

## The Media and Democracy in Ghana: The challenges of ensuring good governance

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### Abstract

*The attitudes and cultures of the past continue to dominate Ghana media's engagement with political leaders. This media landscape since the decolonizing period has been a binary one as expressed in for and against - incumbents. The authoritarian character of governance in the past gave a genesis to it. The protracted authoritarian and illiberal regimes before the inauguration of the 4th Republic closed various modes of expression resulting in the calcification of antagonistic relationships. The democratic transformation since 1992 has not really changed the mode of engagement. With some degree of democratic consolidation, focus has significantly shifted towards ensuring good governance, which encapsulates a government based on rule of law, political accountability and transparency. The media's role in ensuring that power-wielders operate within the standards required for 'good governance' is critical. However, the effectiveness of the media is blunted by its deep-seated partisanship. The credibility crisis that afflicts it makes readership to perceive the media as a fronting meant for political vilification and capitalization. The paper examines the issues that generate the credibility problems and concludes that unless the media transcends the cultures of the past its relevancy in ensuring good governance cannot be assured.*

### Introduction

The relative success of the third wave democracy in Ghana (Thomas Carothers, 2002) since its inauguration in 1993 has significantly changed the political discourse from the prior demands for political participation and contestation, to those of crystallizing democracy through 'good governance'. Unlike authoritarian systems that are definitively opaque, unaccountable and non-participatory, a democratic system based on 'good governance' is expected to be anchored by libertarian guarantees, as well as ensuring that leadership is responsible and accountable to the constituents. In addition, a good governance system should ensure that the administrative system is guided by universalistic principles that enhance transparency, as it contrasts with patrimonial particularism that is integral to opacity (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Mungui-Pippidi, 2006). There is abundant evidence that the route for emerging democracies to the stage of democratic crystallization can be arduous; and as such it is not an assured destination for all that embarked on the journey (cf Dankwart Rustow, 1970). What is, therefore, paramount for fledgling democracies for the realization of liberal democracy that will be characterized by universalistic norms, is the adoption of the requisite political culture that is transcendental enough to effectively engage state-managers in blunting power abuse. The arrival at this stage of political development is usually evinced in the habits of mind and the attitudes of the most active political actors, and the media, by the kind of questions they ask; and how they perceive their political opponents. It is important to note that social and political changes are dynamic processes that can result in either carrying all the actors along, or eventuate in dropping off those segments of society that are glued to past habits and cultures. Thus, the habituated modes of engagement between political actors, made possible by an authoritarian environment are most likely to leave stranded some of the protagonists when the pace of change towards democracy gets too overpowering. The media in Ghana today seems to be victims of the calcification of the cultures that are dwindling in significance as shown by the way the media responds to new circumstances.

The political environment has significantly changed after 15 years of the democratization process, which according to Joseph Ayee (1997) has reasonably consolidated; and yet the media continue to exhibit difficulties in transcending the past. The gladiator-fashion of the media's engagement with perceived political opponents is mainly a manifestation of the feud-mentality that is characteristic of

Ghana politics ( Owusu, 1986). The media has been the vehicle for political combatants to fulfill their objectives over the years. It is for this reason that the media is eminently in a 'trotting on the spot' stasis, even though the ground is fast shifting under it.

The reactions to opportunities, and the closures, of the protracted authoritarian past tend to impose partisan polarization on the general society, of which the media is its crystallized microcosm. By its strategic location in the social spectrum, the media in many ways could not be a mere reflection of the binary societal polarization; but an active agent in accentuating this cleavage. Currently, the two major parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), which incidentally are the only parties that have so far formed government, carry the banners of this polarization. The roots of the current cleavage and its associated attitude are in the exclusivist authoritarian politics of the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC). But even before the PNDC era, the antecedence of the binary nature of the media landscape had been registered in the combatant character of the decolonizing politics, and also in the rally against postcolonial authoritarian regimes. Since the colonial period, the traditional approach the media which had engaged the political leaders are shown in two predictable ways: in antagonistic terms or in clientage-directed sycophantic fashion. The placement of a particular media institution in this engagement equation is usually determined by its attitude towards the incumbent. In this regard, the media had either been used as the instrument for the mobilization against repressive rule, or for the maintenance of an existing order of things. In this relational context between governments and the media, it is no surprise that when the incumbents perceive a particular media institution as a menacing nuisance, it is disregarded and visited with the reprisal wrath of power-wielders. The opprobrious baggage that the media carry, in the eyes of the stakeholders, has consequences on how people understand its gate keeping role and that translated into the observance of good governance.

The seminal concern of the paper is, therefore, to examine the dwindling role of the media in its traditional vanguard role, which will ensure that the fundamentals of 'good governance' are realized. This is done against the backdrop of the deep political partisan cleavage in the Ghana polity that the media itself has actively been contributing to. The effort is to trace the development of this prevailing media culture over the years. The bifurcated engagement that had existed over the years may have fitted well into a social arrangement of the past; but whether that posture continues to be relevant in the changed political situation that is now democratic is worth examining. It is agreed among transitologists that a transition process would not necessarily terminate in an assured liberal democratic destination (O'Donnell, 1986; Ninsin, 1998). Once the likelihood for an emerging democracy to stall is a known fact, it behooves on the media, and civic associations to adopt new engagement tactics that transcends the prevailing pettiness for the sake of their own relevancy in The transformed environment. It is only when that happens that its acclaimed fourth estate role would hold, in ensuring that governments stay the democratic course. As we acknowledge, the strategic importance of the media is in its role as a check on power-wielders; but we are also inexorably pushed to ask whether the media everywhere has the capacity, and attitudes that will make this happen. It is the capability of the Ghana media to effectively fulfill this role in an atmosphere of skepticism about their autonomy that is the nub issue here. The current political landscape in Ghana is awash with a deep-seated political partisanship that in many ways is a continuity of a political culture that is traceable to the colonial period. The task mainly is to historicize the current situation as we trek back the path of the partisan culture of the Ghana media as this would enable us contextualize the present situation.

This is also done to examine the social mutating dynamics that have occurred in order to situate the problematic of the media within the proper perspective. The media, just as any other social institution may be left behind, and thereby suffer irrelevancy, if it remains in situ with past attitudes. It is within this frame that the imposing questions of how the traditional attitudes of yesterday, continue to be relevant today, and will culminate in the determination of tomorrow, will pop up repeatedly, particularly as it relates to the media culture. This is a core issue, as we examine democratic governance in its 'end of history' phase.

### **The Genesis and Evolution of the Partisan Media Culture**

The traditional media, of which the press featured prominently, had been instrumental in the battles against the kaleidoscope of authoritarian regimes that sprawled the Ghana polity. The frontline role of the nationalist media in the decolonizing politicking that continued in various postcolonial anti-authoritarian struggles culminated in the cultural traits that such circumstances imprinted on the media political warriors. A cultural trait is definitely an embossment that is distinguishable by one's innate reflexive and stubborn observance of an expected mode of behavior. It is this definitive rigidity in cultural observance that had developed over the years, which largely characterizes the current media situation in Ghana.

