Article

Intimidation, Assault, and Violence Against Media Practitioners in Ghana: Considering Provocation

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Abstract

The ability of the media to function effectively as a fourth estate is hooked firmly on the maximum cooperation it receives from the different entities within society at whose service it operates. Recently, concerns have been raised in Ghana about the spate of assault and intimidation against media practitioners, and this action appears to hinder the independence, growth, and development of the media. Using an inductive approach for qualitative data analysis and drawing on the provocation theory, this study explored the degree of assault and intimidation in Ghana's media environment and found that attacks on the media were traced to three major sources, namely, security agencies, communities/individual citizens, and supporters of political parties. The article further argued that the communication interplay of the aforementioned entities is ideal for a functioning public.

Keywords

assault, media, security services, communities, provocation

Introduction

The safety of the media and the fact that it reserves the right to convey stories about any subject is uncontested in this day and era (Voinea, 2015). However, the question is, to what extent are the media free to discharge these uncontested rights? Recently, media practitioners have become targets of increasing physical attacks and assaults globally, and these have recorded astonishing and unacceptable injuries and deaths. Beyond their right to life and secured professional environment, it tends to violate the right of society to information (Elliott, Elbahtimy, & Srinivasan, 2012). In a report of the Commonwealth Press, Ross (1999) stated, "Conventional wisdom suggests that life for journalists has become considerably more dangerous and difficult in many parts of the world in recent years" (p. 5). These, among other concerns, appear to have prompted the protection of media practitioners from assault and harassment, which became so pertinent that it received attention at major global summits such as the U.N. Security and Human Rights Councils in 2006 and June 2010, respectively (Elliott et al., 2012; Lissosky & Henrichsen, 2011). These resolutions, on one hand, affected Africa positively, and cases of smooth state–media relations are evident (VonDoepp & Young, 2013). On the other hand, journalists in some parts of the continent, especially those who carry recording devices to take photos and video shots, are confronted with dangerous security threats because they become targets for security agencies

who want to suppress footage of brutalities meted out to protesters. For instance, cameras are either confiscated or destroyed in such encounters (Keita, 2011; VonDoepp & Young, 2013), as witnessed in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars that saw 16 journalists dead in each country while many newspaper and radio outlets were set ablaze. Also, justice was not served for the murder of editors Norbert Zongo in 1999 and Deyda Hydara in 2004 from Burkina Faso and Gambia, respectively, despite the efforts of the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) (Karikari, 2011). In addition, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) report indicated that the police (government) in the Philippines had not done enough to prosecute those who murder journalists because of 55 cases uncovered, only one had been convicted over a 20-year period amid situations where some police personnel were identified as prime suspects of cases of murder. Prior to the demise of many media practitioners, most practitioners had received threat messages through anonymous phone calls and texts (Noonan, 2005). For example, Norbert Zongo received several death

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threats before his brutal murder (Tettey, 2001). The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) indicated that generally more than 94% of assaults on media practitioners were not investigated at all (Elliott et al., 2012). This state of affairs appears to suggest that most practitioners work under fear, which tends to affect the independence and development of the profession. Furthermore, in other places such as Israel, Colombia, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Pakistan, assault and murder of journalists have occurred between the period 2009 and 2010 (Elliott et al., 2012), and these appear to have continued till present. War regions are fundamentally dangerous locations and this puts some media practitioners under more risk than others with respect to fears emanating from serious injury and death. Largely, journalists are assaulted and sometimes lynched while on assignment (Taback & Coupland, 2006; Tumber & Webster, 2006).

Ghana in Focus

Beyond being the first country to attain self-rule in Africa, Ghana has weaved itself through different governance systems and made strides to stabilize democratic rule since 1992, a quality that has credited the country as a model of democracy on the African continent. At the core of this historic feat is a vibrant media, whose role has been indispensable to the sustenance of democracy up to today, and thus, the need for them to work in a safe environment should be sought. Ghana was ranked 22nd on the 2015 World Press Freedom, which placed the country in the "free" category (Reporters Without Borders, 2015). By the close of 2016, Ghana's media freedom status worsened to 26th in the same ranking index. Furthermore, in a compilation of freedom of expression (FoE) violations such as arrests, attacks and threats, fines, and imprisonment among 16 countries in West Africa in the first quarter of 2014, Ghana recorded the highest cases (eight) of the 25 overall media violations. This prompted the MFWA to issue a statement about the growing spate of attacks and harassment on media practitioners (Mordy, 2014). Subsequently, various media associations and regulatory bodies comprised of the National Media Commission (NMC), Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), Ghana Independent Broadcaster's Association (GIBA), and the Private Newspaper Publishers Association of Ghana (PRINPAG), jointly conveyed a press conference in this regard (Jafaru, 2014). For instance, journalists of the *Multimedia Group* and *TV3* crew were harassed by security officers when they were taking shots of demolition of some human settlements on purported encroached lands in the capital to publish the living condition of residents after the operation by the Accra and Tema Metropolitan Assemblies. In addition, there have been reports of assaults on the media by members of the public including active politicians. In as much as media laws and the political orientation of a country pose some challenges to the establishment of media freedom

globally, media analysts in Ghana tend to attribute the country's dwindling ranking on the World Press Freedom Index to increasing instances of assault in the landscape. Similarly, the United States attributed their drop on the World Media Freedom ranking mainly to the arrest of scores of practitioners—broadcast, print, web, blogging, and live streaming—at "Occupy Wall Street" protests across the United States, and the intimidation of other practitioners by baton and gun-wielding police officers during a NATO summit in Chicago (Madsen, 2012). Thus, it appears that the very society the fourth estate represents as its mouthpiece is constantly assaulting and frustrating their efforts in ensuring that society functions well. To Tumber and Webster (2006), the clampdown on media practitioners is an assault on democracy. The current study subjects media practitioners in Ghana to qualitative interrogation with respect to intimidation, assault, and violence in the landscape, and intends to identify their sources and the extent to which this informs their autonomy and development, public tranquility, and coexistence. This would help inform policy on the general development of media.

Literature

The critical function of the media to inform and educate society, set agenda, and influence public opinion makes it a precarious profession. For instance, amid the turbulent political landscape of Nepal, journalists were threatened or sometimes killed for writing about a subject or refusing to do so, and these plots occasionally extend to their relatives who become targets for possible attack (Neupane & Zeng, 2014). Arnaldo et al. (1998) observed,

> It is equally difficult to understand how journalists can be harassed, imprisoned, tortured or killed mainly for their disagreement with those in power or for expressing opposing or often just different views. Is it that those who hold power, or seek power or who wish to preserve that power, do so at all costs, even the cost of human life? (p. 6)

Thus, public office holders employ violent tactics such as arrest and physical violence, to inhibit media practitioners from conveying stories about armed violence and its repercussions (Tumber & Webster, 2006). Moreover, the nature of their job in many situations exposed practitioners to these hazards because their assignments normally take them to environments where the likelihood of violence breaking out is high, such as the stadia, massive demonstrations, and protests (Bridge, 2004; Spiliopoulos, 2007) among others. Using the provocative theory and drawing on a data set that spans 15 years and covers 23 nations, VonDoepp and Young (2013) explained the state of assault and harassment of the fourth estate in Africa from the perspective of what drives government to stifle flow of information over time. They showed that assault heightens in media when governments (a) sought

constitutional amendment to prolong their stay in office, (b) incites series of protests and (c) masterminds coup plots. Neupane and Zeng (2014) investigated how Nepali journalists have fared after the Constituent Assembly election in 2008 through in-depth interviews drawn from print, broadcast, and online media platforms. Their findings revealed that beyond media freedom protection stipulated in the Interim Constitution, journalists remained confronted with threats and assaults attributed to what they write. Moreover, security forces, minority groups, and media owners exert pressure on journalists, and government has done less to protect them. The influence of religious bodies and political fanatics are strong factors because coverage of sensitive subjects such as religious beliefs and corruption have triggered attacks on journalists if entities involved feel offended. The fears of violent attacks make media practitioners cautious in their reportage of these subjects, which eventually leads to self-censorship (Hanitzsch & Hidayat, 2012). The state of assault on media practitioners appears to be worst in conflict zones, and writing on "A Story to Die for," Bridge (2004) cautioned,

> Prepare yourself mentally. Garner knowledge about where you are going and what you may be faced with and seek out trusted contacts and fixers in the country. And remember that common sense is an important survival tool. And if it really does go horribly wrong? Well, nobody forced you to be a journalist. (p. 40)

The position of Bridge reiterates the experience of Chris Ayres of *The Times* when he found himself entangled with the Marines during the 2003 Iraq Invasion and commented, "I found myself in a circumstance where I was absolutely terrified beyond belief since I just thought that there was a fair chance that we'd die, or get captured" (Tumber & Webster, 2006, p. 19). Kodellas, Papastavron, Giannakoulopoulos, and Koutsompolis (2014) examined victimization at the workplace and the degree of fear of crime among media practitioners using a sample of 635 practicing media professionals. Their findings showed that physical victimization is common in the workplace and journalists whose roles are "news sourcing" and "photography" experienced higher fears of physical and verbal attacks, threats, and stolen or damaged property. Melki and Mallat (2014) used a mixed method to examine the marginalization of female journalists in the Arab world and theorized that a number of factors such as sexual harassment and absence of enabling legal and social setting jointly discourage, prevent, or push females out of the media profession. Moreover, females who have proved successful in the job are assigned to roles that exclude them from decision and policy determination. Their findings also showed that global cultural and institutional practices dating back to centuries are fully operational in media establishments in Lebanon and the Arab world. In his paper, "Journalists as Citizens," Whittle (2005) maintained,

> We have to be free to gather news and views to serve the society of which we, too, are a part . . . we cannot afford to be thought of as an extension of the police service or the intelligence agencies. We need people to talk to us. The public need to have access to that information. The public interest is better served by our being able to report what is happening and get inside the minds of people. That becomes impossible if every step is dogged with the threat of police raids and seizures of journalistic material. (p. 54)

From the position of Whittle, freedom of media practitioners to collect information from the public to help advocate the interest of society is central to the media profession, and he established that the media should not be misconstrued as an integral part of the security services. Taback and Coupland (2006) investigated security of media practitioners, and concluded that media reports from conflict zones can provide a meaningful database on the effect of armed violence on vulnerable groups, including journalists, to enhance human security. They maintained that media documentation and subsequent publication is the surest means to convey information to the international community to influence policy direction on human security. In Haiti, verbal and other forms of abuse against practitioners in public are on the rise for posing a question to public officials. Haiti's president Michel Martelly ignored a question, and upon persistence by the journalist, he remarked, "Look, if you persist, I'll insult you and your mama!" Following this, a young female journalist's question about unfulfilled previous campaign promises at his party rally in July 2015, the president said, "I came to talk to you; you must listen," and then he added, "W$%re! If you want to have s*x, find yourself a man to!@ck you behind the wall! I'm ready to!@ck you on the podium!" George Fortuné, a Haitian journalist, was also assaulted violently in November 2014 by a policeman in the presence of a public official, and the ordeal photographed as a threat to other journalists who might want to cover the protests (Chery, 2015). At a forum in Washington, *These Times* reporter Mike Elk's microphone was seized and unlawfully detained by a Honeywell official after he asked the Honeywell CEO about his firm's environmental policies. In the recent attempted coup in Turkey, soldiers seized several broadcasting newsrooms and coerced Tijen Karas at gunpoint to read a televised statement. Moreover, while there are growing incidences of assault against purported opposition newspaper *Hurriyet* in Turkey, progovernment media practitioners also participated in the campaign against the paper (Yeginsu, 2015). By this, politics seem to have broken the formidable front of the media in their effort to eradicate assault and violence on the institution.

Provocation Theory

This work utilizes the provocation theory. Farrington (2011) asserts that "provocation" is a "perceived attack on a person's

or (his or her significant other's) property, security or self-respect encouraging an unlawful response. It occurs in response to frictions" (p. 218). Furthermore, Lord Holt in 1707 stated that four main activities legally constitute sufficient provocation: "(1) hearing angry words followed by a physical assault; (2) seeing a friend being assaulted; (3) observing a citizen detained by force; and (4) seeing one's wife in bed with another" (Mison, 1992, p. 139). Such as other theories, the theory of provocation has become interdisciplinary. In law, it is traced to the 12th century (Berman, 2011), and has also been applied extensively in the natural sciences and the creative arts. Whereas in the natural sciences, provocation encapsulates the introduction of a provoking stimulus into a controlled setting to enable the investigator to draw inferences about the features of the stimulus under study, it is applied in the creative arts to provoke reaction and emotions in the audience, or to activate new ideas and perspectives on daily practices and objects (Pangrazio, 2016). Provocation may not always be direct. In the indirect sense, persons can be provoked to aggression by social exclusion, circulated rumors about them, among others (Warburton & Anderson, 2015). But it appears that provocation is the most singular activator of aggression (Bettencourt, Talley, Benjamin, & Valentine, 2006). However, the terms *aggression* and *violence* have been misconstrued as being the same. Violence is aggression that is intended to cause harm extreme enough to require medical attention or to cause death. Thus, all violent behavior is aggression, but most aggression is not violence (Warburton & Anderson, 2015). Due to the nature of provocative examination aimed to produce a response to determine the effect of a stimulus (Pangrazio, 2016), breaches of ethical concerns have been raised because participants may be unaware that they are under observation. Writing on *Guardian Online*, Chris Chambers (2014) questioned the ethical basis of the joint study by Facebook and Cornell University on "Emotional Contagion" because Facebook users were unaware that they were being monitored. However, the current study draws on past experiences of media practitioners in the field to examine how the three entities mentioned above responded. Provocation is rarely used in the social sciences; it enables the researcher to focus on how a particular social phenomenon affects the individual and society more broadly (Pangrazio, 2016), hence the need for its application in this study.

By the use of provocation theory, this work intends to determine whether the actions of some media practitioners and/or the nature of their profession trigger intimidation and assault on them by some actors in society.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the sources of intimidation, assault, and violence against media practitioners?
Research Question 2: What factors provoke intimidation, assault, and violence against media practitioners?

Research Question 3: Should media practitioners be blamed for their assault?

Method

Data for this study were sourced from individuals who could comment constructively on the state of the Ghanaian media with respect to intimidation, assault, and violence against media practitioners under the country's fourth republic. Informed consent was obtained from individual media outlets, associations, and regulatory bodies. Participants were purposively selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) participant is a qualified media practitioner, (b) participant is at the time of this study in full-time practice, (c) practitioner identifies with either the state or a privately owned media outlet, (d) practitioner had a minimum working experience of 10 years and more, (d) participating media professional bodies should be advocates of media freedom and expression, and (e) participant lives within the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. For representative purposes, the sample was composed of reporters who mainly go into the field to gather news. This also includes editors and representatives of media regulators and journalist associations because these bodies monitor activities of the media and are the first point of call to report incidences of violence. These criteria made them resourceful enough with respect to issues of the media to critically comment on the subject under investigation. Fifteen ($N = 15$) participants who met the above criteria individually also gave consent to grant interviews at various locations of their preference. The study adopted a semistructured interview design that enabled informants to have flexibility to express their views beyond specific questions in an exploratory fashion. Also, this interview structure ensured that the core facts of an issue were unearthed and the participants were experienced enough to do. Questions include the following: (a) Have you ever been a victim of assault in the field and by whom? (b) Have you ever reported from a violent or crime scene? Who are those involved and what was your experience? (c) In your opinion, which group(s) of people normally assaults the media? (d) What do you think triggers assault on practitioners? All informants consented to have their verbal responses recorded.

Analysis

The study employed the inductive approach to the qualitative data analysis process as hypothesized by Thomas (2003). This approach is effective and convenient for analyzing data and allows "research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies" (Thomas, 2003, p. 2). The use of a qualitative interpretivist approach gave the opportunity for the researcher in the current study to connect with respondents and to view the world from their perspective (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). After data

transcription of audio-taped interviews by the researcher, the following processes were followed to guide the entire research: First, preparation and organization of raw data files was carried out where the imported electronic text was *cleaned* using Microsoft Word. This involves overall formatting with respect to font size, highlighting interview questions and their accompanying responses to ensure clarity and legibility, orderliness, and finally printing a hard copy. Second, detailed reading of the text (responses) was done, and the former stage made it convenient to be familiar with the content and understand probable themes. Third, categories were developed by taking the study's research questions into consideration. Categories were identified at both the *upper* and *lower* levels of the coding process. The former considered the general aspect of the study where six categories emerged and the latter, which is more specific, helped to narrow down the categories into four. Fourth, text that overlapped at the third stage in the process of coding was recoded to fit the four major themes and those that still fell outside the domain of the research questions were stored in a separate file for future reference. Final reorganization and redefinition of the categories were undertaken but no subcategories were identified in the responses. The process of thematizing eventually turned out three major themes, and the findings were presented narratively.

Result and Discussion

Assault and harassment of media practitioners in Ghana's landscape emanates from three major spheres. These include security agencies, communities/individual citizens, and party supporters. Although the media operates autonomously of the aforementioned entities, the regular flow of uninterrupted information between the media (the fourth estate) and the three major players is critical to their coexistence, and hence the effective functioning of the media.

Security Agencies

Security agencies have attacked journalists (Foerstel, 2006; Karikari, 2011; Keita, 2011; Neupane & Zeng, 2014; VonDoepp & Young, 2013; Whittle, 2005), and the Ghanaian media scene is no exception. Security men in their official regalia attack media practitioners and confiscate and destroy their cameras provoked by the following claims: (a) the journalists have caused obstruction at the court during proceedings and (b) were taking photographs of persons who were at the center of court cases. Although the informant reckons that these attacks do not occur regularly in the landscape, he concurs that some journalists were held at the office of the BNI (Bureau of National Investigation) and released in the evening for the alleged offense of "disturbing proceedings at the court." Likewise, a female journalist was almost left nude during the process. The office of the BNI in Ghana, like the FBI in the United States, handles and deals with very serious crime situations that require in-depth intelligence and investigations. By this, the detention of media practitioners at the BNI instead of the police station shows the extent of media-security services relations with respect to intimidation and assault. This situation seems uncharacteristic of Ghana considering her growing democracy. The informant noted that the sensitivity of an issue, especially those with high public interest, determines the level of security interference in the functions of the media.

> Occasionally it [assault] happens. Some of my reporters were beaten in court by state officials in state security apparatus and cameras were seized. We were covering a case that takes high interests. It was about a policewoman who had taken the state to court and obviously it takes hard interest so we wanted to take the photo of the woman and they prevented us from taking the shot, seized our cameras and smashed them . . . *Yes*, it happened. At a point they [the policemen] said we were obstructing [court sitting] so they wanted to get us [journalists] out of court but they couldn't after realising that would be a big mistake. Some of the reporters were even detained at the BNI office for some hours and released late in the evening so we [journalists] face challenges. One of my lady reporters was virtually stripped . . . Y*es!* It happened in Ghana.

Furthermore, another informant reiterated that security services, chiefly the police, army, and "macho men," sometimes assault media practitioners. *Macho men* in the Ghanaian context are "body builders" who due to their physique, are normally recruited as private security guards. This informant explained an incident where official security men escorting a foreign delegation to Ghana harassed and detained a photojournalist at the police station because they found a liquid medicine on him. Although these attacks have also occurred at other places, the respondent also hinted that there is an element of provocation from the media, and that informs why security personnel assault them because occasionally journalists go beyond boundaries set by the security services and enter "no go areas." Considering the fact that regular encounters between media and the security agencies are inevitable due to the nature of their job functions, this informant proposes a relationship that should be built on interdependence so that in the event of misunderstanding, it could be resolved to forestall future incidences of assault. This reflects the theorization that conflict begins as a disagreement, confrontation, escalation, de-escalation, and is finally resolved (Botezat, Dobrescu, & Toomescu, 2007). Although the CPJ revealed that 94% of assaults on media practitioners are left uninvestigated (Elliott et al., 2012), findings from the current study show that media assault cases in Ghana undergo investigation, and in some instances, security agencies render apologies whenever they occurred. The comment below confirms:

> We have had some instances where policemen or military people or "macho men" have attacked and assaulted media people.

Quiet recently, an Israeli foreign minister came to Ghana and there was a photographer who was covering them and he had a local liquid medication on him. Apparently the state security apparatus had allowed it but when he went through the security checkpoint, the security officers accompanying the visiting delegation arrested and detained him at the police station after being harassed. This incident underwent investigation. Moreover, there were other areas where journalists have been abused.

. . .

At times, journalists too will trespass and go to areas they have been asked not to. Thus, there is the need for better relationship between the security agencies and the media. I think regular consultations will help build a good relationship between journalists and the security agencies which should be symbiotic. Once we have infractions and come to a compromise, I think we could arrest some of these happenings. In the above incident, both the Chief of Defense Staff and the District Commander of Police whose station the journalist was detained at apologised.

In a related scenario, an editor of a media outlet explained that though he has not suffered such attacks personally, his reporters and other journalists have been victims. He recounted an incident that occurred at the Independence Square in which his photojournalist was cruelly assaulted by personnel of the army. This incident generated into a major issue and occupied the agenda of the said media house till the military compensated the journalist. It appears that the media itself, with its publicity function, wields the power to the greatest extent to lessen and/or eradicate incidences of assault because the perpetrators (security services, citizens, and partisan groups) abhor negative publicity from the media and will deter future attacks. On the Ghanaian National Calendar, March 6 marks the country's independence from colonial rule in 1957, and it is celebrated yearly nationwide. This ceremony subjects the ability of media and security services to coexist amicably to test. From the view of this informant, many media outlets in Ghana equally have worries about the state of assault by security men.

Personally! No [I have never been assaulted], but my colleagues and officers who go out on assignment are sometimes physically assaulted. On 6 March 2013 at the Independence Square, one of my photographers was brutally assaulted by the military and it became a major issue that we had to take the military to task for. We published a lot of stories about it and eventually our photographer had to be compensated by the Military High Command. Throughout Ghana, I know that other media institutions have cause to complain about harassment from public officials.

Journalists attacked by security officials and other groups were often betrayed by the very instruments they work with such as audio and video recorders. This is consistent with other studies that showed that media roles, which involve news gathering and camera handling, have a high chance of being attacked physically, verbally, or their property vandalized (Keita, 2011; Kodellas et al., 2014; VonDoepp & Young, 2013). For instance, in Uganda, journalist Joshua Mutale who works for *Radio Simba* was attacked by the police while interviewing women protesting against increased police assault. Mutale commented,

I was recording the voices of the women with a recorder in one arm and a set of earphones in another when a policeman I hardly identified appeared and pepper sprayed me in my eyes using a hand spray. I fell down and was helped by fellow journalists. It was surprising that I was the only victim of the attack. (Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda, 2012)

It appears that practitioner Mutale was the sole target of assault because the equipment he carried easily betrayed him. The advent of sophisticated miniature multimedia devices offers a wide range of new recording experiences in this age; however, the media still fall prey to the handling of huge visible recorders. This situation shows that despite the education of the security services in Africa by international security forces such as the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), attacks on media practitioners persist (Keita, 2011).

The security services are institutions of government whose training, besides defense, is grounded in both civil and criminal laws of every land. In Ghana, for instance, most people have "nick-named" the police and/or military "Aban" meaning *government* because they perceive them as the direct representative of the government within the society and as the executors of the law. This notion of the public seems to produce a positive effect of tranquility and coexistence among society players, otherwise depending on the professional conduct of the security services. Thus, whenever the law enforcement agencies (police/military) flout the law and assault the media, the other civilian players (citizens and party sympathizers) do not feel restrained from attacking the media either in their encounters with them. