‘Radios Don't Kill, People Do’: Media, Post Election Violence, and Democracy in Nigeria

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Abstract

Using three case-studies from Nigeria, this article examines the role of the media in post-election violence. Following his defeat in the 1993 gubernatorial election, Chief Bola Ige of the Unity Party of Nigeria, addressed the State; an address which precipitated violence and death. In 1993, Nigeria went on the boil following media reports that the Presidential election, widely believed to have been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola, had been annulled. The 2009 governorship re-run election involving 10 wards in Ekiti State precipitated unprecedented violence, which, at its very height, spurned situations whereby nudeprotesting women took to the streets. Using speeches made by the different actors on these occasions and media reports of the circumstances before, during, and after the elections; this article weaves a narrative that emphasizes the sociopolitical and economic situations associated with elections in Nigeria rather than media contents and contexts as underlying _factors in the constellation of post-election violence in Nigeria. While not underestimating media roles in these conflicts, especially its tendencies towards biases, most notably against the state in 1993 and 2009, the article advocates a people-centered media practice as a sine qua non to democratic growth in Nigeria vis-a-vis Africa.

Introduction

Mass media, broadly conceptualized to include print, radio, television and, most recently, internet, has played important roles in social, economic and political lives of peoples, products, institutions and nations. Media roles, for instance, in shaping behaviour, modifying character, and inculcating habits have received criticism

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from among the academia, politicians and media practitioners. In, for instance, the US, Canada, UK and Europe, critics have maintained that through overtly and covertly attitudinal-affecting contents, the media has contributed immensely to the inculcation of violent behaviours, gangsterism, prostitution, etc. Diametrically opposed to these criticisms are other views emphasizing the media roles in shaping existential values, such as affirmative action, democracy, justice, transparency, openness, especially in governance. Mahmood Mamdani, while not discounting the positive contributions of the media to socio-economic and political developments, berated the media, especially in reporting conflict-related deaths in Sudan, DR Congo and other parts of Africa, as unnecessarily sentimentalizing and magnifying conflicts and conflict-related deaths in Africa (Mamdani 2010:3). Another often cited case of media use in political articulation is the role of Milles Collines Radio, popularly known as ‘Radio Machere’, in the 1994 Hutu-Tutsi conflicts in Rwanda. The radio, as widely reported, was used in perpetrating genocide against the Tutsis and moderate Hutus (Oyeniyi 2007:273). Goran Hyden, Michael Leslie and Folu Ogundimu, at another level, noted the role the media played in the ongoing process of democratization in sub-Saharan Africa, most notably the media roles in public service reform, the judiciary, legislature and other formal state institutions (Hyden et al 2003:7). These different views on the media roles in socioeconomic and political articulation, it must be conceded, are in consonance with the arcane and traditional tripartite function of the media: to inform, to educate and to entertain.

Although at different stages of development, the media in Africa have been vital to African development since independence in the 1960s. The media, working under extreme conditions characterized by repression, persecution and brutality, especially during military autocracy, played vital roles in ushering the third wave of democracy. Democracy, most especially its attendant socio-economic and political developments, has also changed the media
landscape tremendously. Besides orchestrating the establishment of private media organizations, it has also ensured competition between private and public media organizations.

In addition to the above, mass media, like never before, has become increasingly technologically driven. Developments in internet, computer and communication technologies have, more than ever before, revolutionised media practices. Internet, an integral part of globalization, has removed barriers of space and time. Miniature computer equipment, ranging from mobile phones and tablets to servers and mainframe computers with high-ends capabilities are connected via the internet and reporters, without borders or frontiers, have emerged in all cities and villages. More than ever before, events are relayed across frontiers as they happened. Moreover, size and number, which had hitherto played vital roles in media practice, no longer matter, as technology has made multi-tasking, in real-time, over equally multi-functional equipment of incredible capabilities, possible. The import of these developments on modern societies cannot be understood except in consideration of their multiple dimensions, notably political, cultural, economic, and technological.

This article examines the role of the media, online, print and electronic, in the political articulation of Nigeria between 1983 and 2009. This time frame is important to an understanding of the roles of the media in political articulation in Nigeria, as it covers, sizably, from the demise of the Second Republic and the first ten years of the third wave of democratization. The article captures the events associated with the general elections in 1983, 1993 and 2009. Specifically, the three basic events the article focuses on are the post-election speech of late Chief Bola Ige, formerly the Governor of Oyo State, to people of Oyo State; the Z7 June 1993 report of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida’s cancellation of the Presidential election; and the media’s roles in the Ekiti State governorship re-run election of 2009. In all these instances, violence of varying magnitude followed either political speech of main actors.
or media reports of associated events. While Bola Ige’s Post-1983 Election Speech was confined to certain areas of Oyo State; the 27 June 1993 Gen. Babangida’s Annulment Speech led to violence in different parts of Nigeria, most especially Western Nigeria. The violence that followed media reports of Ekiti Re-run Gubematorial Election of 2009 was, however, limited to Ekiti State.

The combination of state-wide and country-wide examples, the judicious blend of cases involving different time periods, and the intermix of elections covering from a few wards within a state, state and national elections help to demonstrate the growth and development of media practices both over the short and long-run in Nigeria. While not pretending to be a tour de horizon of media use in Nigeria, the article deployed oral interviews, questionnaires, extant literature and participants’ observations to weave a narrative on the intersections between media use, political articulation and the civil society in Nigeria.

Besides this introductory section, the article has four other sections. The introduction sets the basic objectives of the article while section two examines media use, its impact and consequences. Section three examines media-use in Nigeria using the three earlier mentioned representative examples. Section four examines the nexus between mass media and political articulation, not only in Nigeria, but across Africa. The concluding section briefly summarizes the basic arguments and suggests modalities for improving media-use in Nigeria vis-a-vis Africa.

The Role of the Media.

Generally, mass media refers especially to television, radio, newspaper, and magazines, by which information and news are disseminated to large number of people. Since the advent of the twenty-first century, the internet has also been included in this mix. The use of the mass media in product marketing, political campaigns, public announcement and enlightenment, on the one hand, is tied to its potential to reach a larger number of people at the same time and, sometimes, at relatively cheap cost. On the other
hand, it is also tied to such existential values such as its ability to produce expected outcome in consumers, Whether a salesperson, a politician or a public official; media use aims specifically at eliciting a response, which could be to buy a new product, to vote for a particular candidate or to pay taxes to government. These and other potentials of the media have made it an important component of government, private businesses as well as individuals.

Many overlapping theories have developed around media and democracy. They revolved around issues of governance and information dissemination. ‘Authoritarian theory, which owes much to the sixteenth century political upheavals in Europe, holds that the media must provide support services to the ruling class as well as advance its policies. Siebert et al explain,

*In that society, truth was conceived to be, not the product of the great mass of people, but of a few wise men, who were in a position to guide and direct their fellows. Thus truth was thought to be centered near the center of power. The press therefore functioned from the top down. the rulers of the time used the press to inform the people of what the rulers thought they should know and the policies the rulers thought they should support (Siebert et al 1956: 12).*

Information was considered an exclusive preserve of the ruling elite; hence, media serves as tool for disseminating whatever rulers deemed fit. Criticism of government officials and government policies was strictly forbidden and media ownership was possible only through royal patents. Soviet Communists, German Nazis, Italian fascists, Gadhafi-led Libya and many other autocratic states in Africa, especially under military rule, adequately epitomized this absolutist or authoritarian conception of mass media. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, emphasis shifted, as individuals and groups pressed governments for treatment as rational beings, capable of making independent judgments on social issues and developing their own individual senses of truth. John Milton, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and many more argued for
intellectual freedom and open marketplace of ideas. Freedom of thoughts and opinions as cornerstones of any change underpinned this shift. As Denis McQuail argued, when the media is free, “the nearest approximation to truth will emerge from the competitive exposure of alternative viewpoints, and progress for society will depend on the choice of 'right' over 'wrong' solutions” (McQuail 1994:128). Deductively, the media should be allowed as much freedom as practically possible, in order to promote political debate and encourage diversity of viewpoints on socio-economic and political issues. The social responsibility model, while accepting the fundamental issues in libertarian model, questions the social roles of the media under liberal principles. This approach owes much to the fundamental changes introduced into media practice by science and technology, especially during the closing period of the twentieth and the early period of the twenty-first centuries.

These and many other theories have shed useful light on the impact of media, most especially on governance. Although African countries are at different stages of media development, majority are either just transiting from authoritarian to libertarian, or to social responsibility model. In fact, the media landscape in Africa straddles between authoritarianism and libertarianism. In Nigeria for instance, Channel TV and Adaba FM were closed down in 2009 for broadcasting news items considered unfavorable to the state. Until 2005, media practice in Libya was completely under the state control. Similar situation has been reported concerning Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, etc. Under military rule, regular burst-up between government and media, detention of journalists and clampdown on media houses, etc. were commonplace. During this period, media practitioners were incarcerated and media houses were either raided or closed. As the cases in this study show, information control lies at the heart of media practice and, as far as the state is concerned, the media is regarded as an instrument of the state, to be used as “a collective propagandist, collective , agitator and collective organizer”. McQuail 1994:116).
Goran Hyden, Michael Leslie and Folu Ogundimu, among others, have established the place of the media in the democratization process, political transition, socio-economic reforms, and commerce. Recently, Ngeri S. Benebo, Director General and Chief Executive of Nigeria’s National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), noted the role of the media in ensuring a cleaner, healthier environment. (Benebo 2010130–31). Aderanti Adepojuw noted media role in facilitating labour migration in both the sending and receiving countries (Adepoju 20081251 By and large, it can’ be argued that the media have come to play dominant roles in human life and therefore can neither be left at the mercy of the ruling elite nor the whims and caprices of the media practitioners and their overt concerns for profit.

Samples of Media-use in Nigeria.

In this section, three representative examples of media use in democratic processes are used to demonstrate the nexus between media, democracy, and violence in Nigeria. Chief Bola Ige’s radio message, after losing the 1983 gubernatorial election, is used to underscore how personal influence could ride on power of the media to wean post-election violence. The annulment of 12th June1993 Presidential election underscores how media, through sensitization, contributed to the frenzied pace of agitation to end military rule in Nigeria. The Ekiti State Gubernatorial Re-run Election measures how the media, through sensitization, contributed to the frenzied pace of agitation for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Other cases of media use and misuse abound in different parts of Africa; these three examples merely illustrate a general phenomenon.

Chief Bola Ige’s Post-1983 Election Speech

President Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) ruled Nigeria from 1” October, 1979 to 31” December, 1983. At the expiration of his first term as President, another general election, which he won, in a ‘landslide victory’ over his main rival, Chief
Obafemi Awolowo of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), was viewed by local and international observers as a ruse. The elections were said to have been massively rigged.

In UPN controlled-states of Bendel, Oyo, Lagos, Ogun and Ondo, policies and programmes such as free education, free health care and many others were carried out, which, as many had reasoned, were enough reasons for the people to re-elect the UPN into power in the 1983 elections. Despite this substantial progress made by the UPN dominated states, the party lost the elections in Bendel, Oyo, and Ondo to the ruling party, the NPN. In these states, a number of reactions followed the announcements of election results. In Ondo, NPN and UPN engaged in fierce post-election conflicts, which left many people dead. At its height, Chief Akin Omoboriowo, NPN’s governorship candidate, fled to Lagos for safety. In Bendel, Sam Mbakwe, in a state-wide broadcast, declared himself as winner of the election so as to forestall the NPN from taking over his Bendel State. In Oyo State, Chief Omololu Olunloyo of the NPN was announced over Chief Bola Ige who had, as even the oppositions have admitted, ruled creditably for four years under the UPN (Igbokwe 2007)

Chief Bola Ige, in a state-wide television broadcast, took a swipe on the entire elections, analyzing one zonal election results after the other in order to show the discrepancies in the official results. He went ahead to ask the people of the state to resist any attempt by the NPN to take the state.

_Eyin eniyun mi ni agbegbe Osun, won ni e dibo irinwolelogun fun Egbe Imole, esi dibo Egberun lona merinlelogun fun Egbe Onile? Se be ni? Pelu gbogbo ore ti a se: Se beeni?(Ige]983)_

Translation:

My people of Osun Division, we were told you cast just 420 votes for UPN and 24,000 votes for the NPN? Is this true? With all our friendship and relationships! Is this true?
Chief Ige, after analyzing all the results, challenged the people not to acquiesce in the matter, but to go out on the streets and demonstrate their rejection of the rigged elections. Chief Ige, a consummate speaker, aptly referred to in Nigeria as the ‘Cicero of Esa-Oke’, asked the people of Oyo State to reject the imposition of Chief Omololu Olunloyo.

Following this broadcast, violence broke out in most parts of the state. In some places, the rigged election reopened age-old conflicts. In other places, free-for-all fights broke out between supporters of different parties. In Ile-Ife, crises broke out between the Ife and Modakeke peoples. The Ife people argued that the UPN lost the election in their area because of fraudulent acts of the Modakeke, who, prior to the election, decamped to the NPN. It must be noted that fragile peace existed between Ife and Modakeke since the nineteenth century. The election crises opened up this age-old crisis, and mutual recriminations followed. Before the election, Modakeke’s request for an all-inclusive local government was turned down by the UPN-controlled State Assembly, a development that prompted the NPN to promise the Modakeke an all-inclusive local government if they could join the NPN and vote the party to victory in 1983. The issue of an all-inclusive local government was one of the issues that have polarized Ife and Modakeke since the nineteenth century. With NPN’s victory in the election, the Modakeke took to the street in wild jubilation, not so much for the NPN but for the imminent all-inclusive local government, which would set them free from the Ife forever (Oyeniyi 2007:711-35).

For the Ife, NPN’s victory would not only alter the local politics between them and the Modakeke, it was also contrary to the established voting patterns in the area; therefore they argued that the Modakeke rigged the elections in favour of the NPN. The sheer fact that Ige, the UPN sitting governor and candidate, hailed from Esa-Oke, a few kilometers from Ile-Ife, made the result that gave landslide victory to NPN even in Ile-Ife unacceptable to the Ife people.
There is no doubt that Chief Ige’s four-year rule brought tremendous progress to Oyo State, however, it is not mandatory that laudable projects would automatically secure a second term in office for a political incumbent, as other considerations may apply. For instance, in Ibadan and Ogbomosho, two major cities in Oyo State; local politics was different. Ibadan, the largest city in West Africa, is the home town of Chief Omololu Olunloyo. The Ibadan people, irrespective of Chief Ige’s pedigree, were rooting for Chief Olunloyo not because of any past deeds but because of his being a native (a ‘son of the soil’, in local parlance), an important factor in Nigerian politics. Ogbomosho was the home of late S.L. Akintola, former Premier of Western Nigeria, who fell out with Chief Obafemi Awolowo and formed another party. Akintola and Awolowo were bitter political rivals, a development that, since independence, fractured Yorubaland into two: pro-Awolowo versus pro-Akintola. The Ibadan and Ogbomoso people, owing to these two unrelated factors, voted massively for NPN.

Besides these few, but politically important places, violence of varying magnitude broke out in Oyo State between UPN and NPN supporters following Chief Ige’s address. On account of the large scale violence, the NPN-controlled Federal Government deployed soldiers to Oyo State (as it did in Ondo) to enforce peace and Chief Omololu Olunloyo was installed as the Governor of the state.

Gen. Babangida’s Annulment of 12th June 1993 Election

General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida recently indicted the media as being responsible for the uproar and carnage that greeted the June 27th 1993 Presidential Election’s annulment widely believed to have been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola. Speaking exclusively to the Westerner Magazine, General Babangida said:

"following the impasse that followed the 1993 elections, we met and after deliberations we decided to put the elections on hold, but you guys went out the next day and painted bad picture, which misled the public. You all know what you did!"
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You plunged the nation into darkness and delayed transition to democracy until 1999”. (Babangida 2010).

It must be noted that this was not the first time the erstwhile Nigerian leader is pointing accusing fingers at the media for the mass rally and violence that followed the annulment. In 2009 when he was delivering a speech at Governor ‘Gbenga Daniel, the Ogun State Governor’s birthday. Babangida also berated the media for inciting mass violence and misleading the public. While not discounting the role of the media in the general reactions following the annulment, it must be noted that Babangida precipitated violent reaction following his inability to fulfill promises to hand over power to democratically elected president in 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993. To cap it all, Babangida annulled a transition programme that had already produced council chairmen, governors, national and state assembly members and the president-elect. Following media report that the election had been cancelled and that machinery was being put in place to kick-start a new electioneering procedure, Nigerians took to the streets; burning, maiming and killing in anger over the annulment.

Media reports were to the effect that the Babangida administration made no official statement except an unsigned A-4 paper announcement, not even on the official government letterhead paper, announcing that the election had been cancelled (Babangida 2010). This graphic picture of the processes of the annulment served to incense the public and raised the specter of the resultant violence. By 26th August, 1993, Babangida was forced out of office in what he termed as ‘to step aside’.

In the wake of the stepping aside, the military government installed an Interim National Government (ING), headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan. The interim arrangement was to allow General Babangida negotiate his exit from power and to forestall another coup plot. (Babangida 2010).

The media, it must be stated, was believed to have precipitated another round of incitements by discrediting the ING
and calling on the numerous auspices and community-based organizations (CBOs) that crystallized around the struggle for the actualization of the 12th June 1993 mandate of Chief M.K.O. Abiola and also to prevail on Abiola and his running-mate, Baba-Gana Kingibe, to discountenance the interim government and form a government of national unity. The Campaign for Democracy, (CD) National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), and the O’odua People’s Congress (OPC), three foremost CBOs of the period, not only organized rallies, but also mobilized people for mass actions to reject not just the annulment but also the ING. The struggle paid off when the courts declared the ING as unconstitutional; thereby paving the way for yet another military coup, headed by late General Sanni Abacha.

With the military take-over by General Sanni Abacha, the initial hope that the annulment of M.K.O. Abiola’s election would be reversed after intense pressure disappeared. It was against this backdrop that Chief M.K.O. Abiola declared himself President of the Federal Republic. His arrest, detention and trial by Abacha left no one in doubt that Abacha intended to carry through his government without consideration for either popular will on the 12th June 1993 election or the debacle the supposed annulment had generated.

At the height of the crusade for the actualization of the 12th June Presidential election, incessant violence between pro-democracy groups and the military government was common. At the height of this crusade, members of the OPC, CD, NADECO, the media, most notably newspaper outfits such as The Nigerian Tribune, Alaroye, The Comets, Vanguard, Tell Magazine, Newswatch Magazine, The Punch, The Guardian, etc. became targets of state-sponsored terrorism of unprecedented magnitude. Kudirat Abiola, the wife of Chief M.K.O. Abiola, Pa. Alfred Rewane and a host of others were murdered. Bombs and explosives were detonated in Lagos, Abuja, Port-Harcourt, Ibadan, and in other cities. Most of these explosions targeted pro-democracy groups.
Many of them were clamped down in jails without trial. Many more fled the country, including the Nobel Laureate, Prof. ‘Wole Soyinka.

Incensed by these actions, the media and the CBOs sensitized the public to the need for intense agitations against military rule. Hardly would a day pass without elaborate details, comments and op-eds on the issue in the media. In response, decrees were rolled out banning and closing down media houses and those who were regarded as arrow-heads of the struggle. The nation, thus, became a pariah state, ostracized, by virtually all nations of the world.

As General Babangida and many others have noted again and again, the public outcry and the strings of developments that followed the annulment, were maliciously orchestrated by the media. ’

*Ekiti Re-run Gubernatorial Election of 2009*

Following the nullification of the electoral victory of Mr. Segun Oni of the ruling Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) at the 2007 Electoral Petition Tribunal in Ekiti State, the Ekiti people were set for a round of re-run election in ten wards. Penultimate week to the re-run election, politicians from different parts of Nigeria converged on Ekiti State to ensure that adequate preparations were made for the election. The atmosphere became tense, as the day approached.

The ruling party, PDP, and its main challenger, the Action Congress (AC) political party, jostled and canvassed l’or supports toward either returning Mr. Segun Oni of the PDP or Mr. Kayode Fayemi of AC. Midway into the election, the Resident Electoral Officer, Mrs. Ayoka Adebayo, disappeared and the process was halted. The Federal Government’s initial report was that the electoral commissioner took ill. This was controverted by the commissioner, who sent a resignation letter to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the media purporting that she went underground in order not to declare an unpopular candidate, which was against the wishes of Ekiti people, as expressed in the voting.
She claimed to have been under intense pressure by an unnamed political party to declare its candidate as winner contrary to the wishes of the electorate, and also her conscience, as a Christian (Haruna 2009:64). For resigning and going underground, the media and the AC described her as a heroine and enjoined her to make public the names of people or political party pressurizing her to declare the unpopular candidate. Within two days of her disappearance and purported letter of resignation, the police declared her wanted.

Following this reaction by the Federal Government, the media were awashed with reports, commentaries, and reactions all of which accused the Federal Government and the ruling PDP of attempting to rig the election once again. On 29th April 2009, half-naked Ekiti women marched on the streets of Ado-Ekiti and other parts of the state to protest an alleged attempt to subvert the will of the people. The women, acting under the aegis of the Ekiti Women for Peace, not only deplored the delay in announcing the winner of the April 25 governorship rerun election, but also accused the Federal Government and the ruling PDP of attempting to manipulate the election results, cowcrying the electoral commissioner and also declaring her wanted for refusing to declare the PDP candidate as winner. The women publicly invoked the spirits of their ancestors against those “who planned to announce the loser of the election as the winner”(Haruna 2010:65)

The peaceful protest by the placard-carrying women paralyzed business and commercial activities as well as vehicular movement on the major streets of Ado-Ekiti. Some of their placards read: "INEC, Announce Election Result Now”, “Prof Iwu, Be Warned”, “We Salute Mrs. Ayoka Adebayo’s Courage”, “Dr. Fayemi Won, No Magomago”, “Iwu, Stop Your Antics", “VP Jonathan, Stop Your Imposition”, “Ayoka Adebayo, Heroine of Democracy” and “Prof. Iwu, Fear God” (Haruna 2010:65). among others.

The women, numbering about 300, and comprising young mothers, school girls and aged women sang:
Magbe, magbe o,  
Don’t steal it, don’t steal it,

Ibo fayemi ko see gbe,  
Fayemi’s votes cannot be stolen,

Magbe, magbe”  
Don’t steal it, don’t steal it.

Mayi, mayi o,  
Don’t manipulate it, don’t manipulate it,

IboFayemi ko see yi,  
Fayemi’s votes cannot be manipulated,

Mayi, mayi  
Don’t manipulate it, don’t manipulate it.

Majority of the protesters wore white apparel and held white handkerchiefs, and their hairs were uncovered. They claimed that the Action Congress (AC) candidate, Dr. Kayode Fayemi, won the election and demanded that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should declare him as winner.

The nude protesters came from across the 16 local government areas in Ekiti State, and were led by their President, Mrs. Ronke Okusanya. Also in the group was the wife of the AC candidate, Mrs. Olabisi Fayemi and the Governorship candidate’s running mate, Mrs. Funmilayo Olayinka. According to Mrs. Okusanya, the women decided to go half-naked to press home the demand for the sanctity of their votes (Olayinka 2009). She added that the protest was a warning to election riggers and manipulators of the electoral will of the people that they could no longer get away with fraud.

While the outcome of the election is of secondary concern to this article, it must be noted that the nude-protest was given intense media coverage. All media outfits in Western Nigeria were present to beam the protests to viewers and print media gave it wider coverage on their various editions of between 30th and 1st May 2009. Copious statements and opinion essays depicting the bent of mind of the protesters and media were endemic; thereby giving credence to the position expressed by the Segun Oni Campaign organizations that the AC not only orchestrated paid-protesters to foment trouble in the state but also with criminal connivance of the media. At the height of the debacle, the state governor ordered the closure and withdrawal of broadcasting rights of one of the obtusely anti-PDP media, Adaba FM.
Mass Media and Political Articulation.

From these representative examples, a host of substantive and conceptual qualifications could be made on media and democracy in Nigeria. Substantively, it is incontestable that Chief Bola Ige, consciously or unconsciously, incited the people of Oyo State to violence in order to re-claim his stolen mandate; the same qualification could be made on the 12th June mandate. The media, in this case, not only call the people to action in defence of the 12th June election, but also educate them on the existential need to rid Nigeria of military autocracy altogether. In the case of Ekiti, it is axiomatic to note that pre-election and post-election media activities played important roles in the consternation of violence that followed the elections, Media’s role in Ekiti went beyond reporting pre-election events to including educating, analyzing and informing voters about the election and the possibilities of its being rigged by the ruling party. This last pan is preposterous, as not only the ruling party is capable of rigging any election.

Most critics have argued that media, as these representative examples have shown, directly or indirectly incite violence for existential purposes. As argued, these existential purposes include media’s obtuse fascination with sensational news and news features that are capable of driving sales, and also to enable the media carve niches for themselves in today’s competitive media space. Media practitioners and advocates have, however, countered that media, more often than not, report events and happenstances and not invent or manufacture them. However, it must be conceded that sensational news pushes up media sales and acceptance, hence, it can be argued that the media, in these cases, may have pushed for sensational news for existential factors.

Existential gains, as the Rwandan genocide and many other examples have shown, may not necessarily be fascination with sensational news to drive-up sales and carve niches for media organizations, but also to attain other ends, such as fostering and preserving corporate identity of a group over the others. From these
and many cases, a number of questions could be raised to interrogate the nexus between media, democracy, and violence in Nigeria. Given the criticism that media practitioners tend to oversentimentalize issues for existential reasons, can we then argue that the media, in handling Chief Bola Ige’s radio and television broadcast of 1983, oversentimentalized the process in order to gain popularity and jack-up patronage? Or was the election truly rigged as claimed by Chief Bola Ige? If the election was rigged and media owed it to the public to report a sitting governor’s speech, it therefore turns logic on its head to blame the resultant violence on media.

In the case of 12th June crisis, can we argue that the media overplayed the circumstance by overfraternizing with the late presidential candidate, Chief M.K.O. Abiola? By raising people’s awareness on the need to reject military rule in Nigeria, have the media overstepped their bounds? Neutrality is central to establishing truth in any event; can the media be adjudged as neutral in the 12th June crisis? Can the media afford to be neutral in the event, especially given the level of opprobrium that media outfits and practitioners endured under Babangida? The Ekiti re-run election is different only in matter of degree from the 1983 election. How are the media to blame for the Ekiti women’s protest?

In an attempt to place these substantive qualifications in their broader perspectives, especially in the context of the literature on violence and democratization in Africa, the remaining part of this section examines the conceptual qualifications of these and many other cases. As noted in the literature (Ogundimu 2002), the relationship between media and democratization straddles at least four important domains: the political, technological, economic, and cultural domains.

Causal relationships between media and democracy are manifold. In the cultural and political domains; the relationships are multi-directional: they go in both directions. This translates to mean that the media affects democracy and democracy affects the media,
Unlike in the economic and technological domain where the relationships go in one direction, economic and technological factors shape media and are not, in turn, shaped by the media.

As Ogundimu and others have already noted, although the media are significant factors in shaping and sustaining democracy, it is indefensible to say that an open or socially irresponsible media practice could serve the course of democracy. In order words, an open media alone 'are insufficient guarantee for sustaining democracy. In addition to the above, it must be noted that media in Africa can make a difference, but they cannot operate outside their cultural domains. Development in media practice in the West notwithstanding, the traditional thinking in much of Africa is to see media as an important arm of the state aimed solely at informing and educating citizens about government activities. Attempts by the media to play out of the box, as the Oyo, l2th June and Ekiti suggest, are met with open criticism and repressive laws, which sometimes bother on tyranny.

In line with the above, three important developments underscore the place of the media in democratization in Africa. These are the changes that have taken place in international politics, new cultural influences associated with globalization, and technological growth. All these have had tremendous impact on media and democracy in Africa. Changes in geopolitical make-up of the world following the end of the Cold War signals that bipolar and superpower supports for tyrannical regime in Africa ceased suddenly and abruptly. This development, invariably, led to the burgeoning of democracy across the world. For the media, the development signals new challenges and opportunities, especially in nations that have chosen to reform. The state ceased being the dominant factor in media practice. The more the economy of most countries was opened up, the more media ownership and control shifted from government to private individuals whose focus was not only on return on investment but also to ape developments in media practice globally. To ensure free operating landscape, legal reforms
to abolish restrictive media practice followed and state monopoly fractured in no time; The United States, through the USAID, played fundamental roles in opening up of the media space in most African countries. The US democratic assistance to Zambia in the early 1990s included packages on media reforms. Similar assistance, with emphasis on media reform by USAID occurred in Kenya, Malawi, Botswana, Ghana, Cameroon, and Swaziland (Ogundimu 2002) In all these and many other examples, the underlying principle is that media and democracy goes hand-in-gloves.

By implication, externally directed reforms brought to abrupt end the monopoly of media outfits by government. It also widened the media market by bringing Africa into the vortex of a global mass culture. Cable and satellite communication systems have brought Africa into the global space as well as brought the world into Africa. Events and developments in distant lands became readily available in most homes and offices. Media outfits in Africa, therefore, cannot afford to cut themselves off from global happenings, as they also must report and educate their consumers on global events.

In this area, technology plays an important role, Mobile phones, internet and computer communications have compacted space and, like never before, the world has become instantly connected. Information, local and global, is shared effortlessly and seamlessly by people without recourse to the media. Media houses dare not insulate themselves from reporting events, even if they have to anger the authority. This development has generated corps of internet reporters or i-reporters, as media houses are today jostling with these internet reporters on who shares information first.

In this fast-paced, borderless media space, restrictive laws, and repressive regime whose sole concern is on regime-protection have no place and governments have long realized that the media have gone a step forward. Not only are government policies and programmes daily scrutinized and analyzed by millions of people using modem, real-time, and highly efficient means; media houses ~ privately and publicly-owned - are buying into the practice with
reckless abandon. Given the foregoing, one can ask: what is the role of the media in this fast-changing space, especially in relation to governance architecture in Africa? What are the consequences of the development in making the political environment competitive? What conceptualization does this development connote for democratization in Africa?

Altschull noted that no media can exist within this socio-political milieu without being a watchdog, an adversary of state policies, and an agenda-setter (Altschull 1984:194).

*The watchdog, the adversarial, and the agenda-setting functions assigned to the press converge into a unique formidable theory that can proclaim the doctrine of social responsibility as its philosophical lodestar. The centerpiece of this theory is power, U” the press sets itsel” up against political (and economic) leadership, it is being adversarial. if as part of its adversarial behavior it maintains a steady watch on the leadership, il is being a watchdog. And #it lets the people know what is important and what is trivial, it is setting the public agenda. In all these situations, the power of the press is formidable. The press is clearly cast in the role of an independent actor - as investigator (watchdog), combatant (adversary), and planner (agenda-setter) Altschull 1984:194."

No other opportunity afforded the media to play any or all of these roles in Nigeria’s social engineering than 1983, 1993 and 2009 elections. On these occasions, except for the socially irresponsible incitement by Chief Bola Ige, the substantive actions of the media conform to the watchdog, the adversarial, and the agenda-setting functions conceptually expected of the media. Any contrary argument, such as the one muted by retired General Babangida over the 12th June issue, is a reversal to authoritarianism and a view to the media as an instrument of the state.
As contributors and aggregators of and to public opinions, the media, in all these instances, not only aired public opinions prevalent and in consonance with their socio-cultural and political milieu, but also contributed, in no small measure, to the forming of these opinions. As expected, it is not and should not be in relation to the state that the media are expected to play the agenda-setting role, but in all aspect of public life. Directly or indirectly, the media in Nigeria vis-a-vis Africa, most times, over-romanticize with the opposition that they, oftentimes, appear as instruments of opposition. The media, irrespective of this failing, afford the public the much needed communicative spaces for independent discourse that helps individuals to form opinions, not necessarily on public and state matters, but on any subject of importance to them. So, rather than castigate the media for their roles in these and other examples, it must be conceded that the media were mainly performing their conceptual roles.

It must also be admitted that the openness the media experienced following the end of the Cold War meant that the state’s ceiling on what could be discussed, and how such issues are to be discussed is shattered. Owing to this development, state actors and state institutions are daily buffeted on all sides by the media who are demanding that state actors and government open-up their activities for public scrutiny. Expectedly, the resultant criticisms against media’s role in post-election violence in Nigeria vis-à-vis Africa could be conceived as merely residues of the authoritarian period, yet to wear away.

Summary and Conclusion.

Substantively, two important qualifications could be made on Chief Bola Ige’s post-election media broadcast. Overtly and covertly, the speech incited violence; therefore the blame could not be placed on the altar of the media. Secondly, the military take-over of 1993 may be premised on the electoral frauds perpetrated at the 1993 elections, this is not enough to exonerate Chief Bola Ige from blame for
inciting the violence. Chief Bola Ige, as later events have shown, truly won the election. Neveitheless, the former governor was a bad and intolerant loser. His post-election speech was, to say the least, socially irresponsible.

The media, in the 12th June and Ekiti re-run election crises, directly or indirectly, took sides with the populace and the opposition and were overtly critical of the military and the ruling Peoples’ Democratic Party. Notwithstanding this, 12th June and Ekiti re-run elections could be described as the glorious moments for the Nigerian media, as the two elections afforded the media opportunities to watch, agitate and set-agenda for public debate on very important national issue: governance. The socio-economic and political landscape in Nigeria prior to the 1993 election was confusing. On many occasions, the General Babangida-led military government promised, but failed to hand-over power to democratically elected government. This situation weaned public disenchantment with the regime One false start after another created distrust and, general confusion, when the 12th June election was finally annulled.

The massive electoral malpractices that took place in Nigeria in 2007 were unprecedented in the nation’s history. The late President, Alhaji Musa Yar’Adua, admitted this incontestable fact during his inauguration on 29th May 2007. The electoral victory of the PDP in most states, especially the South West, came to everybody as a surprise, as there were no meaningful development in any of the PDP-controlled states to justify massive support the PDP claimed it had at the elections. Therefore, the media, like the opposition and international observers, daubed the elections as grossly flawed. Given this background, it could not be blamed on the press that emotions rose during the re-run elections in Ekiti. More appropriate, the media in these cases could be excused as mainly performing what could be described as their three conceptual roles in the democratic process: to watch, to fight and to set agenda for public debates. This position becomes all the more important
when considered along the lines of the pre-election socio-economic and political environment briefly described above.

For democracy to thrive and survive in Nigeria vis-à-vis Africa, it must be emphasized; the media must be free, open, and must be ready to be socially responsible for their actions. A situation whereby the media, rather than being objective, take sides with the opposition is unacceptable and intolerable. Post-election violence, as the article has shown, could be regarded as offshoots of the pre-election socio-economic and political atmosphere created by the political and military classes.

**References**


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