In the mobilization of social forces against colonial rule, the role of the media was seen as critical to the realization of that objective. Even before the nationalist drive entered higher gears in the postwar period, the African Morning Post, in the 1930s had adopted a fiery stance against colonial abuses. The article 'Has the African a God?' written by Wallace Johnson in the African Morning Post, which was a cause célèbre reaction to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1936, provoked the colonialist's response through the invocation of the Sedition Act (1934) that resulted in the deportation of Wallace Johnson and Nnamdi Azikiwe to their respective countries of Sierra Leone and Nigeria (Kwame Nkrumah 1957; David Rooney 1988). The panicky response of the colonial authorities to the publication in the African Morning Post rather gave the two non-Ghanaian and yet nationalists celebrity status; and to register the point that notwithstanding the repressive character of colonial rule, it was after all vulnerable to the legitimacy crisis that the media could bring to bear on authoritarian power-wielders. Though the purpose at the time was not to dislodge colonialism per se, the anticolonial media that emerged in the postwar period found the utility of the media's anti-government posture in the corrosion of opponents' legitimacy a useful tool. The leadership of the Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) in Particular was quick in employing the Accra Evening News and the Daily Telegraph in the sweltering journealese which was started by the African Morning Post to carry on the zeal of decolonizing politics. What was conspicuous at the time was that despite the profound loathes and libel that the CPP newspapers carried, except the complaints and lawsuits from the UGCC and the colonial authorities, the general readership condoned the excesses. The near commonality on the independence objective among the nationals was so overriding to warrant 'rocking the boat' by contestations over the veracity of what the CPP papers were publishing. Even when efforts were made to restrain the malice the CPP media were up to, through libelous lawsuits, they boomeranged on the plaintiffs, as the prestige of the CPP rather soared. But as the contestation between the CPP and the colonial authorities waxed through the inauguration of the political dyadic in 1951 the cleavage between the competing African groupings came to assume exaggerated dimensions by its acuteness. As the political frontline shifted, so did the combat character also changed to fratricide, which the media encouraged further. This came out of the realization that the tools that the CPP media used previously against the colonial authorities, were now better directed at the mosaic competitors that they now faced.

But the use of the media for political capitalization was not a sole patented monopoly of the CPP; and as such the papers that were sympathetic to the oppositionists also pursued their goals with comparable vigor to unseat the CPP. The appositeness, and the effectiveness, of the employment of the media to undermine the incumbent authority were also fully exploited by the amalgamated opposition to the CPP. The National Liberation Movement (NLM) in particular used the party paper the *Liberator*, and the privately-owned paper the *Ashanti Pioneer*, to detoxicate the CPP-sympathetic papers (Dennis Austin, 1964). Thenceforth the binary schism in the Ghana media culture became well entrenched as political power was intractably contested for, between the CPP government and its opponents.

In addition to the openly proclaimed party-owned newspapers that were unabashedly propagandist; the state-owned newspaper the *Daily Graphic*, which initially portrayed a neutral stance quickly lost that image as it became a vociferous government mouthpiece. This was later joined by the state-owned *Ghanaian Times* to augment the incumbent-supportive media. For patronage reasons, the state-owned media for most part of Ghana's history had been pliant in their relationship with incumbents; few efforts at assertiveness were punished with measures that sent the editors back to the employment-seeking desk. The audacious effort in October 1970 by Cameron Duodu, editor of the *Daily Graphic*, to question Busia's foreign policy of 'dialogue' with Apartheid South Africa produced immediate emotive response when the Prime Minister fired him. As if he was not satisfied with the oversight performance of his Minister of Information, the Prime Minister assumed the ministry's responsibility himself in a cabinet reshuffle. In the case of the private media, the approach to fight back has always been multi-pronged. The suitable arsenal to employ laid in the estimation of the incumbent of the level of threat the media posed and, which approach of action constituted the least line of social rejection. The case of the *Pioneer* is illustrative in this case; whereas it was possible for Nkrumah to ban the Kumasi-based *Pioneer* in 1961 Busia, driven by similar menacing character of the *Pioneer* rather chose to co-opt the editor. The noxious sting of the *Pioneer* was removed by the editor's appointment in January 1971 as the Public Relations Officer in the Prime Minister's office (Goldsworthy, 1973).

Some Christian churches such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and the Methodist Church also joined in the newspaper trail, obviously for clerical reasons but the newspapers that had their genesis in the colonial period were to find entry into postcolonial political arena irresistible, especially as they also found themselves in the crucibles of totalistic control unbearable. The circumstances that veered the focus of the clerically pontificating papers to politics, made them susceptible to partisanship in their engagement with political leaders. The height of the clerical media in politics was marked by the mobilization effort against Acheampong's corporatist project of 'Union Government'; when the (Catholic) *Standard*, the (Presbyterian) *Christian Messenger* and the *Methodist Times* became implacable in their attack on the ruse effort in the 1970s. The *Catholic Standard* in particular was noted for the carriage of the politically camouflaged Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letters that attracted a lot of interest for being daring in its critical look at Acheampong. Later the epistles were directed at the Rawlings' rule to denounce its wanton abuse of human rights. The general suffocation of the dissenting media under the PNDC before 1990 caused a strategic retreat of the oppositionists to the cover that the burgeoning Pentecostal and Charismatic Church industry had provided. As the clerical messages became political, often captured in satires, so did the newspapers and mimeographs that were obviously being authored by their ambitious members that appropriated the religious space for politically-directed goals.

In the familiar postcolonial circumstances that had veritably become a continuity of the repressive colonial order, the academic community also suffered attenuation of their ivory-tower freedoms to varying degrees. This was especially the case with the thought-homogenization effort under the CPP monism, and the fall-in-line mentality that was later followed to varying levels by the several illiberal regimes that spotted the Ghana political landscape. For this reason the Legon Observer published mainly by the members of the academic community of the University of Ghana championed the anti-incumbent drive, which basically turned out being anti-authoritarian one too. In the 1970s the survival of the Legon Observer as a paper was only possible through the adoption of pseudonyms that somehow protected the authors (Goldsworthy, 1973).

It is worth noting that political exclusion in Africa easily translates into material deprivation too, and hence it is often with a heightened sense of indignation that political opponents fight their course for inclusion and for power control. That indignant posture is best shown in the media, where the stage for the political gladiators is set. As the principal goal is usually for the authoritative allocation of values for society, the dichotomous cleavage of for or against relationship with the incumbent is always discernible. As has been the case in Ghana, over the years this line of demarcation was always in existence irrespective of which group was in power. And in a polity that thrives on rent capital, patrimony and patronage there are always calculative positioning in relation to the resource-patrimony and patronage there are always calculative positioning in relation to the resource-dispensing machinery of the state; for distance has consequences on livelihood chances. The pro-incumbent media are, therefore, mainly state-owned, incumbent party papers, and privately-owned Incumbent-sympathetic press that find it imperative, for livelihood reasons to defend the status quo. At the other end of the pole are the mostly oppositionist private-owned, party-owned and church-owned media that found it expedient to defend the opponents' course to dislodge the government for reasons that may be due to political and economic exclusion, ideological, personal and primordial identification. Naturally it should be expected that there would be a midway occupancy between the polar opposites, but it is the very paucity in this realm that makes the Ghana case problematic. The fault lines that had already developed before independence were further accentuated by the conception that political engagement can only be a zero-sum one. The danger, however, exists that the media may not be fast enough in realization that the situations that engendered certain responses in the past are no longer in existence as the country undergoes democratic renaissance.

### **The Media and the Democratic Transition**

As should be expected, the Ghana media was visible in the mobilization of the maze of forces that fought against authoritarian rule, which led to the conduct of the general elections of 1992. As had been the case since 1960 the media was usually among the first-line casualties of authoritarian control; as leaders with dwindling and shaky legitimacy know exactly where to first direct attention. The colonial legacy of placing the media under strict state surveillance gained higher levels of executors' sophistication in the postcolonial era. Since the general conception about the media has been its partisanship, the corresponding general attitude of governments too had been to treat critical papers as nuisance opposition fronting that should not be tolerated. What that translated into in real terms had been the narrowing of media freedoms through constrictive legislations. Among the tools that were deployed for such purposes were legislations that intensely prescribed the mode of behavior, such as the Criminal Libel Law (1961) that was vigorously used to bully and to silence the media. Another means of control exercised under a legal garb was the administrative control through the various licensing decrees that was first introduced in the Newspaper Licensing Law (1961) and, which was

reenacted by the various military regimes the last of which was the Newspaper Licensing Law 1985 (PNDC Law 211) principally required that the media institutions must first register before beginning operation. The hammering of the media was sometimes subtle to private gangster groups to carry out. This alibi-seeking device became a specialized art in the 1980s, when glaringly drug-propelled lumpen elements intervene frequently to do the dirty work for the PNDC government. The array of tools that were deployed by governments converged around a singular objective of shutting up the media that expressed divergent view.

