Political Violence and Media Challenges in Ghana

Samson C. Agbelengor

University Of Ghana Legon

Abstract: **Political violence in contemporary times is becoming ubiquitous as the interplay of political and social forces continues. Since the global wave of democratization in the 1990's, Ghana in the Fourth Republic has attained significant credits in key democratic indicators; political stability, rule of law, elections and peaceful electoral turnovers hence its fame as the beacon of African democracy. Although Ghana has been free from the kind of political violence that other African countries experience, there are some miniature occurrences conjuring undesirable recollections of the state of nature. This calls for deep concern. The role of the media as informative and vibrant social force for shaping public affairs and public policy particularly the proliferation of private media is becoming vulnerable and subjected to the whims of some commerce political personalities. So long as the media has graduated from the culture of silence that occurred in pre-Fourth Republic Ghana to the culture of noisily emancipation in the Fourth Republic where democracy reigns, it is important to find another culture that can restrain these institutional abuses. Existing academic literature on this subject is thin and this article hopes to fill the gap.**

Keywords: **Political violence, media, rule of law, elections, Republic, Ghana.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are creatures of flesh and blood who rub shoulders with each other in the political environment. This is according to Aristotle. Their actions and inactions promote peace in one breadth and violence on the other. Whether with lethal means or with a nonlethal approach, violence inflicts visible and invisible wounds on people. Though they may be forgiven through pragmatic reconciliation, yet the injuries of political violence are intolerably unforgettable. Hobbes in his days observed that men acted in accordance with the law of nature if they believe their own security was being undermined. In the state of nature, he made the legendary statement that the social environment was "continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." (Encyclopædia Britannica, 1980) When the social or political environment remains horizontally unequal and mostly ethnocentric, it violates the principles of ethnic self-governance leading to civil warfare and notarizing armed struggles. (Balcells 2015: 4 as cited in Wimmer 2013:6)

The study of political violence and order in the humanoid framework has been designated with the phrase; the two edges of the same coin. Its academic study particularly relationship with other communal forces including institutions and traditions are not new in contemporary times but as old as modern western political thought. The main argument then is that political theory throughout centuries, one way or the other theorized issues relating to political violence. (Balcells 2015:2)

But in contemporary times, the quest to capture political power, the desire to restore fundamentalist beliefs has been stimulated by two major approaches; either the 16th century "Machiavelli-Italian" tactics such as the force of arms and violent confrontation to attain a political objective or the very 20th century "Gandhi- Indian" approach that believes in engaging the opponent through non-violent political means. (Encyclopædia Britannica, 1980) This study looks at political violence in the Ghanaian perspective but with special focus on the media as a socio-political institution.

II. BACKGROUND

Socio-politics is not new in Ghana. In fact, it runs through the entire Ghanaian history and the country generally has one way or the other been influenced by a mild or hefty "Machiavellian" or "Gandhian" political strategy. The country has survived the culture of political intolerance, human right abuses and media censorship under civilian and military regimes. Socio-politics involves relationship between the political hierarchies and social groups such as labour organizations, educational groups and professional groups─ and particularly how the engagements impacted on the country's political credentials.

Like any other African country, Ghana has a unique political and electoral history.For instance, the struggle for independence from Britain was one of the toughest political battles the natives had to grapple with, the Gold Coast intelligentsia as pacesetters and the first president of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah finishing the decolonization race. (Boahen 1957, Biney 2011)

Among other factors and reasons, the tumultuous years of 1954 and independence in 1957 was the political confrontation that ensued between the ruling party of Nkrumah and a newly formed Asante based National Liberation Movement (NLM). As part of a strategy to neutralize this herculean confrontation, the first president of Ghana decided to pass legislative instruments to get people culpable incarcerated or exiled by national laws. (Biney 2011:65)

The Avoidance of Discrimination Act (December 1957) was passed to ban organizations formed on tribal, racial or religious grounds. The Emergency Powers Act (January 1958) was also passed and applied in opposition strong hold─ in Kumasi proper. But the notorious of all of the laws was the passage of the Preventive Detention Act which was actually rushed through parliament between 14th and 16th July 1958. It succeeded in arresting and detaining several famous political opponents for years without trial. (Boahen 1957:194) The gap between the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah in February 1966 and the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1992 could be described as the period of spasmodic politics. The use of mostly unconventional and undemocratic means to overthrow regimes made governance an unsafe business.

But to continue further to the main literature, the political, electoral and military years of Ghana's history will be summarized below in phases to build a historical substructure. The phases will be grouped into three for emphasis sake. It begins with the pre-independence era that includes the colonial days under British rule and the struggle to independence; the second phase is the immediate post-independence era from the first through the third republic and the third and final phase is the Fourth Republic era. The first phase witnessed a very strong British Empire usurping full colonial and imperial authority over the natives of the Gold Coast through direct and indirect rule. But that authority was slightly broken when the natives became enlightened about their conditions and made steps towards demanding a change in the colonial status quo─ several social, economic and political factors gradually led to independence and ending the first phase. The second phase witnessed spasmodic politics under civilian and military regimes. (Boahen 1957:155-156) Today, Ghana lives under the Fourth Republic phase, enjoying the benefits of democracy and enduring the challenges as well.

Recounting from the first through the third phase, there were legislative elections in the years 1951, 1954, 1956 and 1969. Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party (CPP) won all three elections before independence whereas the Progress Party (PP) led by K.A Busia won the 1969 parliamentary elections after independence. Two presidential elections were also held in 1960 and 1979 respectively. Nkrumah and the CPP won the presidential election of the 1st republic (1960) whiles Hilla Limann of the People's National Party (PNP) won the 3rd republican election (1979) where Ghana practiced a presidential system. (Hottor 2010:17-18, Boahen 1975)

Four referendums were organized in the following years of Ghana's history 1960, 1964, 1978 and 1992. The first granted Ghana a republican status; the second legitimized a one party state under the CPP, the third approved a union government under General Acheampong and the last adopted the 1992 constitution, ushering in the Fourth Republic. The Fourth Republic has also experienced a remarkable peaceful turnover that includes six presidential and parliamentary elections respectively dating from 1992 to 2012. Indeed, this is the reason for Ghana's extolled political credentials. Jerry John Rawlings under the National Democratic Congress (NDC) won both 1992 and 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections having governed Ghana under military rule of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). The then

opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) comfortably won the 2000 and 2004 elections. The NDC made a good come back to win the 2008 and 2012 elections led by John Atta Mills and John Mahama respectively. (Hottor 2010:18-19; Gyimah-Boadi 2001, 2009)

There is no doubt that the wounds of past regimes overlap into current ones. In the Fourth Republic today, some political and social injuries threatens democratic development, political stability, peace and security. Electoral violence, intemperate political commentaries, radical political party activism and partisan politics are polarizing the political environment and challenging the professional work of the media in Ghana. This article will identify and analyze the cases of political violence in the Ghanaian perspective; the agenda is to contribute to literature and at the same time make headway in finding explanations to the problem often referred as the politics of violence.

Although the practice of politics since the start of the Fourth Republic has been progressively peaceful─ elections being the litmus test, the country cannot be politically complacent or ignorant of some realities on the ground. Gyimah-Boadi acknowledges that there has been improvement in the quality of each successive election in Ghana since 1992. But a country with such electoral successes and unique cases among new democratic countries in Africa cannot afford to fail Africa, at least politically. (Gyimah-Boadi 2009:138)

Democratic development today also moves with several other fundamentals—a crucial tool being the media. It serves as an influential actor with a dominant communication tool over a democratic nation. As a watchdog agent, it has supported community responsibility, shaped public opinion and strengthened democratic processes in Ghana. Yet the considerable discrepancies that have mutilated the hard won reputation of the media are that over the years it has become the target of undesirable actions. Some media organizations serve as avenue for swaying public opinion against issues, groups and candidates to the extent of fueling political violence. (Hottor, 2010, p. 5; UNDP, 2014, p. 1)

Should the Media be held responsible for political violence in democratic Ghana? What are the external forces that challenge the role of this institution in Ghanaian politics?

Against this background, the aim of this article is to use accessible secondary data to examine occurrences of political violence in Ghanaian politics and the challenges it pose to the media. Having introduced the topic and highlighted the problem, the next section will briefly review the available literature. The study will then proceed to the main section to discuss and analyze historical and contemporary issues of political violence in Ghana and the role of the media. It will then be finalized with a summary and conclusion.

III.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Political violence includes several dimensions in its influence in a political environment. It is an ambiguous concept whose definition sparks a lot of debates because scholars are not only supposed to define the term "political" but the definition should also include the concept "violence". This is where the controversy lies and again the reason for the thin existing academic literature in the specific area of political violence and the challenging role of the media. But some scholars have succeeded in theorizing a definition, defining the term as "repertoires of collective action that involve great physical force and cause damage to an adversary in order to impose political aims" (Balcells 2015:2 as cited in Della Porta 1995) In its radical sense, political violence can also be defined using its distinctive characteristics as political action that applies either humane and inhumane means including mass protest, coups, terrorism, riots, pogroms, ethnic cleansing and genocide. (Balcells cited in Kalyvas 2013)

As O' Neil (2011) also noted, political scientist view political violence in a large scope as involving "contentious politics" or "collective political struggle". This struggle includes issues such as civic revolution, civil war and mass protest for a common cause. O'Neil sought to better explain this concept in three distinct approaches namely institutional approach, ideational approach and the individual approach. The institutional explanation focuses on how the state, economic factors or the social system contribute to violence in politics. The ideational approach explains how politics and religion cause political violence whiles the individual approach focuses on individuals and what motivates them to engage in violence.

Broadly, this triune approaches helps us understand the causes of revolutions, terrorism, electoral conflict, character assassinations and other forms of violent behavior covered on the media landscape. But in the case of Ghana's political history, the institutional approach gives a broader explanation of the study of political violence particularly the interplay between political power and social forces.

Institutions are described as the systematic rules, norms, values, beliefs and organizations that generate together in a consistency of social behavior. (Balcells as cited in Levi and Menaldo 2013) The fundamental role of institutions in the development of the modern state is so important that it cannot be overemphasized. This is because it helps us understand political deficiencies and outcomes such as civil wars, coups, revolutions and mass protest. (Balcells as cited in Acemoglu et al. 2006, Acemoglu and Robinson 2012) Why did the Arab spring swiftly succeed in toppling the once insurmountable dictators in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya yet when it got to other close neighbours in the Islamic Maghreb; Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Morocco and even in Syria, civilian protest failed to cause a political revolution.

Whereas institutions help maintain standards in the society, institutions have also been vulnerable to violence in political discourses. Indeed it plays a dual role sometimes as transmitter of political violence and other times as a vulnerable recipient. Indeed, there is no doubt that institutions play a critical role in explaining the nitty-gritties of violence with political objective. The opportunities and capacities for using political violence are also shaped by institutions in several ways. For instance if political actors are satisfied with the outcome of an election based on the fact of institutional impartiality, rule of law, due diligence, free, fair and transparent polls then violence should not be taking place. (Balcells 2015:2) The antithesis to political peace on the contrary will occur when elections (an aspect of politics) do not function peacefully and electoral chances of competing parties fail to reflect their military wing "in the shadow". (Balcells 2015:3 cited in Przeworski et al 2014)

The institutional approach to a large extent will help us understand political violence; why political violence occurs in our social and political settings. In the evolution of political violence, some have argued that popular protest most often and consistently lead to coup or political overthrow, (for instance the recent rebellion against Blaise Compaore in Burkina Faso, the Arab Spring that ousted Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia) political overthrows may trigger civil war and terrorism (a notorious aspect of political violence for instance Taliban, Al- Qaeda, Islamic State and the ideational approach they adopt in Middle East violence) normally mingles with civil wars. (Balcells, 2015)

O' Neil consider institutions as having a deterministic and particularistic approach whereas issues of the free will and universality turn to drive the individual approach to political violence. For example the media (an important informative institution in a state) under self-regulation determines on its own accord how news coverage must be structured. Issues of objectivity and subjectivity lie in the principles, beliefs and values that the institution set. Therefore to ensure a professional work, the media must be co-regulated. The particularistic feature of the media can be argued in terms of the uniqueness of the core values of the institution. But whereas radio, television and the newspaper can be effectively co-regulated, a new media platform, social media seem to be far stronger than the principle of co-regulation. (O'Neil, 2011; UNDP, 2014, pp. 19-24; Richards, 2011, p. 3)

Using the concept above, political violence can be defined as the use of conventional and unconventional political means to achieve an uncompromising goal as a result of unsatisfactory political environment when those means create conflict in words and actions, abusing the legitimate mandate of institutions.

In another dimension to the existing literature, Dreier (2005:193) has also carefully considered how the media compound problems in urban America. In his observation, he noted some defects in the way and manner the major media frame coverage on news in the country. The images and media content Dreier observed were:

Unrelenting story of social pathology—mounting crime, gangs, drug wars, racial tension, homelessness, teenage pregnancy, AIDS, inadequate schools, and slum housing. Moreover, this perspective on our cities is compounded by news coverage of government efforts to address these problems. Government programs are typically covered as well-intentioned but misguided, plagued by mismanagement, inefficiency, and, in some cases, corruption.

Dreier continued to say that the media rarely report about solutions to problems in the country such as successes in grassroots organization. They are rather anxious of covering issues on socio-political aggression, radical activism and civil confrontation. For instance, when workers are on strike; when political activist are protesting or when despondent persons engage in violence to satisfy desperate needs. He noted that during the coverage of local elections, the media distorted issues and racialized politics.

A study was conducted on the reportage of mayoral elections by local daily newspapers in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York. It discovered that the horse race aspects of elections became the focus rather than on issues. The horse race

model involved personality politics, poll standing, campaign strategies and political endorsements as against coverage on issue based campaign like city administration, education and urban development. Dreier concluded by describing the kind of reportage the media engage as leading to public mistrust. He indicated; "this kind of reporting is a recipe for public distrust of government and suspicion of policies to improve economic, social, and environmental conditions in our metropolitan areas." (Dreier 2005: 195-196 as cited in Peer and Ettema 1998, Sylvie 1995)

The study conducted by Dreier on the media and how it compound urban problems is commendable especially on issues involving the media and their focus on horse race aspects of elections instead of issue based developmental politics. He critiqued the mass media for relying more on attractive pessimism rather than unpopular optimism─ also on issues that breed tension and conflict but sells fast instead of productive long-term beneficial matters. Nonetheless, this was an American urban based research work and the findings though helpful─ it will be much appropriate academically to analyze the Ghanaian political perspective of media problems.

IV. HISTORICAL SKETCH OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Political violence, as widely known focuses on atrocious political crime; for instance terrorism, civil war, assassination and genocidal activities. For example, Tilly (2003:2) highlighted the Rwanda genocide in 1994 in his work varieties of collective violence involving the assassination of the head of state, the slaughter of about 800,000 Tutsi's and 10,000 to 50,000 Hutu's. This form of political violence was collective in nature and it quickly inflicted physical damage to persons or objects. But political violence can also take the form of political antagonism, contentious politics, collective political struggles, peaceful revolutions and public protest that may not involve the massive loss of human life. (O'Neil, 2011)

As I earlier on noted, the historical sketch of political violence and the role of the media in the history of Ghana present aspects of the Machiavellian type; for instance the assassination plot against Kwame Nkrumah in Kulungugu and the incessant military coup that finally ended on 31st December 1981 with Jerry Rawlings. (The military ruler who later became Ghana's first Fourth Republic President under a democracy in 1993) Also significant is the antagonizing rift in ideology, ethnic politics and indifference in public policy making that has raged between the two dominant political wings in Ghana from independence until now.

In the pre-independence era, the educated elites in the Gold Coast used media propaganda, political party movements, radical political activism, civil groupings and youth movement to counter colonialism. The colony experienced media expansion after the first handwritten work was published under the auspices of Charles Bannerman. (A half British and half Asante) His paper "the Herald" was distributed to about 300 readers most of whom were Africans. In fact, the Accra Herald motivated the native elites to setup other newspapers. They included among others the Western Echo, Gold Coast Aborigines, the Gold Coast Chronicle, the Asante Pioneer, the Gold Coast People and later the Accra Evening News. The spread of handwritten media in the Gold Coast and the freedom it enjoyed became the cornerstone for the liberation of the colony in 1957 and the revolutionary force that affected the first and second phase of Ghana's political history. Newspaper publishing began in a gentleman way until actors like Nkrumah revolutionized the political terrain. (Hasty, n.d)

Indeed as Boahen noted, Kwame Nkrumah's appointment as General-Secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) brought activism and radicalism to political party organization. Having assumed this position, Nkrumah used the media to deepen the already existing contentions with the colonial administration. As General Secretary of the UGCC he caused the movement to spread all over the country. But as leader of the breakaway Convention People's Party (CPP), Nkrumah and his vibrant youth movement used the media to channel the revolutionary aspect of political violence─ using Gandhi's non-violent approach to declare "positive action" and the slogan of "self-government now". Contrary to the CPP's radical actions, the London Daily Mirror group set up the Daily Graphic in 1950 that sought to maintain political neutrality and objective reporting by local African reporters. (Boahen 1975; Hasty, n.d)

During this era of radical media proliferation, the infamous violent incident that took place was the clash between the ex-servicemen who were protesting for their legitimate economic rights after fighting in the Second World War and police officers led by British Senior Police Officer, Major Imray who were also performing security duties for the defence of colonialism. The ex-servicemen organized peaceful demonstration but in the end three were shot dead by uncivil political disorder. The actions led to widespread rioting and looting of stores belonging to expatriates. Beginning in Accra, it

spread to other areas such as Nsawam, Nkawkaw, Koforidua and Kumasi. Hence, the British government realizing the weakness in their complacency had to call for military re-enforcement from Nigeria (another colony at the time) before the riot was brought under control at the painful cost of 29 deaths, 237 injuries and two million pounds of damages. (ibid)

The cause of this scenario can be understood further using the differentiating concept of political and economic horizontal inequality. Political horizontal inequality refers to the unequal access to ethnic groups to politics of state affairs. From this perspective, institutions can prevent political violence if there is inclusiveness and flexibility but not only that─ it must also be pragmatic and empathetic at addressing political concerns. The refusal by the British to tackle the economic horizontal inequality in the colony as a result of wealth indifferences between citizens in the state was the cause of the 1948 riots. Political violence can be prevented if redistributive institutions address the economic needs and concerns of the people. Addressing economic needs, it must be the most pressing and the most demanding or what J.J. Rousseau calls the general will of the people. (Balcells as cited in Wimmer 2013, Cederman et al. 2011, Encyclopædia Britannica, 1980)

In a study on political violence, Garcıa-Ponce & Pasquale (2013:2) noted that in a state, much political violence is orchestrated by the governing party and their allies or the opposition who wish to capture political power. Political leaders apply the instrument of force to suppress opposing views whiles opposition elements with divergent views respond by either increasing their association with the sovereign power or increasing resentment to counteract the force.

When Nkrumah became the head of government business then later the Prime Minister of Gold Coast, another form of political clash emerged. But this time the clash was not against expatriate rule but rather internal political struggle between the two major political wings fighting for supremacy in Ghanaian politics─ the case of native rule against native opposition. As Biney (2011:65) noted, between 1954 and independence in 1957 the boisterous political contentions led to violent hostilities between the ruling CPP and the opposition Asante based NLM. The Accra Evening News and the Asante Pioneer were respectively used for propaganda purposes.

The opposition's quest for a federalist constitution had been rejected by the Sir Frederick Bourne commission report, the Asante's rich natural resources and hegemony was nationalized by the CPP government and the Asante region was divided into two─ Brong Ahafo region was created. The granting of just twenty constituency seats to the Asante region by the government when other regions received more also caused a stir among the opposition, including Asante CPP members. (Boahen 1957:84; Biney 2011:65)

Indeed a setback to a harmonious state is ideological division, ethnic segregation and the use of state apparatus to marginalize minority groups. The condition became worse in the newly formed unitary state and the later years was heated political violence, damaging ideological stance mixed with egocentric political persecution.

In Ghana's First Republic, the media played a significant role in spreading Nkrumah's political agenda both home and abroad. Several events occurred during his reign as president. A remarkable event that quivered internal CPP politics and the country at large was Nkrumah's infamous dawn broadcasting on national radio in 1961. As Biney (2011:119) recounted, that very year saw momentous dismissal of CPP rebels, the rise in the construction of "Nkrumaism" and concurrently the entrenchment of what was called "Nkrumaist cult". He even established the Spark Journal with a domestic and international focus in December 1962.

Nkrumah's days in office were being numbered as Ghana became a one party state and the security agencies feeling uncomfortable with his form of rule. On the morning of 24th February 1966, at 6:00 a.m. the national broadcaster was used as the central informative avenue to announce the successful overthrow of Nkrumah's regime, the dissolution of parliament, the dismissal of all ministers and the banning of the CPP. Although the announcement came with spontaneous joy, excitement, and jubilation from the public, it eventually set the precedence for the other military coups. (Boahen 1957)

The National Liberation Council (NLC) that overthrew Nkrumah's government also took measures to silence private domestic media as a result of its history of fuelling contentious politics. The Rumours Decree was passed to prevent anyone from suing government owned newspapers. (Anokwa, 1997) In the case of the Second Republic, the political elites under the Progress Party (PP) government took decisions that gradually led to friction, tension and the creation of intrinsic opposition from societal forces. Certain policy measures put in place by the ruling coalition in the fall of 1969 aggravated the interrelationship between the political order and social forces. For instance, the passage of the Aliens

Expulsion Act brought agitations among some religious groups in the society. To be precise, it brought dissatisfaction among the local Muslim community that had strong ties with exiled groups, particularly Hausa traders hailing from Nigeria. Some segments of the underprivileged urban groups were just dissatisfied by this indigenization decree by the highly expectant government of the Second Republic led by Dr. Busia. The dismissal of the Daily Graphic editor Cameron Duodo for writing a leading story opposing Busia's appeal for an African Dialogue with the Apartheid government also increased the political friction. The two national dailies were also prevented in July 1971 from publishing the opposition's reply to J.H Mensah's budget. Also in the Sallah's case during the Apollo 568 civil servants dismissal saga, Busia used the media to cause political contention, counteraction and the defiance of the highest court order─ rejecting the Supreme Court's decision that Sallah should be reinstated. (Chazan 1983, Goldsworthy, 1973)

Within the period of the Second and the Third Republic, coup d'état was revisited in Ghana. Below is a brief account of the various coups in Ghana from 1972 to 1981. The main concern is to highlight the extent to which the media was manipulated. On January 1972, Colonel Ignatius Acheampong announced on radio the overthrow of the Busia government having served for just three years. Also on July 1978, General F.W.K. Akuffo under the Supreme Military Council II (SMC II) in a palace coup caused the resignation of Acheampong but on June 4th 1979, when the military regime was preparing to restore multiparty democracy, another revolution occurred─ the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) overthrew the SMC II. On 17th June 1979, Rawlings declared on national radio of a house cleaning intentions. Thirteen days later, Rawlings came back to announce the intension of the AFRC to restore civilian rule after reestablishing sanity in the country. (Boahen, 1992; Goldsworthy, 1973)

In the Third Republic, the People's National Party under the leadership of Hilla Limann played a significant role in promoting liberal media reforms. A 12 member Press Commission was established in July 1980 to investigate complaints about the press, uphold press freedom and provide necessary regulation and licensing to media outlets. But again in the early hours of 31st December 1981, Jerry Rawlings declared the last successful coup in Ghana on national radio toppling Limann's government. (Anokwa, 1997) Because the public Broadcaster enjoyed monopoly in Ghana between the First and Third Republic, the civilian and military leaders manipulated the role of the media. We can confidently then say that in Ghana's political history, no coup d'état was staged without the use or manipulation of the state media by the coup makers.

The 'culture of silence' dominated the 1980's under the PNDC due to the authoritarian control of public and private media. (Temin & Smith 2002; Owusu, 2011-12:9) Political violence in those days took the form of execution by firing squad of people perceived to be subversive after a kangaroo trial. Political opponents were repressed and intimidated through verbal attacks and character assassination on the state-controlled media. There were also arrest and detention of leaders of organizations for long periods. (Boafo-Arthur, 1998 as cited in Gyimah Boadi)

Under the leadership of the PNDC, laws were enacted to restrict the role of the media and opposing views against the revolution. Editors who were critical of the regime were dismissed and some detained without trial under the Preventive Custody Law and Newspaper Licensing Law. (Anokwa, 1997)

But luckily enough, the global wave of democratization began to spread across the world as a result of the end of the Cold War. (Debrah, 2014, p. 195) The global democratic revolution forced many autocratic regimes in Africa to change their political system. In the case of Ghana, the PNDC took frantic measures to restore the Fourth Republic. A new constitution was introduced in 1992 and democratic rule established in 1993.

V. POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

On January 7th 1993, the first President of Ghana's Fourth Republic Jerry John Rawlings gained the mandate of the Ghanaian people for a four year term and was reelected again in 1996 to serve until 2000. The dark days of incessant military aggression and autocracy was over and all the defenders of the 1981 revolution were now challenged for the first time to defend multiparty democracy.

