubs for instance. Later devices such as set top boxes (cable/satellite) facilitated more convenient distribution of options, though at the cost of subscription. These helped extend exposure to other local and globally located public service stations. Audiences were thus able to subvert public service broadcasting that they deemed irrelevant. In the process they had also missed items that may have been relevant.

The role played by the humble video cameras in enhancing the democratic culture should also be noted. Its domestication was due to supply of affordable and user friendly designs. The number of people who could make or contribute to television programs thus increased. TV programs were once produced by highly skilled professionals, often studio-based or in limited outdoor locations. The arrival of the VHS camera (home video recorders) broke down those restrictions. Initially, recordings by audience featured in limited entertainment shows—You've Been Framed (UK) America's Funniest Home Videos (USA). Roving camera reports were also included in shows like Candid Camera and Beadle's About (UK). Nigerian audiences were privy to these precursors of produsage - a term referring to user generated content (Bruns, 2007). In Nigeria, it became standard practice for videographers to record private functions for private consumption. Eventually some products

were broadcast, incorporated into social diaries, or in news and enlightenment programs. These practices raised the importance of spot assessments, interviews, and eyewitness reports. When mobile telephones got converged with cameras and internet facilities, consumers knew what to do.

In the early days, there was little room for public participation in televised programs. Except when picked up in the press or from limited studio audience, audience reaction went unseen. No wonder television news was regarded as little more than a notice board, a town crier, which could not field questions making some audience members indifferent to civic duties. (Esan, 1993). Factual programs on television in particular consisted of talking heads—radio with pictures. In time, the situation improved with formats including discussions, use of vox populi segments, and studio audience participation. These formats, especially those relying on experts drawn from limited pools of available human resources undermined broad based representation. The trend improved when global satellite mobile (GSM) phones flooded the Nigerian market. Interested viewers could elect to participate in the televised discussions. Though mobile telephony was in circulation in the 1990s, it was not widely available till the 2000s. Nigeria was reported to have the fastest uptake in mobile telecommunications services (Okafor, 2016). Based on NCC data, it is claimed that in July 2016 there were approximately 150 million active mobile GSM subscribers, as opposed to around 2.2 million in 2002 (Oxford Business Report, 2016). Access to phones enhances public participation when stations create those opportunities. Independent television stations being leaner and more innovative were quick to create these opportunities which had previously been jealously guarded in government owned stations.

The scope of produsage is much wider now since the convergence of mobile telephony with communication devices. Smart phones are now miniaturized production suites; users can record, process, disseminate and store messages. Democratized access to such devices (phones, tablets, Ipads) is a key development. It demonstrates interdependence of both technological and social

dimensions of television - that technological capabilities only become meaningful when they can be accessed and used. It further attests to the importance of political, economic, and social context. As Williams had argued, by acknowledging both technological and socio-cultural dimensions of the medium, we gain more robust perspectives of the way television has aided the quest for democracy.

Convergence with other media technologies and social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube) has facilitated wider coverage, and enhanced participation in novel ways – audience phone in, other forms of live contributions to shows, redistribution of segments of shows, and through this (viral messaging of video segments, or documentation in public space like YouTube) a public memorialization of televised moments. Acknowledging these brings more agencies (people and institutions) under critical scrutiny. So it can be argued that the collaborative role of the media has been enhanced. A broader definition of those who monitor and those who are to be monitored now applies. Scholarly and professional attention can thus be challenged to reconceive the concept of the powerful - look beyond usual government office holders that had hitherto been the obsession. This is most enabling for monitoring the powerful, arguably the most critical role of the media in a democracy (McQuail, 2013, p.109).

Assessing Content

Having looked at the technological dimension to television, and demonstrated how this is compounded by political and economic factors, in this section, we shall examine how its forms have enhanced or impeded television in the execution of its mission to help establish /maintain a democratic culture as consistent with the aim of public service broadcasting. Drawing a sample of genres to consider returns us to a longstanding debate on media forms and formats. It is based on the legitimacy of a conventional hierarchy of programs. Implied in this is an indication of the quality of the programs, the value of taste groups, (social divisions of the audiences) who consume particular programs. Programs like

the news have been regarded as serious, consumed by the elite (Sparks, 1991). The genre has commanded much professional and scholarly attention. Others, particularly entertainment programs with mass audiences, are often denigrated as being trivial. In the final analysis, media texts have to attract the right size and type of audience to be viable.

Being the later arrival on the media scene, television built on radio's success, adapting its successful message forms—news, talk, music, and drama. The medium also borrows ideas from books, theatre, film, and indigenous media that had preceded it. Perhaps due to the tendency for television service to be sustained by entertainment, television was once not regarded as a worthy academic enterprise (Dayan & Katz, 1994). Scholarly attention was reserved for genres in the purview of political communication (news, documentaries) and education (schools, broadcast). Yet, viewing schedules were sustained by genres such as situation comedy, drama, variety shows, and children's animation. These genres have since attracted critical attention, especially as they have proven to be commercially viable.

Stratification of genres is relevant for another reason - it is reflected in allocation of resources. Genres deemed more serious are privileged in resources for production and dissemination - money, talent, facilities, even slated airtime. The pleasures of certain audience segments are thus better guaranteed. Such audiences are likely to be better engaged with issues. Poorly resourced and poorly researched programs tend to generate audience apathy. In program commissioning, ideas development and production, media institutions themselves need to adopt inclusive strategies.

Regardless of statutory assignments, stated missions or covert agenda of owners and staff, audience pleasure is television's ultimate goal. That being so, programs (as with good dramas) should be engaging even if participation is merely vicarious. Audiences can be supported to use their imaginations – contemplate solutions to problems confronting them. A narrow interpretation of participation leads to an underestimation of such genres. Conversely, setting too much stock by the relevance of certain genres

like news, for example, in the coverage of electoral campaigns, leads to over emphasis on news. In reality, audiences experience media messages in a flow. Though electoral campaigns occur only periodically what happens before and after elections are interesting. Newscasts may lack the scope for continuity, yet to be efficient in television's normative roles; other formats that enable analysis of background, context and implication of issues are required. A variety of news shows now exist with audience participation built in. They contribute to the fulfillment of television's obligations of ensuring that citizens are responsible, well informed, and motivated to properly appraise available range of viewpoints, in a controlled environment devoid of rancor and bitterness. Audiences are now more than targets to be delivered to advertisers. Their views are being tapped in manners akin to the collaborative role. The popularity of their concerns also helps set program agenda. Phenomena from social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) now inspire issues covered in the media.

In Nigeria, news has always been central to TV schedules as evident in a sample of published schedules from WNTV. (Ikhime, 1979). The broadcast day usually started and ended with the news. Slots for a major newscast featured in the course of the evening. News accounted for almost one hour of a six-hour long broadcast day on WNTV in October 1962. In later years this pattern persisted on newer stations including slots for news in brief segments in English and Nigerian languages dominant in designated market areas. The longest slot was always reserved for news reports from home and abroad. The slot for news kept increasing over the years – from 15 minutes reserved for the main evening news on WNTV in 1972, to 45 minutes devoted to 9 o' clock news on NTA network in the 80s. News is still central in the post 1999 deregulated era, by which time independent television stations had emerged. The broadcast day was longer, stations were transmitting almost round the clock, and the privileged status of news was evident on the schedules. News had slots across different times of day. Two of these independent stations are specialist news providers – Channels and TVC News. Although AIT has mixed programming, its

news content is still as dominant as found on government-owned stations. This increase broadened the scope of coverage and facilitated innovation in the definition and treatment of news. There is now decent attention to other aspects of living (Health, Art, Law, Lifestyle, Environment); Politics, though Economy/Business, and Sports remain prevalent. The range of voices being heard has increased as each station found its stock of experts. Pluralism has generated competition; stations work to attract and deliver the right type of audiences to advertisers, by delivering reliable and relevant information. Their slogans and station promos reflect their mission. AIT - "Sharing the African Experience", Channels TV – "Your Home for News", TVC News "Through African Eyes. First Accurate and Reliable". Implicit in this is a commitment to present distinctive narratives in the global arena. While serving local audiences, stations also had eyes for global audiences. Local stories are being picked up by transnational broadcasters like CNN, BBC and others. The stakes are higher in a globalised economy and professionalism is rewarded. From the start of its operations, Channels committed to delivering a fresh perspective in news. It promised to maintain balance, going beyond the jaded view of stories having two sides, acknowledging instead the multidimensional nature of issues. Through a 2017 station promo it commits to following stories. In this is recognition that news should be more than reports of moments signaled in the headlines. Back stories are essential for audience appreciation of headlines. The rhetoric in the promo invites audiences along with the station to take the long route if they are to fully appreciate issues. ". . . We follow the story because the need to know never changes. We don't have all the answers, but keep our eyes open to keep our minds open. . . We follow the story because we are part of the story."

On one level this attests to a station being responsible, but on a deeper level it urges audiences to be responsible too. It illustrates broadcasters fulfilling their radical role and is indicative of a more collaborative culture emerging in television news. Promos from TVC News bring this into sharper focus. They stress the importance of engagement, analysis, and interpretation and have in-

novative approaches for delivering these. Besides usual strategies employed in producing television news (careful coordination of correspondents, strong, personable and respected anchors) TVC employs other formats and taps into opportunities offered by its multiplatform operations to make this possible. Audiences are invited to be involved through social media platforms like Twitter, to keep abreast of developments –to "follow, engage and share". Such dynamism empowers viewers and strengthens the democratic culture (locally and globally) in a post-CNN, 24-hour rolling news era. At a time when so-called fake news and hate speeches demonstrate the licentiousness occurring in less regulated social media spaces, access to authoritative professional and reliable television sources via these platforms is salutary.

Innovation in the broadcast media can be attributed to the improved training and exposure of broadcasters. Audiences have also become more sophisticated, having higher expectations of television services. Globalisation that characterized the deregulated era has been long coming. Besides broadcasting foreign content, formats of foreign shows were adapted for the Nigerian audiences. In the 80s, Lagos Weekend Television (fashioned after London Weekend Television), a marathon (24-hour, weekend) service was introduced by Lagos Television in the short lived second republic. NTA 2 also pioneered a breakfast television talk show, "Morning Ride". Magazine style, the show included a variety of segments—bite size reviews, analysis, and discussion of topical issues and events. A digestible, entertaining live talk show, with studio guests and a phone-in segment, it was lively but did not conform to NTA's usual strict restrictions imposed due to concerns for security and national priorities. Yet an exception was made. Federal government funded NTA was responding to competition from LTV, a station controlled by the rival party. This design exemplified results of staff exposure to global trends as confirmed by the creator /producer /presenter:

> "Every vacation … I had the privilege of going abroad, watch a lot of [UK] TV shows …. I saw TV as it should be, so when my colleagues were just learning the ropes, I had already been honed in a way by [viewing

> professionals like] Michael Aspel, Eamonn Andrews, and all the shows, [such as] TV AM, and I saw that there was a need for us to establish something that was going to capture the imagination. Remember in those days, 85 / 86, NTA in the mornings were transmitting documentaries on earthworms, tomatoes and all sorts of things, grasshoppers . There was no life, and I felt that we needed to seize that morning belt, and I felt there was a need to be able to capture the imagination of people …"
>
> (Danladi Bako in Interview with TVC This Morning July 2017)

The format was initially regarded as a risk because the unpredictable nature of contributions from audience who phoned-in to a live show necessarily compromised usual strict editorial controls. Morning Ride's success opened new prospects, offering a voice to the unseen public, and getting direct feedback from them. The format strengthened the media in their monitoring function. However it was in the post 99 era that it flourished; the convergence of television with other platforms and new modes of communication (phone calls, email, Twitter) really enhanced this development. The format has since become a standard feature on both independent and government owned television stations. The talk show format has become a workhorse being refined by new entrants into the market—AIT's Kakaaki, Channels' Sunrise Daily, and TVC's TVC Breakfast.

These shows offer more comprehensive and in-depth engagement with topical concerns than had been previously possible. Whereas standard television programs were 30 minute packages, newer shows were easily multiples of this. Kakaaki (AIT) runs weekdays for three hours from 6:00 a.m. till 9:00 a.m. NTA's AM Express ran for180 minutes, taking audiences on whistle-stop tours of the nation. Channels Television's Sunrise Daily runs for 90 minutes. Anchored by a panel of three hard-nosed interviewers noted for their adversarial style, the show occupies a niche consistent with the reputation of the originating institution - the first specialist news station in Nigeria. It is the station's "hard-hitting flagship news and current affairs program. It asks the crucial questions and gets behind the stories that make the news-from political leaders, corporate decision-makers to **everyday individuals** of note."

[emphasis mine]—Channels Television website.

The emphasis in the quote confirms as noted earlier, that the broadening of attention beyond government functionaries to individuals strategically positioned to impact everyday living is a dividend of deregulated broadcasting and democratized media. On 6th March and 28th May 2016 for example, electricity distributors, teachers, women and children advocates were featured. Longer transmission days created opportunities for more content and chances to incorporate similar novel accessible formats to address different audience groups. Segmented by interests (politics, business, sports), language (Yoruba, Igbo), age (youth) gender perspective (women), shows like Journalists' Hangout (TVC), "Patito's Gang" (Channels), "Mini Jojo" (AIT), "Your View" (TVC) are worthy examples. Longer transmission days also legitimized repeat transmission of shows which made viewing more flexible.

Factual programs aside, Fiction has a role to play in the fostering of a democratic culture. Entertainment dominates television schedules for good reason – they are social lubricants attracting and keeping audiences happy in between broadcast of factual (graver) fare. Yet entertainment can also have serious consequences, helping to shape audience world views. Concerns about early television's dependence on foreign shows like "I Love Lucy", "Perry Mason", "Little House on the Prairies" were based on the fears of potential acculturation. Simply put, audiences could become disgruntled with lived realities when mediated experiences offer realities deemed better than theirs, especially when no tangible paths to rectify their realities are offered. There are more serious economic, cultural and political implications of this. For this reason, transnational media texts ought to be culturally relevant, raising aspirations without creating frustrations.

Programs should respect peculiar sensibilities of audiences, adapt existing oral cultures, adopt fare suited to perceived tastes and aspirations of local audiences. Central to television's response to serving its diverse ethnic identities is the question of language. Imposition of a dominant hegemony manifests first in the use of language. Since it was expedient to use the most widely spoken

dialect or language, minority groups tended to be marginalized within a centralized designated market area. Whereas national radio was able to transmit news summaries in English along with several Nigerian languages—Edo, Efik, Fulfulde, Hausa, Igbo, Izon (Ijaw), Kanuri, Tiv, and Yoruba—national network television was often restricted. Selected local languages were better accommodated within decentralized television news services. Even these lacked depth and failed to cover the range of existing groups due to the extreme linguistic diversity of the country. Entertainment and enlightenment programs, which were charged to transmit cultural heritage were better able to reflect diverse cultures. Drama with its scope to present a range of characters was better suited to this role. Characters in serial dramas, like "Village Headmaster", depicted different ethnic groups and facilitated the imagining of a variety of locations. For example, Amebo, the village gossip's references to Ahoada, brought to limelight areas then less well known (Bayelsa State). Similarly, music and dance programmes drew on cultural troupes from across the nation. In the case of NTA's "Nigerian Dances", audiences were introduced to existing cultural diversitythough in time, dancing seemed out of place in the face of other pressing national needs.

Addressing burdens of representation was part of the remit for NTA's Programmes directorate. Its successful drama programs to that end include "Cock Crow at Dawn", "Samanja" (North/Middle Belt), "Masquerades", "Icheoku" (South East), "Koko Close", "Sura the Tailor", (South West), and "Hotel de Jordan" (South South/Mid-West). Featured on the network service, these shows transported audiences across the nation and were more than passing fancies. Perhaps more than politically explicitly charged current affairs programs, the dramatic genre helped audiences to confront and explore contrast and similarities in issues of living. They gave context to differences, and raised common issues of concern. On this score, NTA programs deserve credit for laying the foundation in the eighties - presenting diverse slices of national life. This tradition persists, through independent television stations, Nollywood and independent producers which supply content to television.

Use of appropriate local languages attracted large audiences and enhanced participation especially where communal viewing occurred. Dramatized storytelling (fictional) like "Feyikogbon", "Super Story", in-depth features of odd occurrences unlikely to make the news "Nkan Mbe", ombudsman /counseling programmes like "Gboromiro", "Mini Jojo" had strong water cooler effects offering talking points carried beyond viewing experience.

Schedules had other bankers for specific audience segments. Children watched locally produced shows, alongside foreign cartoons, action hero series and adventure series. Liberalization in the post '99 era offered access to more foreign channels. Disney programs like "The Suite Life of Zach and Cody" or "That's So Raven" may have outmatched attention to local productions on Africa Magic channels. In any case, middle class parents tended to regulate viewing of Africa Magic more strictly.

Africa Magic is a suite of channels on DSTV, carrying content produced for Africa by Africans. DSTV is a subscription funded satellite distribution television service, a continental initiative owned by Multichoice. Its operations involved redistributing the products of other transnational media corporation (TMCs) including Disney, Cartoon Network , news and movies channels from across the world – Africa, America, Europe, Asia - China, and India. It offers audiences a choice of fare beyond what national broadcasters provide. Once synonymous with Nigerian movies notoriety for negative portrayals, children's viewing of Africa Magic was strictly regulated but its operations are now more diversified as seen on its seven channels. They carry local language productions, popular serial drama like "Tinsel", "Jacob's Cross", and "Shuga". Some are collaborative productions involving Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya. Aiming to offer the best in entertainment, Africa Magic commissions original shows, draws on franchises (Deal or No Deal Nigeria, Big Brother Naija), adapts formats (Africa's Young Entrepreneurs fashioned after BBC's Dragon's Den). Globally franchised entertainment formats were also popular on terrestrial television in the post '99 era. High stakes in competitive formats like -Who Wants To Be a Millionaire, Big Brother (Africa), StarQuest, Nigeria's

Got Talent promoted a voting culture. Outlook and lifestyle of different generations of Nigerians may have directed their affinity and exposure to these. Where it occurs, engagement with such shows may strengthen inclinations towards democratic participation.

Comedy as a form has since evolved from the days of half-hour comedy dramas ("Alawada", "Icheoku" and "Samanja") with their comic characters, slapstick style and focus on human foibles. Comedy skits and stand-up comedy with its irreverence now abound (Ali Baba, A Y Show, Princess, Basketmouth, Helen Paul, and Mr. Patrick). These characterize the post '99 democratic era. The genre offers new spaces for audiences to reflect on their situations. These candid appraisal of socio-political trends, and open lampooning of the powerful are features of a flourishing democratic culture. It is consistent with Bahktin's celebration of the carnivalesque – liberating spaces in folk culture (like the carnival) where authority is temporarily inverted. New order can be broached here and the powerful reproached without fear. Such absence of reprisals is an advantage of comedic forms. Once overlooked, the power in the genre is now recognized and may be under threat of being hijacked by the powerful. Performers are hired to entertain the wealthy at private functions and during political campaigns. Such patronage could become stifling.

Music also flourishes on television as programs and as fillers. Yet recent preoccupation with love songs, relationships and the consumerist culture that trendy musicians promote, may have watered down music's contribution to democratic aspirations (See top ranking songs in the charts e.g. Popular Naija Songs: Top 30 2016; Africa Charts - Official Top Music Videos Nigeria 2017; Official Top 50 Songs Nigeria 2017). However, the potential for incisive social commentary from music videos, such as Lagbaja's 200 Million Mumu – The Bitter Truth (2012), should not be discounted. Indeed Eedris Abdulkareem's track, Nigeria Jagajaga (2004), was deemed so abrasive, that it was outlawed, even in a democratic dispensation. These examples are reminiscent of Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat style, which remains relevant and popular, though

it met with stiff resistance from the military rulers of his time. The contrasting experiences attest to shifting cultural paradigms. The potential of other musical genres like Juju to foster serious reflection and enhance the democratic culture has also been demonstrated. A classic example is Onyeka Onwenu and Sunny Ade's collaboration, Wait for Me (1985), used to promote positive reproductive rights behavior. It illustrates the hybridised genre, infotainment that has since become more prevalent beyond musical genres.

Conclusion - Democratic Forms on Nigerian Television

Television helps exhibit life and lifestyles and thus helps to establish the political agenda. Its ability to represent diverse groups may lie in its treatment of matters of interest, employing the right format as appropriate for target audiences. Traditionally television programs may be classified broadly by a station's organizational structure—Public Enlightenment, Entertainment, News, Sports and Current Affairs. These classifications matter to the end that they determine resource allocation—both financial and human. With proliferation of channels, including specialists (niche) channels, the need for competitiveness and innovation, program classifications have broadened the scope of audiences served. Nigerian media, which had relied on the elite in society and the "serious" genre (news and current affairs), to deliberate on and convey political information, is now reaching out beyond those. There is evidence to suggest the democratizing of television service. This may be attributed to the mix of factors—technological, economic, socio-cultural, and political—discussed above. The tendency towards discussion, concurrent dialogues, and, principally, the ability to participate directly, makes television more than a notice board as it used to be. With formal moderation of its space, unlike social media, television is a platform for reasonable and rational debate between these diverse groups.

Media roles have been variously defined, but it can be argued that the ultimate goal for media in a democratic society is to foster participation and informed decision making. Messages must be relevant, and audiences ought to have ordered access to contrib-

ute views that can be rationally considered. Nigeria is richer for access to diverse (global and local) perspectives, and media are making bold strides towards building an inclusive society. Wide-scale coverage was the first step in guaranteeing access for wider segments of the population. This is now in place. With its fragile geopolitical context, the Nigerian television market should be segmented mindful of complex identity politics. Education, age, income, occupation, and gender aside, ethnicity, nationality, and religion remain much more sensitive markers. Balancing the need to be distinct with the imperative to belong remains a challenge to television's impact.

Televisual language and the medium's genres commend it for the mission of creating an enabling culture for Nigeria's democracy. Audio-visual forms were often readily recognizable when stations got their formula right. Successful formats have been reminiscent of familiar forms yet fresh enough to be engaging. However the assumed success also relies on audience ability to properly decode the messages. Where there is shared affinity between producers and audiences, nuances in the codes of political communication will be accessible. Even when individuals have gaps in their decoding skills, having others who were familiar with the codes means they could be easily supported to interpret the message. Not so when messages are technically or culturally distant from generality of the audience. This is one advantage of the increased opportunities for more members of the audience to have direct access, even dialogues with producers and other members of the viewing public. In other words, it is an advantage of media convergences and emerging cultures.

Television has come a long way since the authoritarian control maintained under the military. Both the organizational structure and program designs were inhibiting. The vibrancy of public discussions conducted on varied TV shows since the opening of communication floodgates contrast sharply with previously observed political apathy in sections of society, and resentment among the voiceless. This broad based participation in demanding accountability of powerful groups is empowering. Surveillance of society

is now collaborative, and not left to professional intermediaries. Consequent to the new narratives, new heroes and villains are being identified. Through its various forms, including dramas and comedy, television helps viewers to see, imagine and re-imagine their society. It thus contributes to building the informed citizenry required to make informed decisions. Changes in television's landscape are most encouraging. There is a commitment to interpreting current events, attempts to predict the future, and guide the plans for same. Although it is not yet ideal, television does frame the democratic culture and supports Nigeria's democratic aspiration.

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7

Talk Radio: A Democratic Tool for Citizen Engagement

By Funke-Treasure Durodola

Introduction

Radio is the dominant medium and main source of information in Nigeria (Freedom House, 2012; Akoh & Jagun, 2012), compared to other forms of mass communication. It is considered Nigeria's most obvious and effective means of mass communication because of the immediacy of its impact (Akoh & Jagun, 2012), even with the advent of technology and the incursion of new media, notably Twitter and Facebook. A radio listening culture is prevalent in Nigeria perhaps because it is "most accessible and available to the ordinary, non-literate Nigerian living in a rural area with

unreliable electricity access" (InterMedia cited in AMDI, 2005, 15).

A 2008 survey submits that "three quarters of households" in Nigeria own radio sets (ITU cited in Akoh & Jagun, 2012, 6) while a 2010 survey indicates that 43.5% of households in urban and semi urban areas own radio sets (Akoh and Jagun, 2008).

In Nigeria, as it is prevalent globally, radio continues to converge with new technologies such as the internet and mobile phones. New socio political dynamics such as live online streaming and podcasting continually emerge to keep radio alive as a dialogical and participatory medium.

According to Gunner, Ligaga & Moyo (2011), across Africa, radio continues to "focus on the everyday" and still "engage with moments of high national and cultural drama". The unique ability of radio to merge these two makes it a powerful and dangerous broadcast medium.

Historically, in Nigeria, radio was used by British colonizers in an ideological way. It was used to represent the interests of the colonial class. They also used it to advance their ideas about culture and the political order to the indigenous majority. Years later, radio also provided a powerful channel for state propaganda in order to constitute differing levels of political identity (Larkin, 2008). The agitations about the exclusion of regional governments by Nigeria's colonial central administration, led to the development of regional broadcasting and the transformation of broadcasting in 1959 (Ladele, Adefela & Lasekan, 1979).

The Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) started in 1959, followed by the radio arm, Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service (WNBS) in 1960 (Uche cited in Ariye, 2010:416; Ejiofor, 2002 cited in Atoyebi, 2002, 7). The Eastern Broadcasting Service (EBS) started in 1960 while the Northern region followed suit with (BCNN) in 1962 (Saulawa, 2001 cited in Atoyebi, 2002, 7). Regional governments wielded immense power and engaged in tribal invectives until 1967 when civil war broke out. States then came into being in order to "wither the powers of the regional governments and limit the use of regional broadcasting services for propaganda and politics" (Atoyebi, 2002, 7). Twelve states were created, and each of

them established their respective radio and TV stations (Atoyebi, 2002). Nigerian radio thereafter transformed from regional tools in the hands of colonial masters to state apparatuses used by the Federal Government (Larkin, 2008).

In most developing nations across the world including Africa, the diversification of radio from the monopoly of state broadcasters is closely "tied to processes of political and economic liberalizations" (Fardon and Furniss, 2002, 3). This has created an array of local community radio stations, where local issues are prioritized and local languages are used. In Nigeria, this liberalization was achieved through commercial radio stations.

The National Broadcasting Commission was established in 1992 through the promulgation of a decree, which brought about "private participation in the ownership and operation of broadcast stations" (Akingbulu, 2010, 12).

In appraising radio broadcasting in contemporary Nigeria, the role of niche radio stations using indigenous languages must be factored, especially for their role in heightening citizens' cultural identity evident in the surge in the use of indigenous languages, including Pidgin English, by radio stations in the country's major cities of Lagos, Abuja and Kano which reflect the multilingual composition of Nigeria (Durodola, 2013).

Radio stations using indigenous languages offer governments the opportunity to communicate their actions and policies to the grassroots, the un-educated and the semi-urban population outside the capital cities in their languages. As Soola (2002) states, radio is particularly relevant to the needs of the rural, marginalized and disadvantaged poor. Radio is thus being used as a tool for development across Nigeria, similar to its use in other developing nations with a large illiterate population (Larkin, 2008). In Nigeria, radio has evolved as a veritable tool for mass mobilization, national orientation and creation of awareness on a variety of issues, including democratic governance and accountability.

How Radio Blossomed in Nigeria since 1999

The Nigerian broadcast sector was liberalized with Decree No. 38 of 1992 (Jibbo & Simbine 2003, 182). It paved the way for pri-

vately owned radio and TV stations to begin operation. The decree also provided for a regulatory body known as the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). In 2000, FRCN was directed by the Federal Government of Nigeria to operate FM stations at various state capitals. That same year the broadcast sector was privatized, paving the way for ownership and operations of broadcast stations by individuals. Another expansion drive for more stations started with the FRCN and NTA at the beginning of the millennium (Akingbulu & Bussiek, 2010).

By 2009, 17 years after liberalization, the industry had developed such that there were "more than 394 stations and an annual advertising revenue estimate of about 2 Billion Naira" (NBC, 2009). This informed the need to allow alternative networks in the industry, more importantly however, the plurality of broadcast was informed by "the size of Nigeria, culture, her religious diversity, commercial and national interest" (NBC, 2009).

The Evolution of Talk Station Formats in Nigeria

Nigeria has a duopolistic state broadcasting system, with stations owned by the federal government and state governments (Akoh and Jagun, 2012; Akingbulu, 2010; Mytton, 2013; Bolarinwa, 2011). The two forms compete "in providing news and current affairs content, especially when the political affiliation of the state administration differs from that of the Federal government" (Akoh & Jagun, 2012, 28). The Federal Government owns the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) network and the Voice of Nigeria (VON) "which provides Foreign Service broadcasts" (Bolarinwa, 2011, 1). The monopoly of the FRCN, which is the broadcaster mandated to "perform a federally defined broadcasting function,'' does not cover state radio broadcasting (Akoh & Jagun, 2012, 28).

Each state has its own broadcasting corporation, which provides both radio and television services (Akoh & Jagun, 2012). These broadcast in English language and the predominant indigenous language(s) of the state. They relay the National Network News on the Federal government-owned network, thereby contributing to the federal radio broadcaster's widest reach in the country (Akingbulu, 2010).

Talk radio in Nigeria was pioneered by the FRCN Network, a public broadcaster turned state broadcaster, which has grown in dimensions and scope since 1932. After privatization, Daar Communication's RayPower FM emerged as the alternative radio platform, especially to counter government's views and position on sundry issues. Early in its existence it established itself as a formidable platform for holding the government accountable to the people. It was thus seen as a people oriented platform, performing the role of a watchdog in Nigeria's emerging democracy, without the limitations of a state broadcaster. Somide (2017) says Daar Communication's radio has since evolved into a radio network broadcasting across Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Although owing to issues bordering on political economy, arising from its owner's involvement in partisan politics in 2015, which resulted in money laundering charges (Balancing Act, 2010), the sense of ownership of the station by the people and credibility has waned, particularly its television arm, AIT. However, Raypower FM continues to produce participatory programs that enjoy listenership and patronage.

The Nigeria Broadcasting Commission (NBC) in 20 years licensed 402 operational broadcasters, 123 of them were privately owned. There were also 233 radio and television stations owned by the FCT, federal and state governments, as well as 46 cable stations (PM News, 2012). Talk radio stations in Lagos include Radio One 103.5FM, Nigeriainfo, Brilla FM a niche sports station, LagosTalks owned by Megalectrics Ltd and WFM, a talk station for women. Most radio stations in Lagos and indeed Nigeria operate the general format of broadcasting, combining talk and music.

The Impact of Radio on Citizenship & Influence of Talk Shows on Citizens in a Democracy

An impact study about three local community radio stations in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania submits that radio stations have significant effects on enlarging the public arena for citizens to be heard in public on matters of priority public concern. It also states that the ability to harness local information and use them for information and decision making improves significantly with

broadcasting from radio stations. It further states that citizens experience an increased sense of dignity; and that citizens are opportune to catch sight of themselves as a public and to discuss issue of public interest.

According to the study, radio, used in this manner, evolves into a tool used by the citizen in holding political leaders to account. This makes citizens become active participants and contributors to the debates around elections and governance. Erichs (2007) posits that the media can continue to play an active role in the building of public opinion by widening the variety of voices heard. This is the rationale behind using the BBC media Action Town Hall meeting Format of discussion to bring about inclusion in governance in Nigeria. This usage cuts across talk radio stations in Nigeria.

Erichs (2007) states further that the media generally can strengthen the capability of citizens to be agents of change by holding actors in power accountable to the general public. It can contribute to the strengthening of citizenship by supplying participatory opportunities to have rights and citizenship practiced in real life.

Carey (1995) states that to be a citizen is to be seen and heard, and to have a public life. Media audiences participate ritually in meaning construction. Both vocal and visual communication channels of radio and television make communicating individuals into personalities with a voice, a face, a character and a history, personalities with whom recipients can sympathize or empathize, whom they can like or dislike, detest or revere (Thompson 1990:228, original emphasis). This results in valorization (Deacon et al, 2007).

In the age of interactional communication on both mediums, made possible by 'technological production and diffusion'; they create the same effect or response from callers, citizens who are seen as vocal in their response to 'hailing' by radio station regarding issues of common interests in a democracy. These are known by their voices, more so by their consistent contributions to various issues raised by radio stations, day in, day out. This accounts for the popularity of talk show presenters and anchors and the

subsequent popularity of their shows.

In the regional politics of Nigeria in the 60s, radio was a vital tool for information and mobilization, for both primary and secondary engagements of the citizen. It was also used inadvertently to incite violence. Babarinsa (2003) documents the Western Nigeria elections of 1965 conducted under a civilian regime led to a revolt against the regime of Chief Ladoke Akintola, tagged 'wet e' due to the negative use of radio. He also gives a personal account of the coverage of the gubernatorial elections in Ondo State between Akin Omoboriowo of the National Party of Nigeria and Adekunle Ajasin during which Radio Nigeria, Akure and Ondo State Radio Corporation were used by both parties to fan the embers of violence (Babarinsa, 2003).

In the aftermath of the annulled presidential elections in 1993, radio played a prominent role, at some point evolving into an oppositional tool by civilians to combat military rule.

In the fourth republic, there were landmark political developments in Nigeria which were heralded on radio and then further analyzed and debated in the court of public opinion on talk shows. I present two instances of media organizations that played the role of a watchdog in democracy in contemporary Nigeria. These are Radio Nigeria, notably breaking the news about the abduction of former Governor of Anambra State, Chief Chris Ngige, to the nation; playing a major role in the return of Governor Peter Obi, of Anambra State through the coverage of the court case; policing the 2007 election through effective and objective reportage, the BBC Media Action's Town Hall discussion format about inclusive engagement of citizens, in partnership with several radio stations across Nigeria and the watchdog role of BBC Hausa Service in Northern Nigeria.

Radio Nigeria and its Role as a Watchdog in the Fourth Republic

Public broadcasters in Nigeria as represented by Radio Nigeria (FRCN) and Voice of Nigeria and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) presently account to the executive arm of government across the tiers of government instead of the public through the

legislature. These modes of operation negate the declaration of the principles of freedom of expressions in Africa (BBC cited in Akoh and Jagun, 2012, p.27). This projects these public broadcasters as a captured media, government's mouthpieces which routinely report government's activities without an agenda to investigate corrupt practices or hold government accountable. This is the case with state owned broadcast services controlled by sitting governors across Nigeria. The courage to then report a sitting governor in Anambra State on national radio was redeeming for Radio Nigeria. It remains a reference point in Radio Nigeria's recent history.

Ononye (2017) in her personal account as the Head of Reportorial at the Radio Nigeria headquarters says the first contact on the issue was with an aide of the then governor of Anambra State, Dr Chris Ngige, who hid in a bush for fear of being found out. He gave the account of how the former governor was abducted amidst sporadic shooting, in an interactive on the Radio Nigeria Network. The then DG alerted the PDP secretariat in Abuja, which was oblivious of the development. These two acts checkmated a civilian coup, which could have resulted in the swearing in of the deputy as acting governor. The Chief Judge of the state heard the news on the 4pm Network News of Radio Nigeria, which stated that the national leadership of the PDP was not in support of the development. That stalled the 'installation' of the deputy and eventually the governor was restored.

It turned out that the abduction was the result of a tussle between a political Godfather and his candidate (Dawodu, 2015). "The impact was such that, something like that had never happened before; people were worried, nobody actually knew where the governor was or what was happening; there was great panic in the environment. The impact was multifaceted. Radio Nigeria was able to, as a leading light break the story (Ononye, 2017).

In the context of the watch dog role of the media, "The FRCN was doing what it was supposed to do; we broke a story that occurred; that was what we were supposed to do, we didn't do it because of the governor, we did it because it was our responsibility

to do so" (Ononye, 2017)

The unbiased coverage of the 2007 elections by Radio Nigeria is another instance of how a state owned radio network operated 72-hour election coverage, with live streaming and deployment of a large contingent of reporters across Nigeria. The election was considered one of the freest and fairest in Nigeria's democratic history. FRCN reporters reported from polling centers and stayed until election results were announced (Okere, 2017).The election ushered in President Umar Yar'Adua. The coverage was acclaimed in the country's broadcast history as a pioneering, pace setting and objective reportage, contrary to widespread belief that Radio Nigeria was a captured media.

Another significant contribution in Radio Nigeria to democracy is the creation of the talk show, '**The President Explains'** during the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. "The idea that Chief Obasanjo speaks with the generality of the people on his programs and policies via Radio Nigeria was born, running in the process, 15 editions of robust engagements and uncensored interactions with every category of the populace in a monthly program known as The President Explains" (Aloko, 2014, p.1).This talk show anchored by the President of Nigeria during which he engaged the citizenry became quite popular. It was a phenomenal talk show bridging the gap between the government and the governed without an intermediary.

Okere (2017) states that 'The President Explains' was a very important watchdog platform that Radio Nigeria instituted during President Obasanjo's administration; and there were major breakthroughs achieved through that program within those years.

The BBC Media Action in Nigeria produces a range of talk programs including drama, town hall discussion formats and interviews to educate Nigerians about democratic governance. These include voter rights, rights as citizens and active participation in democracy. The organization has achieved this through partnerships and collaborations with radio stations across Nigeria.

Lewis & Booth (1989) make a clear distinction between public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting. They state that

while the former should be in "the business of selling programs which inform, educate and entertain, to audiences", the latter is expected to sell "audience to advertisers" (Lewis and Booth, 1989: 99). The boundaries of the basic functions are, however, blurred in Nigeria; the context of FM broadcasting is such that Federal Government-owned FM stations in Nigeria compete with privately owned FM stations for revenue from advertising (Akoh & Jagun, 2012). Daar Communication's RayPower and Radio Continental are examples of such commercial general format radio stations. Political talk shows on both stations are further analyzed in this chapter.

Understanding Talk Radio

Talk radio stations operate and function as niche stations, carving out particular tastes for their fragmented listeners. Radio stations, including those which operate the general format have specific programs through which they function as watchdogs, playing a role of the umpire between the government and the governed, in the society. A large number of radio stations in Nigeria belong to this category. They include Raypower Fm, Eko FM, City FM and more.

Talk radio stations may not necessarily churn out reportages in the news form. Tettey (2010) cited in Gunner, Ligaga & Moyo, (2011, 9) states that such radio "ensure that issues do not die with the news cycle, but can be kept in the public realm and in the public consciousness for some time". He argues that talk radio "moves the debate beyond the monotony and fleeting nature of "current news and passing public interest".

Talk is contextually defined, and media talk, irrespective of the medium, involves different discursive relations in different forms of context. Social divisions are displayed, intricately enacted and confronted in televised talk (Deacon et al, 2007). This works for radio as well. In Lagos, Nigeria, these social divisions are obvious in the programming and target audience of stations such as Bond FM, Radio One, Nigeria Info and Wazobia FM. Some programs attract certain people from particular social classes, because they see themselves reflected in the content, or they can identify them-

selves in the programming. Talk in the media is conditioned by the genres and types of programming in which it occurs; there are differential gradations (Deacon et al, 2007:286).

In the broadcast media generally, the site and setting of a talk program are created in a sustained and thorough going manner such that it reflects certain realist representations of social life (Deacon et al, 2007). This is attractive to the listener and sustains his interest and participation actively or passively in the program.

> "Where talk takes place and with whom, can influence considerably what it accomplishes, and how" (Deacon, Pickering, Golden, Murdock, 2007, p.286).

Talk on radio can be monologic or dialogic or a combination of both. It is monologic where one person speaks to many listeners, as in a lecture or speech. It is formal, even where what is said or heard has a familiar structure. This manifests on radio as news commentary or news analysis as is the case on the Radio Nigeria Network News. It is sometimes the intro of a program, the monologue, as is the case with Kubanji Direct on Radio Continental or Issues in the News on FRCN's Radio One. Dialogic talk is a process of interaction between two or more people. It can be informal and familiar, formal and unfamiliar and have variants of the two. This is dependent on those involved and the context of interaction (Deacon et al 2007). Talk shows combine both to elicit a robust engagement from the public.

Talk Shows

> "The right and ability to participate as listener and speaker in public debates is essential to competent citizenship" - John Dewey in Peter Erichs (2002) cited in Erichs (2007).

Participatory program formats in radio and television are the norm in many countries today. One of such participatory formats is talk shows, which has made the public arena more inclusive (Erichs, 2007). It has given poor people and other previously excluded citizens the access, representation and voice needed for participation in a democracy. Tettey (2010) says talk shows often heighten public awareness of specific issues concerning minority and the marginalized social groups and issues.

In analyzing the verbal encounters of a radio talk show, in the

book Confrontation Talk (1996), Ian Hutchby reveals how power is instantiated, at a micro level, in what is said, and argued between participants in institutional settings.

There are two types of discussion talk shows. There is the populist TV discussion program which results in tabloidization. It is the construction of 'the public sphere as a sort of spectacular circus show, it is characterized by intense vocal contests, often leading to the open expression of vitriol and abuse. It is an unrestrained form of talk, and it delivers premium entertainment value. The second type or format is the televisualization of academic talk, which is to 'the public sphere as a professor's living room on air'. It is a restrained form of talk, characterized by having 'university dons, writers, and politicians explore differences of views about given topics in a generally sedate and sequentially ordered fashion and in a manner of mutual absorption in ideas raised'. Other forms are constructed in between these two types which correspond to stratifications of social class, status and educational background (Deacon et al, 2007).

Another is the radio magazine which takes different forms, styles and genres. It is a format of program in which the presenter's links provide the logic of why all the different items in the program are provided (Ali, 2008). Examples include breakfast shows and popular magazine talk shows like the Ellen Degeneres Show and the Oprah Winfrey show in the United States; Soni Irabor Live, Kubanji Direct on Radio Continental, Talk Nigeria on Radio Continental, This Morning, Wake Up Naija and Nightline with Funke Treasure on FRCN's Radio One 103.5FM, RayPower's Political Platform and Fact File.

These popular talk shows, characteristically, elicit discursive participation from citizens and promote inclusion through interactive sessions. Such talk programs also exist in indigenous languages and pidgin.

Broadcasting reproduces the world as ordinary but that seeming obviousness is an effect. It is the outcome of a multiplicity of small techniques and discursive practices that combine to produce that deeply taken-for-granted- sense of familiarity with what

is seen or heard(Scanell 1991, 8). One of these taken for granted practices is the act of talking which is reproduced in the studio. The features of which are similar in reality and in the simulated space of broadcasting Deacon et al (2007) state that the features of talk are turn–taking, topic maintenance, establishing transition from one topic to another, offering appropriate forms of initiating and terminating talk. It is pertinent to note how these features come into play in a show host's engagement with citizens.

Political Talk Shows in Indigenous Languages & Pidgin English

In Lagos, there are four radio stations broadcasting in indigenous languages. They are: Radio Lagos-Tiwantiwa, FRCN's Bond FM, FRCN's Choice FM and lastly Daar Communication's Faaji FM. In addition, there are two NigP radio stations bringing the number to six non-English language radio stations out of the 26 radio stations (NBC List, 2013) in Lagos city. On RayPower's Faaji FM, "People who find it difficult to express themselves in English during 'Fact File' or 'Political Platform' find it easy to express themselves in their local language, the Yoruba language on 'E gbe yewo' (Somide,2017).

NigP radio stations, which developed in Lagos, a city originally populated by Yoruba-speaking Nigerians, caters for the needs of non-Yoruba-speaking indigenes in the metropolitan city. They also address people from the different ethnic groups in Nigeria, who are not necessarily educated. These NigP radio stations have thus become quite popular and have expanded from Lagos to other major cities in Nigeria (Durodola, 2013).

Radio One's pidgin breakfast show, 'Wake Up Naija' continues to be a participatory talk show that encourages citizen engagement. The station like Wazobia FM liberated a previously marginalized majority through its language of communication. Soola (2002) submits that

Wazobia FM activated a "community-specific and situation-relevant" radio station which is also "dialogic and participatory" (Soola, 2002, p.24).

In a series of interviews with hosts of Talk Shows in Lagos, Ni-

geria, I interrogate the thinking behind these programs, whether presented in English or indigenous languages; and how they have functioned as watchdogs in Nigeria's emerging democracy in a series of interviews with show hosts.

Analysis of Interviews with Talk Show Hosts

Radio is used as a tool of subversion under military and dictatorial regimes. It is difficult to achieve or sustain that under a democratic dispensation. Tettey (2011) writing about talk radio and politics in Ghana states that the increase in 'non-state controlled radio stations in several countries has led to a vibrant, pluralistic and competitive radio landscape. And this has led to the expansion in the media spaces available for the expression of citizens' preferences and perspectives. This is reflected in an interview with Ambrose Somide, the director, Radio Services, Daar Communications.

RayPower 100.5 FM

There are two political talk shows on the radio station, **Fact File** and **Political Platform.** Fact File is as old as RayPower FM. It runs between 8.30 and 9.00am, weekdays. **Political Platform,** which started from Lagos and used to last for 15mins, now runs between 9.15am - 9.45am weekdays on the RayPower Network which covers Nigeria. Media research and monitoring reveal that those are the two key programs on the RayPower Network that shoot the listenership up (Somide, 2017).

Political platform is managed by the political desk in the newsroom, headed by Austin Okhiria Agbonsurenmi, who is the lead anchor; there are four other presenters from the political desk, two ladies and two gentlemen. They "look at topical issues in the news, that people are talking about, take reports, bring in a guest to comment and analyze, either on phone or in the studio, do a bit of analysis themselves looking at different angles. Phone calls are not allowed on the program; they rely on feedback via letters, emails, text messages in the course of the program (Somide, 2017).

The program has a huge influence on its listeners and could be said to have contributed to shaping civic competence among

citizens:

> "we have some people who can lay claim to part ownership of the program because of the length of years they have been listening to the program and following it; they feel like a part of that program" (Somide., 2017:2).

Listeners on the program thus have a sense of ownership. Ross (2004) says participation in talk radio reflects active agency, which is critical for 'growth, consolidation, and sustenance of democracy' (Ross, cited in Tettey, 2017, 21):

> "whenever, due to technical issues, we fail to run **Political Platform** on the network. . . as I said, the program originates from Abuja. . . you will see people calling in, cursing because the program is a no holds barred kind of programme where people, the presenters, the analysts and the guests express their opinions freely on any subject" (Somide, 2017, 4).

Sometimes RayPower runs afoul of the rules and regulations guiding utterances on radio in the bid to accommodate all shades of opinions:

> "It's very engaging, although at times they talk themselves into trouble and this has put us at loggerheads on a number of occasions. I have had to visit NBC (the National Broadcasting Commission, the regulating body for broadcasting) several times for views expressed, guests featured, content of the program and all of that" (Somide, 2017, 1).

It is a documented fact that talk show hosts represent particular political interests. Issues treated on Fact File and Political Platform and statements from high profile guests, however, continue to make the front pages of newspapers the next day.

> " I recall one particular edition (Fact File) where I interviewed the current Minister of Communication, Adebayo Shittu, That was when there was this proposal, by 'telcos', that was endorsed by NCC for increase in data rate. . . and I asked him if he was aware of the development... He said that has not been discussed with him. He was not aware; he was just hearing this for the first time on radio. The question I put to him was, "are you really in charge of communication? Because if something has been endorsed by an agency under your watch and you are claiming on radio that you are just hearing for the first time, are you really sincerely in charge? And he said one or two things that made the headlines the next day in the newspaper" (Somide, 2017).

Media production should be carefully linked to the uses, meanings and values made of the media products consumed (Deacon

et al, 2007). The meanings made by some citizens are as divergent as the views expressed on the two programs are varied. Somide (2017) says at a point during the Jonathan administration, the presenters were accused of being quite biased, and serving the interest of the PDP; and that many times, the present Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed, who used to be the spokesperson for the APC then refused to go on that program. Even after winning the election and President Buhari took over government, presenters of 'Political Platform' are accused of playing the opposition card and being the mouthpiece of the PDP (Somide, 2017). This situation on RayPower's talk show validates the assertion that political talk radio offers a 'facade of a deliberative public sphere', a thin public sphere where the media operates as a billboard of opposing viewpoints as against a space for proper debates and analyses of issues (Tettey 2011, p.26):

> "And that's a long battle that we've been fighting. And when people say you are too biased, some would also commend them to say you are bold, you are courageous in taking the government up on some of these issues" (Somide, 2017,4).

As in other parts of Africa, talk show hosts in Nigeria functioning in their professional role of watchdogs continually struggle to strike a balance between being disinterested parties in discussions and debates and facilitators of objective analyses of issues (Tettey, 2011).

Radio Continental, Lagos

Another talk show that has a huge followership on radio in Lagos is 'Kubanji Direct'. It is a news magazine on which topical issues from politics, economics to sports are discussed. It is general interest, but as the occasion demands, it delves into politics and political issues. It is anchored by Jones Usen known as Citizen Jones on the program. He has been the anchor since 2012 when the program attracted sponsorship from a household brand in Nigeria The program starts with a prologue that sets the tone of the program and then the guests take over, the two guests usually don't agree (Usen, 2017).

'Kubanji Direct' airs on weekdays, at 7pm, the prime time for

major radio networks, as a 'creative alternative to them', especially to compete with Radio Nigeria which relays a Network News and program at that time (Usen, 2017:1). Citizen Jones treats 'topics that are not common to radio stations in Lagos and around the environment:

> "I swim against the tide, when it is fashionable to latch on to a particular subject matter in the country; I come from a different plan. I approach issues that ordinarily would have been forgotten by the listenership. So I don't go with the flow. I try to be different" (Usen, 2017, p.2).

This is instructive, and in tune with the characteristics of talk radio, which is to ensure that issues are kept in the public realm and in the public consciousness for some time. Usen (2017) reiterates that the essence of radio is to provoke and stimulate debates:

> "Just bring these issues to the debate and allow the listener to make up his mind. As far as that goes, I would imagine I take on issues that are germane to the listenership and so participation is keen" (Usen, 2017, p.3).

Tettey (2011) says this approach makes it difficult for the subject of a news stories or even public officials to ride out an issue with the hope that it will die with the news cycle.

Talk radio is live and so instant feedback is another characteristic of talk shows. Tettey (2011) states further that phone-ins are the main vehicle through which citizens participate in talk programs. Usen (2017) agrees with this assertion. He offers that on 'Kubanji Direct':

> "The social media engagement would tell you that sometimes when we open the telephone lines, it is surreal and I would say the traffic is stimulating" (Usen 2017:3).

Usen (2017) talks about the peculiar democratic experience in the country, arguing that, the failure of leadership necessitates that the people must be engaged. He asserts that although the issues are there, they need to be provoked and so citizens rely on radio (Usen, 2017):

> "Radio is not just the king of the electronic media due to its blind nature but a personal medium too, so they (citizens) tend to yield to any radio station that gives them what they want" (Usen, 2017, p.3).

And the peculiar democratic experience arose from the disap-

pointment about the rulership of the political class and the fact that 'the military severed the bridges we had built overtime, so radio comes in to provide the succor' (Usen 2017, p.3).

In his analysis of the verbal encounters of the radio talk show, Hutchby (1996) submits that there are various ways in which power relations are given form, reproduced and resisted. Participation on 'Kubanji Direct' is keen as with most talk shows, although Citizen Jones has not featured too many women as guests. In terms of engagement, a sizable number of women call in once the lines are thrown open; more call in when the programme ends to engage with the presenter (Usen, 2017).

Soni Irabor Live

Soni Irabor Live was initially on NTA and AIT from February 1997 till April 2010. It was a general interest talk show with a focus on public officials and public intellectuals. Political party presidential candidates like Basorun MKO Abiola, Baba Gana Kingibe, Tom Ikimi and cabinet ministers appeared on it. His interview with former Minister for Information, Walter Ofonagoro, was serialized in *Weekend Concord* of Dec 23, 1995. Soni Irabor Live radio version started in June 2011 on Inspiration FM and continued as a general interest show. It, however, prides itself on dealing with political issues before human interest. Foremost political personalities like INEC Chairman, Attahiru Jega, when INEC was preparing for the 2011 elections and also in 2015, prominent political figures relentlessly featured included the INEC Chairman, Attahiru Jega, Governor of Lagos State, Akinwunmi Ambode and a number of other government functionaries (Irabor, 2017).

Soni Irabor also pioneered the presentation of Radio Link, an audience participatory talk show on the Radio Network which he hosted for a year and half and stopped presenting in 2000. Radio Link was credited with getting debt paid to Nigeria Airways. (Irabor, 2017:3) recalls another watchdog moment in 2000 "when President Obasanjo raided Aguleri, they (Radio Nigeria Management) tried to stop me. We had to tone down the reactions."

During the military regime, he was invited by the SSS and detained for seven hours for making a statement about the Structur-

al Adjustment Program (SAP) on Radio Scope.

In the beginning of the fourth republic, an interview talk show, 'Media Chat' was created for President Obasanjo to field questions from the media. It was a multiple interviewers and one interviewee format talk show, which was jointly produced and presented by Nigeria's public radio and TV, Radio Nigeria and the Nigerian Television Authority. It had no feedback channel of a phone –in. Soni Irabor interviewed the new democratically elected Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, who heralded the fourth republic in Nigeria, four times on 'Media Chat'.

Free expression is critical in fostering and consolidating democratic governance (Tettey, 2011), yet the Nigerian media strive to achieve it in successive democratic governments. Irabor (2017) recalls the dismissive and sometimes combative responses of President Obasanjo then when asked questions bordering on governance in Nigeria on Media Chat and how they managed it. Although they backed down eventually, the interviewers still asked hard questions. One was about the police force, the many contracts being awarded for developments and how the new president told him off saying: " are you their lawyer?" (Irabor, 2007, p.3)

Conclusion

The media space is agog with talk shows in English and indigenous languages, helping citizens to make meaning of political developments and issues; and creating a deliberative democracy. Radio has for long played a major and definitive role in Nigeria's democracy, in alignment with Castells (2007) who says the media have become the social space where power is decided. The media have a democratic mandate to scrutinize political power in line with their role as the fourth estate of the realm. The mandate arose from the normative functions of the press, to represent public interest by making it possible to hold powerful actors in the society accountable to the public.

Although, radio stations and talk show hosts have become increasingly partisan, as Tersmeden (2007:133) argues, journalists cannot become silent for fear of criticizing a government they support. To do so is to abandon their watchdog role in society.

In Nigeria of the 80's, radio played a vital role in engaging the citizenry about government's policies and developmental projects. Federal government-owned agencies like MAMSER and the National Orientation Agency; and initiatives like Better Life for Rural Women and Family Support Program were powered using radio as a tool.

A Department for International Development, UK White Paper 2006 states that the biggest difference to the quality of governance is active involvement by citizens. It affirms that politics is the only thing that can, in the long run, "transform the quality of decision making in developing countries and the effectiveness of the States".

Contrary to the claims that radio is a dying and forgotten medium, in relation to advancement in technology through new media, radio has continued to adapt to changing circumstances. It continues to be relevant for new kinds of imagining the self as an individual and citizen (Gunner, Ligaga and Moyo, 2011), just as the utilization of indigenous languages is equally continually relevant in engaging citizens on programs bordering on politics and governance.

Since the traditional role of the media in a democracy is to continually challenge the authorities and bring about an awareness of democratic values (Tersmaden, 2007), Nigerian radio stations have continually held this up not only in their coverage and reportage of developmental issues in the fourth republic, they have consistently done so through an array of talk shows.

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8

Media and Diversity Reporting of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: A Perspective

By Nathaniel D. Danjibo

Introduction

There is a relationship between ethno-religious violence and the media in Nigeria. For most Nigerians, these stories are heard only on radio, television and newspapers; and Nigerians react and relate to the stories depending on how the media frame their reports. The media, therefore, serve as the mouthpiece and ears of

many a Nigerian. In the same vein, the media also play a vanguard position in governance by letting the public know what government's activities are all about and by conveying to the government the desires and aspirations of the public. The media thus become an integral part of society in facilitating mutual understanding between the governed and the government(s). However, "While conflict discourse systems and their interrelations of opposition and alliance can be identified in individual conversations about news, it is more effective to concentrate on media content as an indirect method of observation because of the unique fast moving feedback involved in daily journalistic production" (Arno, 2009, p.6).In times of tension and actual expression of conflict, people rely on the media to act and react, just as people become emotional when media reportage is deemed highly sensational.

It is observable that a lot of items reported as news are in fact, pseudo-events that are simply created for the media, which otherwise would not have taken place. This is a bit complicated. The question is-could there be any reportage of an event considered not to be a news item? This brings us to the place of ethics in media reporting, where a journalist has to make discretionary decisions on whether or not to report particular news items in the face of its devastating effect on the general public. This is why Sharkey (2003, 20) suggested that:

> Reporting only what you see, might not, on first hearing, seem like such a bad thing. It sounds like a basic definition of objectivity: factual, unembellished coverage. But good journalism includes an appreciation of nuance and an ability to place 'what you see' in a broader context... it also demonstrates that there is a difference between seeing and understanding.

A good deal of what the media report about conflicts center on what is seen without adequately investigating the root causes and the consequences thereafter. In some dire cases, a lot of hearsay and speculation is passed for news. Moreover, Grimes, Husken, Simon and Venbrux (2011, 5) were of the view that "Mediatizing conflict spreads it". In other words, spreading news items in the media about conflict and violence only helps to exacerbate conflict, especially in the manner in which conflict cases are re-

ported with strong adjectives without due consideration for the after effect. Accordingly, the phrase 'mediatized conflict' "is used to emphasize the complex ways in which media are often implicated within conflicts while disseminating ideas and images about them" (Cottle, 2006, p.8-9). Moreover, media profession in Nigeria has a lot more to do with ownership, business, politics, ethnicity and religion than strict adherence to the principles of ethics and morals. Dautrich and Hartley (2011, 137) observed: "As with other institutional actors, the professional norm of journalists, editors and producers have an impact on their actions."

Ownership of the media has a great impact on media reportage in the sense that the ownership guides what is publishable and what is not publishable. In other words, news and editorial publications are dependent on the owners' interests; in our setting, they are also largely dependenton the owners' ethnic, religious and political leanings.. News reporters and editors are constrained to tailor their works to please the owner. This development colours reporting and weakens the appeal of media products as fair and comprehensive accounts of goings on. Isola (2010, 12) aptly captures the point about media ownership and economic interest when he wrote:

> Economic and ownership influence also tend to affect the actions of the media.... Journalists are mostly employees who are strongly influenced by those who own and control the media. Like other employees in the capitalist enterprise, journalists are subjected to direct economic power of media owners. The fact that most news media organizations are constituted as lucrative capitalist enterprises, whose owners play key roles in the domestic economy and politics, sometimes turn media owners and their employees into pro-systemic individuals.

Two other variables that cannot be ignored in the analysis of media reportage in Nigeria are the issue of corruption and poor remuneration of the workers in the media industry. The poor, irregular and sometimes non-payment of workers in the media industry has negative effects on media reportage as most reporters and editors would have to go an extra mile to make ends meet. That extra mile is not often decent or honorable. Indeed there are reports of some media owners boldly telling their workers

to utilize their identity cards as meal tickets. This immoral and unethical conduct tacitly encourages corruption to be part and parcel of the media industry and de-emphasizes the role of ethics in media reportage.

Ethnicity and religion are not new concepts in Nigeria's political development. For a long time, the Nigerian people have been defined and have defined their identities based on ethno-religious differences (Suberu, 1996; 2004; Campbell, 1997; Nnoli, 1980; 1995; Osaghae, 2001; (Sklar 2004; Young 1999; Nnoli 1980; Osaghae 2002; Horowitz 2000; Kukah 1994; Kastfelt 2004; Falola 1998). Often times we are misguided by a wealth of literature that tends to segregate the Nigerian state into two distinct social categories of the Christian south and the Muslim north, and this false categorization has helped to heighten mutual suspicion between those in the south and those in the north of the country. Nigeria is both a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, and there is no doubt that ethnicity and religion have impacted negatively on the body politic of the Nigerian state with enormous consequences on both human lives and properties. This, in fact, tends to negate the cardinal principle of most religions to promote peace in human organizations.

There was the broad assumption that both ethnic and religious conflicts were a characteristic of military regime, but contemporary experience, the world over, has shown the contrary. Huntington's *Clash of Civilization* was to portray the emergent conflict between the Arab and Western worlds based on religious undertones. Today, terrorism and the fight against it have derived their justification from religious beliefs. We can, therefore, assert that both ethnicity and religion have become catalysts of conflicts among new and old democracies.

Nigeria transited from military to civilian rule in May 1999. There were high hopes that the new democracy would offer prospects for better governance, including bringing about peaceful co-existence among different ethno-religious groups. Unfortunately, shortly after the country embraced democracy in 1999, Nigeria was confronted with the enigma of ethnic and religious conflicts.

This study focuses on analyzing major ethnic and religious conflicts that have occurred in Nigeria since 1987, with the intention of providing lessons for Nigeria's media professionals on how to investigate and handle the dissemination of news items. Such conflicts as the Shari'a crisis; the Yoruba-Hausa Sagamu/Kano conflict; the Miss World religious crisis; the crises in Jos; and the ethno-religious crisis in Maiduguri, Kontagora and Onitsha as a result of the cartooning of the prophet of Islam in Denmark, and the effective way in which Boko Haram uses the media shall be our cases for discussion.

Media Role and Functions in Conflict Reportage

Media can be defined as "the paths, ways or means through which messages are disseminated. They are the channels through which information are (sic) passed across" (Sadeeq, 2006, p.249). Defleur and Dennis (1981, 148) defined mass media as "devices for moving messages across distance or time to accomplish mass communication". The media have a great role to play in the life of a nation and its people. As the name suggests, the media are the intermediary between the people and the state and vice versa. The functions of the media in a society are unquantifiable. Apart from providing information and knowledge, the media serve as the voice of the people. Lord Bingham of the British House of Commons summarizes the functions of the media thus:

> In a modern developed society it is only a small minority of citizens who can participate directly in the discussions and decisions which shape the public life of that society. The majority can participate only indirectly, by exercising their rights as citizens to vote, express their opinions, (and) make representations to the authorities from pressure groups and so on. But the majority cannot participate in the public life of their society in these ways if they are not alerted to and informed about matters which call for or may call for considerations. It is very largely through the media…. The proper functioning of a modern participatory democracy requires that the media be free, active, professional and inquiring (cited in Welsh, Tom, Walter Greenwood and David Banks, 2007, p.3).

Generally, the media are regarded as the Fourth Estate of the Realm because of the vanguard role they play. They exercise oversight functions over the activities of the three arms of government-

the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, but also inform the government about the pulse of the people whilst educating the people on government's plans and activities. So, the media have a noble and crucial role in the political and economic development of a nation. Information is vital; it can build and it can destroy a nation; stabilize and destabilize. People and nations go to war because of information and people and nations also become friendly because of information. And it is in the media that information usually has a free reign. As (Nwosu, 1990, p.31) observed, the mass media "help people to find new norms and harmony in periods of transition, change the power structure in the society by giving knowledge to the masses, create sense of nationess (sic), lead to increased political activity or participation…." In the same vein, McQuail's description best captures the role of the media as:

> Windows that enable us to see beyond our immediate surroundings, interpreters that help us make sense of experience, platforms or carriers that convey information, interactive communication that includes audience feedback, signposts that provide us with instructions….(1987, p.52-53).

Bryant and Thompson (2002, 306, cited in Isola, 2010, p.8) listed eight important functions of the mass media in a democracy:

1. Surveillance of contemporary events which are likely to affect citizens positively and negatively
2. Identification of key social and political issues
3. Provision of platform for advocacy for causes and interest
4. Transmission of diverse contents across the various dimensions and factions of political discourse
5. Scrutiny of government officials, their institutions and other agencies
6. Giving of incentives and information to allow citizens to become actively informed participants rather than spectators
7. Provision of principled resistance to external forces attempting to subvert media autonomy
8. Respectful consideration of the audience as potentially concerned, sense-making efficacious citizens.

Ethics and the Media

Ethics is a necessary and obligatory condition needed for the proper functioning of the media in the society otherwise the media would evolve into channels of disseminating false information and become anarchical and irresponsible in their activities. Here, "Ethical thinking involves considering the effects of one's actions on multiple and distant stakeholders and on the integrity of a larger community" (Carrie, 2014, p.4). What this suggests is that no matter how captivating a news item is, it should not be disseminated if that would bring about a greater danger to the people. And "Central to ethical thinking is impartiality, or disinterest: the capacity to look beyond one's own interest, feelings, and empathy for close relations in order to make decisions in the interest of a larger group, public or society" (Carrie, 2014, p.5). Accordingly, "Ethics should provide the journalist certain basic principles or standards by which he (or she) can judge actions to be right or wrong, good or bad, responsible or irresponsible" (Adelabu, 2015, 183). But to be able to do this, the media must imbibe the culture of moral discipline. They must also demonstrate expertise in the field by disseminating information that that is true and lucid, reliable and verifiable.

However, on the part of the Nigerian media industry, there is a lot to praise and vilify the media for. Routinely, many Nigerian media houses fall short of the standards of media practice with regards to some ethical principles such as:

- Objectivity in reportage;
- Disseminating true and unbiased information
- Protecting national interest.

According to Sadeeq (2006, 258), "The reporters on the field too are not left out of the bastardization of their media ethics. Being the first gatekeepers, they choose what to write and what to suppress based on their selfish reason and the gratification that accompany such stories". The distortion goes down the line as line editors and title editors are no less guilty.

Diversity in Interests and Diversity in Reporting

Nigeria is ethno-regionally based. We moved from the First Republic of four regions to the present 36 states, conveniently

grouped into six Geo-political Zones in public discourse. At other times specific reference and recognition is given to other political entities such as the Niger-Delta and the Middle Belt regions. There is also diversity in religious beliefs and identities with Christianity and Islam as the two predominant and salient ones. In terms of what we may refer to as "territorial politics", Nigeria is again divided into North and South. The media industry is also caught in the web because they are not just regionally, ethnically and religious based, they also reflect these tendencies in their output. There is reference to "northern newspapers" and "southern newspapers". This is to say that these papers speak and protect either the interest of the north or that of the south. Such papers as *New Nigerian* and *Leadership*, mostly promote the interest of the north, while such papers as the *Guardian* and the the *Sun* mostly promote the interest of the south. There are also ethnically based papers such as the *Oodua News* and Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo (Hausa- Truth is better than money) for the Hausa/Fulani. Each tries to promote and protect its individual and group interests. Even the government owned non-print media such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) seem to project the interest of the local states where they have branches instead of being national representatives. For example, NTA and federal government owned FM stations in a good number of states in the north do not allow for Christian programs in the erroneous belief of protecting communal interests at the expense of human rights and the overall national interest of the people to freely practice their religion. Such media organizations are guilty of pursuing a dubious Agenda Setting, which is predetermining what "issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society" (Umuerri, 2008, p.191).

Ethno-religious Crisis in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society (Horowitz 2000; Young, 1999; Suberu, 2001). On ethnicity alone, scholars have not agreed on the specific number of the country's ethnic groups. The number ranges from 250 (Otite 1990) to about 370 (Osaghae 2006). There are predominantly three religions- Christianity, Islam and the Traditional African Religions.

Of course, the cultural complexity of the country is as much as the ethnic composition. The ethno-religious complexity of the Nigerian state was reinforced by colonial social formation that had pitched various ethnic groups against themselves. First, there was heightened competition for the control of the Nigerian state by any of the three dominant groups- the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and the Yoruba on one hand (Nnoli 1980; 1995; Mamdani, 2003) and the problem of majority-minority relations with the latter crying foul of marginalization (Suberu 1996; 1997; 2001;Danjibo 2005; Osaghae, 2006). The bitter rivalry for the control of the Nigerian state led to threats of secession by each of the dominant groups at one point or the other, which culminated in the declaration of the Biafran Republic by the Igbos in 1967 that eventually led the civil war that lasted three years (1967-1970). The war was spiritedly fought to keep Nigeria one (Oluleye 1985).

In Nigeria, religion has continued to remain a potent catalyst of inter-ethnic and group relation (Mu'azzam, 2001; Egwu, 2001; Ilesanmi, 2001; Salamone, 1991; Alanamu, 2004; Otite, 1990) with two dominant religions Islam and Christianity expressing high level of competitiveness (Falola, 1998; 2003; Ohadike, 1992; Udoidem, 1997). Unmindful of the fact that these two religions were actually alien to the Nigerian pre-colonial society, adherents of both religions express fundamentalism as if these religions originated from their traditional societies. For example, religion has caused a divide between the north and the south that most scholars falsely fractionalize the country into 'Muslim north' and 'Christian south' as if Christians are not in the north and Muslims are not in the south. This fallacious divide has impacted negatively on inter-ethnic identities and group relations to the extent that every person from the north of the country is often viewed as Muslim despite the fact that there are numerous ethnic identities that are not Muslims. The Igbos, for example, are generally seen as non-Muslims and are treated so; likewise the Hausa-Fulani are generally seen as non-Christians and are treated so. Yet in the north, majority of non-Hausa/Fulani are Christians while a great number of the Yoruba in southern Nigeria are Muslims.

Religion cannot be ignored in Nigerian government and politics. During the regional governments, religion made a subtle encroachment in Nigerian politics to the extent that minority groups in northern Nigeria who were mostly Christians were disenchanted with the way the Hausa/Fulani were using Islam to manipulate the activities of the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC). This made the minority groups mostly from the Middle Belt to form the Middle Zone League (MZL), which later transformed into the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), a political party of mostly Christian minority groups to free themselves from the political/religious hegemonic activities of the NPC (Sklar 2004; Ksatfelt 2000; 2003). However, the question of religion came to light during the Constituent Assembly of 1977/78 when the debate on whether to establish a Shari'a Court of Appeal or not almost stalled the constitutional process (Kukah 1994). In 1986, the smuggling of the Nigerian state into membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) by the Ibrahim Babangida military government brought another religious controversy between the Christians and the Muslims (Kenny, 2004; 1996).

Suspicious of the government's intention with the membership of OIC and disenchanted with the perceived plan to islamize the country by removing Christian army officers from key strategic positions and replacing them with Muslim army officers, some young army officers led by Major Gideon Orkar staged a coup to overthrow the regime of Babangida in 1990. Unfortunately the issue of ethnicity and religion was reflected in the coup when Major Gideon excised some five northern states from the federation. As a result of this miscalculation, the coup that was initially welcomed lost the support of the majority of Nigerians (Kenny 1996).

Despite the influence of religion and ethnicity in the political history of the Nigeria, we must recognize the fact that at certain periods these issues were even tolerated. For example, the Buhari-led military government (1983-1985) had both the Head of State and his Deputy, General Tunde Idiagbon as Muslims; likewise the duo of Moshood Abiola and Babagana Kingibe during the 1993 Presidential election. If the Christians tolerated this, it

was unlikely the Muslims would have. For example, the Muslims protested vehemently, and even threatened to embark on a jihad (holy war) against the Nigerian state if Muslims were not considered in the appointment to head the National Political Reforms Conference of March 2005 after Justice Nikky Tobi and Rev. Fr. Matthew Hassan Kukah were appointed as Chairman and Secretary respectively (*The Guardian*, March 13, 2005). To douse the tension, President Olusegun Obasanjo had to appoint two other Muslims as co-Chairman and co-Secretary. This clearly shows that issues of religion and ethnicity are still very crucial and germane in Nigerian government and politics and it is with this background that we shall analyze ethno-religious conflicts and diversity in media reporting from 1999 till date, while drawing lessons for the future.