As expressed by Kwame Karikari (1998) the PNDC rule, under Jerry Rawlings, marked the highest point in the deployment of varied suppressive arsenals against the recalcitrant media. In many ways the PNDC was archetypically authoritarian. This characterization emanated from its own intent of launching a people's revolution, which was exclusive in its deliberate parochial definition of the 'people' in whose name the revolution was launched. When lumpenism became the synonym of grassroots democracy the political actors of old, felt left out and estranged. The struggle by the discarded power-wielders to re-inject themselves to their accustomed political positions meant that their media representatives carry out that task. It soon became clear that the PNDC was not going to countenance any opposing media that posed a threat to the revolutionary goal; and/or to allow any institution that could undercut its legitimacy, which was clearly wobbly in its early years. As the initial years of the PNDC rule was characterized by a bizarre legitimacy crisis, the regime's opponents scarcely spared any efforts to unseat it. The government, which never hid its suppressive capabilities against its opponents descended heavily on the media institution that dared it. It was in this light that the Palaver was confiscated by the state. Some of the newspapers, consequently, folded up to save their skins as they realized the futility of fighting the goliath. The PNDC itself was hardly an ideologically homogeneous entity, as it was soon realized that the only thing that united the early members of the government was their employment of the leftist revolutionary verbiage. The original members of the military-based government began to pull in different directions that halted progress. The result was for the government to purge itself in ways that swelled the rank of its political enemies. One of the factors around which the intra-group struggle centered was how to fix the inherited moribund economy; something urgent needed to be done if the government was not to overstay the clearly unenthusiastic welcome. When the radical left was pushed out of the government; the "peoples' government" then chose to do business with the Bretton Wood institutions that epitomized neoliberalism. The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), which was the hallmark of the PNDC's economic and social policy, rejected the role of the state as had existed in the original social contract. The social reactions to the whittling away of the previous entitlements increased further the distance; between the government from both the left, and the right. The left felt betrayed by the neoliberal SAP policies while the right was battling their dislodgement from power together with the denial of libertarian guarantees that coupled with anti-institutional character of the PNDC.

The mounting challenges that the PNDC had to grapple with from the very onset was enough for the leadership to place the country under three years of state of emergency when the ubiquitous para-military functionaries of the regime were abundantly used to keep lid on dissenting views. A regime of quietus resulted out of the government's clampdown on opponents; this was christened the 'culture of silence'. The state of developments scarcely conduced media vibrancy, especially when the political leaders never hid their aversion to liberal and libertarian virtues. As the government developed anchoring adventitious roots everywhere, through the para-military institutions that had become robust in their arbitrariness with the quasi-judicial powers that they wielded, in bargain . Backed by the

multilateral financial institutions that at the time condoned suppression, the PNDC maximally utilized the cover of darkness under the state of emergency to physically eliminate opponents.

In the wake of the 'state of terror' that reigned, many media institutions chose the least line of resistance by withdrawing into quiescence and those who miscalculated were forced by the government's zealots to close down as was the case of *The Echo* and the *Free press*. Under the PNDC rule the suppression of the media, together with other expressive freedoms reached unprecedented levels; but as the imperatives of the global and domestic conditions began to break the monopoly the government had actually picked up a phalanx of enemies. By 1990, it was becoming clear to the government that the polity would have to be opened up for others to contest for participation. The confluence of domestic and foreign forces placed the government in a definite quandary of how to manage a transition process without losing control.

The oppositionists' demands during the political transition in Ghana, just as in other parts of Africa, had primarily been focused on shattering the authoritarian domination. The anti-authoritarian struggle was, therefore, associated with a certain attitude, which tend to be the continuity of the antagonist engagements from the past. The management of transition process itself was a contributory factor to the deepening of the negating attitudes. The Ghana transition process was managed by the incumbent; and since the government had demonstrably shown its dislike to liberal democracy, the opposition felt there was no reason to trust the government. The failure to stage the Franco-type transitions through National Sovereign Conference in Ghana exasperated the opposition.