Rawlings as Boafo─Arthur noted metamorphosed into a civilian head of state under the leadership of the National Democratic Congress (NDC). Under this new republic, the expectation of most Ghanaians was the restoration of full political rights. The new challenge that the government faced was how to separate the current multiparty democracy and

the culture of free speech from the culture of silence in the 1980's. Another challenge was how to solve the persistent economic hardship in the country and set the pace for the institutionalization of democracy. (Boafo-Arthur, 1998; Photius Coutsoukis, 2014)

The first parliament was also a rubber stamp type as a result of the opposition's boycott of parliamentary elections. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) was the main opposition having won close to 40% in the presidential election led by the Ghanaian historian Adu Boahen but boycotting parliamentary elections. But because of the emergence of vibrant private media that survived the dark days of media restriction and the state broadcaster's urge to promote media fairness, the NPP were able to air their views through democratic means particularly public rallies, peaceful protest and press conferences. Indeed, they urged their supporters to identify their constitutional rights and familiarize themselves with the court system rather than engaging in the politics of violence. (Photius Coutsoukis, 2014)

But Ghana was an emerging democracy by then prone to many infant problems. Therefore, as the government was implementing its policies and the 1996 election was also approaching; political tensions began to taint the country's democratic integrity. The greatest fear in the public domain was whether the Rawlings government will be willing to hand-over power to the opposition NPP in the event that the opposition wins the 1996 elections. The opposition presidential candidates particularly John Kufour of the NPP and the former president of Ghana Hilla Limann who was ousted out of power by the sitting president were all hopeful to win the elections. (Osei, n.d)

For instance, Hilla Limann on his part was alleged to have spoken publicly condemning his overthrow as unjustified and allegedly threatening that if his party does not win there will be bloodshed in Ghana. The state broadcaster could not ignore this story but had to publish it. On the other hand, the challenge was whether it was advisable to deliberately hype the story in the midst of the heated electoral tensions. Nevertheless, it broadcasted both the hearing and denial of the allegations for close to six months before the 1996 elections. The Private Free Press joined the media hype of the story by deepening the already existing political tension with a more serious caption; "There will be Bloodshed". (ibid)

Media coverage at this point deepened political tensions. Following the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1992, the new constitution among other things provided the guarantee of the right to free expression and the freedom of the media and other press agencies. Additionally, the National Media Commission was established with a co-regulating constitutional mandate over the media. (Buckley, 2011, p. 6)

But a year before the 1996 elections, the first private Radio station was established in Ghana just about forty eight hours after the Conference on Private Broadcasting had adjourned its meeting in 1995. The Radio Eye was established and five weeks later, another Radio station was set up in Accra. Both stations had to struggle with their operations and transmissions because government forces were alleged to have manipulated the system by destroying their transmitter. (Osei, n.d)

Within that same year, the government decided to introduce the Value Added Tax system but the events that followed contaminated the image of Ghana's emerging democracy. The opposition parties mobilized their supporters through the media outlet in a massive demonstration called Kume Preko. ("Kill Me Quick") The ruling NDC also mobilized their supporters to organize a counter demonstration— a clash that led to the shooting and killing of four opposition demonstrators. At this point, state monopoly of the media and the influence of the government were being challenged by emerging private media. Yet although private media served as alternatives to state monopoly of the media, the seed of media abuse was also sowed unknowingly. (ibid)

The 2000 elections also served as an important litmus test to determine the fate of Ghana in terms of the potency of political peace and stability on one side and the capacity of political violence on the other. For the first time in Ghana's political history, the presidential and parliamentary arm of government in 2001 was marked by a peaceful transition from one democratically elected government that fully served its term of office to another. As Gyimah-Boadi highlighted, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, the dominant figure in Ghanaian politics for nearly 20 years was required to step down after ruling Ghana democratically since the adoption of the 1992 elections. But the pre-election period was not quite peaceful because of reports of ruling party agents intimidating and threatening the opposition members and the fear was that conflict might erupt. Many Ghanaians also doubted the post-election period that it might lead to pervasive political violence but at the end there was a peaceful turnover of power from Rawlings to Kufour. (Gyimah Boadi, 2001, p. 103)

The media, both the state owned and the emerging private media is an important component of any election in a developing country and in case of Ghana; the media played a significant role in enhancing the success of the polls. But at this time of Ghana's political history, the media was not free from challenges either. Some unpleasant incidence against private media brought back into memory the dark days of the culture of silence under military rule. A private Radio Station in Berekum in the Brong-Ahafo region Chris FM was reported to have been shut down by the Regional Minister and surrounded by military personnel for the simple reason that an NPP parliamentary candidate allegedly critically spoke against the NDC government on that station. Nana Kofi Koomson who was the editor of the Ghanaian Chronicle was also arrested and charged with offences of receiving diskette that had allegedly been stolen from the NDC. Other private media editors and personalities such as Felix Odartey-Wellington and Crusading Guide Editor Kwaku Barko Jr. had an encounter with state apparatus. Yet the populace demand for change was far stronger than the abuse of incumbency and the victimization of the press. (Temin & Smith 2002, 593)

When President John Kufour became president in January 2001, democracy was further improved, particularly when in July 2001, seven months in his administration the criminal libel law was repealed and the restrictions attached to legitimate press freedom removed. The libel law was largely viewed by several organizations including Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) as an affront to press freedom. The repealing of the law ended the subjugation of press freedom and public communication. The government was hailed by local and international organization who expressed the view that it was a step in the right direction. MFWA, an organization promoting the rights and freedoms of journalists, believed the new law will give journalists more breathing space to work without any fear of intimidation and harassment. (Owusu, 2011/12, p. 8)

