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In Search of a Role for the African Media in the Democratic Process

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Abstract

This paper analyses the concepts of development and democracy to determine their compatibility within the African situation, and discusses how the mass media could promote them. It demonstrates that, while appropriate models of the concept of democracy are still being sought, it is indisputable that there already exist sufficient elements in the African conception of human rights to provide a base for a press system that tends towards liberalism rather than authoritarianism. It, therefore, approaches the discussion from the perspective of what role the press ought to play in the African society to promote both democracy and development.

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Quel rôle pour les médias Africains dans le processus démocratique?

Résumé

Cet article analyse les concepts de développement et de démocratie en vue de déterminer s'ils sont compatibles au contexte africain; il examine comment les moyens de communication de masse peuvent aider à les promouvoir. Il démontre l'existence irréfutable d'un certain nombre d'éléments dans la conception africaine des droits de l'homme qui peuvent servir de base à une presse plutot libérale qu'autoritaire, même si on continue de rechercher des modèles appropriés du concept de démocratie L'auteur aborde donc la question du point de vue du rôle que la presse devrait jouer au sein de la société africaine pour promouvoir la démocratie et le développement.

Introduction

Since the 1960s when African countries attained political independence, they have been in search of ways to translate their nationalist aspirations into reality. The search has stretched over the whole field of political structures, economic systems, societal arrangements and institutional mechanisms for responding to the challenges of modern society. This search has often been characterized by jolts and swings, sometimes from one extreme to the other. This is seen, for example, in the swing from multi-party to single-party systems, or non-party military regimes. In the economic sphere, the movement has gone from centrally planned, state dominated, interventionist systems to liberal, market-oriented, free enterprise economies with or without the prodding of international financial institutions.

These swings have come about as a result of rigid dogmatism and, more especially, as a result of the lack of national debate and rational discourse on policies to find reasonable middle grounds. This situation has produced a lack of continuity in policy making because the tendency of a new administration has been to reverse previous trends, even if only to prove that it is different from its predecessor. This is often the case in the succession to power brought about through irregular, unconstitutional means, which is increasingly the case in Africa. Africa has thus been in a kind of ferment and experimentation aimed at adapting institutions and practices to present needs. Given the central role that the mass media can play in social transformation, it is normal to expect that a definition of the roles and functions of the mass media would be an important part of this search.

In the search, tradition has been invoked to support the establishment of certain institutions and practices, but in certain areas of national life, there are no indigenous traditions to fall on, and this has made the search more problematic. One such area is mass communication and, precisely for this reason, quite a lot of controversy surrounds the role of modern mass communication in society, especially for the promotion of democracy and development. This search for a role for the mass communication media has been further complicated by the fact that Africans have been faced with opposing ideological options ranging from liberalism to authoritarianism, with the latter being a more attractive option in several cases.

It is to be remarked, however, that even though modern mass media systems are not indigenous to Africa, there were certain accepted practices governing communication, and the expression of ideas in general, in traditional societies which can usefully inform the search for a role for the modern media. In order, therefore, to determine the contribution that communication can make to the democratic process, it may be instructive

to briefly find out what useful lessons may be learnt from African political and cultural traditions regarding human rights in general and freedom of expression in particular. We consider this background essential to the discussion because it will provide a response to those who argue that the concept of press freedom is alien to Africa and, therefore, a luxury that cannot be afforded at this stage of national development.

In our attempt to define a role for the media in Africa, we shall also briefly examine the concepts of democracy and development to see their compatibility. This step is necessary because the impression has been created that the promotion of democracy cannot be done concurrently with the pursuit of development. This examination will entail defining the concept of development and the media's role in the process. This may provide us with insights into the nature of relationships that exist between democracy and development and enable us to define a role for the media.

Human Rights in African Cultural Traditions

From the way in which human rights have been disregarded in Africa, the impression can easily be created that there is no tradition of human rights in Africa. There is, however, considerable evidence to prove the contrary. Despite the wide variations in the political systems of pre-colonial Africa, it is possible to make some safe generalizations on the basic principles of human rights. Whatever the different articulations and expressions of human rights, one common point in all the systems was that they had checks and balances. Even the king or chief was subject to laws, and failure to abide by them could entail his destoolment or removal from office. There was thus little room for despotic or absolute power over the citizens. There was a distribution of power, and the principle of prior consultation with counsellors or elected representatives of the people was recognized. There was also a clear conception of the right to free self-expression and the freedom of association as attested to by numerous proverbs, court practices and oral traditions. The structure of traditional society itself was meant to guarantee civil and political rights. There was devolution and decentralization of authority such that, in practical terms, the king or chief was basically a *primus inter pares.*

The argument about the extent to which human rights formed part of traditional African political culture stems from the fact that with modernization, there is a general decline in the traditional constraints upon both the rulers and the ruled. Societies have become larger, kinship ties are no longer as solid and as binding as before, hence the need to formally define human rights and formalize the means for their enjoyment within the framework of the modern state.

It must be noted that the expression and formalization of human rights in any society will be governed by the level of modernization and instruments that the society has at its disposal. For example, the freedom of expression can be concretized in the freedom of the press in a society which has the facilities for printing. But the basic principle remains the same. Since the traditional structures and arrangements for ensuring a consensual use of political power do not appear to be adequate in the present circumstances, new mechanisms, structures and institutions have to be devised to ensure the promotion and protection of civil, political and personal security rights. It is this kind of concern which has eventually given rise to a document like the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* (OAU 1981).

It can be said, then, that if Africa's record in terms of the respect for human rights is a dismal one, this cannot be properly attributed to the assumption that Africans have a completely different conception of human rights from that of the Western societies with which they came into contact through colonialism. The reason has to be sought elsewhere, but certainly not in African cultural and political traditions. In traditional African society, freedom of expression is recognized as a fundamental human right where consensus was given a high premium, and this was based on the free expression of opinion. Citing an example from the Akan of Ghana, Busia (1967) writes: 'The members of a traditional council allowed discussion, and free and frank expression of opinions, and if there was disagreement, they spent hours, even days if necessary, to argue and exchange ideas till they reached unanimity'. This means that if freedom of expression has suffered diminution in Africa, this is due more to intolerance, the establishment of one-party or non-party states and military regimes ruling by decrees and edicts rather than to any traits inherent in African traditions.

In support of the contention that despite differences in the mode of expression, human rights are seen to be truly universal and that they are also embedded in African traditions, one can do no better than recall that the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* is quite explicit in its preamble on certain points which it sees as deriving from African civilization and culture. The preamble says in part:

> ...Taking into consideration the virtues of their historical tradition and the values of African civilization which should inspire and characterize their reflection on their concept of human and peoples' rights;
>
> Recognizing, on the one hand, that fundamental human rights stem from the attributes of human beings, which justifies their international protection, and on the other hand, that the reality and respect of people's rights should necessarily guarantee human rights...
>
> Firmly convinced of their duty to promote and protect human and peoples' rights and freedoms taking into account the importance traditionally attached to these rights and freedoms in Africa ..., (etc.)

With particular reference to the freedom of expression, the Charter states in Article 9: (1) 'Every individual shall have the right to receive information; (2) Every individual shall have the right to express and disseminate opinions within the law'.

Chapter II of the Charter prescribes certain duties. Among these duties, sub-paragraph 7 of Article 29 enjoins each individual 'to preserve and strengthen positive cultural African values in his relations with other members of the society, *in the spirit of tolerance, dialogue and consultation* and, in general, to contribute to the promotion of the moral well being of society' (emphasis added). The import of this provision is that governments are expected to establish institutions and create the atmosphere that will make it possible for citizens to contribute to the general development of the society, and this means guaranteeing and respecting their freedom of expression and of association, among others.