The frustration that accompanied the slow-mo transition process played out in shifting the battle ground to the streets, and the media. The transition process had considerably slackened the absolute Control that the government exercised. The enabling environment that specifically emerged in the 1990-92 period made various types of media institutions to mushroom to fill the political space. The emerging situation created both opportunities and threats to the political combatants. Even though the media generally hibernated during the peak of the PNDC's suppression, the media largely failed to undergo a snake-like skin sloughing transformation process. What rather happened in the Ghana case was the invigoration of the antagonistic engagement. Thus, in the run up to the 1992 elections the gulf that had always defined media landscape became intensely voluble in the vigor with which for- and against- government attachments were dutifully carried out. The anti-government media was obviously revengeful in nature as the media in the camp of the opposition believed that it was payback time for a government that had tortured its people for so long. Thus, when the ban on political party activities was lifted the anti-PNDC media openly campaigned for the plethora of groups and parties that lined up to dislodge the incumbent that had metamorphosed into the NDC (Kwame Karikari 1998). The PNDC had certainly gathered considerable moss of supporters in its 11 years in power and hence when the government wanted to reinvent itself through the formation of the NDC, the sympathetic media threw in massive clientelistic support. The opening that was provided by the transition phase did little to bridge the binary gap. The attitudes were further carried into the democratic dispensation.

## The Challenges for Good Governance

It is increasingly becoming a cliché that Ghana's democratic process has reasonably held on well; and with its accompanying rise of democratic crystallization, issues of 'good governance' are now taking the center stage. As has been indicated, there is the realization that without firm grips the new kids on the democratic block can easily go into slalom back into the authoritarian old ways. This is particularly the case, when democracy is conceived narrowly as a mere grant of franchise for participation in the electoral enterprise of leadership recruitment among competing individuals and groups. The tendency to be parochial in the conception of democracy is attributable to the closure that was associated with authoritarian exclusivity, which the infertile soil metaphor of Africa's democratic debacle was all about (Richard Joseph 1997). In many ways, the issues that bothered political activists and the media in the past, for instance the granting of liberal and libertarian guarantees and property rights, are now superfluously irrelevant.

In a word, it is no longer an issue to demand for political liberalization. As some of the matters that pull passions in the illiberal past are now taken for granted, it should be expected that the media warriors recognize the need for truce. But this realization has not really made imprint in the Ghana situation, well enough. Democracy thrives in an atmosphere of tolerance and accommodation and not in a situation of mutual distrust.

It is necessary to recognize that in a democracy political power is not granted unconditionally and the exercise of power is premised on a sense of responsibility between the constituents and their leaders. The constituents' assessment of their leaders' form the basis for the renewal or annulment of their tenure. But the effectiveness of the constituents' supervisory role is very much dependent on the level of development of the political culture; this in turn is influenced by the extent to which the polity has moved away from the realm of primordial particularism to universalism. In other words, it is about whether the polity is locked up in a patrimonial-oriented culture or it has attained the status of republicanism. A patrimonial order is most likely to generate delegative democracy where the superintendent role of the constituents are abdicated once election is held (O'Donnell, 1986). The media and the civic societies in emerging democracies are, therefore, expected to engage state-managers in ways that will enhance 'good governance'. Good governance is the parsimony for political responsibility, accountability and administrative transparency that occurs within the environment of rule of law. The media is strategically placed to act as agents for the realization of this objective through the promotion of universalistic cultures. It is pertinent that the gate-keepers in Africa work hard for the realization of good governance since their societies are described as being typically neopatrimonial (Bratton & van de Walle 1997). The African society is neopatrimonial in the sense that it blends the characters of particularism and universalism in ways that raises the conception of public office as privileged posts. As a result, the Africa situation is potentially a perverted one; as its operation tilts away from the performance determining criteria that characterizes the universalistic set. The modern democratic society is structured on formal institutions, where its dichotomous opposite is the informal. The extent to which a political culture that straddles the realms of particularism, and universalism, can be in negating good governance can be enormous. Leaders in such societies tend to think their positions are immanently determined, with unassailable privileges.

This notion of political leadership is also condoned and encouraged by society; the struggle by opponents to take control of state power is hardly an effort meant to overturn the overloaded privilege system.

When the norms of universalism are lost on leadership then democracy is most likely to be stranded in the Carothers' gray zone; and its movement beyond form will be disabled by the prevailing cultural norms.

Since the patrimonial (or neopatrimonial) particularistic attitudes are deep-rooted in Ghana, reversing it would expectedly be a Herculean one. For the purposes of looking good in the international arena African countries become devotedly loud on recitals about their commitment to good governance; for that is the surest way to seek foreign donor assistance.

But it is also known that the penchant of African leaders masking their deficiencies of domestic governance systems for the sake of external help is rather proverbial.

The pervasiveness of patrimonial order tones down societal superintendent role in reducing opacity and predendalism in governmental system. Since the media has the prying lens to go beyond the cover-ups that happen in government, the media, therefore, becomes the leader in fighting misrule. The crucial factor in the effectiveness of the media in holding political leaders accountable is credibility but in an environment where the media is perceived as being partisan few will take them serious. In Ghana it is known that the media places high-profiled political leaders on the spot for purely accumulative reasons. The guiding principle is that news about such profiled personnel sells, and such news easily makes up low advert funds.

These situations present a big challenge for the Ghana media to transcend in order to fit well into their gate-keeping role. The challenges center on media attitude in its engagement with the stakeholders it deals with. When the perception that the media necessarily acts as a front for a political group or party persists then its role in ensuring good governance would be a diminished one. Targets that come under critical media scrutiny rather find flimsy excuses to attack the credibility of the media institution as they use very track record of the media to dismiss it. This situation is further exacerbated by the exhibited willingness of the media personnel that correspond to the dividing political line to go into the rescue of their patrons and through that shifting attention away from the core issues to a media diatribe. It is within such circumstances that unacceptable conducts of governments under the current democratic dispensation had passed without public scrutiny. In the unlikely event that a government would have a weak media constituency to act on its behalf efforts by any section of the media to ensure that the tenets of good governance are observed would not work out well.

## Conclusion

The Ghana media greatly reflects the character of the political trajectory and contingencies that the country has gone through. The end product of which has been the perpetuation of a near straight-jacket dichotomous scenario of for- and against- relationships with governments. This continues to play out even in the democratic dispensation that is substantially different in character from what had ever obtained in the country. In reality this attitude has buckled the effectiveness of the media in the deployment of tools that can keep governments and the other stakeholders in ensuring the observance of good governance. There is need for the media to overcome the pettiness that had always characterized its performance in order to enhance its relevancy in the current democratic dispensation. When the media is able to cleanse its current image then political office holders, incumbent and opposition, alike would take them more seriously in the governance system.

## Notes

The NPP and NDC are two dominant parties in the country based on electoral performance. The NDC lost to the NPP in the 2000 general elections and it is the party in government currently. Komla Gbedemah, editor of the Accra Evening News was, for instance, jailed in October 1949 for libel but returned with enhanced status to lead the CPP campaign to victory. See Dennis Austin (1964: 317-339) *Politics in Ghana: 1946-60* for comprehensive discussion of the combative character of politics and media engagement in the period that preceded independence. The Daily Graphic was established in 1950 as a subsidiary of the London overseas Daily Mirror Group. The Ghanaian Times was originally known as the Ghana Star, which acted as supplement of the Evening News. See Kwaku Danso-Boafo (1996:134) *The Political Biography of Dr. Kofi Abrefa Busia* The PNDC at the very onset of its rule presented anti-institutional posture in establishing Workers' and Peoples' Defense Committees (W/PDCs). These were later transformed into Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs). Para-military bodies, generally known as 'commandos', exercised wide powers that put fear into the general populace.

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