Throughout President Kufour's eight years serving as president of Ghana from 2001 to 2008, his support for free expression, political pluralism, and independent media was an important step towards liberal democracy yet he also maintained that the media ought to be responsible and not abuse that freedom. Whiles commending the significant victory to democracy, an unfortunate and disastrous event tainted Kufour's liberal integrity; the chieftaincy conflict in Yendi. An intolerable ethnic conflict intertwined with politics led to the death of some prominent people in the Northern part of Ghana. As the Wuaku commission report summarized, in March 2002 between 24th and 25th; the Yendi District Security Council (DISEC) received reports that some arms were secretly being smuggled into Yendi to cause mischief during the period of the celebration of the Bungum festival. These clandestine events resulted in the tragic assassination of the Andani Traditional Chief "Ya Na" with 30 of his supporters. (Hasty, n.d; Wuaku, 2002)

The stakes were very high at this point and political violence was almost at its peak in the north as the radio, television and newspapers became the channel the opposition NDC used to sharply criticize the government for allowing the conflict to continue for three full days without any military intervention. Some government ministers also fought back but came under heavy criticism for requesting journalist to clear their stories and reports on the Yendi conflict." (Hasty, n.d) Although the media played a significant role in reporting some early warning signals to the conflict, some private media organization also hyped their post-conflict stories.

Moving on to the 2008 election, the media played a significant role for the good of the country but on some occasions its core mandate was abused as a result of some internal and external political forces. In that election, both the ruling NPP and the main opposition NDC used their partisan interest to influence some private media organizations owned by their members. The horse race kind of politics dominated the political terrain including pervasive political contention, character assassination, media propaganda and the use of intemperate language. The heated electoral campaigns and the high rate of political tensions posed a challenge to the role of the media. Because the media was now a ubiquitous institution in Ghana, the public relied on it for most information on political and electoral affairs. Hence, the challenge was how to ensure that reports were credible. Some political commentaries on the media outlet also created fear and panic.

As Meissner (2010:9) noted, the state media did its best during those periods to toe the line of fair reportage and create a level playing field for all political parties to air their policies. But as expected, the ruling NPP had a stronger media presence in 2008 because of the benefits of being a ruling party and this time also abusing incumbency just as the NDC did in the 2000 elections. With abundant resources at its disposal, the party sponsored several advertisement including video documentaries about its achievements. Under the heated political events, the two major parties challenged the media's role by inviting the press for briefings on the election─ acting ahead of the constitutional mandate of the electoral

commission. At the international press centre, the two parties on different occasions addressed the press with the intention of assuring their supporters that they were on course. But realizing the danger this event might cause, the organizers banned any further press briefing at that venue.

In the 2008 elections, the players in the political game whose actions and inactions challenged the role of the media were the actions of the two major political parties, radical political commentaries and extremist political support base. It will be important to highlight these forces and the challenge they pose to the role of the media.

Political parties in Ghana have used the media to mobilize their support base. Sometimes they call on their supporters to besiege institutions and create hooliganism. Through clandestine means, they teach their youth wing about how to be strong, the tactics of militancy on Election Day; they employ "Macho Men" to defend the ballot or engage in some electoral malpractices. (Amankwaah, 2013, p. 21)

For example, in the 2008 elections at the crucial moment in the second round, the main opposition party used the private media to call on their supporters to besiege the Electoral Commission's (EC) headquarters and force the commission to declare the results. There were reports of these supporters wielding all kinds of violent weapons probably ready to orchestrate political violence if provoked. (Daily Graphic, 2009)

Another challenging role to the media as an informative institution is the abuse of political commentary. Indeed the influence of political commentary in a political discourse cannot be taken lightly at all because it has the potential of causing political violence in a country particularly developing ones. A dangerous part of the abuse of political commentary on the media is when political commentators dilute political commentary and public affairs issues with ethnicity for public consumption.

Amankwaah highlighted a portion of this in his work "Election Related Violence, a case of Ghana". He recounted a case of post-election political violence in 2009 caused by political commentary and radical "ethnic-partisan" politics. This violent incident began as a simple political discussion on a local radio station in the north of the country. Two members of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) were debating on political issues a few weeks after the NDC won the 2008 elections. An NDC member who was an Andani stated:

In all of Andani history since Ya-Naa Andansirli, Andanis had never been in a war and run away. The counter reaction was from the NPP panelist. He also replied in retaliation to his opponent that his facts were wrong and to counteract the debate he replied that the name Ya-Na Andansirli does not necessarily make the chief an Andani and after he died nine more chiefs would be enskinned before Abudu, then Andani, came into office. (Amankwaah 2013:17)

Just after those comments, aggravated party members who heard the latter remarks on their radio stormed the radio station with chains and sticks to attack the panelist. When they could not find their political foe they succeeded in causing vandalism over there. (ibid) Both political commentators should have been careful about commenting on an ethnic and chieftaincy issue that is so sensitive; dividing brothers, families, relations and parties apart. The angry youth should have also been guided by the principles of democracy─ contemporary times have changed and as a result the memories of the state of nature are only revisited by archaic actors who fail to evaluate the ramifications of political violence.