Reported Cases of Some Salient Ethno-religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria

Ethnic and religious conflicts have a long history in Nigeria, but the explosive nature of the conflicts manifested in the 1980s, especially after the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). The introduction of SAP by General Babangida administration in 1986 and the attendant rise in poverty that followed suit was linked to the violent resurgence of ethno-religious politics in Nigeria (see, Jega, 2000; Okafor, 1997). Between 1980 and 2008 there have been unprecedented cases of ethnic and religious conflicts spread across Nigeria, and scholars and analysts are of the opinion that deaths and destruction as a result of ethno-religious conflicts from 1987 to 2017 have outnumbered those recorded during the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970.* It is not possible to give a detailed discourse of all the ethno-religious conflicts that occurred in Northern Nigeria, as that will be beyond the scope of this paper. However, salient ethno-religious conflicts as the Shari'a law crisis of 2000; the Miss World crisis of 2002; the crisis resulting from the cartooning of Prophet Muhammed in 2006; and the Jos crises of 1991, 1994, 1998, 2004, and 2008 will be discussed in the light of media diversity in reporting.

The Shari'a Law Crisis

At the wake of 'democratic' rule in 1999, Shari'a controversy became a very potent catalyst of conflict that led to the death and displacement of several persons, apart from the destruction of property. Shari'a means judgment in Hausa while in Arabic it connotes the whole of Islamic jurisprudence that must guide the life of Muslims in the society (Khuri, 1994). The complex issue is how to practice Shari'a in a society of mixed religions, especially in a democracy.

Addressing a large crowd that converged for the inauguration of Shari'a law on Thursday, October 28, 1999, Governor Sani Ahmed Yerima of Zamfara State stated thus:

> It has become pertinent that we wake up from this sorry state of slumber and live up to our responsibility to the Almighty in order to avoid his curse...Let me make it unequivocally clear that we are not unaware of the multifarious nature of our society as a multi-religious and multi-ethnic one and we do not intend to impose the Shari'a law on the non-Muslims in the state as is being deliberately and mischievously falsified by agents of blackmail" (cited in Oduyoye, 2000:1).

In the same vein, the Governor of Niger State, Abdullahi Kure, reiterated the neutrality of the practice of Shari'a towards those who belonged to other religions. Thus, according to Kure, "Certainly, it (Shari'a) will not pitch one religion against another" (*The Guardian*, December 22, 1999). As it turned out, assurances by both governors that Shari'a would not affect the non-Muslims was rather unrealistic. In Zamfara State, for example, Christian women were subjected to trekking long distances as commercial motorcyclists were banned from carrying women, but also were not allowed to enter vehicles designated for carrying Muslim women. Christian tenants were forced out of their rented houses by Muslim landlords who preferred to have their houses vacant than to accommodate Christians; Christians were forced to settle their cases in Shari'a courts; and there were cases of kidnapping some women to force them convert to Islam (interview conducted with Mr. David Ishaya, the former Secretary of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Zamfara State Branch).

No sooner the Shari'a law was launched in Niger State, than Muslims loaded themselves in trucks from Minna and Kontagora

towns and headed to Salka town inhabited by Kamberi people who are mostly of the Traditional African Religion. It was on a market day in September 2001. Most Kamberi people brew beer from their farm settlements and bring the liquor for sale on markets day. The Muslims who arrived in trucks went round the markets and started breaking the clay jars of the brewed beer. The Kamberis mobilized their folks and laid siege on the Muslims and massacred several of them (interview with Rev. Bulus, now Catholic Bishop of Kontagora Prefecture). Sad enough, the media have not devoted their attention to reporting the impact of Shari'a in Zamfara and played deaf ears to what had happened in Salka town of Niger State, which did not even feature as a news item in any media outlet.

The Kaduna Shari'a crises of February and April 2001 were the most obvious because of the gravity and magnitude of conflict experienced. Christians and Muslims almost in equal proportion populate Kaduna State. Whereas the Muslims predominate the north of the state, the Christians predominate the south. Like most states in the north, the Hausa/Fulani are mostly Muslims while minority ethnic groups are mostly Christians and traditionalists. The Muslims in Kaduna were pressurizing the government to adopt and implement Shari'a like other northern states; the Christians were opposed to Shari'a. Crisis ensued when the Christians embarked on a rally round Kaduna city to protest against the adoption of Shari'a. Some Muslims barricaded some streets and started stoning the Christians. Things got out of hand and the result was the death of several persons, burning down of churches and mosques and other properties. There were reprisal attacks on the Hausa/Fulani Muslims in Onitsha, Umuahia and Owerri by the Igbo in retaliation for the Igbo killed in Kaduna. The *Tribune* reported that about 1,000 people lost their lives (see, *Sunday Tribune*, January 11, 2009, p. 19), while *ThisDay* reported that Shari'a claimed over 10,000 lives (see, *ThisDay*, April 2, 2005, p.2).

Very disturbing, however, was the manner in which the media handled the Shari'a Law issue. For example, *The Punch* newspaper had a story titled "**Shari'a: Advent of a Millennium Monster**"

(*The Punch,* Thursday, February 17, 2000, p. 12). This kind of reportage demonizes Islam as a religion and exacerbates tension between Christians and Muslims because the media in Nigeria are mostly seen as a Christian industry. The style of reportage also shows great ignorance on the part of both the reporters and news editors. Sharia law is not just intricately connected to the practice of Islam but is the very basis of Islamic religion. During an interview with two Islamic scholars- Umar Koba and Nasiru Herge, they made it clear that without shari'a there cannot be Islam, because Islamic jurisprudence is the fundamental principle that covers all aspects of shari'a. Moreover, the Penal Code operated by most states in northern Nigeria today has its foundation in shari'a law even before the advent of colonialism in Nigeria.

The Sagamu/Kano Crisis

The Hausa/Fulani had lived and interacted with the Yoruba in Sagamu, a town in Yorubaland in present day Ogun State known to be the harbinger of kolanut farming and trade for many centuries without any major friction. Unfortunately, July of 2000 turned a dark month for the two groups. The Yoruba were celebrating Oro- a masquerade dancing festival mainly for male initiates. In Yoruba tradition and culture, only men are allowed to come in contact with the Oro masquerade. Two Hausa women were said to have violated the rules by insisting on seeing the masquerades. Their arrogance infuriated the Yoruba worshippers of Oro who took laws into their hands by hacking the two women to death. The Hausa/Fulani in Sagamu protested the killing of the two women who were widely reported to be 'prostitutes' by the media. Violence ensued between the two ethnic groups and the end result was the death of scores of lives.

The violence in Sagamu spread to Kano where several Yoruba people were killed in retaliation for the 'massacre' of the Hausa/Fulani in Sagamu (Alanamu, 2005).Oro is a Yoruba traditional African belief system, and the question is: should the belief system be binding on peoples of other beliefs and cultures? If the answer is in the affirmative in order to justify the violence, then what is wrong in imposing shari'a law on non-Muslims in some states of

northern Nigeria? Moreover, the Yoruba who teamed up to fight the Hausa/Fulani in Sagamu were not just traditionalists, there were Christians and Muslims also, which reinforces Insa Nolte's argument that the control of the economy of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) depot and the overzealous intent to deal with the Hausa/Fulani who 'annulled' June 12, 1999 elections were the remote reasons. An interviewee who witnessed the violence in Sagamu and who is also an indigene of Sagamu was of the view that bottled-up ethnic animosity was at the heart of the conflict in the sense that though Oro is a traditional cult in Yorubaland, Christians and Muslims joined the traditional worshippers as actors in the violence.

The November 21 Miss World Crisis

Nigeria was billed to host the Miss World beauty contest on December 7, 2002. Most Muslims who saw it as the import of Western immorality considered the Miss World beauty contest obscene. That opportunity came in hand when a female reporter with the *ThisDay* newspaper, Miss Isioma Daniel asked what Prophet Muhammed would make of the beauty contestants. Writing in the November 16, 2002 of the *ThisDay* Daniel said "What would Muhammed (the prophet of Islam) think? In all honesty, he probably would have chosen a wife from one of them (the contestants)". This certainly was provocative journalism, which did not take into consideration the feelings of the Muslims and the reaction that was bound to take place. The main issue was that the statement, which was written in the holy month of Ramadan (Muslim period of fast) depicted Muhammed as a womanizer, which was interpreted as an unacceptable sacrilege.

There were violent protests in the streets of Kaduna, Kano and Abuja that led to the death of over 100 persons (see, *The News*, December 15, 2008, p. 26). As a result, the contest was shifted from Nigeria to London. The violence resulted from poor judgment on the part of the newspaper. Furthermore, the comment by the Guardian newspaper that "The protesters chanting Allah Akbar (sic) (Allah is the greatest) also passed a fatwa (death sentence) on the publisher of *ThisDay*, Mr.Nduka Obaigbena and the

editor, Mr. Eniola Bello for alleged blasphemy of Prophet Mohammed in a recent publication was untrue in the sense that the fatwa (death sentence)was actually passed on Isioma Daniel and not the publisher and editor respectively. Here again, the media was trying to be emotive and sensational than report the actual facts concerning the reportage (*The Guardian*, Thursday, November 21, 2002, p. 3.). According to an Anglican Bishop in Kaduna, what the media should have concentrated efforts on was to question why an Islamic Sheikh or cleric would issue a fatwa on Isioma in Nigeria- a country that had not adopted any religion as state religion; or why did the Muslims in Kaduna and Abuja not seek redress in the courts instead of taking laws in their hands by violently demonstrating and destroying lives and property. These were the real aftermath issues rather than dissipate energy on statements that were emotional and non-factual.

The Danish Cartoon and Maiduguri Crisis

The Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten, in its 30th September 2005 edition, published 12 editorial cartoons of Prophet Muhammed. Muslims across the world staged several protests against the cartooning of the prophet of Islam. Muslims protested in Lebanon, Iran and Syria and Gaza where flags of some European countries were burnt. In Nigeria, there were violent protests by Muslims in Kontagora town in Niger State and Maiduguri in Borno State where shops, churches and buildings belonging to Christians were razed and several Christians killed. There were reprisal attacks and killings, particularly in Onitsha and Aba in Eastern Nigeria. What is interesting here is the fact that media did not investigate the reason for the protest in Borno. At the periphery, it seemed the Muslims in Maiduguri protested against the cartooning of Muhammed; but an interaction with a Professor from Maiduguri who was close to the then Governor Ali Modu Sheriff revealed the political undertone to the violence that greeted the Danish newspaper cartooning of the prophet of Islam in Maiduguri.

The Professor said the violence in Maiduguri was actually state-sponsored as the governor of the state needed to cause

a distraction from stories that he was on the watchlist of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Political religion became a handy instrument of distraction and destruction as Muslim fundamentalists were mobilized to cause mayhem. This violent group called the 'ECOMOG' and a large number of the almajeri (plural- street children attending Koranic schools) were the ones that attacked Christians and churches to make it look like it was the Muslims protesting against the cartooning of the prophet of Islam. The cartooning of the prophet of Islam, therefore, provided an alibi that prevented Obasanjo's watchdog, the EFCC from clamping down on state officials in Borno State. The violence in Kontagora was equally fierce but received scanty reportage by the media.

The Jos Crises

The media have consistently reported the Jos crises of 1991, 1994, 2001, 2004 and 2008 as one of the combined forces of religion and ethnicity on the one hand and that between the indigenes and settlers on the other. There are several ethnic groups who originally inhabit Jos city while the Hausa/Fulani are regarded as the settlers. The crises have their root causes in the quest for political and economic control of Jos North Local Government, which is now predominantly occupied by the Hausa/Fulani. As noted by Mavalla (2014, 101), "The cause of conflict in Plateau State was not so much religious as the issue of the indigene-settler divide paradigm. The causes of the so-called 'religious conflicts were…rather socio-historical, ethno-political and socio-economic." The Hausa/Fulani influenced the creation of Jos North local government in 1991 and since then sought to displace the indigenes from the political and economic control of the local government, a move continually resisted by the indigenes (Best, 2007; Egwu, 2008). Thousands of people have lost their lives and properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed as a result of the crises, yet the media have constantly reported the channels of vexation rather than the actual root causes.

The media have not been able to ascertain why the conflict in Jos is between the Hausa/Fulani and the indigenes and not be-

tween the indigenes and non-Hausa/Fulani groups, but one central issue surrounding the incessant violence has to do with the control of Jos North Local Government Area where the biggest market and economy of Plateau State is located. The Hausa/Fulani who are the predominant population in Jos North wanted to take both political and economic control of the city, which has been firmly and fiercely resisted by the indigenes most especially the Berom. During an interview session, some of the indigenes raised concern about the near universal citizenship accorded the Hausa/Fulani in Nigeria over and above other groups. The question was asked why was it possible for a Hausa/Fulani man to migrate from Kano or Katsina or Zaria to Jos and seek to become the Sarki (local chief), a local government chairman, a senator and aspire for other higher positions as an indigene of Jos and difficult for a Berom to go to Kano and become a local government councilor? Moreover, the Hausa/Fulani are not the only migrants into Jos; the Yoruba, the Igbo, Nupe, Auchi people and Igala and several other ethnic groups live side-by-side with the indigenes without any form of conflict. Why the Hausa/Fulani? These are questions that the media, academics, and policy analysts will need to find answers to.

The Shiites and the Clash with the Nigerian Army

December 12 and 13 2015 would ever remain sad days in the history of the Shiite community in Zaria. The Shiites otherwise known as the Islamic Movement of Nigeria is led El-Zak Zakky. Every year the group holds public rallies in major cities in Northern Nigeria such as Kaduna, Zaria, Funtua, Kano and Sokoto where it has some preponderance of followership. El-Zak Zakky has a long history of radicalization beginning from his days as a student in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria where he was instrumental to organizing series of demonstrations in the 1980s against the Nigerian state. He later became the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, with ties to some Middle East groups and leader of the Shiites who certainly are at loggerhead with the dominant Sunni in Northern Nigeria. El-Zak Zakky was said to have received his indoctrination and funding majorly from Iraq and other Shi'a dominated Arab countries.

In their yearly demonstrations, the Shiites have constituted themselves into Lords with flagrant disregard for the laws guiding public conduct. They were known not to seek permit from the police and not to allow anybody pass on major roads where they conduct their rallies. On 12 December 2015, the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General TukurBuratai was on his way to pay a courtesy visit to the Emir of Zazzau (Zaria) when the Shiites who were conducting their rally halted his convoy. A Brigadier General came out of his car and pleaded with the Shiites to give way but they gave deaf ears to the plea. Even when the security details of the Chief of Army Staff wanted to take military action, the General pleaded with them not to. The Shiites were said to have attacked the military convoy with sticks, clubs and machetes. The next day, soldiers from 1 Division in Kaduna stormed the Shiite community in Zaria, killing hundreds of the members. El-Zak Zakky was said to have lost one of his wives and two sons, while he and another of his wives were taken captives. There were conflicting figures about the casualties. Whereas the *Guardian on Sunday*, of December 13 put the number of casualties as 'unspecified' the same paper later estimated the number of deaths to be 34 including the three sons of El-Zak Zakky (*The Guardian*, Friday 20, 2005. The Secretary to the Government of Kaduna State would later admit that 347 corpses were buried after the soldiers and the Shiites clashed (see The Punch, Tuesday 12 April 2016, p.12). Yet, towards the end of 2016, Amnesty International came up with a more alarming figure of more than 800 persons. ,

Boko Haram and the Kidnap of the Chibok Girls

The violent activities of Boko Haram terrorist group spanned from 2011 to 2016 and too wide for the scope of this paper to capture. However, the media succeeded in making heroes and heroines out of the Boko Haram members by constantly referring to the group as the "dreaded Boko Haram" and presenting the Nigerian state and its security forces as weaklings. On 14 April 2014, Boko Haram abducted some secondary school girls in Chibok community of Borno State. While the CNN and Al-Jazeera gave the figures of the kidnapped girls as over 270, the Nigerian media,

For example, two days after the abduction, *The Punch* reported "**Boko Haram abducts 100 schoolgirls in Borno**" (*The Punch*, Wednesday, April 16, 2014, p. 2).

Conclusion

The media will continue to play a very crucial role in the life of the Nigerian state, and to a large extent, the media can be adjudged to have performed above the average. However, the Nigerian media are confronted with daunting challenges such as inadequate welfare for journalists, , constraining ownership interest, ethno-cultural and religious bias which limit their effectiveness. For as long as journalists are poorly remunerated, their commitment to higher ideals of professionalism will be compromised and sensitivity to conflict reporting will be dampened. Media ownership in Nigeria is another issue that needs to be addressed in the sense that it affects the independence and workings of the media industry. Most owners of media houses find it extremely difficult to detach themselves from the industry and reporters and editors are unduly pressured to navigate the tightrope in order to keep their jobs to the detriment of the news process.

One obvious major challenge confronting the Media in Nigeria, however, is inadequate investment in investigative journalism and the continuous training of journalists and media reporters in this aspect. Media bodies such as the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation and the Nigeria Union of Journalists must lead the fight in ensuring ethical journalism thrives and ownership does not become an albatross to the industry.

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9

Media coverage of Ethno-religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Another Perspective

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Introduction

This chapter discusses media reportage of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic. It attempts to contribute to the global debate on the character and impact of media coverage of ethno-religious conflicts. From a wider perspective, it should be noted that Nigeria, like many African and other multicultur-

al states are tormented by frequent religious and ethnic clashes, based on actual or manipulated identity claims. Globally, the role of the media in shaping events as well as the reciprocal relationship between the outbreak of conflicts, disorders, wars and the media representation of these, (Olukotun, 2011) constitute an important subject in contemporary analysis.

That is another way of saying that the narrative strategies and framing which media employ in times of conflicts have bearing on the trajectory and outcomes of those conflicts. Indeed, the growing popularity of conflict-sensitive journalism in Nigeria, which trains journalists to be more conscious and aware of the consequences of irresponsible, flamboyant, partisan, and overtly biased reporting is a proof of the recognition of the importance of the reportorial frames of journalists in time of conflicts.

In Nigeria, there is a rough coincidence of ethnic and religious cleavages, to the extent that the Northern part of the country is predominantly Muslim, while the Southern part is predominantly Christian. To fill in the picture a little bit, there are pockets of Muslim communities in Southern Nigeria, especially Yorubaland, while there are scattered populations of Christian communities in the largely Muslim North. In the North, Islam tends to be more radical and fanatical, especially, with the advent of heretical and fringe sects such as the Maitasine and Boko-Haram, which mount crusades against the established religion adopted by the majority. Although, ethno-religious conflicts are frequent in the history of postcolonial Nigeria, they gained more salience in the Fourth Republic with the adoption of Shari'a by some states in the North, and the more liberal atmosphere of a democracy, which allowed freedom of expression.

Some of the salient conflicts in the period under study include the February 2000 clashes between Christians and Muslims over the implementation of Shari'a law in Kaduna, the 2002 clashes over the proposed hosting by Nigeria of a *Miss World* beauty pageant, the 2008 clashes between Muslims and Christians in Adamawa state, as well as the 2010 clashes between Fulani Muslims and Christian-dominated villages in the Jos area in 2010. In the

last two years, coinciding with presidency of Muhamadu Buhari, a Northern Fulani, there has been an escalation of attacks by Fulani herdsmen and other groups on Christian communities around the Middle Belt, South-East Nigeria, and elsewhere.

Regarding the media, it is, largely for historical reasons, dominated by the Christian South with a preponderant section of them, located in the Lagos-Ibadan axis. The media-- print electronic and digital--reflect fratricides and fractures of the nation state, to the extent that Adebanwi (2002) could argue that Nigeria does not have national media but, 'Arewa media', ' Nkenga media' and 'Ngbati media' corresponding to the major ethnic division in the country. Our narrative strategy is a case study approach, in which we look in detail at particular ethno-religious crises with a view to analyzing how the media, overwhelmingly located in the South, more precisely in the South-West, report the clashes. We draw upon primary and secondary data, including interviews with editors of newspapers as well as content analysis to tease out important trends.

SECTION TWO

Identity Conflict and Media Framing: Contextualizing the Issues

The concept of identity derives from a Latin word (idem), which connotes uniformity and continuity and belongs to the category of essentially contested concepts in the social sciences, featuring a confounding wide array of definitions. As is commonly quipped, ours is the age of controversy deriving from different approaches and disciplinary orientations over the concept of identity. A rough and ready elaboration is to conceive of identity as a person's mental image and expressions of their individuality or group affiliation. It resides in the interstices of negotiation between individual and socially determined roles, suggesting that it can be viewed as a coterie of group affiliations that mark out the individual.

Obviously therefore, language, socialization and cultural attributes loom large in the appreciation of identity as socially constructed phenomenon; and it goes without saying that the media in all its variegated forms are central to the construction of iden-

tities. The repertoire of symbols, totems and ancestral myths from which identities as cultural projects are constructed and reinforced are supplied by the media, while in conflict situations antagonistic factions draw upon and appropriate media narratives to shore up their legitimacy or to reinforce their sense of 'them' and 'us' (Kelinar, 1995). Class, gender, religion, and ethnicity furnish the basis for identities, and identity conflicts, although obviously in the African context, given the particular ways in which nation-states were constructed as colonial amalgams or experiments in political cloning, ethnicity and religion are among the most contentious and around which pitched battles, occasionally leading to the dissolution of states have been fought.

In Nigeria, as well as elsewhere, in Africa, study after study have borne out the premise that the framing of media coverage of identity conflicts directly affects the unfolding, trajectory and prospects of eventual resolution of the conflicts. The inflammatory broadcast of Radio Kaduna, as well as the editorial slant of the *New Nigerian* newspaper--a paper, which advertised its mission as "telling the words and pictures of leading story of Northern Nigeria"-- direct to the genocidal killings of Ibos in 1966 in many parts of Northern Nigeria set the fragile nation on an irreversible course of conflagration. In her doctoral study on this period of Nigeria's media history, Doyin Abiola (formerly Aboaba) informs pertinently that the press and radio of the North unleashed a campaign of verbal hostilities against the South. These mass information media were fully employed in denouncing the 15 January coup, rejecting proposals for unitary government and preparing the people's mind for the counter coup that was to come on 29th July (Aboaba 1990:9, 1979).

Of course, the hostility and war mongering of the Northern media was more than reciprocated by Eastern Nigeria Radio, as well as the *Eastern Outlook*, as the media fissured trenchantly along geo-ethnic lines (Adebanwi: 2002). In more recent times, the pictorial elaboration in August 1999 of the Hausa/Yoruba fratricide in Sagamu, Ogun State, sparked off reprisal conflicts and mayhem in Kano, Northern Nigeria. As Bamigbetan (2000, 96) informs on this

score:

> There were gory blood-chilling pictures of dead victims packed in trucks and station wagons apparently being conveyed to the mortuary. Although, there were no visible marks to indicate the ethnic identity of the victims, the pictures serve the disruptive purpose of rousing hatred between the divided. The result was the reprisal in Kano, which again left several dead. Media analysts, considering the impact of the pictures, believed the editors should have exercised restraint in printing the horrid scenes.

Elsewhere in Africa, the seminal culpability of Radio-Television Libre Des Mille Collines (RTLM) and that of the Tutsi folk singer, Simon Bikindi, in the genocidal killings in Rwanda has been noted in several studies. As Craig (2006, 41) remarked:

> Around the time of the genocide, the solid links established between RTLM staff and their listeners became an operational framework for mass murder. Inflammatory broadcast made on RTLM were clearly linked to attacks on Tutsis and Hutu moderates alike, within the course of everyday operations. RTLM staff provided the militias with list of prominent 'enemies' (who were then targeted for assassination) and provided a steady supply of anti-Tutsi folk music by popular artiste such as Simon Bikindis.

Operating on tenterhooks, often on the edge of bankruptcy, many media houses have several times lent themselves to recruitment as combatants in the many civil wars in Africa.

Our discussion is anchored on the theory of framing which refers to various ways in which journalists structure or more accurately pre structure news and other media output by drawing attention or giving salience to certain aspects more than others. The theory is derived from the word 'frame' which refers to the marking of boundaries in the same way as an image is demarcated by putting a border around it. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Media Communication* (Chandler and Munday, 2011), frames in media theory refer to "the ways in which representations function to re contextualize (and thus change the meaning of) that which they represent". They go on to argue that frames are "particular techniques and devices employed in representations as a means of constraining interpretation". In other words, news and other media output are anchored by journalists, using selection strate-

gies which are used to lead the audience to view their reports in the light of the codes favored.

SECTION THREE

Media in a Divided Nation

In a plural and divided nation, such as Nigeria, there has been a longstanding debate concerning the role, orientation, and geographical location of the media. This is particularly important, in the context of analyzing media coverage of ethno-religious conflicts; for, obviously, the media, are not neutral institutions standing above society, but are embedded and implicated in the divisions that are dominant features of a polity. Hence, media location, ownerships, and profile of the media have bearing on the frames which they employ in reporting conflict. For example, in a formulation of the role of ethnicity, geography, and impliedly, religion in the postures of the media, Oyovbaire (2001:35) argued that:

> The Nigerian media is not complex, nor is it pluralistic. It is a locational and institutional monopoly. The monopolistic complex of the media is rooted and derived from its historical origins, advantage of market forces and patronage in advertisement, professed hold of the industry and the cultivation of a deep-rooted mindset or world-view of South West.

In this conception, the dominant section of the media located in South-West Nigeria, are viewed as principally reflecting the views of political actors and the perspectives of the majority of citizens from that part of the country. Some go so far as to suggest that what passes as national newspapers are no more than regional publications, which reflect the views and perspectives of the people from that region. Regarding ethno-religious conflicts, it is predictable from the above perspective, that the editorial slant and coverage of these conflicts will be, in a broad sense, from a Christian and somewhat secular perspective. It should be pointed out, however, that location in the Ibadan-Lagos area, does not coincide with ownership, considering that the Niger-Delta area has emerged as the dominant proprietors of major media institutions.

Table 1: Ownership and Location of Major Media Institutions

Name of Media	Location	Proprietor and State of Origin
The Guardian	Lagos	Alex (later Maiden) Ibru (Delta)
ThisDay	Lagos	Nduka Obaigbena (Delta)
Vanguard	Lagos	Sam Amuka (Delta)
The Punch	Lagos	Ogunsola/Aboderin (Oyo)
Daily Trust	Abuja	Kabiru Yusuf (Kano)
The Nation	Lagos	Bola Tinubu (Lagos)
African Independent Television	Lagos	Raymond Dokpesi (Edo)
Channels Television	Lagos	John Momoh (Edo)
Sun	Lagos	Orji Kalu (Abia)
Leadership	Abuja	Sam Nda Isiah (Niger)

Source: Research note

Obviously, from a Southern Nigerian perspective, the table above bears out the dominance of media owners from that part of the country although, this is not the same thing as saying that Yorubas are the dominant proprietors as suggested by Oyovbaire and others. Evidence that politicians of Northern extraction are sensitive to this lopsided distribution of media in favor of the South, was provided by Dr. Adbullahi Adamu, former governor of Nasarawa State. Adamu argued in a lecture delivered to the Arewa Media Group, entitled "Where is the Northern Press?" :

> Is there something, I wonder that makes it impossible for newspaper to survive in this part of the country? Perhaps, the answer lies in the stubborn refusal to appreciate the role news media play in the development of societies and in the contest for power, particularly in a democracy. The balance of power or the balance of terror is a stabilizing factor in every society. I do not argue for a press war, I argue for freedom from other people's mass media in order that we may be heard. (Media Review, July 2005, p26)

Adamu's remarks, it should be noted, were made against the backdrop of the comatose state of the *New Nigerian*, the dominant newspaper from Northern Nigeria, which however, did not go off the streets until February 2012. It should be noted that since the

advent of the Fourth Republic in 1999, a number of newspapers based in Abuja, with northern proprietors have emerged. These include: *Leadership*, *Daily Trust*, *People's Daily* and *Abuja Inquirer*. These are complemented by private television stations based in the North, such as, Desnims in Kaduna as well as Gotel Television, which is owned by the former Vice President, Abubakar Atiku and based in Yola. The bounce back of the Northern media is not substantial enough to cancel out the advantage enjoyed by media located in the south, especially the Southwest.

Table 2: Major online News Publications

Name of Publication	Founder/ Proprietor	Ethnicity
The Cable	Simon Kolawole	Yoruba
Premium Times	Dapo Olorunyomi	Yoruba
Linda Ikeji Blog	Linda Ikeji	Igbo
Sahara Reporters	Omoyele Sowore	Yoruba
The Eagle Online	Dotun Oladipo	Yoruba
Freedom Online	Gabriel Akinadewo	Yoruba
Gbamji.com	Dr. Ismaila Iro	Hausa
Real News	Maureen Chigbo	Igbo

Source: Research note

As table two shows, the arena of digital media, as reflected in online news media increasingly replicates the preponderance of southern Nigeria proprietors. To the extent, therefore, that we can speak of a southern Nigeria perspective, it reflects a more or less Christian view point, influenced by advantages enjoyed in modern and amenities relative to the North. It should be mentioned that when ethno-religious crises break out, protesters often do not discriminate between various publications located in the south. As the former editor, and later managing director of the ANN plc, publishers of *Nigerian Tribune* Mr. Segun Olatunji, told us in the course of researching this paper, when the Miss World Beauty pageant crisis occurred in 2002:

> Every Southern newspaper was taken to be *This Day* in the North. Our

> vehicles could not move freely and our members of staff were afraid for their lives, we lost millions of Naira. We were careful not to pour fuel on an already combustible station… so that we could to do business in the north. (Interview with Segun Olatunji, August 3, 2017).

In other words, several southern newspapers suffer whenever the anger of protesters in northern Nigeria is directed at any one of them. Of course, there are cleavages within what we have identified as southern Nigeria, but these cleavages tend to pale into insignificant or relative insignificance in the contexts of North versus South ethno-religious conflicts. Evidence of divergent perspectives between the north and the south is offered in the tone and tenor of editorial coverage of the Shari'a crisis by southern newspapers. To take an example, the *Guardian*, which on Sunday publishes a center spread, devoted to Christian religious issues, employed such headlines as 'Shari'a monster resurrects in Kano', and such expressions as 'the Nigerian Taliban'. These were markedly different from the pro-shari'a articles published by the Kaduna-based *New Nigerian*.

In ending this section, it is important to remark that other cleavages such as political, criss-cross the north-south divide in the coverage of ethno-religious crisis. In other words, a nuanced analysis will take note of factors such as professionalism, shifting arithmetic in political coalitions and the emergence, through globalization of ideas that are broadly subversive of narrow and provincial worldviews. Agbaje (1992, 20) alluded to these criss-crossing tendencies when he argued that:

> The press has found it difficult to rise above the personal, political and cleavage acrimonies of the colonial and post-colonial state and society. Second, the press itself has been bifurcated along the lines of the fissures delineated in these inter-personal, interparty, intra- party, cross-cleavage and intra-cleavage schisms-

Hence, a southern perspective of media coverage, as previously argued, is not the same thing as the much talked about Ibadan-Lagos press. But with respect to the northern media, it is indistinguishable from newspapers located outside the South-West. Hence, for example, Mahmud Jega, former editor of the *New Nigerian* evokes this generic description when he writes that:

> As far as I can see, among the biggest national newspapers, such as the *Guardian*, *Punch* and *Vanguard* (all Lagos-based) regional slant is most consigned to letters, columns and editorials. However, in troubled times, it bursts out to front pages and is easily seen in news selection and the drowning out of other news (Jega 2003, p.18)

This reinforces the tendency already identified, to view southern newspapers as maintaining more or less the same perspective, with respect to their perception and reportage of ethno-religious conflicts, many of which have their origins in northern Nigeria. As will be shown, in the next section of this paper, there are differential reports corresponding to the north-south divide as to the causes of ethno-religious crisis. To give an example, the clash between the Oodua People's Congress, a Yoruba security outfit and Hausa immigrants in Idi-Araba in 2002, featured differences between southern newspapers, such as the *Punch* and the *Comet*, and *Daily Trust* located in the north. Specifically, the *Comet*, reported on its front page on February 5, 2002, that the crisis was triggered by the refusal of a young Hausa man to pay for the use of a public toilet in the area. On February 7, a front page story by the *Comet* reinforced the trope of Hausas as aggressors, when it wrote that:

> Already some rich-resident-settlers in the Idi-Araba have been accused of giving out arms to create more havoc in the area. One Alhaji Gulolo who owns one of the beautiful houses in the area was said to have given guns to some of the resident settlers. Equally, Alhaji Mohammed who owns a popular house around Ifagbenro Street was said to have given bows and arrows to the youth in the area. But several Yoruba who fled the scene of horror said that the resident settlers always planned for and relish communal violence.

A contrasting perspective was offered by *Daily Trust* which painted the picture of the slaughter of Hausas by OPC members. For example, it reported on February 4, that "when *Daily Trust* visited the area yesterday, many of the wounded northerners were seen being taken to the Lagos General Hospital by Red Cross officials". The story made no reference to wounded Yorubas. On February 5, *Daily Trust* sought to mobilize northern politicians such as Senator Idris Kuta, who screamed "Do not push us to the wall". This northern frame was reinforced by an Op-ed article in the *Dai-*

ly Trust of February 12 entitled "OPC: The limits of tolerance". The article said in part:

> The latest massacre of the Hausas and other people of northern origin by the supposedly outlawed Oodua People's Congress (OPC) in Idi-Araba and other parts of Lagos have indeed brought many of us to the deepest limits of tolerance.

Obviously, therefore, what is at work here are divergent reportorial frames with respect to the media located in the south and those located in the north. In the next section of this paper, we elaborate more, through a case study of these divergent approaches.

SECTION FOUR

Narrating Ethno-religious Conflicts: Two case studies

As mentioned, in an earlier section of this paper, there is intertwining of ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria, to the extent that the country is in a sense divided, geographically into a largely Muslim north, and a predominantly Christian south. This division is accentuated by unequal development featuring a south, whose antecedents are located in early contact with European civilization, through missionary influence, and a north that is in a sense a replica of the Muslim-dominated countries of North Africa and the Maghreb. Obviously, this sets the stage for a Huttingtonian clash of culture, and indeed, of civilization. As Salawu (2009, 90) puts it:

> In Nigeria, due to its configuration as a nation, the strand of religion is intertwined with that of ethnicity. The ethnicization of religion is reflected in the fact that whenever there is a religious uprising, people from different parts of the country are always at each other's neck. The Igbos, for the fact that they are mostly Christians, are usually the object of attack of Northern Muslims.

In view of this combustible combination of the competition for resources including grazing land for Fulani nomads in a political context, the memory of past injuries, and the manipulation of ethnic and religious identities by politicians , the Fourth Republic, has witnessed scores of clashes between Christians and Muslims, most of them pitching ethnic groups against each other. Table three below, far from exhaustive, as it only covers the period be-

tween 1999 and 2012, is indicative of the widespread nature of these conflicts.

Table three: Selected cases of ethno-religious violence in Nigeria 1999-2012

No	Date	State (s)	Nature	Remarks
1	1 July 1999	Ogun	Violent clashes between Yoruba traditional worshipers and Hausa groups in Sagamu, Ondo state	The crisis originated from the killing of a Hausa woman by the Oro Masqueraders for violating traditional rites.
2	22 July 1999	Kano	Reprisal to the Sagamu crisis above	The casualty figure was not reported.
3	20 Dec. 1999	Kwara	Muslim fundamentalists attacked and destroyed over 14 churches in Ilorin	Properties worth several millions of naira were destroyed and unspecified causality reported.
4	21-22 Feb.2000	Kaduna	Riots over the introduction of Shari'a	An estimated 3000 people died
5	12 Oct.2001	Kano	Religious riot in Kano	In protests against US invasion of Afghanistan over Osama bin Laden. Over 150 persons were killed.

6	7-17 Sept.2001	Jos	A religious riot between Muslims and Christians in Jos. Mosques, churches and several properties were damaged or torched. The clashes started on September 7 and lasted nearly two weeks, ending on September 17.	The riot broke out when the Islamic Brigade attacked a Christian woman who attempted to cross a public high-way barricaded by Muslim worshippers on Friday. Over 300 people were killed.
7	16 Nov. 2002	Kaduna	The *Miss World* crisis in which Muslims attacked Christians and churches.	The crisis was triggered by an article authored by Isioma Daniel, in *ThisDay* newspaper, alleging that Prophet Muhammed would have loved to have the girls contesting. Over 250 people were killed and churches were destroyed
8	22 Mar. 2007	Gombe	Muslim pupils killed their Christian teacher Mrs. Oluwatoyin Olusesan.	The pupils claimed that their teacher desecrated the Qur'an while attempting to stop students from cheating in an examination hall.
9	21 Feb. 2009	Bauchi	Ethno-religious conflict at the Makama New Extension.	Over 11 people were killed, more than 400 houses burnt, over 1600 families were displaced.
10	26-30 Jul.2009	Bauch, Borno, Kano,Yobe	Religious violence unleashed by the radical *Boko Haram* sect on Christians.	Over 700 persons killed, 3 500 persons internally displaced, 1264 children orphaned, over 392 women widowed, and several properties destroyed.

11	17-20. Jan.2009	Plateau	Resurgence of religious crisis in Jos	Police announced at least 320 killed, but aid workers and local leaders place death toll at over 550. Over 40,000 persons displaced.
12	7 Mar. 2010	Plateau	Attacks by Fulani Muslims on Christian-dominated villages of Dogo Nahawa, Shen and Fan in Jos.	Over 500 people, mainly women and children, were killed.
13	22 May 2010	Plateau	Attack on some Christians who were returning from their place of worship along Bauchi road in Jos	Reprisal attack by the Muslim over the killing of 3 Fulani Muslims. At least 1 person died while many were injured.
14	29 Aug. 2011	Plateau	Clashes between Muslims and Christians at Rukuba road and Farin Gada in Jos during the Ramadan prayers.	No less than 20 persons were killed, 50 injured, over 50 motor vehicles and 100 motorcycles were torched.
15	26 Aug. 2011	UN House, Abuja	Suicide bombing at the UN House, Abuja by suspected Boko Haram Islamists	23 persons (11 UN personnel were killed and 12 non-UN personnel were killed)

16	5 Nov. 2011	Potiskum, Damaturu and Maiduguri	Coordinated attacks on churches and police stations by suspected *Boko Haram* Islamists.	More than 90 persons were reportedly killed, several churches and police stations torched.
17	5-6 Jan. 2012	Mubi, Adamawa state	Suspected Boko Haram militants stormed a gathering of Igbo Christians and shot sporadically, killing over a dozen and injuring others in apparent execution of an ultimatum given by the Boko Haram Islamist sect to Southern Christians living in the North to leave.	22 persons were reportedly killed; a dozen others were injured.

Source: Adapted from Sampson 2012:112

To take the specific example of the violence that broke out in November 2002, over the *Miss World* beauty competition, our reading of media coverage of the event is that no newspaper, either in the north or in the south, played an overtly instigating role with respect to the outbreak of the crisis. Once it broke out, however, coverage of the event followed a predictable pattern of north-south division, as well as Christian-Muslim dichotomy.

The crisis was inadvertently provoked by an article written by Miss Isioma Daniel containing a sentence considered to have been blasphemous of Prophet Muhammad. The "offending article" published in the *ThisDay* edition of November 16, 2002 (pg. 50) had Daniel say, "The Muslims thought it was immoral to bring ninety two women to Nigeria and ask them to revel in vanity. What would

Mohammed think? In all honesty, he would probably have chosen a wife from one of them." There is no evidence that the statement, tucked deep in the inside pages of *ThisDay* was calculated to cause disaffection, let alone to spark off a deadly riot. It remains unclear as the various editors interviewed in the course of writing this chapter stated, whether the wave of destruction was a direct consequence of the publication which would have been read by only a few educated readers, or whether other factors, including northern sensitivities to a "Christian" southern presidency, were at stake. The outbreak of the conflict suggests, however, just how tender the fabric of social and political life can be in a society at the time, polarized by religion and ethnicity. Mahmud Jega who edited the *New Nigerian* advanced six underlying causes of the crisis:

> Possible cause number one is genuine Muslim anger at a blasphemous statement directed at the Holy Prophet of Islam. Second, is the pent-up frustration of unemployed young men, failed WAECists, NECOists and JAMBites, as well as successful holders of these certificates who could secure neither jobs nor high school admission. Third, there were thieves who were looking out for opportunity to loot. Fourth, there were plain anarchists who were looking for the chance to burn, to maim and to kill. Fifth, there were local city thugs who had one or two old scores to settle with landlords, assorted creditors, former employers, and people 'who do not assist other people', a common allegation among the city's marginalized. And the sixth, there were political activists looking for an opportunity to reduce the incumbent governor's roller-coaster edge in the race and prevent his cruising to victory, as it looks. (Interview with Mahmud Jega, August 03, 2017)

A similar opinion that the publication for which *ThisDay* published several profuse apologies was only tangentially responsible for the crisis was expressed by Mr Lasisi Olagunju, editor of the *Tribune on Saturday* who said:

> I remember my initial reaction to reports of the crisis was disbelief until our correspondent filed in a report confirming it. I believe the violence was an obvious over reaction by those who turned whatever they found disagreeable in the report to an opportunity to kill, maim and raze property of innocent people. The crisis, as I said before, was just an excuse to commit unimaginable crimes by some people. Again, it was easy to get foot soldiers for the mayhem because of the Alma-

> jiri system in the north which was/is also fallout of the acute illiteracy among youths in that part of Nigeria. (Interview with Lasisi Olagunju, August 03, 2017).

In keeping with that trend, the newspapers in the north and the south adopted a positive tone to the reportage of the impending beauty contest. For example, the *Nigerian Tribune* in its edition of November 9, 2002 published a featured piece entitled "we are ready to host the world". The article quoted one of the organizers of the beauty pageant, Mr. Ben Bruce, who informed the readers about the preparedness of the hosting company and the provision of adequate security for visitors. *ThisDay* adopted a similar, reassuring tone notwithstanding the Isioma's article which, as mentioned before, could not have been calculated to offend. It is broadly the same thing for the *New Nigerian,* except that close reading of its coverage in the days leading up to the crisis suggested a subtle undercurrent of opposition. This "opposition" was, however, confined to letters to the editor, rather than to the paper's opinion and news pages. For example, reflecting the tendency to criticize the event on religious grounds, the *New Nigerian* in its edition of November 13, page 8, published a letter with the title "Mrs. Obasanjo, stop this Beauty Contest." Addressed to the president's wife, the letter read in part "...exposing nakedness in the name of parading women for beauty pageant is ungodly. Look at it this way, would you in fairness to your conscience model in such an event?" The point being made here is that there was no overt indication of looming crisis in the papers in the prelude to the crisis, save for the subtle hints of the *New Nigerian*. In this respect, it should be recalled that newspapers are businesses which have a stake in the preservation of the social order, and consequently suffer severe destructions in times of conflicts.

On the reporting of the crisis itself, all the papers, especially the ones located in the south maintained a stabilizing tenor. This pacifying posture was predictably led by *ThisDay* which almost daily published apologies and sorrowful regrets on its first pages. For example, in its edition of November 25, 2002 it published what it called a further letter of apology from *ThisDay* chairman. It read

in part "The last one week has been a nightmare for all of us at ThisDay as we try to find answers to how all these have happened … When we founded *ThisDay* in 1995, it was to promote peace, order and good governance; it was to seek a better life for all the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Our ethos was not to be offensive to any religion or to denigrate the cultural and religious values of our people".

ThisDay's posture should be contextualized by reference to the fact that its offices in Kaduna were burnt while a report in one of the papers had it that by the 24th of November, 200 people were reported dead and 4500 were displaced. As the riot escalated, state security arrested the editor of *ThisDay*, Mr. Simon Kolawole.

In general, the *New Nigerian* located in the north, the area covered by the riot, maintained a stabilizing tenor as evidenced by a front page story of Saturday, 23th November, 2002 entitled "Kaduna now calm after anti *ThisDay* protest". However, it continued not only to blame *Thisday,* but also convey the resentment and reactions of its northern readers. This pattern can be illustrated by its front page story of November 26, 2002 entitled "Zamfara declares Fatwa on Isioma Daniel."

The story quoted the Zamfara state deputy governor, Mamud Shinkafi as saying that: "Like Salman Rushdie, the blood of the *ThisDay* writer can be shed. It is binding on all Muslims wherever they are to consider the killing of the writer an important religious duty". Considering that editors use front page positioning to set agenda, the prominence of the story and its wordings could not have been accidental.

Similarly, its editorial opinion of November 28, 2002 entitled "A Case of many wrongs" went so far as to say that Isioma Daniel, who studied in Britain should have heard of the author Salman Rushdie and the worldwide furor generated by his blasphemning the holy prophet in his infamous book "Satanic Verses." Such words were certainly not calculated to de-escalate, especially as there were fears that the crisis may spread to other northern cities such as Kano, having already spread to Abuja. Similarly, *Weekly Trust* in its edition of November 22-28 reported the crisis in the

following words:

> Ever since the idea of hosting the Miss World pageant in the country was made public by its promoters, there have been indications that the controversial beauty show may turn out to be an ill wind that would blow the nation no good. Even before the staging of its grand finale, which has now been shifted to December 7, a seemingly sponsored publication on the licentious beauty parade has sparked off a violent protest in the country.

The tenor of the report was one which appeared to justify the unleashing of violence rather than regret it. Another example from the *Weekly Trust* is that it lent its front and back pages of November 22-28 edition to news reportage, which instead of de-escalating would appear to be fueling the crisis. The front page story was entitled "Kaduna on the Brink", thus, more or less spreading the message that further violence may be expected.

Our finding in this case study is broadly in line with other researchers conducted by scholars looking at other cases of ethno-religious violence. For example, in their study of media reportage of the Jos crisis of November 2008, Musa and Ferguson 2013:17 conclude that "the sample of reports by *ThisDay* and *Daily Trust* analyzed here differed principally, due to the fact that the newspapers belong to two geo-political extremes in the country. And this plays a major role in determining their choice of news values and presentation.

The scholars, went on to argue that while there is no causal relationship between media report and the outbreak of violence,

The reportage of the two newspapers differ due to their regional and religious affiliations; they used polarizing terms to make the crisis a thing of 'us' and 'them'; enemy images and stereotypes were employed demonize the others; the audience were aware of the such images to influence their impression on the other; 'otherness' is a major feature of cultural and political differences between the two divides, North and South, or Islam and Christianity.

Table 4: Timeline of Herdsmen and Farmers' clashes 2012-2016

No	Date	State (s)	Nature	Remarks
1	July, 2012	Plateau	Violent clashes between farmers and herdsmen	Senator Gyang Dantong and the Majority Leader of the Plateau State House of Assembly, Mr. Gyang Fulani died in the stampede that ensued while attending the mass burial of about 50 victims of attack by Fulani herdsmen at Maseh village in Riyom LGA.
2	April 23, 2013	Benue	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	10 farmers killed in an attack in Mbasenge community, Guma L.G.A by suspected herdsmen.
3	May 7, 2013	Benue	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	47 mourners gunned down by suspected herdsmen in Agatu while burying two policemen.
4	May 14, 2013	Benue	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Over 200 herdsmen surround Ekwo-Okpanchenyi, Agatu LGA killing 40 locals.
5	July 5, 2013	Benue	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	20 people were killed in a conflict between Tiv farmers & herdsmen at Nzorov, Guma LGA.
6	July 28, 2013	Benue	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	In retaliation to the alleged killing of 112 cows, herdsmen invade 2 villages in Agatu LGA killing 8 villagers.
7	November 7, 2013	Edo	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Attackers strike at Ikpele & Okpopolo communities killing 7 and displacing over 6000 inhabitants.

8	November 9, 2013:	Benue	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	36 locals killed, 7 villages overrun in an outbreak of fighting between herdsmen and locals in Agatu L.G.A.
9	June 2015:	Kwara	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Fulani herdsmen attacked Motokun village, Patigi Local Government Area, Kwara State. The Oro-Ago community in Ifelodun Local Government Area of the state was also attacked. Fulani herdsmen attacked Ninji and Ropp villages in Plateau State and killed 27 persons. Also, the same group reportedly murdered about 70 Christians.
10	July 16, 2015	Plateau	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Fulani Herdsmen attack and killed farmers in Plateau.
11	September 2015	Delta	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	an attack by some Fulani herdsmen on the community of Onitsha Ukwuani in Ndokwa West local government area of Delta State left about three persons dead. A middle-aged woman was raped and subsequently killed by three Fulani herdsmen in Edo state.
12	October 2, 2015	Ogun	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Fulani Herdsmen raped, killed Ogun Residents and Farmers.

13	November 2015	Kogi	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Herdsmen invaded Ulaja and Ojeh communities in Dekina Local Government Area of Kogi State and killed about 22 men and women.
14	December 1, 2015	Delta	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Fulani Herdsmen kill a man in Ofagbe community, Isoko North council area of Delta.
15	January 24, 2016		Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Nigerian police DPO, 29 others killed by suspected Fulani herdsmen.
16	February 2016:	Plateau	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Fulani herdsmen reportedly killed About 10 persons in Tom-Anyiin, Tom-Ataan, Mbaya and Tombu in the Buruku Local Government Area of the state.
17	February 8, 2016:	Plateau	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	10 killed, Over 300 displaced in clash between herdsmen and farmers at Tom-Anyiin, Tom-Ataan in Buruku LGA.
18	February 11, 2016	Enugu	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Herdsmen attacked Abbi community in Uzo-Uwani LGA, Enugu killing two siblings and burnt houses, motorcycles.
19	February 29, 2016:	Benue	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Over 500 locals killed and 7000 displaced in an attack in Agatu LGA by fulani herdsmen.
20	March 9, 2016:	Benue	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	8 residents killed during herdsmen attacks in Ngorukgan, Tse Chia, Deghkia and Nhumbe, Logo LGA.

21	April 5, 2016	Benue	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	APC youth leader, Mr. Aondohemba Kasa and 3 others killed in fresh Fulani herdsmen, farmers' clash in Benue.
22	April 8, 2016	Ondo	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Fulani herdsmen kidnapped and killed Falae's security guard at his Ondo state farm.
23	April 9, 2016	Edo	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Fulani camp was razed following the killing of a 64-year old farmer, identified as Alex in Edo.
24	April 12, 2016:	Taraba	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	Fulani herdsmen attack Dori and Mesuma villages in Taraba, killing at least 15.
25	April 19, 2016	Oyo	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	A member of about 18 suspected herdsmen that invaded farms in Lagun village, Lagelu local council Oyo state, shot Mr. Jimmy Aido.
26	April 25, 2016	Enugu	Violent clash between farmers and herdsmen	48 killed, 60 injured by Fulani herdsmen in Ukpabi Nimbo community, Enugu state.

Source: The Guardian, April 29, 2016.

Interestingly, one of the issues that has generated animated discussion as well as deepened ethno-religious polarities between North and South on the one hand, as well as between Christians and Muslims on the other, is the growing conflict between Fulani nomads or herdsmen and farming communities in parts of Southern Nigeria and the Middle Belt. Table 4 illuminates the scale, intensity and fatalities involved in these frequent clashes. In the ensuing discourse, the media have been implicated to the extent that they are sometimes accused of taking sides in the reportage and analytical discussion of the events. For example, Odunlami (2017) in an investigation of the editorial postures of two Southern-based newspapers, namely, the *Punch* and the *Nation*, came

off with the conclusion that there was little or no sensationalism or slanted coverage of the clashes by the two newspapers. Indeed, following a content analysis, Odunlami (2017, 189) argued that:

> Most of the publication on the Fulani herdsmen stories were displayed in the inside pages of the newspapers. Only in very few cases were the stories made front page items. The reason(s) for this may not be unconnected to the fact of the recurrent nature of the crisis and its reportage appears to have become routine and seemingly intractable tragedies for which government has not been able to control.

Odunlami's conclusion appears to have been based on overreliance on the counting of quantitative techniques of content analysis, which are obviously inadequate to capture the entire gamut of the impact of media reportage. For example, it is obvious from the increasingly heated discourse on the subject that journalists and intellectuals of northern extraction are more and more sensitive to and irritated by what they regard as southern newspapers demonization of the Fulani and allegedly biased coverage of the issues. For example, a journalist of northern extraction, Is'haq Modibbo Kawu argues that southern media are guilty of hate speech, stereotyping and sensationalism over their coverage of herdsmen/farmers conflict. According to him, "In recent years, the FulBe (another word for Fulani) people in general and Fulbe nomads in particularly have been regularly profiled within a pattern of hate speech that endangers national cohesion in our country." (Is'haq Modibbo Kawu, "Media Narratives and the FulBe Normad", *Vanguard*, May 5, 2016).

Kawu argues that Southern media reportage of these conflicts are influenced by their predominantly non-Muslim identities, as well as their backgrounds of having been born in sedentary agricultural communities, which have been on the receiving end of the frequent clashes. He maintains that the *Punch*, the *Sun*, the *Nation* and *Vanguard*, all based in Southwest Nigeria are the principal culprits in these slanted narratives. Illustratively, he says that "Even when the media reported the killing of 20 FulBe nomads and over 80 cattle in Nassarawa state this week, the killers did not have their ethnicity reported, they were only gunmen." (Vanguard, May 5, 2016).

Obviously, Kawu's position is characteristic of the postures of northern, especially Fulani journalists, reacting to what they see as biased reportage on the part of the Southern media. In earlier years, in the wake of the crisis in Northern Nigeria over the Shari'a controversy several northern journalists came down on the southern media reportage of the crisis.

For example, referring to the provocative characterization of the Shari'a by the southern- dominated media in the aftermath of the crisis of 2000, a senior northern journalist, Muhammed Haruna went on record as saying:

> I have never seen anything like the days since February 21 when violence broke out in Kaduna. Almost to the last, the media have portrayed Muslims and Islam as the sole and total villain of the piece. In one particular edition of the Hallmark newspaper, Sharia was caricatured on three different pages as a vulture, a viper and a rampaging demon (Olukotun, 2011, p.133).

Obviously, this is an issue that will continue to resonate in Nigeria's political and cultural history, necessitating, as we argued in the concluding section, intensive and focused training of journalists in balanced, fair and conflict-sensitive reporting.

SECTION FIVE

Conclusion

As previously discussed, our case study and others referred to, do not suggest that the media on both sides of the fence, directly incited violence. Media, we argued earlier, are enterprises, and the larger they are, the more stakes they have in the preservation of political order, and the kind of predictability and stability that will assure the smooth running of their businesses. However, as soon as rioting and mayhem broke out, they adopted positions and postures which suggest that they perceive the other side in antagonistic terms. It is this aspect that Aliyu and Ferguson (2013) referred to as enemy framing of issues.

It should also be noted that not only do the media and their output affect the outcome of crises; they are also affected in their journalist practice by contingencies arising from those crises. For example, as Mahmud Jega told us "Editors had to be careful about the way and manner they report the crisis in order not to become

victims of an aroused populace (Interview August 3, 2017). In general, the sensitivity and vulnerability of Nigeria to ethno-religious violence which assumed dramatic proportions in the Boko Haram insurgency (the sect actually carried arson attacks on some newspaper houses they believed were hostile to them), suggest that media personnel should be extremely careful in their report and choice of words.

In this respect, training in diversity reporting, the avoidance of stereotypes, sensational and inflammatory language, can be of help here. That apart, enhancement of professional standards, through training in objective reporting, as opposed to opinionated journalism can assist the search for less fractious journalistic frames. For example, Oso (2011) has lamented the shortage in the Nigerian media, of factual and objective reporting and a slide towards opinionated output. This can only make more daunting the challenges of conflict reporting, in multicultural settings like Nigeria.

It is often pointed out, and with good reason that there are several meeting points between what good journalism seeks to achieve, and the tool kits of conflict mediators. Obviously, by providing truthful and objective information about the protagonist in a conflict, the journalist helps to establish a channel of communication between combatants and to narrow differences between them. In this respect, journalists need to be trained to frame and define conflict situations, in ways that create common meeting points between opposing sides. This is to say that journalists should not passively reflect their immediate environments, but should come to terms with a journalism of nation building, which avoids playing to the agenda of either side in conflict situations.

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10

OF RATTLE SNAKES AND GRAPES OF WRATH: Rise, Fall, and Rise of Independent Media in Kenya

By Peter Kimani

Introduction

The Kenyan media are intricately woven in the narrative of the nation's political evolution. Through the years of single-party autocracy, the media acquitted themselves well in safeguarding the nation's **democratic space**. As one observer summed it up succinctly, the Kenyan media helped influence "the pace of political change and political liberalisation, in turn, facilitating media growth, **pluralism** and relative independence."

This article reflects on that historical epoch, and how the so-called "dividends of democracy" from the 1990s have problematized the practice of journalism in recent times, with specific attention to the eventful 2007 General Election that inadvertently led to **self-censorship,** with far reaching consequences. In recent years,

technological disruptions, falling circulation and dwindling advertising revenues have dealt the media with severe body blows. Deft manipulations from the government dangling advertising carrot have only served to undermine the media, but this may only prove a temporary setback as a critical mass of phone-wielding citizens are **democratising** society in ways both complex and compelling.

Without a doubt, 1991 was an eventful year for Kenya, Africa and the world. Multiparty politics was re-introduced in Kenya— after nearly 30 years of single-party autocracy under Kenya African National Union (KANU); Namibia hosted a watershed UNESCO conference, the Windhoek Declaration— affirming free media as a key plank in the construction of democratic and free societies. And months earlier, in November 1989, the Wall of Berlin fell, effectively ending the Cold War to provoke a re-alignment of global politics, with immediate ramifications in Africa.

While the confluence of these events suggest change was inevitable for Kenya and the rest of the world, there is consensus, as Odhiambo (2002) argues persuasively, the Kenyan media helped influence "the pace of political change and political liberalisation, in turn, facilitating media growth, pluralism and relative independence."

Ogola (2010) contests this view, arguing the relationship between the media and the state in Kenya has always been "largely convivial and symbiotic," due to the media's reliance on advertising revenues from the government, and the resultant efforts to control the media, resulting in a complex power play that has enabled and constrained media development.

According to a 2012 survey by the quasi-government agency, Media Council of Kenya, Kenya enjoys a vibrant media environment with six major daily newspapers, 11 weekly magazines, 20 monthly magazines, 301 radio stations and 83 TV channels[2]. But

2 This number may have changed since, as new stations have been registered and old ones shut down. For instance, in 2017, the Nation Media Group suspended its Swahili broadcasting services, QTV and QFM. The Group also closed its tabloid, the *Nairobi News*, in 2014, same year that the *Standard* launched its own tabloid, the *Nairobian,*that continues to thrive. The *Standard* also ceased publication of its bi-weekly

as the Media Council report revealed, and Ogola reinforces in his article, cross-media ownership vests these media outlets in a few hands—most of these connected to powerful business and political elites. Ogola's conclusion, however, is problematic, given the efforts made by the media to resist overtures from the state over the past 40 years.

This article pays particular attention to several phases of state consolidation of media control that the media successfully resisted in 1991— when multipartyism was restored in Kenya— and in 2002, when the largely private media orchestrated another epoch by helping route KANU out of power, after an interrupted 40-year reign. This change of guard, media historians' record, fortified media freedoms in unprecedented ways.

Two of the dominant media players in Kenya are the privately-owned Nation Media Group, referred to hereafter as the *Nation*, which has multimedia interests in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda, and The Standard Media Group, referred to hereafter as the *Standard*, that owns print, broadcast and online platforms.

Unsurprisingly, Kenyans ushered the 21st Century in a euphoric mood. Nzioka (2003) says a Gallup International Survey in January 2003 polled Kenyans the most optimistic people on earth. But this euphoria was short-lived. In March 2006, after a period of relative stability and growth for the sector, the *Standard* was raided by hooded State agents who carted away equipment and razed down the following day's paper. They also switched off transmission signal for the group's TV station, KTN. Government agents alleged the media group had intended to publish "embarrassing" reports about then President Kibaki's family, with Internal Security minister John Michuki making his infamous statement: "if you rattle a snake, you must be prepared to bebitten by it."[3]

The media fraternity pushed back to defend their hard-won freedom. But over the next decade, government machinations did

County Weekly. The closure of all the outlets at both The Nation and The Standard was blamed on lack of advertising revenues and a tough business environment.

3 The event was widely reported across the world, and condemned by Kenya's former Opposition leader and current President Uhuru Kenyatta: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4765250.stm

not bear the violence meted out on the *Standard* in 2006; rather, the media have been dismantled with surgical precision through, to use the inventive expression by the former editor of the *Guardian*, Rusbridger (2016) "fiscing"— which is an abbreviation for "financially-induced self-censorship."

If this sounds sophisticated, that's because it truly is, as journalists are emasculated without any laws being violated. The sacking of one of Africa's prominent cartoonists, Godfrey "Gado" Mwampembwa from the *Nation*— the leading newspaper in East and Central Africa—was perhaps the best indicator that media houses were willing to sacrifice anyone or anything that threatened their bacon.

Gado, a Tanzanian who had plied his trade in Nairobi for more than 20 years, aroused the ire of Tanzanian authorities after caricaturing then President JakayaKikwete being fed with grapes by a bevy of beauties, appropriately named "Cronyism," "Incompetence" and "Corruption," among others—alluding to the ills that beset the Kikwete administration—massaged and manicured the near-naked king.

Other prominent editors, Chaacha Mwita and Denis Galava, were eased out of the *Nation* and the *Standard* in 2014 and 2016, respectively, for allegedly penning articles that did not go down well with the Nairobi administration. Chaacha Mwita was sacked from the *Standard* for sanctioning an article that imputed the Uhuru Kenyatta administration was speaking out of the two sides of its mouth—by advocating austerity measures while indulging in opulence in a cabinet retreat in a posh hotel, while Galava's hard-hitting New Year editorial urging Kenyatta: "Mr President Get Your Act Together this Year," rattled the *Nation* to the core. We shall deal with these claims at some length later.

Disruptions driven by technology have dealt the Kenyan media with a body blow that prolongs the pain.

This paper assesses the tempestuous relationship between Kenyan media and the government, and its implications on the nation's nascent democracy over the past 25 years. Given that the Kenyan media are intricately woven in the nation's political evolu-

tion, we shall use election cycles to map out how that relationship has evolved, for better and for worse, and its future implications on media freedoms in Kenya.

This paper is structured in four main parts. The first two are devoted to contemporary history of Kenyan media and the watershed 1992 General Election, when the media instigated great social change. The third and fourth parts are devoted to the 2007 and 2013 General Elections, when the media capitulated under pressure from inside and outside. The fourth segment also provides a conclusion projecting into the future.

For the purposes of this paper, our description of the Kenyan media is restricted to print media which, since the beginning in 1902, have largely been privately owned. There is need, however, to underline that in the pre and post-independence decades the state broadcaster, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), and its precursor, Voice of Kenya, was the dominant player that largely served the interest of the state and the ruling Kenya African National Union (Kanu) and its propagation of what Ogola calls, "nation-building" project.

Until 2002, when Kanu was routed out of power, broadcast media was a near monopoly of KBC. This means news bulletins almost always dominated by news revolving around the then President Daniel arap Moi and his coterie.

Kadhi and Rutten (2001) illustrate this absurdity by reminding that in 1994, as the entire world waited with bated breath for the prison doors to creak open to set free the world's most famous political prisoner, Nelson Mandela—after 27 years behind bars—KBC's bulletin still started with the news of Moi's church appearance!

They explain that even the oldest private TV station in Kenya, KTN, which was established in 1990, remained in the grip of the Kanu power clique through its ownership. And journalists who appeared to forget were constantly reminded of that fact, as was Rose Lukhalo, the day editor who was sacked on Christmas Day in 1991 for breaking the news of the formation of the opposition Democratic Party. Other KTN editors, Vitalis Musebe and Isaya

Kabira were suspended in July 1990 for reporting anti-government protests.

Right from the start, Kenyan journalism was intricately woven with the politics of the day. At independence in 1963, Kenya inherited a press that had been weaned on British colonial journalistic tradition and a segregated readership. Obonyo (2002) says there existed "a three-tier system with the European press at the top, Indian in the middle, and African at the bottom." Farringer (1991) says although the oldest mass circulating newspaper, the *East African Standard*, was founded in 1902 in Mombasa by a Parsee migrant, A. M. Jeevanjee, its shift to identify with the African cause was painstakingly slow, as was its Africanisation programme. For Abuoga and Mutere (1988) this racial undertone in the *Standard* was expressly manifest as "a typical European people's paper concerned with the happenings in Britain and urging subservience to the settlers," a theme that Farringer observes persisted after independence.

This was the market gap that Kadhi and Rutten (ibid) say His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan, leader of the Shia Imamilsmaili Muslims in 25 countries— a fair number of them in East Africa— sought to fill when he bought a tiny Kiswahili weekly, *Taifa*, from Charles Hayes and his partner, Althea Tebbutt, and re-launched as an English weekend paper in March 1960, the *Sunday Nation*. The daily edition, *Daily Nation*, was launched in October of that year.

Ideologically, the *Nation* was diametrically opposite of the *Standard* as it outlined its desire to propagate the Africans' viewpoint and push for political independence for the colonised. Barely a decade after its launch, the *Nation* overhauled its older rival in circulation. Its success soon attracted politicians and their cronies, who sought to wrest its control.

Loughran (2010) narrates those contestations in *The Birth of A Nation: The Story of a Newspaper in Kenya*. He spent 12 years as a senior editor on the newspaper, and records a most intriguing battle that took shape in 1976. The setting was Nairobi, where the Aga Khan was opening a $3 million Serena Hotel, presided over by Kenya's founding President, MzeeJomo Kenyatta.

Loughran recounts, "Kenyatta addressed the Aga Khan directly: 'This is my nephew, Mr (Ngengi) Muigai. He has just come back from America and I was wondering if it was possible to find a position for him in your newspapers…" A rather startled Aga Khan reportedly promised to look into the matter, but only after making inquiries. Loughran also notes Muigai was accompanied by Kenyatta's son-in-law, Udi Gecaga, then chairman of Lonrho East Africa Ltd, owners of the *Standard* and the *Nation*'s chief rival.

Over the next few weeks, Loughran narrates, "it soon became clear that the position he (Muigai) had in mind was the top one, chairman of the holding company and publishers." The *Nation* managers were justifiably alarmed what Muigai's chairmanship would mean for the newspaper. "They (*Nation* editors) were even more concerned about the political implications. The two (Muigai and Gecaga) had close ties to the 'royal court' at Kenyatta's Gatundu home, the Kikuyu power centre which appeared to wield more power than Kenya's elected cabinet; they were also members of the Head of State's own family…"

A unanimous decision was then made to reject Muigai's chairmanship of the Nation, but how would that be conveyed to the President without hurting his feelings, especially after the Aga Khan had made, in the words of one *Nation* executive, a "vague promise," to look into the matter? Then chairman, Albert Ekirapa, is quoted in Loughran's book explaining that the newspaper's board and senior management met with the Aga Khan in Paris and drew up a list of potential backlashes, and how to counter each. This included offering the newspaper for sale to the government.

This response was crafted as a communique from the Aga Khan, in which he delicately informed Kenyatta that he regretted Muigai's chairmanship was untenable. He outlined, among others, readers' backlash—and so potential losses to shareholders—should it become public that the *Nation* and the *Standard* were effectively "under the control of one group of individuals with a consequent monolithic outlook…"

Loughran says the Aga Khan reiterated this message with a private call on the President weeks later, when he offered to sell the

newspaper if the Government was keen on it. Kenyatta reportedly declined to buy the newspaper and conceded that the Aga Khan had a point in seeking to keep the *Nation* free of government control. The crisis was over, after a six-month tense period.

Loughran writes that it soon became apparent how the *Nation* would have been used to serve political interests when, in September 1976, the *Standard* headlined with a report from the President's Gatundu clique that sought to circumvent constitutional order from taking root. In the event of the President's death, the Gecaga-controlled *Standard* championed that the Constitution should be changed to vest power in the House Speaker, not Vice President Daniel arap Moi, who had deputised the elderly statesman for 12 years.

In the event, Moi succeeded Kenyatta in 1978 and as he sought to consolidate his power, he orchestrated a systematic crackdown on writers and intellectuals. The Kenyan novelist NgugiwaThiong'o was detained in December 1977 (by Kenyatta) and his release in late 1978 (by Moi) was only fast-tracked when Amnesty International adopted him as a prisoner of conscience. He later went into exile.

An attempted military coup in 1982 unleashed a state of paranoia, claiming more academics and journalists, including the *Standard*'s Otieno Mak'Anyengo and Wahome Mutahi, who served as Arts editor at the *Nation*. Mutahi chronicles his prison experience in a novel, *Three Days on the Cross*, that captures the psychological and physical torture that detainees endured in the dungeons of Nyayo House—a government building in downtown Nairobi.

The torture chambers of Nyayo House were opened to the public in February 2003, after Kanu's ouster, as old detainees trickled in to recall their stories of pain and suffering. Most survivors recalled the severe beatings at the hands of police officers, and the endless hours in water-logged cells, naked, without food or water, often surviving on their own waste.

Albert Ekirapa was at the helm of the Nation through this period of turbulence: "All editors had stomach ulcers[4]," he chuckled, add-

4 One on one interview with the author, December 13, 2016, in Nairobi.

ing that some editors, like George Mbugguss, had early sign-offs to avoid the predictable calls from the Nairobi State House, seat of the President. Ngotho's (2017), recent recollections of the tricks employed by Kenyan *Nation* editors to escape state harassment, which often started with a call from the Big Man himself (former President Daniel arap Moi) border on hilarity. Some left office early and dictated headlines from public payphones (to avoid the office), locked themselves in and waited for things to cool down, or simply went into hiding, as their juniors concocted cock-and-bull stories to give to authorities.

But things would get worse before they got better. Through the years of single-party rule, those expelled from Kanu could not practice politics, but so many had been expelled to form a critical mass that demanded inclusion in national politics, key among them former minister Kenneth Matiba, and former Nairobi Mayor Charles Rubia. The two were arrested on July 4, 1990 to pre-empt their planned rally. But fellow politicians organised another rally on July 7, 1990 to protest the arrests.

Internationally, as Galloway (1992) recounts in Kenya Report, that was broadcast on the British Channel 4 in 1992, Western donors had suspended $800m aid to pressurise Moi to re-introduce multi-party politics and call for elections—confirming that the fall of the Wall of Berlin in November 1989 had led to a reset of world politics. Despotic rulers in Africa and the rest of the world who had enjoyed backing by West powers due to their strategic position during the Cold War, were suddenly left adrift. These external and internal pressures were made to bear on the local media.

Ekirapa recalls the pressure that he faced through this period as the country roiled through public protests that crystallized in the riots of July 7, 1990, now christened the SabaSaba riots, memorialising the month and date they unfurled, leaving 20 dead, following clashes between police and protestors demanding change.

Ekirapa says while the *Nation* had been denied government advertisement for years, its commercial success was buoyed by its growing circulation and reputation for independent reporting, so they were not under financial pressure to toe the government

line. "There was no compromise," Ekirapa maintains. "We were an independent, private company and would report the events objectively."

Ekirapa adds spies had infiltrated the newsroom to work as drivers, some of whom lingered by the copier long after everyone had left the newsroom to report what stories would be running the following day. Those were hazards they could live with. It was during this climate of fear, in December 1991, that multi-party politics was re-introduced and a General Election called the following year 1992.

Quoting the Kenya Human Rights Commission report, Kadhi (2001) estimates some "20 publications stood officially banned" before the return to multi-party politics in 1991—including *Beyond*, a National Council of Churches of Kenya publication, that was banned for exposing electoral fraud in the 1988 elections, and the *Financial Review* that was banned in 1989 after exposing fraud in government departments, among others.

Out of their ashes sprung *Society* magazine in January 1992 edited by Pius Nyamora, which saw multi-party politics as a harbinger to more freedoms to expose government corruption and human rights violations by police. While the big media newspapers like the *Nation* or the *Standard* could escape direct government censure, smaller entities like *Society* were not as lucky. Nyamora was routinely harassed and his printer's premises vandalised by state agents. In 1992 alone, Nyamora was charged with 11 counts of sedition and 30,000 copies of his magazine impounded. In an interview with the British Channel 4 that year, Nyamora said he thought the harassment was intended to drive him out of business, which the government ultimately did as he went into exile in the United States.

Ironically, Nyamora (2007) says his publication and others under the rubric of "alternative press," such as *Finance* and the *Nairobi Law Monthly*, helped fortify Press freedom for the mainstream press that waited for smaller presses to break the news to gauge government reaction, before they could act. For instance, Nyamora writes, when the doyen of opposition politics, JaramogiOginga

Odinga announced he would form a new opposition party, National Development Party in 1992, the *Nation* and the *Standard* snubbed the news, but started covering the news after *Society* had ran the story.[5]

Nyamora, who previously worked as a reporter on the *Nation* says he was emboldened by the protection accorded from very unlikely quarters: the US ambassador Smith Hempstone in Nairobi, among others. Hempstone, a former journalist himself, gained notoriety as the nyamachoma (roast meat) diplomat because he'd go out of diplomatic circuits to meet ordinary Kenyans for an occasional bite. Hempstone insisted he was not supporting the Kenyan opposition but instead "supported democracy," and routinely addressed the Press in Nairobi to condemn the arrest of journalists and remind the Moi regime that the wind of change was blowing. Gachuhi (2010) writes that Hemptone often reminded that Washington's economic support would only flow to nations that "nourished democratic institutions, defended human rights and practised multiparty politics." Hempstone chronicles his experiences in a memoir, *The Rogue Ambassador*.

Kadhi and Rutten (ibid) note one of the important publications to emerge from that period was *The People*, a weekly tabloid that first appeared on February 14, 1993 and was first owned by Opposition politician Kenneth Matiba, who claimed the mainstream press was prejudiced against him as it was foreign-owned[6].

Matiba's statement raises interesting questions about the intersect of politics and democracy, which speaks to Ogola's argument above. This was probably the legacy of KANU, the independent party that acquired the *Nairobi Times* in 1977 Kadhi and Rutten (ibid) and used it to propagate party ideology. Ironically, Matiba hardly used *The People* as a campaign tool as he did not run in 1997. The paper's forte was penetrating investigative journalism, but it lost its lustre when it started publishing daily.

5 For full details, see *The Role of Alternative Press in Mobilisation for Political Change in Kenya 1982-1992: Society as a Case Study* by Pius MosetiNyamora.

6 At that stage, the Nation's man shareholder was, and still remains, His Highness the Aga Khan, while the Standard was owned by Lonrho. Today, the Moi family has a controlling stake at the Standard.

Its fortunes dwindled further as Matiba's fortunes declined. *The People* is now owned and published as a free newspaper by Media Max, a firm indirectly associated with the Kenyatta family, according to Committee to Protect Journalists. Media Max also owns K24 TV and several FM radio stations.

Nanjom (2012) notes the mainstream media in Kenya is dominated by about a dozen individuals— some of them politicians— lured into the business by "potential commercial returns or likely political harvest." We shall see shortly what sort of "harvest" has been possible in the past decade.

2007—Dividends of Democracy

The 2007 General Election provided a unique challenge for Kenya. The Kibaki years had been defined by steady economic growth, but the so-called "dividends of democracy," characterised by a mushrooming of electronic media, had been whittled by the March 2006 attack on the *Standard*. In the preceding year, 2005, the *Nation* had the rare of honour of an important, if uninvited guest – the First Lady Lucy Kibaki— when she called at the Nation Centre late one night to complain about the alleged bad press that her family was receiving. Ironically, the First Lady waved a copy of the *Standard* in her hand as she protested, implying she may have gone to the wrong address.

Nationally, the 2005 constitutional referendum—an election pledge that Kibaki was determined to keep—had left Kenya seriously fractured. This followed fissures in the cabinet, with senior politician Raila Odinga breaking ranks with Kibaki to lead a brigade that decisively defeated the referendum.

Kibaki responded by firing half his cabinet. The renegades coalesced in the opposition Orange Democratic Movement and promised to use the referendum as a "rehearsal" for electoral victory in the forthcoming General Election, two years away. The country was on the edge and individual media houses braced for the hard task ahead of reporting the elections fairly. Inside the Nation Centre, its management set up a tallying centre to monitor the poll independently.

But nobody appeared ready for the troubles that followed that

Christmas weekend in 2007. Claims of rigging by both government and the opposition had dominated the campaign period, but voting was largely peaceful. Things started falling apart at vote tallying. A restive nation waited for results. The politicos assembled at the national tallying centre in Nairobi and started expressing their frustrations on live TV. When live transmission was banned and journalists kicked out of the tallying centre, the tension hit fever-pitch.

Soon after, the electoral commission chairman Samuel Kivuitu appeared on television to announce the incumbent had been re-elected. President Kibaki was subsequently sworn in a hastily convened ceremony at Nairobi's State House. Violence ruptured in city slums, before spreading to other parts of the land as protests against the election outcome evolved into a vortex of violence targeting those perceived as "outsiders" in parts of Nairobi and the Rift Valley. In the end, some 1,100 were killed, including 30 women and children murdered in a church where they had sought refuge. A further half a million were displaced.

Inside the newsrooms, media outlets were faced with a crisis of their own. As *Nation*'s former editorial director Wangethi Mwangi explains in *A Newsroom Divided: Kenya, the Election Crisis, and the Nation Media Group*, a Case Study developed by Aga Khan University's Graduate School of Media and Communications and Columbia University's Journalism department, he noticed journalists in the newsroom openly supported parties associated with their ethnic communities.

There were two camps in the newsroom: one supporting President Kibaki, an ethnic Kikuyu, while the other supported opposition chief, Raila Odinga, an ethnic Luo. And each group of journalists would cheer if tallies on different TV screens showed their candidates were on the lead, or despaired when they were on a losing streak.

When the *Nation*'s internal tallying centre collapsed, some journalists grumbled it was sabotage, insinuating editor Mwangi was sympathetic to President Kibaki because they were both Kikuyu. Mwangi's deputy, Group Managing Editor Joseph Odindo, was

presumed to be supporting Odinga because he was a Luo.

The Case Study documents the hard choices that the management was faced with, not just in saving its own reputation as a credible news source, but also salvage its business from capitulation; and crucially, restoring relations that appeared eroded beyond repair.

The three challenges were entwined as editors could not edit stories or videos from reporters they suspected were likely to frame stories to favour their ethnic kingpins, or leave out aspects that would weaken their community positioning – in disregard of the laid-down editorial guidelines.

Odindo is quoted in the Case Study conceding newsroom operations were nearly crippled by this animus. "The circumstances made it difficult for editors even to assign stories," he said. "For instance, political rallies were sometimes held in the vernacular. That meant sending a reporter who spoke Kikuyu to a rally for Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU). But then by definition, it meant that they were likely to be politically aligned to support the PNU…"

As a consequence, the Case Study continues, the *Nation* editors were unable to tell if a reporter's story slant was selected for its news worth or to protect community/party interests. In some instances, Odindo says he resorted to comparing the *Daily Nation*'s coverage with the stories in their competition, although that was problematic as "he wasn't sure if he could trust the work of their reporters any more than his own."

A few important developments followed, and somewhat curtailed media freedom in an interesting way. On January 3, as the country teetered towards civil war, the three national newspapers—the *Nation*, the *Standard* and the *Star* joined hands and published same story on the front-page: "Save our beloved country." The report also appeared on the groups' TV affiliates.

"Our beloved country, the Republic of Kenya, is a burnt-out smouldering ruin," started the punchy Op-Ed in the *Nation*. "The economy is at a virtual standstill and the armies of destruction are on the march in the Rift Valley and elsewhere. In the midst of this,

leaders—who are the direct cause of this catastrophe—are issuing half-hearted calls for peace from their hotels and walled homes, whence they are conveyed in bullet-proof limousines…"

This Fanonian image of elite that tele-directs violence among peasants was re-enacted by Kenya's foremost author, Ngugiwa-Thiong'o in a BBC report. "Frantz Fanon, the intellectual visionary of the Third World, had long ago warned us of the dangers of the ideology of regionalism preached by elite whose money can buy them safe residence in any part of a country," Ngugi (2008) cautioned, concluding that no less entity than the United Nations should investigate the violence in Kenya. This would come to pass, as we shall see shortly.

The more immediate challenge, however, was how to continue fair coverage of the tragic events without fanning the flames of violence. "One of the questions we asked ourselves as the pictures began rolling on television, you see people wielding machetes and wooden clubs and stuff," Mwangi is quoted in the Case Study, "was how do you identify these groups?" He decided ethnic identities of those involved in the conflict would not be named. This position was contested by some editors, the Case Study reveals, who felt the decision "took the *Nation* outside the realm of journalism and into diplomacy[7]."

The *Nation* was not alone in this quandary. The *Standard* had seen its circulation dip in Central Province (the region is predominantly Kikuyu) in the years preceding the 2007 General Election, as it was seen as "an opposition newspaper." This assertion was not helped by the resignation in September 2007 by the *Standard* managing editor ChaachaMwita to run for a parliamentary seat on Orange Democratic Movement ticket[8].

The Commission of Inquiry into The Post-Election Violence, headed by retired South African judge Johan Kriegler, which examined how the 2007 General Election was mishandled, exonerat-

7 The Case Study identifies Charles Onyango-Obbo, then executive editor of AfricaReview.com, a Nation Media Group affiliate, among those who protested this brand of journalism.

8 ChaachaMwita's candidacy was quashed after it emerged another candidate had presented a similar certificate from the Orange Democratic Movement.

ed the mainstream media, but concluded "vernacular FM stations contributed to a climate of hate, negative ethnicity and may have incited violence."

Mbeke, Ugangu and Orlale (2010) argue that the liberalisation of the broadcast scene in Kenya was mismanaged as no regulatory framework was put in place when the sector expanded after 2002. As a consequence, many radio presenters lacked formal training and programming was skewed towards entertainment. This is a double-edged sword: Kimutai (2011) estimates 115 radio stations reach 93 per cent of Kenyans, according to an IpsosSynovate survey, but this strength may not necessarily translate into an enlightened public due to training deficiencies afflicting those running the show.

Radio journalist Joshua arap Sang, who plied his trade at Kass FM, a Nairobi-based outlet transmitting in Kalenjin, which is spoken widely in Kenya's Rift Valley, was hauled before the International Criminal Court (ICC) alongside five others, including (current) President Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy, William Ruto, to face criminal charges at The Hague. Sang was accused as an indirect co-perpetrator in the commission of crimes against humanity, murder, deportation or forcible transfer of population. He reportedly used his popular breakfast show, Leen Nee Emet (what does the nation say) to sow seeds of discord. These charges were confirmed in January 2012 but terminated in April 2016—as did all the other five cases. Maina (2017) writes that the ICC Prosecutor FatouBensouda blamed the collapse of the cases on lack of State cooperation, witness intimidation and disappearances.

Sang was not the only journalist consumed by post-election violence; *Nation* insiders confirmed a senior editor was suspended for making a midnight visit to the newsroom, with a politician in tow, to alter a headline. An internal inquiry centred on who tipped off the politician about the impending publication of an adverse report, prompting his active efforts to have the headline amended. [9]The editor was reprimanded for these transgressions but not

9 The report in question appeared on July 12, 2009 edition of the Sunday Nation, "Annan betrayed us."

sacked.

The *Nation* and *Standard* were forced to recall journalists from bureaux that were seen as hostile. Among those recalled by the *Standard* was Cyrus Kinyungu, who served as the newspaper's bureau chief in Kakamega in Western Kenya—which was seen as an opposition bastion and dominated by ethnic Luhya. Kinyungu, an ethnic Kikuyu, said his work there became untenable as he faced pressure from both inside and outside the newsroom.

"In the streets, we heard crowds swearing to harm members of my own community[10]," he recalled. "There were many stories we could not cover because who do you verify with? With the same people who were vowing to harm you?" he posed, adding even his own colleagues were not helpful. "One of them said 'this is a revolution and sacrifices have to be made,' implying I would be sacrificed."

Amos Kareithi, a *Standard* reporter in Mombasa was also recalled. In the *Nation* Case Study, Mwangi recalls a journalist broke down on the phone and wept that he feared he would be killed because he was not a Luo. He had been posted to work in Kisumu, the Luo homeland.

International news organisations like the BBC encourage hiring of local correspondents to serve in their countries of origin where they have extensive news contacts and deep knowledge; wire agencies like Associated Press and Reuters, on the other hand, prefer posting correspondents away from their own bases to ensure impartiality. In the aftermath of Kenya's 2007 General Election, it became anathema to dispatch a reporter to a bureau away from their place of origin. The messenger had become being distrusted to deliver the message. Or neither the message, nor the messenger could be trusted.

But things were not any better on the national news desks, where certain news beats, especially politics, became "personalised." Top politicians would confide in their own kinsmen in the newsroom. When other reporters were assigned those beats, the politicos declined to make any substantive statements; news with

10 One on one interview, Nairobi, June 25, 2017.

gravitas was still delivered to their preferred kinsmen away from the Press conferences[11]. Ethnicity had become entrenched as a news factor, and the 2013 General Election would be shaped by the legacy of ICC, placing civil society, the media and the political class on a warpath.

2013: History Repeating Itself

In his foreword to Nicholas Githuku's*Mau Mau Crucible of War: Statehood, National Identity, and Politics of Postcolonial Kenya*, Londsdale (2016) sees 2007 post-poll violence as a mirror of the nation's bloody past, when it revolved against the British: "Kenya was a turbulent colony, a conquest state that sixty years after its creation ended more bloodily than it began, with its conquerors' brutal suppression of popular violence…"

Ironically, Kenya's political elite looked back on the nation's violent history, and the convulsions of 2007, not as an indictment of its failure to entrench the rule of law, but as a renewal in the nation's quest for sovereignty, more so after the Commission of Inquiry on Post-Election Violence (CIPEV) led by Kenyan judge, Philip Waki, forwarded names of the six suspects to face trial at the ICC.

The most eloquent exposition of this narrative condemning the ICC as an "imperialist" machination came from Uhuru Kenyatta— son of the founding President Jomo Kenyatta— who alleged that his prosecution at The Hague for 2007 electoral violence echoed his father's own trial 50 years earlier, coining the catchy line: "From Kapenguria Six to Ocampo Six. Luis Moreno-Ocampo was the ICC prosecutor who initiated the process.

That may sound sacrilegious, considering that the freedom icons known as "Kapenguria Six," named for the remote location in Northern Kenya where BildadKaggia, Paul Ngei, OchiengAneko, Kung'uKarumba, Fred Kubai and Kenyatta, were jailed for agitating freedom, is a revered signpost in Kenya's political and social

11 Such was the experience of this author during his tenure as Head of News at *The Standard* between September 2008 and August 2011. A politician would call a press conference but fail to state anything substantive if their preferred reporters were not present. They would phone them instead, so it ultimately became counterproductive to send them to cover sources that chose whom to trust.

history. The "Ocampo Six," on the other hand, comprising Kenyatta's son and five other suspects, were accused of undermining the survival of the Kenya State by committing crimes against humanity, among others.

Kimani (2008) argues such a position is fallacious, considering that Kenya's independent leaders were complicit in accepting unfavourable terms that retained the stolen lands in the hands of British colonial settlers. Landlessness was identified by the Waki commission as one of the triggers of the post-polls violence in 2007.

Yet it's easy to comprehend how some politicians were able to harness the ICC cases into political capital: anti-imperialist rhetoric has always found traction with the masses. As the Moi dictatorship crumbled in the early 1990s and intellectuals and dissidents who had fled to Europe and North America started streaming back home to agitate for change, the idea that they and civil society were serving their "foreign masters" became embedded in local political lexicon.

Come 2008, the idea that the civil society was serving self-same foreign masters resurged, more so after the Kofi Annan-led negotiations that brokered power-sharing agreement between Kibaki and Odinga resolved that perpetrators of post-poll violence would be handed over to the ICC, if no credible local mechanism was established. As Obbo and Mwiti (2011) argue, the confluence of the ICC trials in The Hague and the Mau Mau reparations quest for colonial-era atrocities in a London court, provided a perfect convergence of history and the present, reshaping the future.

In the event, the opening of the ICC trials in mid-December 2010 against the so-called Ocampo Six was a culmination of months-long posturing by politicians who chorused, "Don't Be Vague, Let's Go to Hague," resoundingly defeating a parliamentary push for a Special Tribunal to try the cases locally. But the song changed swiftly when it emerged that the ICC trials had been built around evidence gathered by quasi-government agency, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights. The commission was alleged to have been working at the behest of western powers, mainly the

United States that was alleged to be pushing for regime change by locking out some politicians from contesting.

Lough (2013) says the now-famous quip, "choices have consequences," by senior US diplomat Johnnie Carson, "hammering home the same point at least five times during a 40-minute conference call," became a rallying point for Kenyatta and his running mate, fellow ICC indictee William Ruto under the Jubilee Alliance. They had dramatically turned the ICC and Kenya's sovereignty into a campaign issue, and canvassed successfully in the people's court to narrowly win the presidency.

The Jubilee administration has been a paradox. It aggressively projected itself as a "digital" (young, modern and savvy) government to contrast the opposition that was presented as "analogue" (old)—appropriating the lingo of the season as it coincided with the 2013 TV transmission migration deadline, from analogue to digital. Yet Jubilee tapped age-old politics of patronage and embarked on rolling back media freedoms that Maina (2017) explains were "modelled on originals from Sani Abacha's military dictatorship in Nigeria."

The laws in question relate to the November 2013 Kenya Information and Communications (Amendment) Bill that was passed in a record 30 minutes by 40 Members of Parliament, imposing punitive fines of up to $200,000 for media houses and $10,000 for individual journalists for breaching a government-imposed code of conduct. Moreover, the Bill established the Communications and Multimedia Appeals Tribunal, Shiundu (2013) that had been "given sweeping powers to even attach property of journalists and media houses to recover the hefty fines." Worse still, the tribunal was granted the powers to recommend the suspension and/or de-registration of journalists, a function that is only performed by professional associations." Shiundu added.

That wasn't all: The Bill went further to regulate how media houses would make money by placing a curb on foreign advertising in local media. Predictably, the action greeted with uproar, Shiundu (ibid) with the chairman of Media Council of Kenya, Joseph Odindo lamenting: "They (MPs) are retrogressive, dictatorial

and they take this country back to the political Stone Age. We negotiated with these MPs and they have shown singular bad faith. We will carry this battle to the next stage and fight every attempt to deny the media of this country freedom."

And sure enough, journalists paraded in the streets, with the *Standard* running a series under the rubric, "Democracy under attack," illustrated by dramatic images of scribes and photographers with their mouths and camera lenses muzzled. The Kenyan opposition and freedom lobbies condemned the Bill as well, with former Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka quoted as saying Nzau and Nzia (2013) the draconian media Bills would soil Kenya's image abroad. Press freedom lobbies feared the move would set a bad precedent for the region as Kenya was considered as a bastion of free press within the continent. "The laws also set a dangerous precedent for other East African countries which take their cue from Kenya, traditionally a regional leader in the industry," said Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) East Africa Representative Tom Rhodes.

Media freedom lobby, Article 19, further reported that new security laws allowed the "banning of publications, the arrest of vendors, and the arrest and detention of journalists on the grounds of "compromising public safety, public order, morality or internal defence, besides thefinancial and penal punishments ... powers to search media establishments, and seize equipment."

Ngetich (2016) notes the media enjoyed some reprieve in 2016 when the courts declared the security laws unconstitutional, but upheld the punitive law that imposes hefty fines on individual journalists and media houses for breaching the government-sanctioned code of conduct.

But the government wasn't done. It further introduced a centralised advertising agency that would determine where to place advertisement, which Mathiu (2015) thought was "the biggest anti-press freedom project since 1902." Government advertisement accounts for about 25 per cent of Kenyan media's total advertising revenue.

The government's advertising agency, Namunane (2017), was inaugurated in February 2017, and was expected to publish all

government jobs and tenders on the online portal, My.Gov, which would then re-run the info as an insert in newspapers of government's choosing.

But the government was not paying promptly even for advertisement consumed before the directive. The *Nation*'s Editor-in-Chief Tom Mshindi told Rusbridger the delay was "putting a huge amount of stress on our bottom lines, our operational, our cash flows, everything."

Unsurprisingly, job insecurity is so prevalent, virtually all media houses in Kenya—the Nation which publishes the *Daily Nation*, the *Sunday Nation*, *The EastAfrican* and *NTV*, among other media outlets in Eastern Africa; The Standard Group, owners of the *Standard*, KTN, among others; Radio Africa Group that publishes the *Star*; Royal Media Services that own Citizen TV, have all retrenched staff several times in as many years. As a consequence, understaffing is rampant and those who survived the purge are overworked. This has impacted on the quality of journalism, particularly in investigations that are fewer and far between across all media.

As the executive director of the Media Institute David Makali, told the *Nairobi Law Monthly*: "There are moments when you see that the government pulls certain levers to obtain its desires – to frustrate certain reporting so that it can portray a positive image of itself… You can see some level of deftness in media manipulation; they're sophisticated."

Rusbridger (2016) observes sophistication as one of the hallmarks of "fiscing"—financially-induced censorship—the sort that the Jubilee administration has perfected, as the following examples illustrate. Only months after taking charge, President Kenyatta organised a retreat for his cabinet at a swanky resort on the foot of Mt Kenya. Ironically, the theme of the retreat was austerity in public spending. Leading by example, the president and his deputy announced they would take pay cuts to keep down the bloated public wage bill.

The March 14, 2014 *Standard* headline: "Austerity: How Government spent millions on luxury hotel," therefore, was a public-interest analysis. The *Standard* reported that about $1m may have

been sunk to host the 100-strong delegation for four days, this being the cost of airfare, food and other expenses. To work out the math, the *Standard* was guided by the amounts spent by its own crew at the establishment.

Further, the report indicated the costs were inflated by a two-day extension—the initial plan was to shift the cabinet talks to the nearby Sagana State lodge that would have cost virtually nothing, since a budget is provided every year by Treasury.

"Investigations by *The Standard* unveiled a picture of a Cabinet that talks about inevitability of belt-tightening but seemingly oblivious or negligent to ways public expenditure could be lowered much more easily," the report concluded. The government spokesman declined to comment, while the Finance minister scoffed at the reporter in a text message: "Where did you get this crazy figure from? Check with the accounting officer in the Office of the President for correct expenditure."

What followed this public-interest, fairly argued and balanced story was, to use the minister's word, "crazy." As the Committee to Protect Journalists recounts in its July 2015 issue, Broken Promises, insiders at the *Standard* reported that the State House had called to remind that a $700,000 advertising deal was in jeopardy if the newspaper maintained its strident tenor. ChaachaMwita, the editorial director, offered to publish the government's side of the story. The government demanded an unreserved apology, which was granted the following day.

But even that was not enough. On March 16, the newspaper ran a Page 1 apology signed by none other than the group's chief executive Sam Shollei. We shall reproduce in its entirety because it's unprecedented in the paper's 115-year history:

"In the *Standard* newspaper of Friday 14th March 2014, headlined "Austerity: How Govt spent millions on luxury retreat", *the Standard* published the story that the government could have spent more than Sh100 ($1m) million on a four-day retreat by the President and his cabinet at the exclusive Mt. Kenya Safari Club.

"After establishing the truth from State House, we agree the

story had errors and inaccuracies. The truth that was published in the *Saturday Standard* of March 15, 2014 is that the government spent only Sh8.4 million. This low level of expenditure affirms the President's and his government's commitment to cut down on wasteful expenditure.

"The Board, management and staff of the Standard Group offer [an] unreserved apology to the President, his deputy and cabinet for [the] embarrassment and grief that this story caused them. We at *The Standard* support the President and his cabinet's resolve to cut down on wastage, eliminate corruption and cut down on government expenditure especially the huge wage bill that has the potential to cripple the economic development of our country. We made a mistake that embarrassed the President and his cabinet and we apologise unreservedly to him and to the people of Kenya."

The story has been withdrawn from all online editions. (Signed - Sam Shollei - Group CEO, Standard Group).

The following day, March 16, 2014, Mwita and reporter Mark Kapchanga, who filed the story, were fired and escorted out the Standard Group Centre in Nairobi's industrial district. Mwita has sued the *Standard* for $670,000 damages.

In this climate of fear, a satirical column filed by this writer in September 2014 was suspended. A note from the newspaper's Revise Editor, conveyed the hysteria at the *Standard*: "While the satire is appreciated, the feeling among the five editors consulted is that the general atmosphere we operate under is not yet free enough to allow such a piece to go through (sic). It borders on the dangerous at a time when the media is struggling to maintain its right to express itself freely. That is the fact of the times we are currently living in. Perhaps in another place or time…[12]"

12 Email from 'Standard'editor Ruth Lubembe, September 25, 2014. The column in question "Government assures laptop project is still on, elevated to Vision 2030 project, satirised government's broken promise to deliver free laptops for school-children within its first 100 days in office. The project was scaled down to tablets, instead of laptops, and delivered four years later. The satirical column, "Seriously Speaking," ran in the Standard from June 2008 to September, 2015. The last (unpublished) column was filed on October 2, 2015. The *Standard's* Chief Sub-Editor phoned this author to say the last column would be discontinued because editors were "uncomfortable"

Around the same time, in January 2015, on the other side of town, at Nation Centre, the Nation Media Group's *The EastAfrican* was temporarily banned from circulation in Tanzania, following the publication of the now infamous caricature by Gado of President JakayaKikwete.

The authorities immediately banned *The EastAfrican* from circulation. The official explanation was that the weekly had not complied with Tanzania's regulatory requirements, despite being in operation for over 20 years. In Nairobi, Gado, who had plied his trade at the *Nation* for over 20 years, was suspended.

"I told Gado," 'this guy is literally asking for your head, right?'" Rusbridger quotes *Nation*'s CEO Linus Gitahi as saying. "What we do is we give him your head, in the sense that we give you a study leave. If there was ever a time you wanted to write a book, this is it."

A week after Gado's "sabbatical," Rusbridger goes on, *The EastAfrican* published a grovelling apology for depicting the Tanzanian president in "a bad light..." The note concluded that the drawing "should not have been published except for a rare lapse in our otherwise rigorous gate keeping process."

Before the end of the sabbatical, Gado returned to work but he had no job to return to. His contract was not renewed.

Another "gate keeping" lapse was blamed on a blistering editorial published in the *Saturday Nation* on January 2, 2016, which led to the sacking of *Nation*'s managing editor for Investigations and Special Projects, Denis Galava. Titled, "Mr President, get your act together," the editorial was a blunt assessment of the failures under the Jubilee administration, overseeing a corrupt regime where insecurity and unemployment roiled the citizens.

Stewart (2016) says Galava conceded: "...Once the article started trending online, I knew automatically that the political and business class would be upset." His fears were confirmed soon after

with its critical tone. A request to write a farewell to readers was rejected. The satirical column was a carry-over from "Monday Mix", another satirical column inaugurated in the *Daily Nation* by this author in 2005. In the column's 10-year run, which included the entire Kibaki presidency, those two were the only instances when the column was censored, and ultimately discontinued.

when an official from the Nairobi State House phoned, demanding: "Why is the *Nation* declaring war against the President on the first day of the year?"

Galava got an answer the following week. He was suspended and later fired for allegedly not submitting his piece to internal vetting mechanisms. He is challenging the dismissal in court. In an affidavit filed before the Labour and Employment Relations Court in Nairobi in mid-March 2016, Galava states he had filed 476 editorials and two page-one comments over the years, following "the standard format in these cases and in the present case [and] not once had questions of procedure been raised."

The *Sunday Nation*'s Investigations Editor Andrew Teyie, who was declared redundant in mid-2016, is also challenging his sacking, claiming he was edged out for his diligent probing of scandals at the National Youth Service, where some $18m was swindled by State officials, and Eurobond, a sovereign bond that Kenya's Auditor General claimed some $1b remained unaccounted for.

The story is the same at KTN, where investigative journalist John-Allan Namu left in 2015 to protest shrinking freedom. According to Mahugu (2017), Namu felt "over these five years, the government has been very thin-skinned on stories that affect it." Consequently, he and other investigative reporters were faced with "consistent pressure," at times taking an ethnic bent.

"We would stick out our necks, go and do a good story, but the criticism, condemnation, much of it unwarranted, discouraged us. We would be told that we were anti-government, hated Jubilee, hated Kikuyus etc."

One of Namu's stories that elicited the government's ire was his March 2014 Inside Story re-assessing the 2013 General Election and the systemic failures and deliberate machinations that appeared to suggest the elections were anything but free and fair. Cheeseman, Lynch and Willis (2014) say such narratives are unpopular because they gesture away from an entrenched phenomenon that the Kenyan historian, AtienoOdhiambo, calls the "ideology of order." Questioning election outcomes is discouraged, especially if they are peaceful, to avoid triggering social conflagration. This

was the legacy of "peace journalism" that media executives inaugurated in January 2008.

Namu and his associates now run *Africa Uncensored*, an online news portal whose mission is "to investigate, expose and empower," away the strictures of corporate-driven journalism in Kenya.

This could be the future of journalism in Kenya. With its investments in undersea fibre optic cable, internet is fairly cheap and speed high. A recent BBC report says Kenyans enjoy faster mobile internet speeds than Americans. According to *The Economist*, Kenya's exports of technology-related services grew exponentially from $16 million to $360 million between 2002 and 2010.

If there is any evidence for such optimism, it came in August 2016 when, Mutiga (2016) says the CNN dispatched its executive to apologise for the news cable's claim that Kenya was "a hotbed of terror," insinuating that President Barack Obama was at risk when he visited his father's land in July 2016.

Afro-pessimism is entrenched in western narratives of Africa, probably predating the days of slavery and colonialism. That the news cable beat such a hasty retreat and offered a grovelling apology intimates a shift in the balance of power: a critical mass of millions of Kenyans armed with mobile phones had mobilized sufficient leverage to challenge a major western news organisation, and secure a rare retraction.

This means start-ups like Namu's *Africa Uncensored*, transmitting content on phones, could be on equal footing with other media in Kenya and beyond, in the battle for the hearts and minds of an evolving audience. The government censor may have to re-calibrate where and how to place their monitors.

Conclusion

Kenya's democracy has evolved over the past 25 years, for better and for worse, and the nation's robust media have acquitted themselves quite well. This was true in the 1990s, when journalists contributed to the campaign for the restoration of democracy and multiparty politics. In the early years of this century, the Kenyan media showed a measure of complacence, before their guard was forced back up by the violent raid on *The Standard* in March 2006.

The Kenyatta administration, which succeeded Kibaki's, has been decidedly sophisticated in its "silent" though effective emasculation of the media. It is arguable that the media may have been complicit in extending its hands for shackling through well-intentioned but problematic overtures in maintaining peace without addressing the underlying issues that triggered the violence in the first place in late 2007 and early 2008.

Kenya's investments in the technology sector, however, have led to an empowered citizenry and reorganised ways in which information is gathered and disseminated, especially using mobile telephony. This, it is safe to predict, is the next news frontier, and start-ups and other fringe news portals are likely to problematize power relations between media barons and the State, and provoke a reassessment in the way censorship is/will be exercised in the near future.

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11

MEDIA AS WATCHDOG: The Ghana Experience

By Kwame Karikari

Introduction

The media's watchdog role in Ghana since independence in 1957 has been tenuous as a result of the country's checkered political experience dominated as it were by a variety of anti-democratic or authoritarian, governments exemplified by one-party, "no-party" and military regimes. It was a political experience characterized by an inherently congenital aversion to citizen expression of independent or dissenting voices. The ensuing suppression of critical or differing voices was highlighted by the banning of independent press, harassment and imprisonment of unyielding editors, publishers and journalists. These led to a situation popularly designated as a "culture of silence" in which the subordinated press and broadcasting attracted metaphors such as "lap dogs" or "guard dogs" of the regimes.

Africa-wide popular strivings for democratic reforms of the late

1980s-1990s, produced in Ghana, as elsewhere on the continent, new conditions for plural political participation and expression of multiple voices. In Ghana, two of the most enduring outcomes of the restoration of constitutional governance since 1992 are: multiparty political contestation for state power on one hand and, on the other, a vibrant landscape of unbridled media. Unfettered private commercial, community and quasi-public state-owned outlets make up a mix of hundreds of print, broadcast and online mass media.

The far-reaching nature of freedoms guaranteed in the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution has enabled a dynamic environment of citizen speech and expression and a nominal plurality of media and practitioners. It is an atmosphere in which nothing secular or temporal appears sacred to the media, and in which media voices appear to have no limits or any restraint by any power or authority. The exuberance of media, however, has quite often attracted public complaints of excesses. All told, the media under the Fourth Republic have made significant contributions to protecting citizens' rights and consolidating and strengthening democratic governance and culture in the country, through a generally outspoken watchdog role performance. However, on balance, proprietorial influences or interference, political and or economic patronage, "brown envelop" (unethical) journalism, and limitations of technical professional and institutional capacity threaten to encumber legitimate and an even more effective watchdog role performance.

In this paper we examine the watchdog functions of the Ghana media against the background of national and international acclamation of the country's press freedom credentials. Under these widely acknowledged conditions of freedom, the media would be expected to establish their relevance and legitimacy by functioning as guardians of the public interest and citizens' rights. As Curran (2011) noted, to pursue relevant social justice reform agenda, media ought to be imbued with a high sense of commitment, a "disciplined moral passion, hard work and intelligence …"…a "robust independence." Do the Ghana media exhibit these qualities

in their watchdog functions? Who do they watch? What do they watch and for whom? For whose interests? Do the watchdogs have a master or masters? Who is it or who are they? What does the master have that must be watched and protected?

This paper seeks to find answers to these issues within the context of the general environment that shape the nature and functions of the media. Thus, the paper will explore the historical, legal, political, economic, cultural (i.e. media practice) contexts in which the media operate. It is important, for example, to find out about the ownership system of the media and how independent or otherwise they are from the state, political structures and centres of social and political authority and influence. It will make a broad overview of media practice and performance and examine how they exercise the watchdog functions in promoting and protecting democratic governance. It will conclude by assessing selected case studies of specific social justice watchdog campaigns initiated by particular media organizations as they represent different media ownership types; state-owned, private commercial and community. This will include interviews with media leaders from these backgrounds to ascertain their articulation of the watchdog functions they engage their media in.

The study focuses on the watchdog activities of newspapers, radio and television stations. It did not look at such functions of new media, that is, internet and social media outlets for news and public information. In Ghana, the internet and social media constitute significant sources of news and information for growing numbers of citizens. In studies cited below they surpass newspapers as the preferred sources of news and information after radio and television. As news sources there are two categories of online (internet web-based) news and information channels. The first consists of the internet or online editions of broadcast and newspaper organizations. The second comprise independent online news publications. They were not included in the study because the first group only published online what they put out in newspapers or broadcast on radio and television. In the second case, none of the independent online publications has engaged in any noteworthy

watchdog functions beyond publication of news – a lot of time including stories picked from the traditional media channels – and readers' comments and opinions.

The objects of watchdog functions

In a democracy, the media's watchdog role functions define their essential relevance to society. These activities constitute the processes by which the media give meaning and significance to their fundamental responsibilities of promoting or protecting the public interest. In young or so-called emerging democracies, institutions of governance are generally weak, the culture of democratic life is only in the process of maturation, and the capacity of civil society as a bulwark against threats to democratic governance tends to be tenuous. It is in this condition of general vulnerability that the media's professed critical role as an indispensable institution for democratic consolidation becomes most wanted. Thus, it is by engaging in watchdog functions that the media play best their roles as protector of the weak, defender of social justice and democratic institutions, and promoter of the public interest and national development aspirations.

Media watchdog functions targeting social justice concerns must invariably and inexorably lead the media to take a stand in thedefense of one or other section of society. Yet, for their interventions to merit the attributes of watchdog role functions, the media activities as such must be devoid of partisan political motives or some self-serving sectarian pursuits.

