

Globalization of the media and the challenges of Democratisation in Nigeria.

By Abimbola O. Adesoji

Abstract

Without gainsaying, Globalization has impacted tremendously on the media. One important implication of this development is the revolution in information dissemination. The Print Media, which is the focus of this study, is not left out of this information revolution. With the new wave of democratisation witnessed in Africa in the 1990s, the press became active participant in the tasks of promoting, projecting and supporting the process. In Nigeria where the political landscape became confusing as a result of the ambiguities that characterised the military-supervised democratisation, the press was not found wanting despite the travails of the media during the period in question. It would appear that the ability of the press to play the watchdog role creditably derives from its antecedents, particularly during the period of the nationalist struggle for political independence. However the contention is that the Nigerian Media, if placed in the context of global experience, still has a long way to go in bringing the opportunities of Globalization to bear on its contribution to democratisation. More importantly, this paper contends that the varied nature of the press has affected its response to democratisation. The paper examines the impacts of globalisation on the print media and how the impacted press promoted democratisation. The paper also highlights some of the challenges that Nigerian press has to face as far as democratisation is concerned in a globalised world.

Introduction

The Nigerian Press has remained a vibrant institution since the 1920s. Beginning with the emergence of the *West African Pilot* in 1937, the press has played a pivotal role in promoting political awareness, sensitising the populace and moulding and directing public opinion.¹ Expectedly it was a strong force in the struggle for the attainment of political independence. Not even the long period of military rule and its attendant risks could deter the press from playing its ascribed roles. In fact, more than any other period, the press became more vociferous and even took to guerrilla journalism, a practice of publishing and circulating newspapers and magazines underground, in order to prosecute a cause that it believed in.

¹ Fred I.A. Omu, *Press and Politics in Nigeria, 1880-1937*, London: Longman, 1978, 204-240.

Meanwhile the last two decades or so witnessed tremendous advancement in the spread of the knowledge of information and communication technology. Virtually every segment of society, including the press, has been impacted by these developments. Even though the knowledge spread slowly to, or was latently embraced in Nigeria, its effects have been enormous. Not only has it quickened information dissemination, it has also revolutionised the conduct, method and quality of media practices generally.

Beginning from the early 1990s, Africa witnessed a new wave of democratisation, beginning with the Zambian experience.² Nigeria was not left behind as the military made some half-hearted efforts to democratise. The Babangida regime (1985-1993) conceived and ill-implemented is about the most expensive transition programme in the history of Nigeria.³ The consistent corruption under this regime led to the distinct emergence or revival and proliferation of radical and non-conformist newspapers and magazines, which have been appropriately labelled as the activist press.⁴ The activist press is so called because their emergence, mode of operation and activities went beyond the known and conventional journalism that existed earlier. Reminiscent of the anti-colonial press like the *West African Pilot*, the activist press mounted serious press campaigns on the military and its anti-democratic tendencies.

Meanwhile, press opposition to militarised democratisation reached its peak during the dark days of General Sani Abacha (1993-1998). Despite the efforts to suppress it mainly through proscription of newspapers and magazines as well as clampdown on journalists, the activist press became more vibrant. It would seem that the revolution in global communication aided tremendously the ability of the Nigerian press, not only to challenge anti-democratic forces, but also to pursue democratisation. Apart from speeding up the access which Africans have had to fast breaking events in other parts of the world, new communication technologies are also eroding monolithic

² Louise M. Bourgault, *Mass Media in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993, 206-223.

³ W. Alade Fawole, "The Military and the Democratisation Process in Nigeria under the Babangida Regime" in *Crises and Contradictions in Nigeria's Democratisation Programme, 1986-1993*. (ed) Nahzeem Oluwafemi Mimiko, Akure: Stebak, 1995, 101-120

⁴ Nahzeem Oluwafemi Mimiko, "From Agitation for human Rights to the Pursuit of Power: The Impact of Human Rights Organisation on Nigeria's Aborted Democratisation Programme, 1986-1993" in Mimiko, Nahzeem Oluwafemi (ed) *Crises and Contradictions in Nigeria's Democratisation Programme*, 158.

information control within Africa.⁵ This in effect meant that institutions like the Media (that are not government owned) became better placed not only to counter government propaganda but also to popularise views previously suppressed. More importantly, with the citizens better informed, the status quo was challenged while the growing dissent found expression in the mounting opposition to authoritarian rule.

Furthermore, in addition to facilitating contact with other parties interested in the democratic process in Africa, this development also encouraged extensive coverage of the political situation in Nigeria. These developments coupled with the growth of the activist press aided democratisation. Globalization therefore empowers the press to contribute actively to the cause of democratisation.

Globalization, Democratisation and the Media: A Conceptual Framework

Globalization is a widespread concept with a considerable degree of ambiguity. This ambiguity does not mean that it remains unclear or ill defined. Globalization has been viewed from different perspectives and dimensions particularly in relation to different interests, subject areas and scope. Hence it has been difficult adopting a standard definition. One perspective attempts to define it as a process of reinforcement and extension of the international flux of commerce, capitals, technology and labour force. Another perspective refers to institutional changes, which are brought about in the society by the increase of these flows and the development of the transnational corporations. In this point of view, it stressed the weakening of the regulating function of the national states. In its stronger version, globalisation implies the disappearance of the state in its economic dimensions while a subtler version considers globalisation just as the loss of an important portion of the economic sovereignty. Yet another perspective refers to the growing homogenisation of certain processes and behaviours like the introduction of global standards in the production of goods. However, the most extended

⁵ The increasing number of fax machines and computer based networks in the hands of private individuals, companies and non-governmental organizations has broken the monopoly of governments in Africa over information control and the accompanying censorship. See Bourgault, 207.

idea in this perspective is the existence of a convergence in the demands of goods and services, a homogenisation in the regulation of the capital goods and the technology.⁶

Globalization is also defined as a set of processes changing the nature of human interaction across a wide range of spheres including the economic, political, social, technological and environmental. Furthermore, it is perceived as the process of integration of the world community into a common system either economic or social.⁷

From the foregoing, it could be seen that globalisation conjures up a picture of a borderless world more often than not facilitated by the convergence of information and communication technologies. Although it is a concept that means different things to different people across time and space, it essentially means the growing increase in interconnectedness and interdependences among the world's regions, nations, governments, business and institutions.⁸ It is a process, which engenders free flow of ideas, people, goods, services and capital thereby fostering integration of economies and societies.

Attempts have also been made to periodize globalisation. While some see it as nothing new, some others see it as a modern form of capitalism. It is also seen as the euphemism for westernisation.⁹ Historiographically, some dated it to the birth of the world states system following the end of the Second World War, when new technologies transformed the speed and range of communications allowing globalisation and automation of the industrial processes. To the economists, however, globalisation began in the 1970s.¹⁰ These suggestions notwithstanding, it is clear that globalisation is an ongoing process, with its most visible aspect being the spread of information and communication technologies.

⁶ Andres Musacchio, "The Concept of Globalization". Presented at the 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences held at Oslo, Norway August 6-13 2000. 4-7.

⁷ Layi Erinosh, "Globalization and its Paradoxes" *The Guardian* (Lagos) 16 July, 2004, 9.

⁸ Jacob Ajekiigbe, "Effects of Globalization and Universal Banking in Nigeria". *The Guardian* (Lagos), 7 July 2004, 27&31.

⁹ Erinosh, 9.

¹⁰ Daniella Preda, "Globalization and Regionalization: An Historical Approach". Presented at the 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences held at Oslo, Norway. August 6-13, 2000. 8-11.

From different perspectives on globalisation, certain features could be identified. These include spread of technology and ideas, development of institutional changes that cut across national boundaries as well as the homogenisation of certain processes and behaviours. The advance in technology has made available computer equipment, facsimile machines, telex systems and satellite communications, to name a few. Apart from facilitating networking among journalists, these facilities have revolutionised news printing, editing and reportage. More importantly, it has aided considerably in news circulation. Generally speaking, Globalization has made possible adequate and timely processing and dissemination of information.

Beginning from its emergence in the 1860s, the press has been varied.¹¹ The circumstances surrounding the emergence of these newspapers, the ideological disposition of the founders/owners and editors, the purpose of their establishment as well as the operating environment, all contribute to the differences in their approaches, method of operation and responses to issues. These differences, however, became more pronounced in the 1920s, fuelled as it were by the growing north-south divide, radical/nationalist versus liberal disposition, as well as national versus provincial orientation or typology of newspapers.¹² Consequently, different sections of the press have responded differently to such issues as nationalism, constitutionalism and state-creation¹³ among others. With the exception of the seeming unanimity of the press in condemning the military era, the press continues to have varied responses to all issues, including democratisation.

A set of interrelated factors explain why democratisation occurs in some countries and not others. These explanatory factors which could be a condition, structure or process include economic development, social divisions, state and political institutions, civil

¹¹ Increase H.E. Coker, *Landmarks of the Nigerian press: An outline of the Origins and Development of the Newspaper Press in Nigeria, 1859-1965*, Apapa: Nigerian National Press, 1968, 32-47.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Stephen O. Bamiduro, "Press and Politics in Nigeria's First Republic, 1960-1966" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, (JHSN) vol. XI no. 3 & 4 December 1982 – June 1983, 107-125.

society, political culture and ideas as well as transnational and international engagements including war.¹⁴

Theoretical approaches comprising a set of ideas and explanatory generalisation have also been adopted to explain patterns of democratisation. These include the modernisation, transition and structural approaches. The modernisation approach emphasises the centrality of the level of social and economic development to the process of democratisation.¹⁵ Succinctly, it has been summed up as “the more well-to-do the people of a country are on average, the more likely they will favour, achieve and maintain a democratic system for their country.”¹⁶ The transition approach emphasises political processes and elite initiatives and choices as accounting for moves from authoritarian rule to liberal democracy. It contends that certain actions, choices and strategies of political elites are beneficial to democratic transition while others are not. It therefore stresses that democratisation is largely contingent on what the elitist and individuals do, when, where and how.¹⁷

Unlike the transition approach, the structural approach explains the democratisation processes not by the agency of political elite but primarily by changing structures of power. The basic premise of the structural approach to democratisation is that the particular interrelationships of certain structures of power - economic, social, and political - as they gradually change through history provides constraints and opportunities that drive political elite and others along a historical trajectory leading towards liberal democracy. Other such structural interrelationships lead historically in other political directions.¹⁸ This explains why the changing structure of class, state and transnational power could lead in a democratic direction while others could lead to authoritarianism.

Its limitations notwithstanding, theoretical generalizations have helped to explain why democracy is in one place and not in another or why democratisation is taking place.

Globalization, the Nigerian Press and Democratisation

¹⁴ David Potter, “Explaining Democratisation” in *Democratization*, (ed) David Potter et al. Malden, U.S.A.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁶ Diamond, “Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered” *American Behavioural Scientist*, vol 35 no. 4/5 pp 450 – 499; cited in Potter, 24-26.

¹⁷ Potter, 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 18.

The involvement of the Nigerian Press in political activism has, at times, produced landmark results.¹⁹ It would appear that this involvement influenced the press's view of and contribution to democratisation. Meanwhile, the revolution in global communication has brought the world much closer. With regard to the press, it has facilitated networking among journalists. This networking has brought about some developments. These included the recycling of international print media output on the domestic scene, the wide coverage of political issues in Nigeria by foreign magazines as well as the maintenance of contact with democracy and human rights activist and even exiled journalists. These developments became pronounced particularly at the peak of military repression in Nigeria when some print media organisations could not operate freely in the country. Thus news articles and features that were previously being suppressed became worldwide knowledge. In this regard, the *Times of London*, *New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *Time* and *Newsweek*, all contributed in different forms and proportion.²⁰ It would seem that the depth and volume of information about the democratic process in Nigeria influenced greatly the response of the international community to political developments in Nigeria. The isolation of Nigeria in the international community is a case in point.

Understandably therefore, the press has not only opposed and exposed anti-democratic tendencies at different times, it has also played the role of a watchdog with a view to promoting and safeguarding democratisation.²¹ In particular, the Nigerian press exposed the dubious democratisation programme of the military governments in Nigeria.

¹⁹ See for instance Fred Omu, "Journalism and the Rise of Nigerian Nationalism: John Payne Jackson, 1848-1915" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (JHSN) vol. VII no 3 December 1974; James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, Berkeley; University of California Press, 1971; James S. Coleman & Carl G. Rosberg Jr (ed) *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964; Omu, *Press and Politics in Nigeria*, Bamiduro, "Press and Politics in Nigeria's First Republic..." 107-125. Olukotun, "At the Barricades..." 229-243.

²⁰ Ayo Olukotun, *State Repression, Crisis of Democratisation and Media Resistance in Nigeria, 1988-1999*, Ibadan: College Press, 2002, 195-197.

²¹ Abimbola Davies, "Coup Against Civilians: My Role My Regret" *Daily Sketch* (Ibadan), 17 July 1993, 1,7,11; Arthur Nzeribe, "The Grand Strategy" *Newswatch* (Lagos), 20 December 1993, 9-18; Dipo Kolawole, "The Nigerian Press and the Abacha Transition Programme" in *Political Democratisation and Economic Deregulation in Nigeria under the Abacha Administration, 1993-1998*, (eds) Dipo Kolawole and N. Oluwafemi Mimiko. Ado-Ekiti: Department of Political Science, Ondo State University, 1998, 106

It would seem that the democratisation programmes of both Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha were tailored towards ensuring self-succession. This perhaps explains why the programmes were characterised by contradictions, deliberately and carefully designed by the architects to ensure their failure. The several changes of election timetable, the banning and unbanning of certain categories of politicians as well as the encouragement and empowerment of anti-democratic forces like the Association for Better Nigeria (A.B.N) were some of the efforts made to truncate the democratisation process under General Ibrahim Babangida. There was also the manipulated adoption of a single presidential candidate by five different political parties under General Sani Abacha.

Beyond exposing these contradictions, the vibrant press roundly condemned it. Not surprisingly vitriolic attacks were launched on journalists, both foreign and Nigerian.²² It would seem also that the efforts at image laundering in a section of foreign press, particularly by the Abacha government, in which substantial amounts of money were wasted, was a response to the relentless war waged by the activist press on military autocracy and its manipulation of the democratic process.²³

Furthermore, the press through its coverage, reportage and editorials aided considerably, opposition and civil society groups. This was particularly the case with the annulment of June 12 1993 presidential election considered as Nigeria's freest and fairest election. Not only was the annulment roundly and consistently condemned, there was also persistent call for the de-annulment of the election. Beyond this, it has been noted that the pressure mounted by the opposition media made up mainly of the activist press, together with other similar developments forced Babangida out of office.²⁴

With the advent of a new democratic dispensation in 1999 the press has continued playing its traditional role of informing and educating. Through this the press has educated citizens on political parties' programmes with a view to influencing people's choice of candidates or voting patterns. The press has also added glamour to the political process by its promotion of political parties and their candidates mostly through

²² Michele Marnogues, *Guerrilla Journalism*, Paris: Reporters Sans Frontieres, 1996, pp 126-127; cited in Olukotun, 204

²³ The Guardian (Lagos) 30 November 1995. 21.

²⁴ Olukotun, 206.

competitive advertisements and features with a view to selling their candidatures. More importantly, the press has participated actively in exposing the ills and excesses of *dramatis personae*, which have the tendency of denting, truncating or even negatively affecting democratisation. The certificate forgery case of Salisu Buhari, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives is a case in point.²⁵ Buhari claimed to have got a degree certificate from University of Toronto, which he presented to the Independent National Electoral Commission for screening. This was later found out to be a fake. This discovery, particularly the press exposition on it, led to his forced resignation and trial.

However, despite the aspiration of the Nigerian Press to conform to the international standard, it would appear that the level of response is still very low or inadequate. As such, many challenges are not being met particularly going by the standard established in advanced democracies. The Nigerian press for instance is yet to realise the value and thus the necessity of carrying out credible and well conducted opinion polls on political parties, their programmes and candidates as well as their chances of success or otherwise in elections. In the same vein, the Nigerian Press, with few recent exceptions, is not interested in and has not taken seriously the conduct of opinion polls to assess the popularity or otherwise of democratic governments, leaders and their policies.²⁶

Also, the press has not considered the importance of anchoring or stimulating vibrant debates that could bring political parties and candidates out of their shells and expose their programmes to public scrutiny. Similarly, it has neither considered seriously nor cultivated the habit of digging deep into parties' manifestoes and doing deeper analysis of issues affecting the nation and how the contesting parties intend to address them on assumption of power. It would seem rather that the concern of a significant section of the press has been on the undue promotion and projection of the personality of candidates, perhaps with the intent of image laundering with a view to giving them undeserved edge over others.²⁷ It is not impossible that this was done in return for financial reward.

²⁵ *The News* (Lagos), 19 July 1999, 10-18; *Tell* (Lagos), 2 August 1999, 8-17.

²⁶ The Guardian Opinion Poll, "Citizens bemoan state of democracy" *The Guardian* (Lagos), 7 July 2004, 19.

²⁷ Newspapers are usually replete with features on candidates contesting various

These developments have a number of implications. In the first place, it could make election rigging possible. This perhaps was the situation in the past where in the absence of any foreknowledge of how elections could go, victory has always gone to the highest bidder. It has also encouraged the emergence of all manners of candidates including fraudsters, ex-convicts and drug barons.²⁸ This was because adequate searchlight was not beamed on candidates seeking public offices. Neither were their personalities adequately x-rayed to determine their suitability for public offices, which requires a high level of morality, probity and transparency. Besides, Nigerians have been left in the dark due to inadequate information on party programmes and candidates. This no doubt has resulted in situations where people have voted based on ethnic and religious sentiment or even blindly in some extreme cases.

Furthermore, by projecting candidates who lack the credibility and moral standing for public offices, the press distort values, promote mediocrity, wound further the psyche of rational people and contribute to moral degeneracy. In cases where money has changed hands, which was often the situation, corruption has become endemic. This perhaps explains why corruption has been institutionalised in the press with the brown envelope syndrome.²⁹ In the long run, it becomes very difficult to correct or criticise leaders that emerged through such processes particularly by the press that threw them up in the first instance. This development is clearly against the social responsibility theory of the mass media. Simply put, the notion of the social responsibilities of the mass media means that the mass media act as the conscience of the nation by revealing bad things, commending good things and keeping the interest of the citizenry uppermost in their agenda.³⁰

positions around election periods. One important characteristic of these features is that they are mostly written to promote the candidates and enhance their chances of success.

²⁸ The personality of some political office holders in the present dispensation has been controversial. The case of Maurice Ibekwe, a fraudster kingpin who got elected into the House of Representatives is still fresh in mind. Similarly, Governor James Ibori of Delta State is still contending with an ex-convict case. There are other examples.

²⁹ The brown envelope syndrome describes inducing writers and editors with financial gratification to influence their writings in favour of the givers.

³⁰ Noma Owens-Ibie, "American Media and the Nigerian Press: A Study of Agenda-Setting in the Democratic Process" in *Governance and the Electoral Process: Nigeria and the United States of America* (ed) Oyin Ogunba, Lagos: ASAN, 1997, .469.

Meanwhile, it would seem that the poor response of the press to the challenges of democratisation particularly in the present dispensation has produced far more serious developments with grave implications. It is not uncommon that in their desire to be part of the system and as a form of compensation, vibrant journalists have secured appointment in government as commissioners, special advisors or special assistants. Some others have become contractors and media consultants to government at different levels. This policy of incorporation, apart from resulting in the incapacitation of vibrant journalists, has more importantly led to the surrender of the press to the state, with the political elite becoming the ultimate victors. One direct fall out of this development has been the watering down of the headlines and content of reports and editorials.³¹ This contrasted sharply with what was obtained under the military when the press, despite its handicaps and the dangerous operating climate, did thorough policing of the elite in government. Not only were the deadlines set by the military to quit government popularised they were also effectively monitored. This was especially the case with General Abdusalami Abubakar's administration (1998-1999).³² More importantly, the military governments particularly of Babangida and Abacha were effectively pre-empted. Not only were the anti-people policies and programmes of the two military governments clearly exposed before they were announced or implemented, the citizenry were sufficiently informed and effectively prepared for what the governments was capable of doing. This perhaps explains the travails of the press under the military characterised as it were by unwarranted arrests, prolonged detention sometimes without trial as well as trial of journalists on spurious charges. There were also seizures of offending newspapers and magazines at different times as well as outright proscription and closure of media houses on flimsy excuses, mostly under the guise of maintaining national security.³³

It would seem also that the capture of the press by the state has affected newspapers' readership generally particularly as discerning readers are becoming more disinterested while the growing club of free readers who were always eager to read the latest exposé on government, have thinned out considerably. This development may not

³¹ Bankole Ebisemiju, "Combat over, time for the news with human face" *The Guardian* (Lagos), 29 March 1999. 36.

³² See for example the various editions of *Tell* between January and April 1999.

³³ Gbolahan Gbadamosi, "The Many Cases of Human Rights Abuses" *The Guardian* (Lagos), 11 June 1998. 15-17.

be unconnected with the impression that has been created in the minds of Nigerians that the press had become an arm of the state. With most journalists and editors now threading cautiously, there is the likelihood that the dissents will sooner or later be whipped into line while the uncompromising ones will be branded as extremists. This trend is beginning to emerge.³⁴ The arrest and trial of two journalists who produced a comprehensive feature on the newly acquired presidential jet is a case in point. Gbenga Aruleba of the African Independent Television, (AIT) was accused of describing the recently acquired presidential jet as *tokunbo* (fairly used or second hand), while Rotimi Durojaiye of the Independent Newspapers Limited raised some questions over the age and cost of the presidential jet. The two journalists were therefore arraigned for allegedly making derogatory statements about the new presidential jet. Arguably the press feature on the jet particularly its cost, age, capability as well as whether its purchase followed due process or not, could no doubt have been seen by the Federal Government as “going too far.”³⁵ The ultimate casualty of this ugly scenario will be the Nigerian people who will be denied robust criticism and assessment of government policies and programmes aimed at keeping the leadership on their toes.

Conclusion

The response of the Nigerian Press to the challenges of democratisation has not been adequate. This could be due to the fact that the Nigerian Press has not taken full advantage of the benefits of Globalization to information dissemination. The implication therefore is that many challenges have either not been met at all or not properly met. While the Nigerian press could be excused on the ground that it is still globalising, it is pertinent to say that there is the need for it to quicken its pace so that it can catch up with the novel developments characteristic of the globalised world. This will not doubt enhance its ability to cope with the growing challenges of democratisation and other developments in the world. Corroborating this position, Sola Oni contends that,

³⁴ Sometime ago, President Olusegun Obasanjo accused the press of being too critical of his government. He particularly accused the press of acting like a colonial press. See Usoro Usoro, “Press Singing and Praise Freedom” *Saturday Sun* (Lagos), 8 November 2003. 23.

³⁵ *The Punch*, (Lagos) 27 June 2006. 1, 2 & 9.

The world as a global village has come to stay. An institution that fails to meet the challenges of globalisation shall remain irrelevant. There is no other lexis. This is the prize of globalization.³⁶

³⁶ Sola Oni, "Prize of Globalization" *The Guardian on Sunday* (Lagos), 28 February 1999. 28.