Misguided political commentary on the media has the potential of triggering violence in an already volatile society. As a result of the problems associated with political commentary, Kwame Karikari who was the Executive Director of MFWA, noted that one way that politicians throw the ethics of media professionalism to the wind and undermine democracy is media ownership. Speaking at an event organized by the Danquah Institute in April 2009, he noted that these politicians abuse the privileges of owning a Radio station to persecute political opponents. In very strong words, he lamented on how dangerous such utterances were and during the 2008 elections how some radio presenters and prominent political figures made comments that could have slipped Ghana into the brink of civil war. He encouraged that urgent steps should be taken to pass the Broadcasting Bill into law in order to help save the country from the kind of civil war that Rwanda faced in 1994 because of the abuse of the media. (Daily Graphic, 2009)

With reference to the 1994 Rwanda genocide, radio and some print media were used to aid the mass murder of the Tutsi by the Hutu dominated government forces and civilians. Repeatedly, the newspaper and the radio targeted the Tutsi population for their destruction. The genocide may have been quelled if the media was probably restrained or the actors

responsibly humane. But what do you expect to see in an ethnically polarized society ─ it is nothing but lawlessness. (Thompson, 2007) Nobody wants that kind of thing in Ghana, but the actions of the political players will prove whether they want to embrace or deter war.

By-elections in Ghana have also challenged the Ghanaian institutions and the stakeholders particularly the EC, the security agencies, political parties and the media that focuses on reporting the pockets of violence. By-elections are organized in small and manageable constituencies yet political violence still occurs. In 2010, the Atiwa by-elections in the Eastern Region witnessed a case of political clash between the NPP and NDC party members. Amongst them was the alleged accident involving the vehicle of the NDC women's organizer, the damage of the DCE's official vehicle and the assault on other persons in the constituency. (Ghana News Agency, 2010)

Just recently the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD)-Ghana lamented on the Tallensi by-election which took place on 7th July 2015. According to the CDD;

Reports of incidence of violence with sporadic firing of gunshots and attacks with machetes during the conduct of the polls, resulting in the hospitalization of victims and destruction of vehicles, are unacceptable and raise serious concerns about the ease and impunity with which violence is unleashed during elections in Ghana. (Toryi, 2015)

By-elections have given political parties several benefits such as making new recruitments, boosting political popularity and testing their electoral chances for future elections. Just as national elections are crucial in the media circles, by-elections are also given such coverage. (Frempong, 2008)

The media will do the nation good if political commentators are restrained from abusing it. But the challenge for most private media organization is how to fight against the politicization of the media and promote media professionalism when some radio and television stations are owned by politicians intoxicated with political power.

VI. SUMMARY

In the assessment of political violence in the Ghanaian perspective and its challenges to the role of the media, three periods in the political history of Ghana has been highlighted; the Pre-Independence era, the First to Third Republic era or immediate Post-Independence and the Fourth Republic era.

First of all, in the Pre-Independence era, the proliferation of the media in Ghana was the cornerstone for the liberation of the former Gold Coast under the leadership of the educated elites. Charles Bannerman's Accra Herald although handwritten played a significant role in the transformation of newspaper publication in the early stages of Ghana's political history. Among the various political activities at the time, it was the appointment of Nkrumah as General Secretary of the UGCC and leader of the CPP that led to radical media activism and contentious political engagement against expatriate rule, the struggle for political emancipation, the use of media propaganda, public protest and other peaceful revolutionary means. But the greatest political contentions and media battle was the case of native rule against native opposition─ the governing CPP versing the opposition NLM in politics.

Secondly, in the immediate Post-Independence phase, the media was used to create the culture of intolerance. Nkrumah was able to silence the opposition whereas Busia dismissed the editor of the Daily Graphic for writing articles against his political actions. Limann was a friend of the media but his administration was fatally overthrown. The military hierarchies also manipulated the monopoly of the state media to their benefits through military coup decrees and notably the culture of silence under the PNDC.

Thirdly, the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1992 and the inauguration of the Fourth Republic was also the cornerstone for the liberalization of media in Ghana just as the media did same in the struggle for independence. But in this current political era, various factors are challenging the role of the media and its contribution to prevent political violence. Among them are electoral violence, chieftaincy conflicts, partisan politics, radical political commentaries, the danger associated with politicians owning radio stations and the case of radical political support base. But in all these factors, a focus on peaceful and violent free elections will enhance the professional role of the media.

VII. CONCLUSION

Ghana's 1992 constitution has created an electoral system based on "the winner takes all" approach. Because of this, elections have over the years become a "do and die affair". Political commentators who mount media platforms forget that Ghanaians are one people irrespective of their political persuasion. Scholarly recommendations over the years have advocated for the creation of a "win-win" (all inclusive) political system in order to tackle the polarization problem and the politics of violence.

Today, the radio, newspaper and television are the quick sources of information for all Ghanaians. The current challenges to the role of the media in Ghana are radical political commentaries, political extremism, abuse of media political commerce and the polarization in the country as a result of the actions and inactions of the two major political parties. These variables are more likely to cause political violence if they succeed in manipulating the professional role of the media. Going forward in the future, in the 2016 and beyond, it will be much profitable if the various stakeholders in Ghana's political discourse avoid the practice of divisive politics. So long as the media has graduated from the culture of silence that occurred in pre-Fourth Republic Ghana to the culture of noisily emancipation in the Fourth Republic and media freedom that the repeal of the criminal libel law has aided; another culture must be developed to restrain these institutional abuses. The culture of checks and balances, professionalism and the attainment of socio-political equilibriums must be employed through the strengthening of the co-regulating media framework and its related institutions.

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