And the watchdog role function is always an act of exposure of issues of public interest. As such it is relevant if these activities include and involve advocacy for redress or change. It must call for action. To be effective, therefore, media watchdog role activities are distinguishable by the sustained – but not one-off – continual broadcast or publication over a period of time of the issues of contention.

As Tettey (2008) has reiterated, there is a temptation to limit the focus of media watchdog role to "state officials and government institutions to the neglect of other actors and centers of activity whose actions have significant implications for good governance,

democratic accountability and sustainability of democratic institutions and practices." It would be a severe curtailing of the media's societal responsibilities if their watchdog functions were restricted to monitoring government and its agencies only, to the neglect of all those other institutions and agencies – non-state and traditional – that function in the public sphere and whose existence, operations and activities impact on or affect, one way or the other, the daily lives, well-being and welfare of citizens or the public.

As (Tettey, 2008) notes the resultant destructive impacts on the lives of citizens occasioned by "the extensive opacity of government transactions in Africa ...." rightly deserves the media's constant and unrelenting attention and exposure of government policies and programs and how they are implemented. Even then, it would still be inadequate to limit interpretation of the media's watchdog role as only concerning "corruption" and abuse of power by government officials and agencies, but not as surveillance of any sources of threats against the existential socio-economic interests, needs and rights of the marginalized, poor and weak. Media watchdog functions that do not address broad social justice reform issues are incomplete.

The Ghanaian media professionals interviewed for this paper not only concur that the media have a responsibility to exercise watchdog role functions; they all see their roles as an obligation sanctioned by Article 162 (5) of the 1992 Constitution, which states: "All agencies of the mass media shall, at all times, be free to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people of Ghana."

However, even as the Constitution obliges the Ghanaian media to exact accountability from the government, the media professionals do not consider government as the focus of their watchdog monitoring. The leading investigative journalist, Manasseh Azure Awuni (2017), summed up the general perspective:

"I understand my role basically as holding the government accountable to the governed. But it doesn't also end there. There are also public or civil servants who hold positions in trust of the people. Sometimes, even the private sector; we have to see to it

that they perform their functions well in a way that does not short-change the fortunes of our republic. So, that is what I understand by the watchdog role of the media."

For Ashigbey (2017), Managing Director of the largest newspaper group, Graphic Communications GAROUP Limited, it means also that,

"In the media we need to give the voiceless in society a voice. In our current context, we find that issues of poverty, of squalor, disease, corruption are all things that plague us. And if we the media only report on them and do not do anything, then we really will not be part of the solution. The media is a vehicle for development, and we need to be seen to be relevant by saying the things that the people want you to champion for them."

Historical context

The newspaper was first introduced into Ghana (then called the Gold Coast) in 1822. Radio was introduced one century later in 1935, and television in 1965, after independence. But it is only in the last 25 years – that is during the Fourth Republic – that the media have functioned without interruption in an atmosphere of freedom from legal or political repression by the state. As with post-colonial political governance generally, this is also the period in which the media have experienced the most stability and growth. In other words, media development, freedom and independence have been casualties of the checkered political history of post-colonial Ghana.

The socialist, one party regime of the First Republican government of the Convention People's Party of President Kwame Nkrumah imposed state monopoly ownership and control on the media. The situation was maintained and enforced by the authoritarian military regimes that dominated political power from 1966 until the Fourth Republic in 1992. The short-lived attempts at constitutional governance, the so-called second and third republics (1969-71 and 1979-81 respectively) that interspersed the military juntas, represented very brief honeymoons for independent private press resurgence.

The period of state monopoly and control of media represented

what in the 1980s was popularly described as a "culture of silence". When direct censorship was not imposed, self-censorship was the norm and editors saw themselves as part of the government machinery. Dissent or subjects contrary to or different from government perspectives, and generally forbidden in the society at large, were anathema to the media. State-owned media were used as vanguard arms in the arsenal of authoritarian rule. The only media tolerated (press, since there was only state broadcasting) were the "lap dogs" doing government bidding; guard dogs providing espionage about presumed subversives; and attack dogs condemning, discrediting, and doing vile propaganda against the political opposition and critics.

The generalized suffocation of speech and expression over the years, therefore, made the clamour for freedom of speech and media one of the most urgent demands of the popular movement for democracy in the 1980s leading to the constitutional reforms of the Fourth Republic.

The media landscape today

As in most African countries the media landscape in Ghana today is characterized by a proliferation of media outlets representing a plurality of ownership. The print industry is made up of scores of newspapers (National Media Commission, 2016) Unlike Nigeria; however, in Ghana there are no news magazines worth the description. For reasons that have not been investigated, historically news magazines have never thrived in the country. Similarly, there are no newspapers published in any Ghanaian language. Historically too, apart from the church-sponsored newspapers from the late 19th to mid-20th centuries, some state-sponsored experiments in the 1950s-early 1960s, and a few scattered unsustained local initiatives here and there, Ghanaian language press has not been part of the country's mainstream media development traditions. There certainly have never been noteworthy initiatives for commercial or political press publication in any Ghanaian language. This obviously has implications for the scientific and cultural development of the languages and for the active and educated participation of the mass of the population in public affairs discourses. It does

not also help to enhance enforcing downward accountability – as envisaged in Ghana's local government law on decentralization of governance.

The broadcast sector is categorized by the regulator National Communications Authority (NCA) into Public (state-owned), Foreign Public, Commercial, Community and Campus. Currently there are 354 radio stations altogether in operation, out of a total authorized number of 481. There are 51 television stations in operation out of 93 authorized applications (National Communications Authority, 2016).

Radio remains the most important source for news and information for the majority of the people in Ghana. Internet use is growing so fast that it comes after only radio and television as the next important channel for news and information for most people, relegating the newspaper to insignificance. A nationwide survey conducted by the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE) (2014) found that 62.92%of people regarded radio as their primary source of news and information, followed by 25% for television and 6.4% for the internet and social media. The newspaper represented a "Negligible percentage of 1.5%" followed by "Family and friends" in order of importance as a preferred source of news and information. These findings are corroborated by other surveys conducted by other reputable non-governmental institutions. The Institute of Economic Affairs (2016) confirms the same trend in preferred sources of news and information by citizens.

A noteworthy point about the multiplicity of media outlets in the country is that, though the capital, Accra, and the second city of Kumasi have high concentrations of mostly commercial broadcast stations, there are radio stations in each of the 216 administrative districts of the country. There are television stations broadcasting from cities other than the capital as was before 2005 when the first private television station started transmitting. Accessibility to broadcast media is further enhanced by the fact that, because of the geographical spread of radio stations, nearly every indigenous language or dialect can be heard on air. Until 1986, when the state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) established

a regional station in the then Upper Region and introduced five of the area's local languages for programming, only four Ghanaian languages (Akan, Ewe, Ga and Nzema) and Hausa were used in broadcasting. This language diversity engenders wider popular participation in media use for involvement in public affairs and for enforcing public accountability and watchdog mandates.

Legal constitutional framework of media freedom

The much celebrated press/media freedom in Ghana derives from the guarantees provided by the 1992 Constitution and some legal reforms. But these have been achieved and sustained also by active civil society engagement, particularly in the 1990s. Progressively over the post-independence period, "The 1992 Constitution contains by far the most elaborate articulation of provisions designed to ensure the freedom and independence of the media." (Kotey, in Karikari & Kumado, 2000, p.35)

Chapter 12 of the Constitution, Articles 162 to 173, is devoted to "Freedom and Independence of the Press". It guarantees the rights of journalists and media to function without state or other external interference, with the provision that no media professional shall "be penalized or harassed for their editorial opinions and views, or the content of their publications." Among many other provisions, the Constitution abolishes censorship and establishes an independent oversight agency, the National Media Commission (NMC), with the mandate to promote and protect press freedom, to "insulate the state-owned media from governmental control" and, through a complaints settlement mechanism, protect citizens from media abuse. Elsewhere Articles 21 (1) (a) (b) and (f) of the Constitution enhance further the media's freedom in provisions guaranteeing and protecting freedom of speech and expression, of thought and the right to information.

The Constitution imposes obligations on the state media specifically to give political parties access to present their viewpoints to the public, and to give to all presidential candidates the "same amount of time and space" to present their programmes to the public. For the particular purposes of this paper, the Constitution, as stated above, unequivocally obliges all media, without discrim-

ination, to play a watchdog role over government.

The Constitution's "elaborate provisions" notwithstanding, there have virtually been no reforms of the extant legislation that over the years have been used to repress media freedoms. The only exception is the fact that the Fourth Republic has rejected and made unconstitutional the newspaper licensing law that had been used since independence by the various authoritarian regimes to prevent the publication of independent periodical print media. And the state, under the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government of Flight Lt. Jerry John Rawlings, continued applying some of these laws to repress the media's newfound freedom in the early 1990s.

A major boost for media freedom, however, came in 2001 when the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government of President Agyekum Kuffuor repealed the Criminal Libel and Seditious Libel provisions of the Criminal Code, 1960 (Act 29). The repeal of these laws, which had been some of the pernicious instruments of suppressing press freedom since colonial times, followed agitation for media law reform by a civil society coalition led by the Ghana Journalists Association. The issue was forced onto the 2000 election campaign issues. The then opposition NPP adopted the issue and made it a campaign promise. When it won the election it fulfilled the promise by getting the laws repealed, eight months into its first year in office.

All the legal and constitutional regimes have ensured that, since 2001, no journalist has been arrested and or detained arbitrarily and no radio station or newspaper has been closed down for what they have published. However, precisely because there has been no media law reform, media run the risk of falling foul with the many pieces of legislation that still remain on the books. In this period, the one legal instrument that has been invoked to limit media expression is the law on contempt of court. The Supreme Court, as well as courts of lower jurisdiction, have used it in ways that have attracted public outcry and demand for its abolition or reform.

The two most celebrated contempt cases slapped on the media

by the Supreme Court related to journalists' comments on election-related cases before the highest court. The first was in 2013. The most recent (Supreme Court, 2016) resulted from highly opinionated comments, imputing the court's bias, by three panelists on a talk show programme discussing election-related cases before the Supreme Court. The three were staff of a radio station (Montie FM) owned by leaders of the then ruling NDC.

The panelists' verbal attacks on the court's judges hearing the case included threats of violence. The perceived unprofessional acts of the radio panelists attracted widespread public condemnation. They received prison sentences for the criminal charge of contempt of court. The three men were activists of the NDC campaigning for the reelection of the president, their party's candidate, in the impending general elections. The candidate, urged on by party leaders, therefore, used his constitutional powers as president of the country, to give the three party propagandists a reprieve from the court-ordered custodial sentences.

The Ghana media, meanwhile, have not been completely immune from reflexive harassment from errant state security operatives of the lower ranks. The Media Foundation for West Africa's monitoring of media rights violations has consistently indicted operatives of the Ghana police and other security agencies of abuses by way of physical obstruction of journalists' work, seizure of equipment, assault and arrests.

In many democratic societies nowadays, an important instrument that enhances the rights of citizens and media to exact accountability from state officials and agencies is the law on the right to information (widely known as Freedom of Information act). The "right to information" is among the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Constitution (Article 21 (1) (f)). But ignoring 18 years of popular civil society campaigns, governments of different parties and their parliaments have all refused to pass into law a Right to Information bill first drafted in 2003.Equally, the various parliaments have been oblivious to nearly two decades of civil society campaign for the passage of a broadcasting law, the bill of which was also drafted in 2006. It is not farfetched to suggest that the bill

on broadcasting has not been passed, and may never be passed for a long time, because the commercial owners and politician owners, would rather there were no regulation in the industry.

OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE

State-owned media

The state continues to own the largest circulating newspaper, the *Daily Graphic*, and other print publications belonging to the stables of two state companies: the Graphic Communications Group Ltd. and the New Times Corporation. The state also owns the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation which operates a network of regional (i.e. administrative provinces) radio stations and the oldest television station, the Ghana Television, which transmits across the entire territory of Ghana and is thus virtually accessible everywhere in the country. Although the state is the sole shareholder in these media organizations, by the Constitution they are "insulated" from state control of editorial decision-making and professional output. To affirm their independence from state intrusions, the independent constitutional oversight body, the National Media Commission, and not government, appoints the management boards and the chief executive officers of the state-owned media organizations.

Community initiatives

Officially the NCA counts some 89 radio stations as community. But according to the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN), the association of the non-profit radio stations established and managed by communities of rural, mostly socio-economically marginalized populations, their actual members number 30. The GCRN states that in the absence of statutory criteria some commercial interests are given frequencies under the guise of setting up community stations but instead operate them as commercial outfits. (Graphic Communications Group Ltd., 2015)

The commercial sector

In the highly competitive market of this multiplicity of media outlets, the state-owned establishments hardly dominate audience shares. The ownership dynamics of the hundreds of media operations in the private sector show a pattern towards a "con-

vergence of business, politics and media" (Public Agenda, 2015). Less than a dozen companies own the most influential private commercial media – measured by numbers of outlets or networks owned, geographical location, easy access to high state officials and other segments of authority, and agenda-setting content production. Among this are three categories of owners. The first group is made up of investors solely set up for media business. An example is the Multimedia Group, owners of the respected JOY FM radio and TV and their other networks in and outside Accra.

The second comprises big businesses that have branched out with investments in media. Examples include the Despite Group of Companies and its network of radio and a television station. What makes this company's media significant, influential and with the potential to command the largest shares of the audience is that the networks broadcast in Twi, a language of the majority Akan nationality (ethnic group?), which is also the most widely spoken lingua franca across the country. Indeed the company's UTV is the first television station that uses exclusively an indigenous language, Twi.

Tobinco Pharmaceuticals Ltd., a leading pharmaceutical marketing and distribution company, owned by businessman Samuel Tobin, is the latest entrant into the media industry in this second category starting with Atinka FM and Atinka TV in Accra. Tobin also owns Abii National Savings and Loans and Priority Insurance.

The third category is made up of media established by big businesses owned by persons with relations to the two dominant political parties. An example of this is the Excellence In Broadcasting (EIB) Company, a recent entrant into the media market but expanding rapidly by setting up new establishments or by acquiring existing ones. The flagship radio station in the company's stable of over a dozen broadcast outlets across the country is STARR FM in Accra. The owner is Dr. Kwabena Duffuor, former Minister of Finance (2009—2012) and, prior to that, Governor of the Bank of Ghana under the NDC government of President J. E. Attah-Mills. Dr. Duffuor's primary business interests are some 15 companies in insurance (Star Assurance), banking (Unibank), real estate and

agribusiness.

TV 3, the first private commercial television station, is owned by Media General. The company also owns radio stations in Accra, Kumase and Takoradi. The company is the media subsidiary of the First Group Company, which is owned by leading members of the NDC (in opposition since losing the elections of December, 2016).

Although Dr. Duffuor is no more active in competitive party politics for national office, he and Dr. Paa Kwesi Nduom represent very well the nexus of business, politics and media. Dr. Nduom, a former Minister of state (2001—2008), is founder and twice (20012 and 2016) the presidential candidate of the opposition Progressive People's Party (PPP). His media empire consists of about seven FM radio stations and three television channels. Though these businessmen are politically well connected, the apparent orientation of their media organizations, so far, appears to be more for commercial objects than for partisan political objectives.

Another politician with extensive investment in media is Kennedy Agyapong, a Member of Parliament and an outspoken financier of the NPP. His business interests include about 14 companies, and his network of media establishments comprise about half a dozen radio stations and a television station. His radio outlets, Oman FM in Accra and Ash FM in Kumase, openly do publicity for the NPP. The other influential media in this category is the highly respected Citi FM in Accra. The station is owned by a businessman who is a key supporter of the NPP.

Edward Boateng, owner of the Global Media Alliance, which owns over half a dozen radio stations, a TV station and cinema exhibition outlets, is a key member of the now ruling NPP. He was appointed ambassador to China in March, 2017, after his party took office as victor in the December, 2016, general elections.

Media General, owners of TV3 and allied radio stations, forms part of this nexus.

A common feature of the last two categories of media investors is the extra-commercial uses they make of their media organizations. They ensure that advertisements from their business entities are carried exclusively on their media networks. As their principal

businesses grow, not only does the media industry provide yet another opportunity for further expansion of their capital, investments in the media yield the additional value of advertising revenue, facilitate farther reaches into the consumer market and thus expansion of the consumer base of the goods and services offered by their business interests.

Although the advertising industry in Ghana has expanded considerably in recent years, access to advertising and sponsorship revenue is far from fairly distributed. The state-owned media and the dominant commercial ones cited above receive the lion's share of that resource. This is an important factor that makes it difficult for the media to exercise public interest watch over big business. For example, despite incessant public complaints, sometimes through newspaper letters to the editor and radio phone call-ins, the media refrain from editorially criticizing poor service quality provided by the telecommunications companies. Some telecom companies have variously withdrawn advertising from media in retaliation against perceived adverse news coverage. In addition, many individual journalists are beholden to political or commercial interests as paymasters. Besides, with so many of the big players allied, through ownership, with political parties, the media's independent watchdog role functions would be essentially compromised, weakened or limited at best.

The party media

It would indeed be a curious, even strange, development if, in this hectic atmosphere of political partisanship and media multiplicity, there were no media set up purposely for political party propaganda. The party press has, since the anti-colonial period, been an important feature of the private media. In the post-colonial period, whenever there was an opening for multi-party political contests during transitions from military rule, the party press was a major instrument in the public discourses over the direction of national affairs. In the Fourth Republic, since 1992, however, the party press – as that formally owned, operated and managed by a political party – has ceased to exist. Today, the party's publicity is conducted by newspapers and radio and television stations

owned privately by individual wealthy party members and leaders, including members of parliament. Thus, the partisan media are those set up or owned by individual entrepreneurs but placed in the service of their parties for directly partisan propaganda and voter mobilization. Party members and supporters form their principal audiences. The most notable and influential of these openly partisan media are owned by leading members of the ruling New Patriotic Party (in power 2001-2008 and since January 7, 2017), and the opposition (since January 7, 2017) National Democratic Congress (in power 1992-2000 and 2009-2016).

Small commercial stations in 'rural' districts

A good majority of the commercial radio stations, in cities or in the district capitals, invariably also the provincial commercial centres, are owned either by individual entrepreneurs of big or medium-sized businesses or politicians. District towns with two or more radio stations are not uncommon. Yet, though the proliferation of radio stations across the country is an index of the country's macro-economic growth and the growth of the middle classes in recent years, the long term financial sustainability of most of the mushrooming media owned by individual entrepreneurs is questionable. Advertising business and revenue sources are concentrated in Accra and Kumasi. The smaller media organizations have limited access to advertising income. Interviews with a number of such stations in 2015 paint a picture of a distressed sector.[10] In the medium to long-term, the vicissitudes of competition and limited revenue resources render many of these stations vulnerable to closure or as fodder for acquisition by the emerging magnates. Already, as is to be expected in a hectic competitive market environment, some established radio or television stations are selling off shares or entire establishments to non-media businesses. At the same time bigger media firms are swallowing up some smaller outfits.

These dynamics show a tendency toward concentration in the industry. Apart from such acquisitions, the bigger entities smother the smaller establishments, especially those in the provinces, in two other ways. The first is by "poaching" promising journalists

and presenters/disc jockeys by enticing them with high salaries and other lucrative inducements. The other is through free franchising of news and popular current affairs programmes to the smaller stations – in what is described as "affiliation". These affiliate or partnership arrangements expand the audience base of the principal stations and, by extension, their advertising revenue. The "affiliated" stations, on the other, are attracted to this arrangement because it provides them 'national' news and current affairs Talk Shows and panel discussions – from and about the capital and central government, as well as other important public affairs programmes – which the "affiliate" or junior partner stations could otherwise not be able to produce on their own.

The dominance of a small number of broadcast organizations in the market betrays the appearance of pluralism of outlets and of choices as projected by the official numbers. As at December 2016, ten commercial radio stations, eight of them based in Accra, two in Kumasi, and including the two most popular partisan stations (Radio Gold for the NDC, Oman FM for the NPP), commanded 54.5% of the total audience in the country (Geo Poll Media, 2017). About five companies own these ten most listened-to stations. The same stations also have the highest ratings during peak hours. The dominance in ratings is obviously enhanced by the system of affiliation with smaller stations in the regions and districts.

Through cross-ownership, some of the same companies that dominate the radio sector also own most of the ten television stations which attract over 90% of the television audience in Ghana. While the radio stations of the state-owned GBC do not feature among the top pullers of listeners, its Ghana Television ranks fifth in attracting viewers to its screen (8.5%).

These ownership structures reflect the political-economy dynamics that support or disable the normative watchdog functions. For, elites and elements within the corridors of political, economic and social power tend to trump the objective determinants of news and programme contents.

Tendencies toward control of media

According to Curran (2011), in a formally democratic context

an important object of control of the media, in the absence of repressive legislation and or use of violent attacks, is to monopolise the airwaves, drown out alternative ideas and opinion and sources of information and news. The dominant political forces, organized in their parties, have exhibited strong tendencies toward monopoly of the broadcast media through the control of the regulatory system of spectrum governance. The governing board of the National Communications Authority (NCA), the body that manages the frequency spectrum for all communications, is appointed by the president. Its activities have attracted public criticism and suspicion that it is used to farm out broadcast frequencies disproportionately to politicians of a ruling party, their allies and cronies to aid the particular party's monopoly of the airwaves for their political purposes. The parceling out of frequencies among party cronies appears to have been largely pronounced under the government of the NDC especially during its 2009-2016 tenure.

A prominent media and human rights lawyer, Akoto Ampaw, observed that, "… as and when this party [NDC] came into office, it tended to allocate frequencies, through an opaque process of licensing, to its cronies. The result has been a situation where politicians, either directly or through surrogates, own broadcast stations, which they then employ in a parochial and sectarian fashion to champion their political ambitions." (Graphic Communications Group Ltd., 2015)

In 2012, public concern about an absence of transparency in the functions of the NCA led some rights advocacy civil society groups to form the Coalition for Transparency of the Airwaves (CoTA).[12]Coalition members proposed a link between "the opaqueness of the frequency allocation process" and problems of unprofessionalism, especially widespread sectarian partisan "venom and vitriol", on the airwaves that had attracted widespread public disapproval. The coalition's six-point objectives aimed at:

"a) promoting genuine pluralism of voices in Ghana's airwaves

b) ensuring equity and transparency in the allocation and management of broadcast frequencies

c) advocating for the expeditious allocation of broadcast fre-

quencies to genuine community radio applicants

d) helping to ensure the insulation of all broadcast media from governmental control and interference

e) advocating for the passage of , and adherence to, a Broadcasting Law in keeping with international best practice

f) promoting an enabling legislative and regulatory environment for the above." (Graphic Communications Group Ltd., 2015**)**

The key implications resulting from the lack of transparency in frequency allocation are that the ruling party tends to control disproportionate sections of radio/television outlets, thereby tending to drown out opposing or independent voices. By denying access to applicants whose loyalties are uncertain, the ruling party minimizes the number of outlets with the potential to engage in independent watchdog activities. Another critical effect is that community radio operators are squeezed out, thus weakening pluralism and the voices of mainly rural citizens.

Media performance and watchdog implications

The pattern of ownership has shown a significant tendency by the political elite to vie for control of the media to further their political interests. However, the strictly commercial interest has tended to dominate ownership and with it dominance of audience attention and influence through content outputs. What emerges is an appreciable autonomy of the non-partisan private commercial and independent community media to perform watchdog roles by probing issues of critical public interest and concern regardless of the attitudes and preferences of local or national state authority or non-state corporate or traditional interests. The partisan media have only raised questions and played watchdog when they are in opposition, and in relation to issues unfavourable to the rival ruling party. They must probe the ruling party for obvious reasons of boosting their parties' popularity and electoral interests. The partisan media are, as is to be expected, usually vociferous defenders of their parties against all critics.

The autonomy of the non-partisan commercial and community media to perform watchdog functions derives primarily from the certainty of uninhibited civil society voices to make use of and

protect the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression. The prevalence of opposition parties exercising their freedom to voice "opposition", including mobilization of supporters for open protest demonstrations, adds an important buffer for the media to assert their autonomy. Moreover, the political elite share a common interest in protecting the media's freedom and independence. For, when in opposition, the parties utilize their partisan media supporters to promote their causes, and can also depend on the non-partisan commercial media for reliable and fair coverage of their activities and as platform for their viewpoints.

This is the environment by which the media's performance may be assessed. One of the important outcomes of the generalized public protection of the freedom and independence of the media is that, despite the changes in government resulting from elections, there has been no initiative to promote legislation threatening the status quo. The media have, thus, the enabling environment that enhances their potential to perform their social responsibility of watchdog over all matters of interest to the citizens and their public.

In addition, the open space in which the media thrive, with its attendant competition for audiences and relevance, encourages improved professional standards and content quality. It also enhances innovative approaches to content format development. Thus, progressively broadcast stations generally, but more especially the big non-partisan commercial houses, have improved standards and introduced new content formats through all of which they perform various aspects of their "monitorial role", including "adopting an active watchdog stance". (Christians, et al, 2009)

The more popular and widespread programming feature of the new broadcast culture involves public participation, enhanced by the new communications technologies of mobile telephony, internet and social media. From News, special interviews, Talk Shows to documentary features, nearly no programme on TV or radio ends without a phone call-in, text messaging, queries or comments by email and social media from the public. This highly subscribed

form of listener/viewer participation amounts to what Selormey (2012) proposes is "a new form of voice mechanism…through the radio phone-in programmes", which contributes to citizen engagement in promoting public accountability and strengthening of democratic culture.

Tettey (2011) adds that "talk radio", enhanced by the public's use of the new technologies, most especially by the phone-in mechanism, "has led to a fundamental shift in the demography of contributors to political discourse". The engagement of wider sections of society in public affairs discourse through broadcast media is even more critically important, according to Tettey (2008), because much of the time it represents "counter-discourses that challenge the hegemonic viewpoint of the state … within the virtual architecture of this reconfigured public sphere" of the new communications technologies.

But which sections of the lower social classes have now found their voices in public affairs discourses through the media could be a useful enquiry to undertake. In Ghana there is a radio station everywhere and nearly every language and dialect is used on the airwaves. Mobile phone usage penetration is significantly high too. So, Tettey's (2008) proposal, nearly a decade ago, that the majority of media in Africa are located in urban areas and use mostly European languages, and therefore the voices of "Rural dwellers who constitute the majority …do not get articulated in the mediated public sphere" is worth further investigation, at least in Ghana.

Be that as it may, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between, on one hand citizens' freedom of voice, and on the other, the media's freedom and responsibility to serve the public interest. When citizens are assured of unrestrained access to the media to amplify their voices, by utilizing that right, they tend to impose on the media responsibility to satisfy their information needs, serve as whistle-blowers against acts of injustice, as channels of exacting accountability from public authorities, and encourage them to expand their platforms for the expression of more diverse voices.

Free, fair and transparent elections are one of the major pil-

lars of constitutional representative democracy. In Ghana, no other process excites the public's demands on the media to function with responsibility more than during the quadrennial general (presidential and parliamentary) elections. Over the years, their performance in providing public education, monitoring the integrity, transparency and peaceful conduct of elections marks the Ghana media's highest point in their commitment to their watchdog role in safeguarding democratic governance.

Of the new content formats emerging with the opening up of the media space, none has made more dramatic impact in the media's watchdog roles of fighting corruption and abuse of power than investigative journalism as a specialized discipline in the profession. It started cautiously and timidly among some of the resurgent private press of the late 1980s, such as *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, but has grown to be a sturdy presence on a number of the leading commercial broadcast outfits. Astute investigative reporters have hounded every government by ferreting out of their hiding places the dark dealings of ministers, top public officials, public agencies and criminal deals in the private sector.

Radio documentaries, a very new format that has gained popular appeal on radio and television stations, are used to expose serious social problems concerning anything from prison conditions, environmental degradation, human rights abuses and corporate malfeasance. The dramatic effect of documentaries have usually had the impact of arousing near instant public reaction and demands for rectification.

Public perceptions of media performance

Public complaints about media impropriety have become increasingly widespread. Much of that has expressed concerns about the incessant invective, intemperate and insulting manner of speech that characterises political discussion on air. The language of political discussion on radio, dominated by NDC-NPP diatribe, is especially polarizing during election campaigns. It fuels an atmosphere of tension and arouses fear of political violence among the population.

One way by which the two dominant political parties, particu-

larly, have sought to control the airways is by ensuring their presence on discussion and Talk Show programmes. The parties too have been aided in this by the managers of radio and television stations who have made it a routine of inviting representatives of political parties to discussion programmes, interviews or any other programmes, regardless of the subject matter of discussion.

More importantly, the parties have devised a discretely innovative and effective strategy of dominating or controlling public voice in political discourse on air, thereby tending to "drown out" independent non-partisan voices. It is the strategy of "serial calling". The parties' communications (propaganda) departments mobilize cadre from their ranks whose principal daily function is to use the mobile phone to call or send text messages to intervene in radio or television programmes, most of the time, to attack opponents more than to elucidate on their parties' programmes and or policy ideas. The intervention of the "serial callers" is one major source of the improprieties on air that elicit most public complaints.

The partisan media have particularly attracted remarkable public opprobrium. The partisan newspapers received the unenviable appellation of "rented press" from Martin Amidu, a former Attorney General and Minister of Justice, whose campaigns against corruption had earned him popular appreciation by the public giving him the title "one man vigilante". This followed a scurrilous campaign of personal attacks by newspapers of supporters of the NDC government, the minister's former employers, who had become the target of his anti-corruption crusade.

The "rented press", according to Amidu (2017) is a "press which has no ideology, editorial visions, nor any editorial independence. It is press that is put at the service of anyone who can hire it. These are newspapers who (that) do the bidding of anyone who can pay. They have no vision, no ethics – just cash. Nothing moral; just the editor's stomach. It is stomach journalism. They will sell their conscience for anything."

Possibly influenced by the prevalent partisanship that dominates current affairs discussions, significant sections of the public

are skeptical of the media's credibility. In 2014 the IEA's national "Survey on Key Socio-Economic and Governance Issues in Ghana" reported that 56% of respondents "believed that the news media abused their freedom by printing or saying things they knew were not true". For unexplained reasons the figure fell to about 46% in 2016, but the proportion of those surveyed that doubted the media's credibility was still disturbing.

Thus, by the political parties capturing the Talk programmes and call-in times, the parties blur the vision and focus of the media as watchdog of the public interest – acting, instead, as megaphones of the parties. In this case, the media are seen not as being on the side of the public but as lackeys and lapdogs of their owners or political god fathers.

Media as watchdog: case studies

Various media organizations, irrespective of their ownership backgrounds, have initiated and carried out different campaigns on a variety of issues of public accountability, social justice, human rights and environmental safety and protection. These activities, examples of watchdog interventions, affirm the potential of the freedom of the media in Ghana to promote issues of critical public interest. They also give indications of the media's autonomy in confronting the state and non-state centers of social, economic and political influence on their responsibilities to the citizens and the public. The sample of interventions analysed here as case studies affirms also the capacity of the media, in conditions of freedom, to set the kind of agenda that has the potential of provoking public engagement for social justice reforms. These examples of media watchdog role performance affirm the effects of media enhancing citizen "mediated voice" expression and participation (Selormey, 2012).

In some of these watchdog activities, the media organizations have gone beyond simply publishing or broadcasting their watchdog investigations or features on critical social justice or rights issues. They have, instead, gone on to engage in direct action advocacy, sometimes in coalition or partnerships with other media or rights advocacy civil society organizations, for redress of the

issues.

They have undertaken advocacy actions by, as Opuni-Frimpong (2015) has proposed, "pleading the cause of another, siding with, vindicating, pleading and making recommendations on behalf of others. ... Advocacy is an action by an individual or group of individuals which aims to influence public policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic and social systems and institutions. Advocacy may include many activities that a person or organization undertakes, including media campaigns, public speaking, commissioning and publishing of research polls, the filing of an amicus brief, peaceful demonstrations, etc."

The examples below are selected because they are among those media watchdog cases that evoked or attracted most public resonance, locally or nationally.

1. The media campaign against mining and environmental destruction ('galamsey')

In March, 2017, the newspapers of the state-owned Graphic Communications Group Limited and the commercial CitiFM jointly launched a campaign to stop "illegal" small-scale gold mining in the country because of the devastation it had been wreaking on the environment. (The illegal small-scale mining of gold was called "galamsey", a corruption of the pidgin expression "gather and sell".) For over a decade, environmentalists and media raised alarm about the ecological destruction resulting from widespread unregulated gold mining taking place in nearly every district of the country. The effects were widespread destruction of virgin rain forest reserves, farmlands, and most alarming of all the pollution and extinction of major water bodies including streams, rivers, ponds, small lakes and marshes. The "gold rush" had attracted miners from neighbouring countries and places as far away as India and China.

Media exposure of this disastrous informal economic activity included anything from news reports, features and radio and television documentaries on these mining activities and some acts of community resistance. The public reaction included local and nationwide civil society coalitions demanding effective regulation of

mining to protect the ecology and the livelihoods of affected rural communities.

The campaign initiated by the two media organizations, starting with editorials and radio discussion programmes, attracted other media organizations and dozens of civil society organizations, big and small, including labour unions, faith-based organizations, rights advocacy groups and think tanks. The campaign's message resonated around the country. And by all indications it portended to be the most impact-making media advocacy campaign in recent years, considering its effects on mobilizing public opinion and catalysing public response for action around the whole country. The immediate impact was attracting government attention. The Minister of Mines and Natural Resources toured the worst affected places and decreed a six-month moratorium on mining, with orders to the police to arrest violators of the ban. Public forums sponsored by the media houses and broadcast live raised questions and issues that tended to provoke demands for fundamental reforms in legislation and regulation affecting all mining activities in the country.

The campaign was an example of media advocacy that leads to general national awareness of an issue of national existential import, and thus a matter of critical public interest. It was the outcome of years of media alerts on mining-induced environmental degradation, sometimes following tip-offs from community activists, reports from environmental researchers, and sometimes as outcomes from covering community struggles against the effects of mining operations on livelihoods.

2. The crusaders against corruption

Investigative journalism has come of age in Ghana and it has become one of the journalistic activities that effectively monitor accountability of government to the people. And the Accra-based commercial Joy FM, one of the top ten radio stations, has in recent years excelled in broadcasting exposes that make government and other high public officials tremble through its revelations on corruption scandals. In 2013 and 2014 the station's celebrated award-winning investigative journalist, Manasseh Azure Awuni

shook the government and stunned the population, with revelations of graft and other criminal acts concerning two major socio-economic development programmes.

The first case, filed in a series of reports, was broadcast between February-April, 2013. It concerned massive corruption that, in the end, collapsed a much-publicized Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency (GYEEDA), a programme ostensibly set up to reduce youth unemployment by providing thousands of jobs through training schemes. The Joy FM investigation revealed an intricate network of collusion between officials of GYEEDA and some businessmen "who were siphoning beneficiary funds with the connivance of bank officials". (Azure, 2016)

The media exposure led to a government investigation which went nowhere. The key culprits accused in the media report, topmost among whom included the Minister of Youth and Sports, were never punished even as their crimes "deprived thousands of miserable youth their source of livelihood while officials of GYEEDA and some 'successful' businessmen built empires out of their sweat." (Azure, 2016)

The second investigation was about how corruption undermined implementation of a programme designed to uplift three regions of the savanna zone of the country out of poverty. The Northern, Upper East and West Regions are three regions that occupy the savannah ecological zone of the north of the country. Colonial policy, dry climactic conditions and other factors had rendered that part of the country socio-economically the poorest, and lagging behind the rest of the country in every index of social and economic progress. The Savana Accelerated Development Agency (SADA) was established by law passed by Parliament on 30 July, 2010. The principal object of SADA was to provide special funds and mechanisms for the speedy development of the savanna north; it was an initiative designed to bridge the development gap between the third northern savannah sector and the forest and coastal southern part of the country.

Within two years of its inauguration SADA started tottering. Joy FM investigations revealed massive misappropriation of millions

of dollars of funds. Key agricultural projects funded under the programme were never executed and afforestation projects, among other schemes, poorly or improperly implemented and managed because the funds were largely diverted into private pockets of officials put in charge of the scheme.

As with other investigative reports by the radio station – and others – the "Sad SADA saga" provoked public displeasure as other radio stations and media picked up the issue in discussion programmes.

Following Joy FM broadcasts, aired in April 2014, the government of President John D. Mahama dissolved the board under whose watch SADA derailed and reconstituted it and appointed a new chief executive officer. But nobody was punished for causing the financial losses and incapacitating a national programme meant to reverse decades-old underdevelopment of a third part of the country.

3. Radio documentaries and rights issues: JOY FM and prison conditions

In March, 2015, Joy FM, one of the stations to introduce and popularize the radio documentary format, broadcast a two-part series of documentary stories entitled "Locked and forgotten". The programme investigated how scores of persons accused of various crimes were remanded in prison custody to await trial by the courts but were never brought to trial for months and sometimes years. The ordeals of these citizens whose rights to justice had been so violated rankled many sections of the society and provoked calls for redress by the Ministry of Justice. Public outcry compelled the President and the Chief Justice to visit a number of prisons. The government and the judiciary set up a programme under which several numbers of such victims of injustice were released from prison.

4. State-owned media asserting some independence

Despite the constitutional guarantees of their independence in editorial decision-making, the state-owned media have been remarkably silent in giving voice to those critical issues that gen-

erally make government and state institutions uncomfortable or even angry at their exposure. This attitude of playing safe must be one important factor why none of the radio stations of the state broadcaster, GBC, appeared among the ten top most-listened-to stations.

The *Daily Graphic* in recent times, however, appears to be striving to break out of that mould and to find a voice to be relevant. The newspaper published in 2015 two investigative reports that exposed examples of serious misconduct of public officials.

The first was an investigation into widespread graft by top officials of the National Service Secretariat, the office that administers the national service programme of graduates of tertiary educational institutions. The paper discovered a scheme by which, over some years, the top managers of the organization inflated the number of graduates registered for the national service programme. They then skimmed off huge amounts of money purported to be allowances for the non-existing "ghost" national service personnel. The government reportedly investigated the matter and promised prosecution of the culprits, including a deputy minister of state. Nothing came out of it.

The second investigative report by the *Daily Graphic* was a case of abuse of office by the chairperson of the independent constitutional Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ). The head of the Commission misconducted herself by incurring for the organization unapproved financial liabilities. She ordered unauthorized innovations on her residence and took residence for months in a hotel at the CHRAJ'S expense. An inquiry by the Chief Justice's office led to her dismissal.

What makes the state-owned newspaper's watchdog reports significant is that, for the first time since the Fourth Republic, the paper sought to investigate an issue of public interest that tested the government's commitment to accountability of persons in high public office.

5. Community radio initiatives in rural districts

Some examples of the watchdog advocacy work of two of the 29 members of the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN)

were selected for this study.

The Radio for Development (RADFORD) is located in Tumu, a town in the Upper West region of northern Ghana close to the border with Burkina Faso. Radio Ada, the very first community radio in the country, is located in Ada, a coastal town some 50 kilometres east of the capital Accra.

(a) RADFORD's campaigns

This community radio's watchdog broadcast activities were around three key subjects of concern to the mainly peasant farming population of the Sissala ethnic community covered by the station's transmission signals and programmes. They comprise:

(i) Security from armed criminal groups.The Sissala East and West Districts were among a number of rural communities in the country that had come under attacks from gangs of armed robbers in recent years. RADFORD's campaigns, in response to community reports to the station, included dedicated reporting of incidents and setting up an early warning system of receiving and broadcasting alerts of attacks from victims or witnesses. These broadcasts resulted in increased police presence and patrols, more effective community prevention of attacks, more arrests and general reduction in armed robbery incidents.

(ii) Protection against environmental destruction. The Sissala districts are in the dry savannah ecological zone bordering on the sahel. Its grasslands with very short rainfall seasons have sparse trees and are easily vulnerable to degradation and desertification. Meanwhile it is rich with the rare rose wood, a species of hard wood treasured for its beauty and use for luxury furnishing. Unregulated exploitation leads to extinction. In 2015 hordes of smugglers entered the forest reserves in the area to illegally exploit the treasured forest product. RADFORD's investigative broadcasts led to the mobilization of youth watch groups who, in collaboration with forestry officials and police, eventually drove out the smugglers.

(iii) Protecting young girls against backward cultural practices. Forced marriage to young girls, including elopement, is an old practice prevalent among some ethnic groups, including the Sissala people. The station's campaigns have involved education to change attitudes and encouragement to families to rescue young girls given away to early marriages, most often by their fathers or uncles. In 2006 six girls were rescued by villagers who reported their actions to the station.

(b) Radio Ada

The most outstanding watchdog role function this community radio station engaged in since it was set up some 15 years ago concerned defending the economic rights of women in the Ada community. For centuries, the area has been one of the richest salt mining centres in Ghana. Traditionally, women have been the principal social force in an informal system of small-scale self-employed salt winning (mining) and trading. But in recent years, the Ada salt industry became a new frontier of encroachment by big capital. And the women of Ada went on the frontline fighting to protect their livelihoods and sources of subsistence. They also resisted new mining practices, introduced by the big capitalintruders, which threatened the ecology of the lagoons that produce the salt.

The work of Radio Ada involved dedicated broadcast campaigns that gave voice to the women for their self-organization, mobilization and advocacy to protect their economic and social interests against an alliance of external big capital interests, local middle men and traditional (mainly male) authorities (chiefs). This struggle was ongoing (at the time of this study) and was not likely to be resolved soon. But Radio Ada and the women it supported did not appear ready to relent yet.

Some common features of the media activities

The examples of watchdog interventions by the media are cited because they were some of the more outstanding role functions in recent years. They are cited also because they represent an insignificant proportion of the hundreds of media organisations in the country that have taken up critical and significant public interest causes beyond mere reportage or commentary, and without partisan political motives.

The cases cited also share some common features that give these media activities the attributes of watchdog role functions. The first is that all the media took the side of social justice, national developmental or public interest causes, be they on citizens' rights, environmental protection or public accountability issues. Secondly the activities involved sustained publication or broadcast

of the issues over periods of time. Further, the advocacy activities in these matters always attracted considerable public resonance and supportive response.The media, in most cases, also involved themselves in active mobilization of the aggrieved social sectors, groups or communities beyond the routine act of reportage or editorial commentary. In addition, the targets of advocacy were not always only government or state institutions. They included non-state actors, such as private economic interests or perpetrators of illegality or criminal behavior threatening the collective security of communities. In some cases too, the media have cooperated with public authority to address the issues raised.

Public responses to media's watchdog broadcasts

New communications technologies, especially the mobile phone and internet, have made instantaneous public interaction with mass media publications a major development in promoting free speech and citizen participation in governance and public affairs discourse. In all the watchdog cases studied – indeed as they regularly do with most news bulletins and discussion programmes – radio stations invited and involved listener comments, opinions and perspectives. Most cases attracted condemnation and demands for justice or resolution of the problem from majority of the public interventions as the case may be.

In some cases sections of the public volunteered support and assistance. In the case of the campaign against illegal small-scale mining, civil groups volunteered participation in the coalition and demanded review of existing legislation and regulation of mining generally.

Reactions to those cases of corruption involving government agencies and or officials introduced partisan biases from the public interventions. Generally, the corruption cases were also roundly condemned by the majority of public commentators. However, party loyalists often called in or sent messages to rubbish the media exposes as "opposition propaganda" or labelled the media houses concerned as tools for the opposition.

The usually lengthy panel discussions that took up the media exposures were often polarized along political party lines. This sit-

uation arose principally because radio stations made it a practice of inviting party activists and representatives to compose the discussion panels. That, therefore, set the tone and directed the tenor of public contributions through the phone calls, text messages, emails, twitter, facebook or other social media.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to show that the conditions prevail in Ghana for the media to exercise the independence and freedom required for vigorous and consistent watchdog role functions. But their general performance of this fundamental role in a democracy is far short from what is possible and necessary. Among practitioners themselves, there is a sense that more could be done. Of the five leading professionals interviewed, only one considered that the generality of the Ghanaian media were doing very well but that "some of the imperfections are more as a result of lack of education and lack of resources on the part of the media."(Attah Mensah, 2017)

The other four agree that the media's watchdog role performance "is below average. I say this because we are all reactive rather than being proactive. We tend to allow the politicians and others to set the agenda and we follow. We are not able to initiate the fight. Also a lot of us are corrupt. Sometimes you do a story and some media people fight and defend the wrongdoers. Sometimes you find out later that they are in bed with some of these wrongdoers. If you look at the kind of freedom we have and the amount of space we occupy – in terms of radio stations going to 400, in all the regions and all the districts – if we were really doing our work well, there wouldn't be so much rot in our system. I am really not impressed with how we utilise our freedom." (Azure, 2017)

"I don't think they [the media] have done well. Maybe some pockets do a good job. With the coming into being of the Constitution of the Fourth Republic and the liberalization of the media, you would think that when quantity improved quality would follow. … But what you find is that most of our journalists are following the ministers, the district chief executives. Our newspapers

are filled with a lot of 'he said' 'they said' stories. Our newspapers are filled with a lot of PR stories. Even business, when business is doing something it is the PR side of the business story that is followed. Who is asking the businesses the critical questions?" (Ashigbey, 2017)

The general verdict is that much, much more could be done by the media. And that seems to suggest that, in spite of the favourable environment, the generality of the Ghanaian media lack the "disciplined moral passion, hard work and intelligence" and the "robust independence" Curran (2011) prescribed as a primary predisposition for committed and relevant watchdog role functioning. As one of the interviewees has pronounced, one of the important factors hampering the media's commitment to this fundamental of roles in a democracy, is corruption among the media professionals. This widespread phenomenon ranges from the petty cases of reporters collecting small amounts of cash from subjects they cover before filing their stories, to reported cases of editors and publishers or radio managers burying or ignoring big stories of scandal in exchange for big cash bribes.

Active leading figures of the two dominant political parties form the single largest proportion of any group of identifiable persons who own radio stations around the country. This reality, coupled with the partisan political influences on, and biases that hold sway over so many among the media professionals, render large sections of the media morally incapable of mounting watchdog activities. For the partisan media, they raise critical questions of government when their parties are in opposition. Similarly, when they raise critical issues about the activities of some business or some non-state entity for public scrutiny, the subject being questioned would almost certainly have something to do with the rival political party or grouping opposed by that media's favoured party. Serving the party in state power or loyalty to a political party comes with rapid access to material benefits never realisable through diligent commitment to independent professional journalism. It may take the form of immediate material rewards or appointment to one or another high political office with attractive perks and access

to material benefits. It is one of the principal attractions for many young persons who enter media work. And with that motivation any concerns for watchdog role performance for public interest purposes is anathema to the seeming aspiring journalist.

These questions aside, there are objective factors of weak or poor professional technical capacity of most of the media, especially the radio and television stations in the rural and district towns, to undertake activities that demand more than basic skills of journalistic work. The media industry has grown faster than the development of the requisite human resource to meet its professional and technical needs.The low capacity of personnel is further compounded by lack of resources to engage in activities that would often involve preparation of material and campaigns of advocacy that would usually require considerable time and financial resources, assets hardly available to the numerous outlets of community radio or commercial stations owned by small and medium-sized entrepreneurs.

These limitations on the Ghana media's watchdog role functions may become even more constraining over time as the business-political nexus of media ownership gets more consolidated and expansive with the dialectical processes of concentration. These trends may be slowed down or reversed if a broadcasting legislation is passed with provisions for effective regulation that are responsive to these fundamental and critical questions for the promotion of unencumbered media independence and transparent pluralism. And it may be questionable if the media ownership cabal of an alliance of political and business elites would encourage enforcement of rules and regulations that threaten their hold on these vital instruments of political, economic and cultural-ideological dominance.

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12

THE MEDIA AND ELECTIONS: The Nigerian and South African Experience

Abiodun Salawu and Kayode Eesuola

Introduction

One thing that the media do, be it in its print, broadcast and digital forms, is utilize an array of devices to communicate with a large, diversified audience.Democracy being a system that centers on the masses of a people shares certain significant symbiotic relationships with it (Rickert 2011). This explains why a large chunk of the social science scholarship, especially in the fields of Communications and Political Science; and in the sub areas of Political Communication, Political Behavior and Psephology, has established the link between the media and many institutions of democracy: elections, political party, pressure groups, judiciary, legislature and so on; and how all of them influence and affect one another for effective functioning of a political system (*Müller*

2014, Coronel 2015).

Election is, however, the main focus of this chapter, vis-à-vis the relationship it has with the media. Nigeria and South Africa are put in comparative perspective. Attempt is made to historicize, and thereafter locate the similarities and differences of media operations during general elections in the two countries, with specific focus on South Africa's 2014 and Nigeria' 2015 general elections. The basis for comparison is clear: Nigeria and South Africa are the biggest economies as well as biggest democracy in Africa, and their general elections hold in a period of one year interval, making issues and discussions highly comparable on the basis of time. The paper generally assesses the role of the media in politics and democracy before narrowing down to elections, and of course placing emphasis on the new media.

The problematic is that many scholarly efforts have been invested on the media watchdog functions on democracy, but neither election as the soul of democracy, nor the form of the media that is more active towards it has received ample attention. So, this chapter will among other things determine the extent to which the media plays its watchdog role by informing and educating people on elections, and which, between the digital media and the traditional mass media, has more potency on the people when it comes to influencing elections in contemporary times. While doing this, we shall also address how the media has contributed to successful conducts of elections and the overall development of democracy in the two countries taken for comparison. After that we give recommendations on which the new media in the two countries can positively influence each other not only for the purpose of election on which the paper focuses, but also on the political development of the two countries in general.

The chapter then intends to respond to the questions of whether South Africans, more than Nigerians, relied on the media more than other institutions for political knowledge and information in their 2015 and 2014 general elections; whether South Africans, more than Nigerians, used the new media for political knowledge and information in 2015 and 2014 and, on the last note, whether

peoples' use of the media for political knowledge and information in 2015 and 2014, increased electoral participation in South Africa more that in Nigeria.

In what follows, therefore, there is, at first, a political history of both Nigeria and South Africa which is followed by a broad, generic exploration of scholarly positions on the relationship between the media and politics, then democracy. This narrows down to the particular case of elections, both in the generic sense and in the two countries.

The Political History of South Africa and Nigeria

The political history of South Africa, particularly within the context of elections, will most accurately be traced back to 31st May 1910 when the Union of South Africa was created. That was byvirtue of the Imperial Parliament's South Africa Act of 1909. At this time, the lower house of the newly created Parliament of South Africa, that is, the House of Assembly,together with the provincial councilswas elected by first-past-the-post voting in single-member electoral divisions. Taole (2005) observes that initially in this election, there were different qualifications in different provinces as the franchise was the same as that for the lower houses in the four colonies that had formed the Union.

This was followed by the enfranchisement of the poor whites and the white women in 1930 when the National Party government of J. B. M. Hertzog passed the Women's Enfranchisement Act,that extended to all white women over the age of 21, the right to vote and be voted for. This development contagiously led to the Franchise Laws Amendment Act that lifted the property and literacy requirements for white male voters in the Cape and Natal, just a year after, and with this development all white citizens of South Africa who had become 21 years at least became enfranchised. According to Taole (2005:17), "as the exclusion of women and the literacy and property qualifications continued to apply to non-white voters, these acts had the effect of diluting their electoral power by more than doubling the number of white voters." This was going to create a landmark political history in which the first female Member of Parliament, Leila Reitz,was elected in the

general elections of 1933 as representative of Parktownfor the South African Party.

Between 1936 and 1948, the segregationist elections were held. In 1936, there was segregation of black voters as the Hertzog government enacted the Representation of Natives Act that eliminated the black voters from the common voters' rolls, placing them separately on what was called the "native voters' rolls". This was, however, repealed in 1959 following series of agitations in which the press played very significant roles. In 1948, the National Party engaged in a policy of removing colored voters in a similar manner to black voters, and the Parliament in 1951 passed the Separate Representation of Voters Act, removing four members of parliaments.

A whites-only kind of referendum was held in 1960 to decide the possibility and modality of South Africa becoming a republic. This was popularly known as the Republic Referendum, and the republic eventually emerged in 1961, removing the remaining black representation. The political alignments and realignments that followed gave birth to the Tricameral Parliament in 1983. A referendum had been held on constitutional reform leading to the formation of the Tricameral Parliament, which consisted of three separate houses to represent the whites, the colored and the Indian South Africans.

The Interim Constitution was enacted as negotiations continued for the eradication of apartheid. The interim constitution introduced the non-racial universal suffrage, and adopted the party-list proportional representation in place of the first-past-the-post voting system, which is that in which voters indicate on a ballot the candidate of their choice, and the candidate who receives most votes wins election. This made it possible for all races in South Africa to take part in the elections of 1994, the first fully democraticand multi-party exercise which became the founding principles of the 1996 Constitution of South Africa. The new constitution guarantees the right of all citizens to vote as contained in the Bill of Rights and it has guided the conduct of elections and politics till 2014.

For Nigeria, one can moderately trace electioneering politics back to 1959 as struggles became intense on which party or parties would control political power in the immediate post colonial period. The keen competition led to a situation in which major political parties controlled majority of seats in their different regions with none of them having enough votes to constitute government at the national level. With this, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) formed a coalition government which provided a measure of north-south consensus that could have been difficult if the Action Group had been second to NPC. With this arrangement the NCNC's Nnamdi Azikiwe became the Governor General and the NPC's Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Prime Minister.

Then came the 1964 general elections which had to be conducted independent of the Britons. It was a competition between the Nigerian National Alliance that was formed by the NPC and NNDC, and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) made up of the NCNC, the AG, and their allies. The 1979 general elections ushered in the Second Republic which produced Alhaji Shehu Shagari as the first executive president of Nigeria. This was followed by the 1983 elections which reproduced Alhaji Shehu Shagari before General Muhammadu Buhari-led military coup returned Nigeria to square one. The military ruled till 1993 when another general (presidential) election took place but was annulled. It wasnot until 1999 that other elections were held to return Nigeria to civil rule. This was followed by the 2003 elections.

The 2007 general elections produced Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Jonathan Goodluck as President and vice–president respectively. Held between April 14 and 21,2007, it became significant for witnessing handover of power from one elected civilian government to another. Akinwalere (2012) says the 2007 elections, perhaps, illustrated the crudest manifestations of all that has ever been wrong with elections in Nigeria, in terms of the extent and magnitude of poor, fraudulent conduct and conflict-ridden nature of electoral politics. From ballot box snatching and stuffing, manipulation of the party nomination process and imposition of

candidates; down to incumbent executive interference in all aspects of the electoral process, electoral fraud aided and abetted by high echelons of the election management body, use of security agencies by incumbents to intimidate opponents and ensure/ assure electoral 'victory', and use of thugs to interfere with the electoral process. The impunity with which these dastardly acts were committed was overwhelming, and Nigerians and friends of Nigeria in the international community were so disgusted with what happened that, virtually in unison, they demanded for reforms to bring about free, fair and credible elections.

It was generally established that the electoral commission in Nigeria identified significant lessons learnt from the past elections and factored them into the preparations for the conduct of another one which came in April 2011. The elections of 2015 followed, and this changed leadership of Nigeria from the Peoples Democratic Party to the newly formed All Progressives Congress which is in charge of the country till date.

The basis for comparison between Nigeria and South Africa is clear. Both are the biggest economies as well as two of the biggest democracies in Africa.Their general elections which have evolved from the period of colonialism till the present, incidentally hold in a period of one year interval, making issues and discussions highly comparable on the basis of theme and time.

Politics, Democracy and the Media

It is well established in literature that the media play a key role in democracy. The media perform the role of a 'watchdog' through provision of information to the democratic society, and, to another extent, they stand as a forum representing views and opinions of citizens. Today, all over the world, people rely almost solely on newspapers, television, the internet and the radio as their main sources of information and knowledge. Such information they need in sports, education, business, health and especially politics- which connects everyone directly and indirectly is obtained primarily from the media (Miller 2014). It is, therefore, difficult, if not impossible to operate without the media in the modern world, whether in a democratic society or otherwise. Neustadt (2008)

holds that in the age of modernity, it is not possible to hold any intelligent discussion on democracy if the roles played by print and electronic media are ignored, especially, in terms of disseminating concrete and important information to the political public.

Whenever there is any innovation in the media, the public evaluates its potentiality towards improving democratic politics, and media professionals are often judged based on their disposition to democratic values. Of worthy note is that gladiatorial politicians, campaigners and political activists reach their large target audiences thorough the media, so, the absolutist position of the indispensability of the media in democracy cannot but gain a certain degree of understanding. This suggests why it is stated that "following the creation of electronic media in the twentieth century, the connections between democracy, political campaigns, public opinion, and journalistic practices have become the focus of great attention and anxiety among communication scholars" (Encyclopedia .com).

This is also why, since the 17th century, philosophers and rulers alike have given due recognition to the media as what Colonel (2015) calls the "Fourth Estate" that creates forum for debates and discussions of issues that affect the public. This notion significantly endures all over the world in spite of the porosity, sensationalism and superficiality introduced by the social media, and the notion that the media serve as the watchdog, "guardian of the public interest, and a conduit between governors and the governed remains deeply ingrained" (Colonel 2015, p.2).

Indeed, the linkage of democracy to the media is as old as the beginning of the use of liberal democratic theory in Europe, at least as an intellectual exercise. In the era of the 17th century, John Milton's *Aeropagitica* advanced an argument towards the need for encouragement of free discussion as a panacea to rejecting falsehood and illogical opinions, and, subsequently towards building knowledge based on truth. In the United States of America, the idea of media importance was enshrined in the Bill of Rights and attracted impacts when the First Amendment to the constitution was made. Today, the duo of media and democracy continue to

attract serious discourse, and, in the words of Edelman (1988, 27), this is, "...in part because of frustration with the early Federalists which made Thomas Jefferson and other anti-Federalists some passionate defenders of the free press in the early days of the American republic". Similarly, English philosopher John Stuart Mill advanced a very convincing argument in support of free speech and a free press in democratic politics, asserting that when people are silenced, truth is suppressed and errors are expressed in the political system.

In not up to two centuries has the modern media been able to disseminate up-to-date political information to the public, and this is largely due to the technological advancements witnessed globally to affect both print and the electronic media. Then, as Jürgen Habermas (1962) reveals, the increase in the political awareness of the public in America and Europe has a fundamental connection to the development of the media. In these societies, not only did people accept news reported by newspapers, for example, their opinions were shaped by them.

However, as newspapers continued to depend on commercial advertising for their survival, the proverbial saying of he who pays the piper dictates the tune began to apply, and newspaper editorial policies and journalistic practices began to get increasingly tainted by the yearnings and aspirations of those who control the greatest financial resources. Habermas concludes that this makes "wealthy individuals or those who control wealth have more influence over public opinion and, ultimately, over what policies are changed than do members of the lower and middle classes" (1962, 11). This created a pool of scholars who have expressed some worries about the fact that the heavy reliance on the modern media on governmental sources of information might lead in some cases to less scrutiny and criticism of governmental policies; in addition to the economic forces that might distort public debate. Indeed, as scholars continue to theorize about the link between democracy and the media throughout the twentieth century, high emphasis has been placed on the extent of media effects, especially in response to the speed and manner in which governments

of nations produced propaganda during the first and the second world wars.

Nonetheless, there is hardly any of the foregoing opinions that will not agree that the media represent an information tool and forum for discussion of issues, assertion of positions and even ventilation of anger. There is no doubt that a truly democratic society requires citizens' participation, and that a diligent media has the capacity of keeping citizens engaged in the business of governance, prompt them to take action--the entire virtue upon which democracy is built-- and when, for instance, the media provide the public with some information in making informed choices such as who to vote for and which policies should be supported or opposed, the media can then be said to be playing a a watchdog role.

In addition, there is, at least a role of the media that can be considered most obvious and common. The media report news and give information on politics, sports, war and peace to all of us in the general public. One will consider this as the most important role of the media, especially in a democratic setting where every activity seems to, at least theoretically, focus on the citizens who are expected to play critical political roles and take crucial and informed decisions through the information available to them. It is expected, therefore, under this circumstance, that the media are professional and impartial when giving out information to the general public on political events and activities of the government within the political system.

Elections are critical in this regard. From the beginning of politicking to the declaration of interest down to the real contests and declaration of winners, the media are expected to maintain neutrality, professionalism and objectivity while educating the public. Indeed, "media coverage should be unbiased rather than favoring any one candidate or point of view in order for the voters to make informed decisions" (Dennis, 2009). In fact, Dennis asserts "political journalists can be especially helpful in this role. Many cover candidates and the elections as a full-time assignment but can provide both positive and negative glimpses into the candidate's

life" (2009, 102).

When the media serve as watchdog they protect the general-public from incompetent political aspirants and mediocre officials by exposing their details through the press. Elchahabi (2015) exemplifies how this has worked:

> Think for a moment about the Benghazi, Libya, attacks and ensuing investigation. In September of 2012, U.S. diplomatic offices were attacked, leaving four Americans dead. The coverage regarding what Secretary of State Hillary Clinton knew and when she knew it continually overshadowed her possible presidential candidacy. This is an example of watchdog media (2015, 8).

Even when exposures have nothing to do with corruption and some evil doings, the media still protect the public by providing information on the successes, strengths and weaknesses of election candidates, their political parties, election officials and their practices. This watchdog function educates the public on the past performances of political personalities and officials in politics, and it obviously helps in holding politicians and their political parties accountable to the political public.

As earlier indicated, the media provide a platform for registering people's voices by allowing candidates and their political parties to communicate their electoral promises and campaigns to the general public. This is often done through provision of debate forums where candidates are invited to present their manifestoes to the public. With this the media impact our political views and color our opinions, and they directly or indirectly shape our electoral and general political behavior through the information that their different platforms provide.

While the media do this on the part of gladiatorial politics, they also simultaneously provide a platform for the public to convey their political thoughts and feelings towards the candidates who have used the media forums to reach them. Strong writers, columnists and opinion leaders used to do this. At present, however, it is done mostly in the social media. Whichever way it is done, and through whatever means, the media also promote the voice of the people by giving them some open forums for debate, discussion, analysis, criticism and appraisals. This is what strikes the balance.

An example of such situation is provided by Castalls (2012):

> During an election for example, a popular television station can hold presidential debates to present the thoughts and programs of candidates to the public. After that, it can encourage viewers to submit comments, questions and topics on issues they want the candidates to address but that did not occur due to the reason of time during the live broadcast. Such comments, questions and topics could be submitted using the email, the Facebook or the twitter. Through a practice of this nature, "the public can communicate opinions and concerns with one another and even with the candidates and the government. In this way, the media provide an interactive experience for the voters. The audience can be participants rather than simply viewers...

However, in spite of the foregoing plethora of roles and functions that the media play in developing political system, especially a democracy, a great deal of controversy exists amongst scholars on whether the mass media actually promote or destroy democracy. This is where the idea of media malaise theory originated from, and advocates of the theory claim that "because mass media in established democracies mostly operate according to market principles, they disregard their democratic duties, thereby inflicting serious repercussions on democracy; causing apathy, cynicism and ignorance with regard to politics among citizens" (Curra, and Cohen et al 2014, p.4).

Propounded in 1976 by Robinson, and expectedly attracting many amendments as it tested the intellectual grounds, the media malaise theory has most of the researches conducted on it in the United States, giving room for different schools within it. There are theorists within the media malaise tradition who completely blame the television for the malaise (Becker, Whitney, Patterson) for instance, while others subscribe more to the generic view rather than blame one aspect of the media (Bennet, Rhine and Newton).

Irrespective of the different traditions discussed in the foregoing, the Malaise Theory essentially presupposes that the way media covers news or disseminates information to the public is antithetical to the interest of the general public and the society as a whole. In doing so, the Media Malaise theory emphasizes the

political realm, claiming that the media have been rendered as an instrument for declining public trust, creating political skepticism, cynicism as well as apathy etc. Evidence can be traced to the predominant interest of the press today on sensational issues such as scandal, conflict, deaths, fatal errors and dramatic situations to attract their audience's attention: the scenario of "Only Bad News is News". This is increasingly so in today's vast world where newsmakers have to compete to survive in a capitalist society. Media Malaise will assert that the media do not give a fair coverage to the existing stories as a fresh and bigger story is searched. Specifically, when the world wide news is covered, it instantly generates a breakthrough where only constant points are put forward without adequate explanation of the details. This often creates a pool of confusion in the society (Curran et al. 2014).

It is difficult to ignore the negative impact of this scenario on politicians and the politics they play. As demonstrated in the case of the United States general elections of 2016, politicians often attack their opponents and do negative things rather than acting positively in order to have more publicity. This underplays the positive aspects of their politics and the good work they do often go untold. From the point of view of the Media malaise theory, this situation creates a constant ambience of mistrust and cynicism; along with such a negative vibe that disrupts, if not destroy the political environment. A study conducted in the United Kingdom found that the period before the elections is often full of such political news and reports that stress the populace and create tension in the polity. People then usually tend to avoid such news and reports by temporarily avoiding newspapers and some television stations. As this scenario tends to make the politicians less accountable to the public, it also, on the other hand, has damaging effect on political participation which is the foundation of democracy. Inevitably also, it affects the quality of public life and stability of the political system.

However, in contrast to the Media Malaise Theory there is the Mobilization Perspectives to the Media, with both theoretical orientations making attempts to assess the role of the media in dual

contrast manner. Adherents of the 'mobilisation' perspective insist that the Media Malaise theorists are quite unrealistic in their expectation of the media. Though they appear to be in minority compared to the Media Malaiseisits, the Mobilizationists feel that the society does not contain such thing as objectivity, but is constantly responding to what is wanted and needed; after all, it is only the news that people love to read or hear that should ordinarily be sent to them. That, on its own, the Mobilizationists will argue, is what makes the media democratic and responsive to the needs of the people. What they, mobilization theorists, perceive to be more realistic is that people should assess the media based on the ample information they provide to the public and leave the rest for the ability of the public to sieve. In other words, what the mobilization theorists will conclude is that media coverage of politics and electoral campaigns does not have significant influence on behaviours of the public; it is the other way round **(**Strömbäck and Shehata 2010)**.**

But if media coverage of political issues and dissemination of political information have little or no influence on the attitudes and behaviors of the citizens, one can assume that people should be less worried about the quality and authenticity of news as well as attention that people pay to the media. To test the reverse, if media coverage of politics and political campaigns has a moderately potent influence on the attitudes and behaviors of the general public, it requires a very meticulous review to protect democracy and the rule of law, and, if possible, the regulation of the media by the governments of nations. What is historical, and which must be stated at this juncture, is that scholars, at one period of history or the other, have maintained the position that the effect that the media has on their political audiences are quite indirect and insignificant; or that, on the other hand, the media exerts a potent, and highly significant influence on their audiences. While the debate continues and is unlikely to end at any time soon, the vast majority of contemporary scholarship will not deny the fact that the media will continue to have some form of influence on the general public and their political behavior.

But, again one must ask, does the quality of the media and its information actually affect the quality of democracy? This is another one million dollar question that has generated debate and responses over the years, and it is best answered by the findings that here follow. As it happens, countries with a higher degree of media performance show higher levels of political participation and less corruption. They also tend to have a more lively civil society, and elected representatives seem to reflect the preferences of citizens more adequately. These findings illustrate that media performance is clearly related to at least some aspects of the functioning of a democratic regime. Therefore, given its relevance to democracy, it can be concluded that the discussion over whether the media fall short of, or fulfil the normative demands imposed on them is highly significant. This questions the general and sweeping assumptions that both the 'media malaise' and the 'mobilization theories' make about the state of media and democracy. Ultimately, both perspectives could benefit from considering comparative empirical evidence that distinguishes between different aspects of media performance and their influence on different elements of democracy (Castells, 2007).

Media in Nigeria and South Africa

The media have developed in Nigeria and South Africa right from the periods of colonialism, and have played critical roles in the political development of the two countries. In South Africa, media partnered with the people to fight segregationist policies and prepare grounds for democratization (Kasoma, 1988). As this was done in South Africa and indeed the entire South, especially in Zambia (Kasoma, 1986), same was going on in West Africa as the press vehemently battled against military dictatorship that overtook most of the countries. Whilst tracing the development of media activities in the politics of Nigeria since the colonial period till the military era, Seng and Hunt (2006) conclude that for Nigeria, political development was more of war of the press than of protests and social movements. Thus, as far as South Africa and Nigeria are concern, the media in the two countries have not been found wanting in their watchdog roles.

Shelly (2010, 16) however declares that "The advent of digital media has turned the media landscape upside down. The news cycle moves at lightning speed, thanks to live tweeting, blogging and citizen journalism, all unknown just a few years ago". In a bid to stay relevant, Shelly further asserts, practitioners are fast adapting to the ways and methods of the new media, especially that aspect which allows interactiveness and feedback mechanism.

This has been more critical in Africa where the task of the media rests in the bulk of institutionalization and deepening of democracy. Since the media, both conventional and new, play a critical role in social equilibrium, peoples all over the world rely on the media for credible information that can in turn provoke informed and civil debates that will ultimately transform their societies. This was and has been the role of the media in Nigeria and South Africa.

A Note on the New Media

The phrase 'new media', can trace its popularity to a 2005 conference which drew attention to the conversation surrounding the future of e-government and the role that social media, new media and online communication would play. It is a drastic and dramatic movement from the print and electronic media to the use of the internet which Tambini (1999) calls "the third sphere", and where communication now goes away from the control of the state; where it is free from the bound of commerce and has become a platform where free public deliberations occur.

The following interaction of Thomas Keenan presents an interesting way of establishing the concept of the new media. Cited in Chun and Keenan (2006), it presents a simplistic and interactive way of understanding the phenomenon:

> When I explore the web, I follow the cursor, a tangible sign of presence implying movement. This motion structures a sense of liveliness, of immediacy, of the now. I open up my "personalized" site at MSNBC: via "instant" traffic maps (which, the copy tells me, "agree within a minute or two" to real time), synopses of "current" weather conditions, and individualized news bits, the Web site repeatedly foregrounds its currency, its timeliness, its relevance to me. A frequently changing tickertape scroll bar updates both headlines and stock quotes, and a flashing

> target floats on my desktop, signaling "breaking news" whenever my PC's on, whether or not a Web browser is open. The numerous polls or surveys that dot MSNBC's electronic landscape (they're called "live votes") promise that I can impact news in an instant; I get the results right away, no need to wait for the 10 p.m. broadcast. Just click. Immediate gratification. (Chun and Keenan, 2006, p.201)

The invention of the internet has over the years given a new dimension to the operation of the media. The internet provides some form of unparalleled avenue to the generality of people trained and untrained, to disseminate information quickly and cheaply across the world. Some scholars describe the availability of the new media as a way of compensating the people with alternative means of democratizing their opinion, having for decades suffered from media monopolies orchestrated by the ownership of traditional media forms by very few commerce oriented, large companies which have frustrated the diversity of opinions that are expressed in established media in order to aid democracy (Muller 2014). The free use of the web for information dissemination, however, implies that news read therein cannot be deemed reliable as they may be posted by ill-informed, untrained persons and sometimes robots. Muller adds that "while some political observers have discussed the potential of internet voting and campaign material distribution to rejuvenate interest in voting and in political activism, others have argued that the tendency of internet websites to engage in shallow political humor and parody is more likely to foster cynicism than to combat it" (2014, 17). Indeed, the rapid development of the Internet and its proliferation of use all over the world is a big concern.

