

**Francis B Nyamnjoh, Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging, Zed Books, London/New York, 2005, pp.308. ISBN: 1 84277 583 9**

Democracy, in essence, is the cornerstone to development of any society. The media as an information generator and disseminator is an important attribute in democratic processes. The book by Francis B. Nyamnjoh is well intended to explore and examine the role played by the in democratic processes in Africa, a continent that still lags behind in terms of upholding democratic values and ideals.

The introduction sets the objective of the text an analysis of 'the role of the media in promoting democracy in the 1990s.p.17...takes stock of media performance ... and explores the attitudinal and structural changes necessary in harnessing the media for positive contribution...'p.24. It begins by examining the relationship between the media and democracy, exploring the role of the media in promoting democracy. The author offered an analysis of how information technology have helped in shaping the media and subsequently playing a pivotal role in promoting democracy though this is at a cost when 'dislocations and disruptions would certainly result from attempts by international media giants to make even more capital out of information or by government control of access'.p.9. He highlighted how African media has remained back and inadequate in terms of the people who have access to it.

Chapter one takes stock of the media and democratization processes in Africa. The author accepts that it has not been exciting because of a number of factors. Attention was given to civil society, issues of ethnicity and the politics of belonging. The chapter zeroed on the media as a medium of conveying information from the backdrop that ' the media are at the risk of employing double standards as well, by claiming one thing and doing the opposite, or by straddling various identity margins, without always being honest about it, especially if heir very survival depends on it'.p.39.

The author analyzed the ownership and control patterns of the media in Africa from colonial to the postcolonial period. To which he noted 'the treats to a free, open and participatory media system and society are as much from repressive governments as of rich nations, international financial institutions and communication multinationals'. Dwelling on the 1990s period the author explored issues of media pluralism giving excellent examples from across Africa and examining its subsequent role in promoting democratization process. The shortcoming of the media in the process was also exposed and factors contributing to such outcome were alluded to. Issues of laws regulating the media were analyzed to which the author noted that they have not been favorable. Issues of working conditions, lack of resources and lack of personnel and specialization were also alluded to.

Chapter two examined issues of ethics in the media and what relevant institutions have been doing to address issues of training, professionalism and ethics across Africa. He questioned the credibility of journalism in the 1990s as various labels have been given to the media personnel. Of importance has been 'that African journalism is in ethical crisis is evidenced by how much debate and literature in this domain have increased since the 1990s'.p.93. On training and professionalism the presented major borne of contentions among the trained and non-trained journalist. Given the contradictions the author noted that 'there is also the need for African journalist to understand that in a plural or heterogeneous society it is normal to have or expect other perspectives'. p.97. In concluding the chapter, the author gave an advice that 'being professional and ethical is the sure way for the media to regain public trust and respect, and to contribute meaningfully to democratization, however defined. For media cannot expect accountability when they themselves are not accountable; nor expect tolerance when they themselves are not tolerant'.p.99.

In Chapter three Nyamnjoh analyzed multi party politics in Cameroon. He gave a historical background to politics in Cameroon from colonial to postcolonial period to 1990. Of importance he highlighted that 'in the post colony, just as in colonial Cameroon the power of the traditional kings is undermined by central authorities, while that of warrant chief has to be constantly propped by demonstrations of force against the local populations'.p110. He analyzed Cameroon's experience with multi-partyism in the 1990s, which came with the spread of liberal democracy ethos. For the author despite heralding of this era of multi-partyism, 'the bulk of Cameroonians...continue to be compelled to abide by decisions taken without their consent or participation'.p.122. As a result of

this the author sees the relevance of the wider civil society which is also weak in its own right because 'the emerging civil society is being infiltrated by organizations that are quite undemocratic in orientation'.p.123. As such the author reminds that 'Liberal democracy, even by African standards, is yet to take off in Cameroon'.p.123.

In Chapter four the author analyzed official media and the role it has played in democratic processes using Cameroon as a case study. He gave a historical background to broadcasting in colonial state and post-colonial 1960-82, then 1982-90. The period 1990s was dwelt on particular attention to Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV). In essence the author noted that 'CRTV has played essentially public relations role, rather than the role of neutral mediator in the democratic process.'p.144. The last part of the chapter analyzed the print media to which he noted that it is not far divorced from (CRTV) to which he concluded 'the government has been firmly in control of state owned broadcast and print media and it has used these institutions mainly for its public relations, while doing it all it could to filter critique and stifle opposition'. p158.

Chapter five dealt with the legal framework governing the control of the media. Again using Cameroon as a case study. He analyzed press control under colonial rule and post colonial one party state era. The author gave a critical analysis of the media law that came into force in 1990 to which he pinpointed that it had some flaws though it better than the previous one.

In Chapter 6 the author concretized, with the use of a case study and examples, issues of professionalism and ethics. He blamed journalist the unprofessional and unethical practices that have contributed to lack of sympathy from the public. These included partisanship, scapegoatism and ethnic bias, which were analyzed in detail in Chapter 8.

Chapter seven explored issues of ICT, political rumor, and press cartoons and how they are used to disseminate and explain political knowledge and information. Chapter nine critically reviewed communication policies in Africa in comparison to the West and to the end attempted to provide a prototype policy framework for Africa's media. To the end he observed that, 'It is hoped that with the right communication policies and structures in place, the media would be better able to redefine themselves accordingly, and be of greater service to democratization as a negotiated process'. p.272.

Pondering about the future of media and democracy in Africa Nyamnjoh thinks that it 'will depend very much on how much well African states design policies that negotiate the delicate balance between public interest and private concerns'.p.273.

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