Press Freedom, Democracy and Development

It has been argued in some quarters that in the face of the enormous problems facing many African and other developing countries, it is necessary to restrict civil and political rights in order to accelerate economic development. The implication is that the promotion of human rights should be subordinated to the imperatives of economic development because the two objectives cannot be pursued simultaneously. This view appears to be based on an outmoded and mechanistic view of development which does not take the human factor into consideration. An enlightened view of development defines it as 'a widely participatory process of social change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment' (Rogers 1976). This enlightened concept of development recognizes the need for material advancement, but it also puts the emphasis on human dignity and the active involvement and participation of the people in the development process.

It is the outmoded, materialistic concept of development which does not reckon with the promotion of human rights as an integral part of human development. The new concept, on the other hand, implies that economic and social rights can, and should be, pursued concurrently with political and civil rights. This is the point that the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* recognizes when it says in its Preamble:

> Convinced that it is henceforth essential to pay a particular attention to the right to development and that civil and political rights cannot be dissociated from economic, social and cultural rights in their conception as well as universality and that the satisfaction of economic, social and cultural rights is a guarantee for the enjoyment of civil and political rights;....

Our interpretation of this is that the two sets of rights should be promoted simultaneously rather than sequentially because one set of rights is a guarantee for the enjoyment of the other rather than a prerequisite.

The new concept of development puts a premium on participation in the discussion of the affairs of the state as well as in decision making. The question then is: How can this participation be ensured in the absence of the right to express oneself freely and frankly? For the purpose of national development or self-development, people should be able to share ideas and discuss freely, exchange views, evaluate alternatives and criticise where necessary. One of the functions of communication is to provide an avenue for social interaction and participation. The mass media system of any country wishing to develop, therefore, should provide a forum or a platform for collective discussion and the weighing of various options in order to arrive at well-considered decisions. In other words, to serve the ends of development, the mass media should provide 'a market place for the exchange of comment and criticism regarding public affairs'. This is the point that Mr. Gorbachev (1988) made when he said:

> I would like to dwell particularly on the political freedoms that enable a person to express his opinion on any matter. The implementation of these freedoms is a real guarantee that any problem of public interest will be discussed from every angle, and all the pros and cons will be weighed, and that this will help to find optimal solutions with due consideration for all the diverse opinions and actual possibilities. In short, comrades, what we are talking about is a new role of public opinion in the country (p. 6).

The import of this statement is that there is a positive correlation between the right to express one's ideas in an open debate and the contribution to the development efforts of the nation.

Authoritarian controls which preclude the free exchange of ideas have been imposed by governments of many developing countries in the name of the need for rapid development and this situation has led to a refinement of the authoritarian theory of the press into the developmental theory of the press. Though it is not easy to give a neat definition of this theory, one can isolate certain important characteristics relevant to the present discussion. The theory enjoins the media to carry out certain development tasks as defined by national policy makers; it is also based on the notion that the need for collective development should take precedence over individual rights and freedoms. Under this theory, the right is conceded to the state to restrict media operations and to exercise direct control to ensure that media resources are used to promote national identity and integration. The authoritarian streak in the developmental theory is evident, and John Lent (1977) tries to rationalize the argument of some Third World leaders and scholars when he writes:

> Because Third World nations are newly emergent, they need time to develop their institutions. During this initial period of growth, stability and unity must be sought; criticism must be minimised and the public faith in government institutions and policies

must be encouraged. Media must cooperate, according to this guided press concept, by stressing positive, development-inspired news, by ignoring negative societal or oppositionist characteristics and by supporting governmental ideologies and plans (p. 18).

What this amounts to is an enforced or imposed consensus in the name of national development, and this is clearly at variance with the more enlightened view of development which sees free participation as an essential ingredient.