But the use of the social media via websites platforms has expanded the frontier of political knowledge and information dissemination and, according to Bokor (2014), has led to a major paradigm shift from the old to the new media with almost unimaginable changes in both the way information content is received as opposed to sent (cited in Pavlik and McIntosh 2011, p.68). Bokor (2014, 11) adds that "The old media provided a unidirectional model of flow of information, a sort of one-way communication that is largely centralized and devoid of facilities by which

the audience interact with one another on the information they receive". This is what the newspapers, the magazines, the television, the radio, telegraphy, telephony, photography and all sorts do. However, with social media instruments such as the Facebook, the Twitter and the Pinterest through which users are able to desire and share with both selected and general audience, the new media "radically break the connection between physical place and social place, making physical location much less significant for our social relationships" (Croteau and Hoynes 2003, p.311).

Internet and Social Media Use in Nigeria and South Africa

All over the world, more and more people are making use of the internet, both in and outside of the work settings; and this activity is growing at geometric progression. As at November 2016, the figure of global Internet active users was 3,495,349,351 (Berners-Lee, 2016). Statista (2017) reported that as at April 2017, the global figure of Internet active users was 3.81 billion, while 2.91 billion were social media users and still counting. This means global Internet active users are now over the 3 billion mark equaling 51% global population (Statista, 2017). Berners-Lee (2016) and Kemp (2016) contended that number of internet users equaled 46% global population.

By 2016, total users of the Internet in Nigeria were over 86 million (86,219,965) while in South Africa, they were over 28 million (28,580,290) – more than half the population in both countries. In another account, Internetworldstats (2017) recorded that by March 2017, total users of the Internet in Nigeria were over 93 million (93,591,174) while in South Africa, they were over 28 million (28,580,290). Also, global statistics show that more than half of planet earth now owns a mobile phone, with Internet and social media access exceeding 3.6 billion (Kemp, 2014). Mobile social media use is also on the rise with 2.31 billion social media users, delivering 31% global population (Kemp, 2016) and with 77% of all social networking users now accessing via mobile devices (Berners-Lee, 2016). In South Africa alone, over a quarter of all South Africans - 13 million people - now use Facebook (Statista, 2016).

Since the inception of the Internet and integration of email

technology into personal and work lives, ways of communicating began to change. However, it was not until the creation of social media interfaces like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp, Badoo, Snapchat, MySpace, LinkedIn, YouTube and other similar applications that we started seeing such a massive harnessing of the potential of the now-pervasive online connectivity in our everyday lives.

Media and Elections

There is little need repeating the role of elections in democracy. In fact, election is so much of a pillar of democracy that a scholar has equated the two (Bidson, 2004). Elections are a major democratic exercise in which the media can contribute positively or otherwise. In a way, the influence of traditional patrons, parties and institutions (like churches) on the electoral process is fast diminishing as the society becomes increasingly modern and the media becomes ever more pervasive. Gladiatorial politicians and political parties do their campaigns and advocacy through the mediaand this has some economic implications as electioneering campaigns are increasingly getting expensive in many countries. The cost of television and newspaper advertisement is colossal, and it often accounts for the largest budget of elections. This is because candidates that are well-funded often stand a good chance of being elected because, in the words of Coronel (2015), "they can buy air time and newspaper space, and, in some countries...also bribe journalists and editors who endorse their candidacies in various ways using various strategies".

As one strong pillar of democracy, the media play an imperative role in influencing political discourse in the period of elections. In a participatory democracy, almost all citizens get their news and information from the media. The media colours people's observation and subsequently process their political information about coverage of elections. The traditional media (print and broadcast), for instance can foster transparency and balance dissemination of important electoral information. The new media, on the other hand, provides additional means and possibilities for citizens to participate, acquire information and share knowledge. That is

what one sees in the functions of such internet sources as social media sites, blogs, email and other new platforms. Combined, the traditional and new media play the all important roles of watch-dog and platform for campaign and avenue for public debates during elections (Elchahabi, Samer, 2015).

Media Performance in Different Countries

Performance of the media differs from one country to the other, especially when measured through the yardsticks of information dissemination, being a watchdog, and education of the public that have been exhaustively discussed above (Norris, 2000). Not very many social scientists, especially political scientists and sociologists will be surprised with this because of their taken for granted knowledge that the character of every state or society will inevitably color the behavior of institutions and structures found in it (Kari, 2013). Suffice to say that the nature and character of a state determine the performance or otherwise of the media in that state. These nature and character in question have to do with the emergence of the state.

Alfan (2013) asserts that the mass media provide a structure of the dominant class in every society. It is used to disseminate their values to the entire society through hegemonic means, and that is why the character of the dominant class would necessarily color that of the media. Muller (2014) did a comparison of democratic media performance in about forty five countries which reveals a considerable variation with different patterns identified. Muller observes that "Although some countries may be ascribed a higher overall degree of media performance than others...It seems that optimizing both media functions at the same time is only feasible up to a certain point. Countries perform badly or moderately on both functions, or outstandingly on just one of the functions" (2014, 5).

In a nutshell, the younger democratic states within the sample generally lag behind (especially the Eastern European, Asian and Latin American cases, but also some Southern European countries), while different patterns of media performance can be observed with respect to the more mature democracies. Muller adds that

theextent of political information provided by the media, what he calls "the vertical function", appears to be well entrenched among Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian countries and then Japan, while the Anglo Saxon countries, the United States of America notably, are generally rated the worst when it comes to media performance. On the contrary, however, the ability of the media to represent the public sphere at all times appears to be better entrenched in Austria, Germany, Switzerland and a host of other central-western European countries. In the final analysis, Muller's patterns, which are premised upon content and structural consideration as well as the structural and the content levels, expressly reveal that "a country's performance on the structural level has an impact on its performance on the content level, thereby suggesting that the two levels are not independent of each other. The systemic conditions that media outlets operate in also appear to influence their news coverage" Muller (2014, 5-6).

Analysis of How South Africans and Nigerians used the Media in the 2014 and 2015 General Elections

As earlier declared, this chapter focuses on the extent to which the media play their watchdog role by informing and educating people on elections. It also tries to address which, between the digital media and the traditional mass media, has more influenceon the people when it comes to elections in contemporary times. It also addresses how the media have contributed to successful conduct of elections and the overall development of democracy in Nigeria and South Africa based on the two general elections of the two countries. Put differently, effort is targeted towards establishing the extent to which the media performed the watchdog roles during these elections, and which form of the media did the subject matter of media as watchdog during elections through primary gathered from respondents. The actual work done in the data gathering was an exploration of the disposition of Nigerians and South Africans towards the media and during the elections of 2014 in South Africa and 2016 in Nigeria.

Limitations

Time was a major constraint in this study, considering what

is required to compare the scenarios of the two large countries involved. This limitation made the researchers restrict the study to Lagos, Nigeria and Mafikeng, South Africa. Sampling carried out in the two locations was augmented with an in-depth analysis of literature in the foregoingbefore arriving at conclusions. In other words, the quantitative part of the study was conducted in the University of Lagos, Nigeria, and the North West University, Mafikeng, South Africa. The research investigated the relationship and experience that people had with the old and new media in the general elections of their countries. In this, reading of newspaper and using tweeters, Facebook and other online sources are actively involved. This inevitably restricts the audience to the educated ones, and explains the choice of universities as location.

Sampling Procedure and Size

The researchers adopted probability method, and used the systematic sampling procedure in which every tenth person within the stream of people available on the two campuses were intervlewed through the questionnaires. This enabled the researchers to attract respondents that cut across categories of the educated people. Two hundred questionnaire copies were separately distributed in Nigeria and South Africa. Nigeria had a higher return of 167 while South Africa was 156. Perhaps due to the simple nature of the questionnaire, and the fact that the researchers persuaded respondents to fill in the questionnaireon the spot, all instruments filled in and submitted were valid.

TABLE 1.1. BIOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

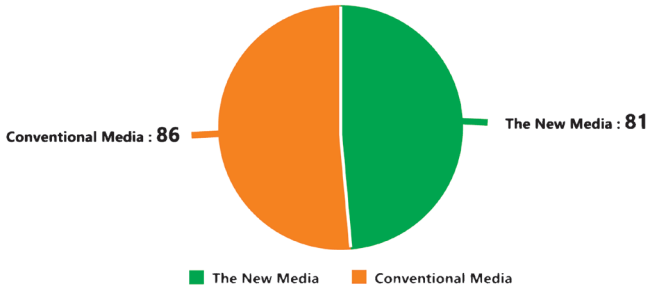
Country	Male	Female	Popular Religions	Other Religions	Rural Resid.	Urban Resid.	Students	Workers
Nigeria	104	93	160	7	29	138	142	25
South Africa	97	59	117	39	40	116	111	45

From responses generated from the questionnaire, all respondents used the media for their political knowledge and informa-

tion, both in Nigeria and in South Africa. They relied on media information on such issues as profiles of the contesting candidates and their political parties, date of elections at different levels, why participating in the elections is necessary, and giving their own opinions on an array of issues regarding the elections. As a result of this, the researchers take absolutevalue because the number of the questionnaire copies validly returned differed in the two countries.

A total of 81 respondents from Nigeria received and relied on elections information from the new media sources such as the Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp while the rest 86 relied more on the conventional media: newspapers, radio and television. In South Africa, 134 respondents got and relied on elections information through the new media such as the Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp while the rest 22 relied more on the conventional media: newspapers, radio and television.

Media Use in Nigeria

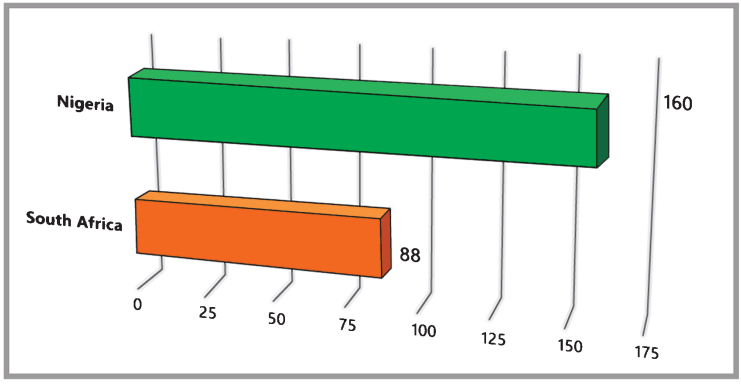


Use of the media for political knowledge and information in 2015 and 2014, increased electoral participation in South Africa more that in Nigeria.

160 out of the 167 respondents in Nigeria agreed that the use of the new media increased their participation in the 2015 elections, while in South Africa, only 88 out of the 156 so agree. Extra comments added under the questionnaire reveal a high degree of disillusionment on the part of South Africans towards the attitudes

of politicians who contested during the elections. This disagrees with the line of argument that "Peoples' use of the media for political knowledge and information in 2015 and 2014 increased electoral participation in South Africa more than in Nigeria**.**

Participation in Elections of 2014 and 2016 due to Media Use



Discussion of Findings

As earlier stated, discussions from the foregoing findings will be supplemented by analysis of literature to arrive at conclusions. The above responses to questionnaires indicate that

1. Nigerians and South Africans use, as well as partner with the media as watchdog in democracy and the entire polity. This was also true during the last general elections of 2015 and 2014.

2. While both Nigerians and South Africans rely more on the new media for political information during elections, South Africans rely more on the new media than Nigerians. This might not be unconnected to better availability of electricity and internet technology in South Africa compared to Nigeria, and it provides another area that demands research inquiry.

3. That while generally the use of the media increased political participation among Nigerians and South Africans alike, as far as the 2014 elections are concerned in South Africa, a high level of disillusionment and seeming apathy greeted the participation of

the people. High number of South Africans got information and monitored processes of the 2014 elections through the media but this did not manifest in high participation in the elections. What this implies is that using the media for political purposes does not on its own contribute to increased political participation; other dominant issues at stake in the polity appear to be more potent. In Nigeria, for instance, the issues of insecurity, economic depression and corruption provoked high level of participation among the people, irrespective of the lower use of the new media due to the problem of electricity. What was at stake in South Africa in 2014 was totally different, and even with the higher use of the new and the old media compared to Nigeria, a lower participation in the election was recorded.

4. While the above is true, it does not necessarily mean a significant improvement in the political development of the two countries under study. The idea insinuated by this, that politicians, once elected into the office, hardly ever follow the programs and promises upon which they are elected, is virtually manifested in the two countries today under Presidents Buhari and Jacob Zuma. This is subject to debatethough.

To discuss the above in line with literature, it is noteworthy that many scholars: Bennett and Entman (2001), Coleman and Blumler (2009), Hindman (2009), Norris (2001), Shane (2004), and Wilhelm (2000), have earlier studied the connection between politics and the new media, as against the conventional or the analogue media. Of them all, Coleman and Blumler (2009) attempted to highlight the pros and cons of the Internet vis a vis how it will influence the future relationship between general citizens and political gladiators, and between the two and the entire political system. That being stated, almost all of the foregoing scholars have some optimistic assurance that the new media and the Internet would foster a deeper relationship between citizens and politicians; without stating the exact dimension of the relationship though; but the optimism changed as most of these researchers observe that with the new media, the result is states' loss of control over information dissemination, and general reduction of interests in

general politics, as well as how unequal access to the Internet would imply unequal access to political information.

From the forgoing one can expressly deduce that the new media now occupy a conspicuous and strategic space in the realm of politics, especially by significantly altering how the general public receive and consume information. Of all spheres of politics in which the new media may have effect, elections as one of the most important structures of democracy remains outstanding, and this is what this chapter has focused on. The question can then be put: How did political parties in South Africa use the new media in the 2014 national election, starting from campaign to declaration of winners?

Swanson and Mancini (1996) observe that of all periodic activities in a democracy, election periods remain the most critical and fundamental, as far as democracy is concerned. This is the period when stakeholders and political parties present the best of their strategies and programs to the public as a prelude to the latter's vote for or against the party in what determines selection of decision makers, shapes policies and re-allocates power and resources within the political system.

The new media make a great impact on voters and what they expect from parties they vote or do not vote for. In the past, all information needed about parties and their candidates were obtained at political rallies, party advocates, radio, televisions and newspapers.With the new media now, however, there is a remarkable increase in the use of the Internet as an information source, upon which majority of the people now regularly rely as source of information that is often needed to take informed political decisions. During electioneering campaigns, the new media play a very important role in creating public awareness over the position, history and integrity level of candidates; as well as their campaign strategies, plans and positions. Apart from that, the media give clues to the general public about the ideological orientations - if any- of political parties and their candidates, after all, as declared Funkhouser (1973, 12), "the average person takes the media's word for what the 'issues' are, whether or not he personally has

any involvement or interest in them". In their study, Williams and Gulati (2008) analyzed the impact of new media on electoral outcome and summarize that online campaign activity is an important additional indicator of candidate viability that is independent of traditional measures like expenditures, media coverage and organizing activities. As further analyzed by Williams and Gulati (2008), the aspect of online campaign is another important aspect of the new media; that if a candidate has a well integrated and clear packaging, through online campaigning he or she is likely to generate a huge positive response.

This study has indeed established the potency of the media as a watchdog in democracy. It has also shown that the new media are fast overtaking the traditional one in playing the role of watchdog. From the two countries studied, the watchdog function of the media, when performed, has the potency of increasing political participation of the people, as is expected of any democracy, but this does not place the people in the control of their governments because politicians in the two countries still find a way to deviate significantly from political promises and programmes once they get to the office. Based on this issue, it is high time that the media extend the watchdog role to very proactive levels where they can hold politicians accountable for their election promises without necessarily waiting for periodic elections. Exactly how this will be dome is unknown yet and can form a basis of new research in the media, but somehow it has to be done in order to add significant value to the role of the media as watchdog in a democracy.

Ultimately, evidences from the study throw up the conclusion that the media in both countries under study are indeed watchdogs, not captured. This is without prejudice to the issues of relativity and grades as the level of advancement of media use differs between Nigeria and South Africa. In spite of the difference in levels, peoples of the two countries partner with the media on political knowledge and political information, and they are quite proactive in giving feedbacks and acting politically based on the information they receive from and send to the media.

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13

CONCLUSION: Glancing Backwards, Looking Forward

Ayo Olukotun

The issues in focus

This chapter recapitulates by backward glances at the contributions of the scholars and brings together some of the issues that have been raised and analyzed within the context of the problematic alluded to by the title of the book, as to whether the Nigerian media have remained alert watchdogs of power or its lapdogs and captive praise singers. It then goes on by way of synthesis to broach scenarios as well as policy prescriptions to make what is undoubtedly, a far from healthy watchdog into a more robust and vigilant one.

It is no news but a staple, even cliché of our generation that ours is preeminently the age of the media. Illustratively, we can underline the statement by drawing attention to the growing, almost pervasive use of personal computers, rapid internet penetration in Nigeria and many African countries, spaces, which Castels (1997) once described as switch-off from the Information Superhigh-

way; the spreading use of smartphones, as well as digital forms of communication. In the United States, President Donald Trump has mainstreamed the deployment of social media, in particular, Twitter, to create a bully pulpit, as well as steer up controversies nationally and globally. Television is often described as the fifth Estate of the Realm while social media is seen by some as the sixth. Indeed the Italian sociologist, Castel, has argued in a seminar trilogy that the information technology revolution has introduced a new mode of production, which has bearing for wealth generation and importantly, for the distribution and exercise of power within nations and in the global community (Castels, 2000).

Obviously, this innovative development and media pervasiveness have differential impacts in the developed world and the developing nations of Africa. What the contributors to this book have sought to document and analyze is the way and manner in which the accelerating developments in media and communication are affecting as well being affected by political transitional changes in Nigeria's semi democracy. In particular and considering the exciting role of the media in bringing about democratic transitions in most African countries, including Nigeria, the book grapples with the question of how much the media in Nigeria–for comparative guidance, we also deal with Kenya, Ghana and South Africa – have contributed to the enlargement of the democratic space and civic discourse by holding elected leaders to minimum standards of accountability.

Revisiting the performance debate

The title of the book poses the issue, somewhat sharply, by raising the poser and question of whether the media have enabled our emerging democracy through their watchdog role or whether they have descended into a captive institution, the ventriloquist of the establishment, barking feebly but unable to bite. It should be noted that in Nigeria, the 1999 constitution, which compared to Ghana's 1992 constitution, is a bit too reticent on media freedom, nonetheless, mandates the media in Section 22 to monitor governance and to hold elected officials accountable to the electorate. The question, around which the book is organized, there-

fore, is not arbitrary, but one that derives from the constitutional responsibility of the media to play the role of an active watchdog of democracy. Anecdotally, one can illuminate the issues in focus by recalling that in a television program aired on Channels Television on 13th January, 2018, political economist scholar and public intellectual, Professor Pat Utomi alluded to a discussion on the role of the media by mentioning that that once vibrant institution has virtually gone to sleep. Utomi went on to rehash the view of a discussant who said that "Once I pick up a Nigerian newspaper, one of the main questions I am asking is who has paid for the stories that are published in it". This, of course, may be an exaggeration, but in the absence of opinion polls to determine just much the media has cascaded downwards in public esteem, it remains a rough and ready gauge of what some concerned intellectuals think about the media. In this respect, and as Lanre Idowu points out in his chapter, the media cannot afford to capsize to economic challenges to such an extent of becoming the butt of widespread cynicism and sardonic jokes about its performance.

To be sure, corruption of media is not peculiar to Nigeria or Africa; it is a global problem, which as a recent publication which looks at the issue in eighteen countries makes clear, is related to "government, unscrupulous politicians, overweening powers of corporations regularly brought to bear on newsrooms" (White, 2015:1). The issue, however, is whether corruption is pervasive enough in the Nigerian media to have rendered it a totally captive institution. As some chapters in the book suggest, the media in an age of recession have become individually and collectively vulnerable to seductive gratification. Nonetheless, it is possible to discern counter narratives to the story of unmitigated corruption especially in the quality press, which have been known to sack senior editorial personnel over allegations of corruption. The case referred to occurred at the *Punch* when the former Chairman, Mr Ajibola Ogunsola fired a senior editorial personnel. As Ogunsola told the story (Ikiebe 2015; 334):

> He was the chairman of the editorial board. We were at the meeting of the Nigerian Proprietor's Association (NPAN) in *Vanguard* which

> hadn't even started. We were having preliminary discussions in Uncle Sam Amuka's room. That was where I heard that there was this thing at Babangida's place and that the editors went including the editor of *Punch*. And I said it's not possible. And then I found out. The chairman, Editorial Board...

Obviously, therefore, and as the audacity and the integrity of the independently-owned Channels TV illustrates, the media and their performance cannot be fixed into one ugly strait-jacket of a corrupt and auctionable media. As the book demonstrates, the Nigerian media are increasingly keeping abreast of technological changes, as well as development in New Media with the rapid growth of the Online Media as well as the fact that virtually every newspaper and broadcast station has an online section which attempts to globalise their content to varying degrees. It can hardly be otherwise, considering that the presidency and the legislature these days not only appoint personnel for Social Media, but actively employ Facebook and Twitter to communicate with the citizenry. Hopefully, these developments will be all the more accelerated with the completion of the transition of the broadcast media in Nigeria from analogue to digital. The transition as well from a media in jaws of an authoritarian hangover vulnerable to the abuse of power by political authorities – as documented in the chapter by Prof. Ogbondah, to a freer and unfettered media needs to be completed. Nigeria continues to rank low on several human rights and press freedom charts and for virtually all the years between 1999 and 2016 is rated as partially free, while Ghana, for most of those years is rated free by the United States-based Freedom House.

In this regard, the passing of the Freedom of Information Act by the National Assembly in 2011, as documented by the chapter by Edaetan Ojo, created a momentum in this direction, although the indications are that journalists and civil society activists are not taking advantage of these potential, while most Nigerian political and public institution are yet to embrace the culture of openness, which the FOI canvasses. Nonetheless, the media in Nigeria are unlikely to succumb to the kind of censorship alluded to by Dr. Kimani in the chapter on Kenya. It is also interesting to note that

the competition in Nigeria for power and resources among large ethnic groups thus creates a balance of terror, which has prevented the emergence of one man or one party dictatorship and consequently, of overt clamping down on the media.

Talking about ethnic competition, the two chapters in the book that take up these important issues suggest that all too often the framing of ethno-religious conflicts by media in different geographical regions tend to stoke the fires of such conflicts rather than douse them. A watchdog media properly so called will be less susceptible to manipulation by politicians and partisan groups which seek to control the media narratives in periods of ethno-religious conflicts. Nigeria, as an unsteady federation, where the national question is often raised, has a long way to go in training journalists to do conflict-sensitive reporting, avoid the publication of hate speeches as well as counter the challenge of fake news, which has tended to increase with the proliferation of social media outlets. Obviously, associations such as the Nigeria Union of Journalists, the Nigerian Guild of Editors and the Newspaper Proprietors Association and the Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria have prominent roles to play in capacity building directed at media vulnerability to manipulation in times of ethno-religious conflicts and elections. In this connection, the statement made by former president, General Olusegun Obasanjo in August 2016 is of note: "Nigeria is increasingly polarised and divided along ethnic lines with the press fanning embers of division and separation." Considering that that the survival of the media is intertwined with the survival of the Nigerian nation state, the media themselves should create monitors, which can expose and limit the damage that can be done by inflammatory reporting and the promotion of sectarian and sectional interests by the media.

In other words, taking into account that the Nigeria 1999 Constitution explicitly mandates a national outlook and federal character by spelling out consociational remedies, the media while not submitting to self-censorship should consciously cultivate and promote trans-ethnic and inclusive mindsets and approaches that mainstream diversity reporting. As I have pointed out else-

where, the media, their constraints notwithstanding can act as the bell-whether of democracy and improved governance by drawing attention to issues of accountability, pushing government towards greater respect for human rights, including those of minorities and marginalized groups, exposing corruption and rent-seeking behaviors and by setting the agenda for public discourse in such way that captures these fundamental issues (Olukotun, 2000).

Before getting to policy recommendations, it is pertinent to mention that, as argued in the chapter on economic and technological issues the biting recession of the last couple of years has thrown the media, state and private, into more distress with the consequent mortality of media institutions as well as degeneration in the working condition of journalists. The media will not be taken seriously as long as they are reduced to a Begging-bowl syndrome in which they supplicate, either as individuals or as institutions for bailouts from the high and mighty. The increasing practice of putting journalists on the payroll of government and corporation for the purpose of media management can only result in a further deepening of the incorporation of journalists into national frameworks of spoils-sharing and distribution of the so-called national cake.

Policy prescriptions and recommendations

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the idea of the media as a healthy and robust watchdog connotes such activities as a scaling up of investigative journalism, exposures of scandals in high places, muckraking, as well as the maintenance of a vigil of sort over the activities of elected officials, undoubtedly, the quality press and sections of independent television have risen to the advocacy and watchdog billings of the media in the current period of democracy. Although these activities and orientation fall short of the magnificent anti-military role that the media once played, the flames of daring and investigative journalism continue to flicker now and again. Ready examples that come to mind include the united opposition of the press to General Obasanjo's Third Agenda which sought to elongate his rule illegally, the exposure of the derelict character of the Nigerian Police College, Ikeja, by Chan-

nels Television under the Jonathan Administration, the opposition to profligacy and squander mania of President Goodluck Jonathan years, as well as the insistence of a section of the media that the former Secretary to Government of the Federation, Mr. David Bachir Lawal must step aside because of his involvement in what has become known as the grass-cutting scandal, encapsulating the payment of millions of Naira for cutting grass at some of the internally displaced person camps in Borno State. Indeed, it is interesting to note that under the Buhari administration, which made the fight against corruption a flagship project, the Nigerian media have been active in extending the tepid borders and outlook of that agenda, especially in cases where government was reluctant to sanction unethical behavior on the part of its appointees. It has done this by the publication of front page news, as well as editorial opinions, which have made it difficult for government to backtrack on its own self-appointed role as the nation's official crusader.

Given that fact, it is difficult to uphold a verdict that the media have become a captured institution, though without doubt, the opportunities for self-actualisation within the multiplying bureaucracies of Nigeria's expensive democracy, the appointment of star journalists as information personnel, the poor pay and low self-esteem of journalists, the lack of human resource organisation and ethos within the media accentuated by the rapid collapse of media institutions have all resulted in cooptation of critical segment of society, the media especially, into Nigeria's notoriously corrupt governmental system. For a nation, which regularly features at the bottom league of Transparency International's tables, it is hardly surprising that corruption has increased in the media in the period under study. For example, Mr. Steve Ojo, one of the founders of private television in Nigeria argued that:

> There are a number of television stations that retain state governments as clients. In other words, any information those governors have, they have to cover them. Galaxy will not accept that. We will not be tied to the apron strings of anybody, including governors, because the point is this, if a governor retains you to promote him, how can you criticize his governance when he is not doing right? We balance our news and make sure we do not get money from anybody simply to survive (*The*

Punch, April 30, 2005, P.A24).

However, as indicated in other sections of the book, there are hopeful tendencies which portend that this is not a problem without solutions. Therefore, the media themselves must become more sensitive to corruption within their own ranks, so that they can be more credible when they subject other Estates of the Realm to critical scrutiny. The Freedom of Information Act remains an important step forward in enhancing the watchdog role of the media. To enhance its exciting possibilities, it is suggested that the media should submit regularly requests for information to public institutions and private entities covered by the Act, and thereafter document and report on their experiences on how much relevant institutions satisfy the requirements of the Law. They should also carry out a systematic assessment of the level of compliance by public institutions with various actions mandated by the law and issue reports of their findings.

On the subject of corruption, Lanre Idowu's paper is replete with policy suggestions, which media managers and authorities will do well to consider. For example, he suggests the need to publish the infraction of journalistic codes through naming and shaming mechanisms. In other words, just as outstanding journalists receive awards based on performance, the media should institute Halls of Shame; perhaps, along the lines of what Media Rights Agenda is currently doing, with a view to going public with ethical infractions. Obviously, no serious anti-corruption in the media can succeed as long as employers of journalists continue to default on salaries. In this regard, therefore, Idowu's suggestion that media proprietors should be compelled by legal means to pay their staff, regularly and well enough, should be seen as an antidote to journalistic corruption. Apart from that, the famous beat association which has developed into infamous cartels can be broken. Idowu suggests that it is not just enough to train journalists well, they should be moved around beats periodically. That is another way of saying that, rather than allow reporters to entrench themselves in certain beats, newsroom managers should ensure that they abort the cartelisation of beats by redeployment of journalists across

beats. Of course, the debit side of this proposal is that beats will lack the expertise of journalists who have developed ties with news sources. However, this drawback is more than compensated for by the gains in a more sanitized newsroom environment.

Regarding the emergent digital media sector, it is important that the communicative and participatory emphasis of these media genre should be rescued from the possibilities of the kind of commercialisation and emphasis on soft/human interest stories, which Oso and Akanni argue have rendered the conventional media less effective as participatory and accessible along the lines suggested by Jugen Habermas. That apart, the dangers of fake news, impersonation, over-politicisation, and the carryover of ethnic and religious conflicts should be countermanded through campaigns and enforcement of existing regulations. In this connection, Oso and Akanni referred to the recent circulation of a fake version of Buhari's speech at the 2017 United Nations General Assembly, which was disseminated on some popular blogs in Nigeria. Even when we grant that fake news is a menace around the globe, society must show a healthy awareness of its dangers by treating it in the same way as it should deal with open corruption and the brown envelop syndrome in the media. In the same vein, the presidency dissociated itself from and condemned a fake tweet credited to Buhari in the wake of the mass killings in Benue State in January, 2018, featuring justifying the attack on Benue farmers (*The Nation*, Janury 14, 2018).

Regarding television and radio, it is obvious that there is too much of a gap between privately-owned and state-owned broadcasting. One dimension of this problem is in the huge amount paid by independent broadcasters, especially television, to the National Broadcasting Commission as license fees. These tend to make entry cost to the industry high and crippling for private sector operatives, who for now, are more credible than state-owned broadcasters that tend to pander to the whims and caprices of presidents, governors and their wives. Another way of putting this is to say that the evolution of state-owned broadcasting into public broadcasting has been stalled; hence, making it easy for the

temporary custodian of state power to control and manipulate political content. A graphic illustration of this misnomer was provided when the Nigerian Television Authority, within a few days of the announcement of the results 2015 General Election switched sharply from a pro-Jonathan news approach to a pro-Buhari news approach. For as long as the executive hires and fires state-owned media personnel, so long would it continue to dictate or at least control the content of state broadcasting. What is required here is the setting up of a National Media Commission along the lines of the Ghanaian example, which can act as buffers between the states and the editorial department of state broadcasting.

Regarding the issue of diversity reporting in the context of ethno-religious reporting, it is important that the media, as suggested by Dr. Danjibo, should be encouraged to invest more in the training and retraining of journalists as well as in investigative journalism, which would make them report objectively in times of crisis. It is also essential that newspaper proprietors be encouraged to include diversity factor, gender, ethnic and religious, as a way of enhancing the abilities of media institutions to capture maginalised groups. Something like this occurred a few years ago when the Guardian newspapers regularly flew in from Northeast Nigeria, a professor of political science to its editorial board meetings. The idea was to enhance diversity and to ensure that a Northern perspective of issues was part of the discussion. The present practice where newspapers are published in two or three locations is capable of enhancing diverse perspectives in reportage and editorial contents generally, if aligned to an editorial object of reporting all the sides of a story. Important too, given Nigeria's private sector-led public sphere is the need to build upon the emerging model of journalists becoming owners of media. This is capable of redefining journalism, as the success of Channels television and a clutch of online media, such as *Premium Times* and the *Cable*, both founded by former senior editors, have demonstrated. Finally, it has been suggested that the partisan public sphere can be reduced in influence and damaging potential if media owned by politicians experiment with or outrightly embrace a trusteeship

model, which distances the media from political control. This was successful in the 1990s when the former publisher of the *Guardian*, Mr. Alex Ibru, put the newspaper under trusteeship when he was appointed as minister by the General Sanni Abacha administration. This safeguarded the relative independence of that newspaper from the government of the day, thereby enabling it to continue to stay at the cutting-edge of advocacy for political reform and democratisation.

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APPENDIX TO CHAPTER ELEVEN

Research Instrument

Research Questionnaire

This is a questionnaire designed to measure which, between the traditional and the new media, contributes more to your involvement in the general elections in South Africa (2014) and Nigeria (2016). Please fill in the information based on the country to which you are responding. It is expected that you respond to every question by ticking the space that appropriately represents your view. Where you leave the space blank, the researcher assumes that you are unsure of the answer to provide.

Ethically, you are assured of absolute confidentiality of the information you give. Please do not write your name or institutional affiliation since whatever response you provide shall be used solely for the purpose of this research.

We thank you as you take a few minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire. The first question is the overall summary and we advise that you respond to it last based on the belief that your response to others will assist your summary instincts.

Country *(Please tick as appropriate)*
Nigeria ☐ South Africa ☐
Bio data
Please provide us with your bio data in what follows.
Gender
(1) Male ☐ (2) Female ☐ (3) Others ☐
Religion
(1) Popular Religions in Africa*(if Christianity or Islam)* ☐
(2) Other Religions ☐
Type of Residence
(1) Rural/Semi Urban ☐ (2) Urban/Cosmopolitan ☐
Current Engagement Status
(1) Student ☐ (2) State Employed ☐ (3) Private Sector Employed ☐
(4) Self Employed ☐
Lowest Educational Qualification
(1) Doctoral ☐ (2) Masters from University ☐ (3) First Degree ☐
(4) High School ☐
Age Bracket
18-23 ☐ 24-29 ☐ 30-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 40-50 ☐ 50-60 ☐ 60-70 ☐
70 and above ☐

	News papers	Radio	Tele vision	Twitter	Face book	Other Online Sources
1. From which of the media did you get political knowledge that has direct bearing on the political development of your country?						
2. Where did you first get information about the last general elections in your country?						
3. Through which of these did you first know about the political parties in the elections?						
4. Through which of these did you first know about the candidates of the political parties?						
5. Where did you get the most detailed information about programs of the parties?						
6. Through which of these media did you get best educated on the need to participate in the election?						

7. Which of these constantly reminded you of the voting dates and other updates needed to participate in the election?						
8. Through which of these did you receive the highest political campaign?						
9. Which of the/.se means did you use to put your own political opinion to the public?						
10. Which of these media did you use very frequently and on daily basis?						
11. Through which of these did you receive your highest knowledge about elections and politics generally?						
12. Which of these stimulated your interest in voting?						
13. From what source did you get elections results and count it real?						
14. Through which means did you know the winners of the elections?						

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"The guiding central narrative of the book is one of power and responsibility: if, as it is assumed, that the media is tasked with shaping society and curbing the excesses of those in leadership positions, how successful has it been? This is an important query as it relates to the conceptual balance of power in society, an informed citizenry, and critical opinions. And as to the specific years in focus—1999 to 2016, the Nigerian Fourth Republic, the period following long interlude of military rule—the connection of the media to which democracy was both critical and crucial. Indeed, the selection of an era brings the essays into focus, whereby the book engagingly informs us of the place of the media in the Fourth Republic, covering its contributions, constraints, and challenges."

- Toyin Falola

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QUOTES FROM THE BOOK

"As Nigeria has finally made the transition to civil democracy, officials of the state must understand that a free press will help to strengthen the pillars of the new democratic society. A free press will help catapult Nigeria to a vibrant democracy."

- Christian Ogbondah

"Everything cannot be abandoned to the whims of commercial journalism as there remain legitimate public concerns and developmental issues that commercial journalism cannot adequately serve if our media must be seen as watchdogs and our democracy endure."

- Lanre Idowu

"A restraining factor is the increasing ownership of media by high-profile politicians who set them up to equalize what they perceive as a journalistic public sphere skewed against them. The best that one can expect from these politically-tinged media are exposures or muckraking against political opponents, rather than watchdog journalism of a professional, agenda building kind."

- Ayo Olukotun

"Contrary to the claims that radio is a dying and forgotten medium, in relation to advancement in technology through new media, radio has continued to adapt to changing circumstances."

- Funke Treasure Durodola

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