But developmental theory of the press has also been seen within the context of participation. Christine L. Ogan (1982) considers that it can be interpreted to mean 'the critical examination, evaluation and report of the relevance, enactment and impact of development' (p. 11). In order to undertake this critical evaluation, it is essential that the media be sufficiently free and independent of government control. This way of defining the developmental theory of the press brings it nearer to the libertarian and social responsibility theories than to authoritarianism. Echoing the same kind of sentiment, Narinder Aggarwala (1979) states that the role of the journalist inspired by the developmental theory is to 'critically examine, evaluate and report the relevance of a developmental project to national and local needs, the difference between a planned scheme and its actual implementation, and the differences between its impact on people as claimed by government officials and as it actually is' (p. 181).

It is clear from the opposing definitions of the developmental theory that it is still unsettled and its real interpretation is still under debate. The difference in interpretation seems to arise out of whether one perceives it as a normative theory depicting how the media serve society, or as an objective theory which attempts to describe what the media actually do. It is from the normative perspective that Aggarwala arrives at his definition of the developmental theory, which seems to be inspired by participative communication models favouring democratic, grassroots involvement.

Closely echoing a liberal and democratic interpretation of the developmental theory, G.T. Anim (1976) puts forward the idea of a 'participant press' system which he considers appropriate for the needs of developing countries. This participatory theory of the press (which is to be distinguished from the 'democratic-participant media theory' described by McQuail (1987) is not seen within the context of either an adversary or servile relationship between the government and the press as Merrill and Lowenstein (1979) see it. Anim postulates that in order to serve the ends of development, the relationship between the government and the press can be characterized by cooperation and understanding without confrontation or servility. He puts forward ten principles underlying his 'participatory theory of the press' among which, for the purposes of the present discussion, one can note the following:

(1) A participant press would operate on a dialogical principle, providing the community with a platform for free and active discussion among its members and between them and the political leadership.
(2) A participant press would conceptualize the process of national development as a search by all members of the community for viable solutions to problems which affect leaders and followers alike.
(3) A participant press would operate on the principle that every member of the community is a searcher after the truth and that, until a consensus is reached, one member's decisions are as important as those of any member (p. 126).

It is easy to see that Anim's participatory theory is basically inspired by libertarian notions and recognizes the need for the expression of diverse opinions within the media system. According to his theory, therefore, democracy and development are compatible and not antithetical, even at the present state of development of African countries. He stresses that the role of the press should be one of education and information and not prescription, and adds that 'social criticism and conflict are not necessarily disruptive. They are important factors in creating and maintaining a participant society and in contributing to sound national development' (p. 133). Nyerere (1973) is obviously referring to the underlying principle of participative communication for development when he says:

> Development brings freedom, provided it is development of people. But people cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves .... A man develops himself by joining in free discussion of a new venture, and participating in the subsequent decisions; he is not being developed if he is herded like an animal into the new venture.

Government-Press Relations

The relationships between the government and the press in Africa have generally been characterized by tension and conflict. Where there appears to be no tension, the reason is that the press has either been cowed into submission or it has become an organ of the ruling party. What one sees is a shrinking of the privately-owned press and an expansion of the state-owned press. This situation appears to reflect the intolerance and the tendency towards the creation of monolithic political institutions in Africa. There has been a systematic suppression of all organized opposition, and the elimination of all forms of organized dissent has usually paved the way for the establishment of one-party states or of military regimes. Just as the creation of one-party states has been justified on the grounds that it is necessary to mobilize all human resources within the nation for national integration and development, the virtual monopolization of the mass media has been explained in terms of the need to ensure that the people are not distracted by 'false propaganda', and that all media resources will be harnessed and directed towards national development.

While people do not seriously question the government's ownership and control of broadcasting, they tend to see in government's monopolization or domination of the press a streak of authoritarianism and interference with the people's right to receive information from diverse sources. There is, however, another way of looking at the question of providing a justification for a government's ownership of a newspaper. The government needs to inform the people about its plans and programmes and to mobilize them for development, using all the channels available. Whether elected or self-imposed, a *de facto* government, acting in the name of, and on behalf of, the people would seem to have a stronger claim to inform and educate them as well as to try to mould their thinking than the owner of a private newspaper enterprise or an editor. Besides, governments also consider it their duty to provide information to the people as a service in much the same way as they provide other social amenities and services. This is the point made by a Ghanaian parliamentarian when he said:

> The Government has a duty to the people, and it is important that its views are clearly reported and not twisted in any way. For that reason, there is a case for the Government having a press where its views will not be distorted. But that does not mean that the Government should monopolise the papers. All that I am saying is that it is important for the Government to have an organ which will publish its views correctly (Ghana Parliamentary Debates 1970).

But if, as has been demonstrated, the government has a right to own and operate newspapers, this right does not confer on it a right of monopoly in that domain. This is because the government-operated newspapers are likely to present only one viewpoint, and hence the need for other avenues for expressing other points of view. In the libertarian tradition, private ownership of newspapers is seen as an index of press freedom, but the question may be asked: Whose interests does the private press represent and on what democratic basis can it claim to represent or reflect public opinion? Since the general public has nothing to do with the appointment of editors and reporters who have the capacity to mould public opinion, it can be said that the private press represents class or sectional interests or the interests of its owners and nothing more. So what is the basis of their authority to inform and educate the public or to shape public opinion? In other words, what gives the press legitimacy as a kind of 'fourth estate"? This is the point made by the American politician, Dean Rusk (1974), when he said:

> Let's get rid of this genial myth of the fourth estate... That this should be so would seem to be elementary because the American people have nothing to say about who are to be publishers and editors and reporters and columnists. We cannot admit in our constitutional system room for something called a 'fourth estate' which has no democratic base (p. 18).

Echoing the same sentiment a few years later, but with specific reference to network television, former U.S. Vice-President Spiro Agnew asked:

> What do Americans know of the men who wield this power? Of the men who produce and direct network news — the nation knows practically nothing.... Is it not fair and relevant to question its concentration in the hands of a tiny and closed fraternity of privileged men, elected by no one and enjoying a monopoly sanctioned and licensed by government?.... We would never trust such power over public opinion in the hands of an elected government — it is time we questioned it in the hands of a small and unelected elite (Keogh 1972).

If such fundamental questions can be raised about the democratic base of the privately owned media in a country with a long tradition of almost exclusive private ownership of media organs and with well established constitutional guarantees, it should come as no surprise that in countries lacking the long tradition or experience of an independent, private press, the government's right to be involved in the operations of the mass media is almost taken for granted.

Whatever the system of media ownership in any given country, if the media are to serve both the ends of democracy and development, a certain amount of diversity is called for. Even though there is no consensus on the concept of a free press system, press freedom is measurable in terms of the extent to which different views, including the dissenting and unorthodox ones, are accommodated and given expression. It can, therefore, be asserted that a plurality of channels of information will serve the interests of democracy better than a monopolization of the channels by the government. An ideal mix would thus be a system in which government operated its channels while constitutionally guaranteeing the right of private entrepreneurs to set up their own newspapers to provide alternative sources of information.

It has been argued that providing alternative sources of information can pose problems for developing countries. The argument is that one major problem facing newly independent nations is that of achieving national integration and creating national consciousness that will distil local and tribal loyalties into national loyalty. To achieve this end, it is necessary to create national symbols through a controlled and centralized media system at the national level. It is further argued that given widespread illiteracy and inadequate political consciousness, a diversity of the sources of information or a multiplicity of voices in the media can only create confusion in the minds of the people and thus render the task of nation-building and development more difficult. It is this same type of argument that has been used to explain the creation of one-party political systems.

The argument sounds plausible but it is patronizing and assumes that either there is only one acceptable version of an issue or that the people are incapable of weighing alternatives and making reasonable choices. In

order to educate the people on their civil rights and responsibilities and create in them the political consciousness that will enable them to participate meaningfully in the governmental process through periodic elections, they need access to information and they should have the right to all possible avenues for obtaining the necessary data to enable them to participate in public discussions and debates so as to be able to influence decisions. Despite the need for the free flow of information in democratic societies, governments tend to consider that this entails risks because opposing views and dissent may be irresponsible and calculated to undermine stability. It is further felt that opposition elements may take advantage of the illiteracy of the masses and exploit their ignorance to advance their own cause. It is for this reason that governments see some political virtue in restricting the flow of information for the sake of national unity and stability.

In discussing the place and role of mass communication in the democratic process in Africa, it is important to recall the commonplace observation that the press system of any country is a reflection of the social, political and economic environment in which it operates. Even though all countries lay claim to democratic ideals and practices, if we see democracy broadly as being characterized by participation and choice, it is obvious that very few countries on the African continent can be considered democratic; single-party regimes without any meaningful choice of leadership or policy alternatives, or military dictatorships dominate the political scene. In this kind of environment in which pluralism is not tolerated, it is unrealistic to expect a press system that constitutes a channel or vehicle for national debate. The fortunes of the mass media are closely linked with those of the political system of which it is a part and, for this reason, it is pointless to isolate the issue of the media and discuss it outside the general political framework. Until the society becomes more open and tolerant, the media will continue to act as propaganda organs for the power elite rather than as public vehicles for rational discourse and debate on national issues.

It can be said that it is this absence of debate on national issues that has posed the greatest threat to political stability in Africa. In the absence of any recognized opposition that will propose alternative policies, the military has often seen itself as a legitimate opposition and has intervened in the political arena to redress what it perceives as the wrongs in the society. The intervention of the military hardly improves the situation; in many cases the regimes get more intolerant and the cycle of instability is resumed. This vicious circle can be broken only if there is genuine goodwill to establish open political systems in which free discussion will permit the weighing of alternatives and ensure that the government is continuously called to account on its performance, which brings the discussion to the watch-dog function of the press.

Watch-dog Role of the Press

One reason given by African political leaders for ensuring the control and subservience of the press as well as other media is that since the media are vital to the exercise of political power, their use should be closely controlled so that they are not used to propagate views and promote interests that are at variance with those defined by the national leadership. It is argued that since political institutions in developing countries are fragile and any criticism of the government may be interpreted as a challenge to the legitimacy of the government, the media should refrain from scrutinizing the affairs of the government too closely. The media should, therefore, confine themselves to serving as a one-way conveyer belt between the government and the people and helping to educate the people on the development goals defined by the government. Within this context, it is argued, the right to criticize as contained in the freedom of the press becomes a luxury which developing countries cannot afford. This means in effect that the media should have no watch-dog role. How valid is this interpretation of the role of the press?

The concept of democracy is one which has a wide diversity of interpretations, but however it is defined, it implies accountability which is established through periodic elections even within one-party systems. But what happens between elections? How does government render account of its stewardship on a regular basis? If such accounting is necessary, what institutional framework can ensure this on a continuing basis? The obvious answer would seem to be the mass media which can exercise a regular scrutiny on the activities of the government to see how performance matches promises or how programmes are being implemented. Even in the African context where one is dealing admittedly with new and fragile political institutions, the press should act as a watchdog of democracy. In a democratic society, actions of the government, which is only a trustee of the collective will and power of the people, are expected to be regulated by the force of public opinion, and the press is the most appropriate medium for gauging and reflecting public opinion. In the absence of any such mechanism for regularly monitoring and evaluating the government's performance before the bar of public opinion, there is a great likelihood of the government falling into complacency, unresponsiveness and irresponsibility.

In this context, it is legitimate for the press to fulfil the role of an opposition in the sense of presenting another point of view where necessary; that is to say, criticising government decisions which are not in the best interests of the people, denouncing abuses of power in society and defending human rights. A press or media system that decides to do less than this reneges on its responsibility and fails to contribute adequately to

the democratic process or to national development based on democratic participation and decision-making. The press should not see its role simply as that of a deflecting mechanism, allowing people to let off steam as a kind of safety valve while the weakness criticized still go on. It should be a substantial vehicle for reflecting the various shades of public opinion and articulating the people's feelings. The press in its watch-dog role should, as a matter not only of right but also of duty, expose and criticize bureaucratic incompetence, corruption, abuse of power and the violation of human rights.

The African press played the role of a watch-dog during the independence struggle and many of the nationalist leaders established newspapers for the purpose of organising and mobilizing the people to fight against colonialism and injustice.[1] Some people who see this adversary role of the colonial press to be justified now argue that with the attainment of independence, the press should play a supportive rather than an adversary role. This is because the governments need the support and sympathy of all to tackle the gigantic problems of development. Those who argue along these lines fail to ask a fundamental question: What were the evils that the press in colonial Africa fought against? The press fought against political oppression, economic exploitation, social injustice and the abuse of human rights. A further question to ask is: If the evils denounced by the press still persist, and the press proved to be an effective weapon in fighting against those evils, why should it not continue to be used in fighting a fresh manifestation of those evils? Should the press abdicate its responsibility of fighting and denouncing certain evils simply because the perpetrators and victims happen to be of the same colour?

Press freedom is not absolute in any political system, but this fact has often constituted a pretext for denying it altogether in many developing countries. While it is reasonable to argue that a certain amount of restraint and moderation is needed in developing countries to protect and help stabilize the new fragile political institutions, the press will be abdicating its important responsibility of watch-dog if it fails to constantly scrutinize the government's activities.

Summary and Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has tried to show that the media in Africa can serve the ends of both democracy and development. As far as democracy is concerned, we have tried to show that in the search for models, even though there is no tradition of the press in pre-colonial African society to draw upon, there are sufficient elements in the African conception of human rights to provide a solid base for a press system that tends towards, or is inspired by, liberalism rather than by authoritarianism. The point is, therefore, made that if there appears to be disregard for human rights in

Africa, the reasons may be sought elsewhere other than in African traditional political and cultural practices.

Our approach has been to examine and reflect not on what role the press plays in African society but on what the press ought to do to put itself at the service of both democracy and development. An attempt is also made to show that contrary to the assumption that, at least at this stage of socio-political evolution in Africa, democracy and development are mutually exclusive, the two concepts are reconcilable and can be pursued concurrently. In fact, it can be argued that the concept of development as redefined by Rogers presupposes the existence of certain basic democratic principles. The notion of participation which is an essential ingredient of the concept also presupposes access to information by the citizens to enable them participate meaningfully in public discussion and decision-making. It is an outmoded, mechanistic concept of development that sees the freedom of expression as a hindrance to its achievement.

It is generally agreed that in addition to the traditional functions of the press, namely, informing, educating and entertaining, the media of developing countries have the additional responsibility of promoting development. The problem arises when discussing how this developmental function may be carried out. While some argue that the press can play this developmental role only when it is subjected to authoritarian controls and direction, we have tried to show that authoritarian controls tend to inhibit public discussion and restrict the free flow of information, thus eventually stifling and negating efforts at genuine human development.

The point is also made that since the press or media system is part of the political structure of a society and operates within certain ideological parameters, any meaningful discussion of the role of the press must take into consideration the political philosophy of that society. An objective look at the African political scene confronts one with an environment that is not conducive to the pursuit of democratic ideals. It follows from this that any meaningful search for a role for the African media in the democratic process should be broadened to include a search for those political institutions that will enable the media to be both a tool for social transformation and a watch-dog over the people's rights; in other words, to serve the interests of both development and democracy concurrently.

Note

1. One can cite as examples such papers as K. Nkrumah's *Evening News*, Jomo Kenyatta's *Mwigwithania*, N. Azikiwe's *West African Pilot*, Herbert Macaulay's *Lagos Daily News*, among others.

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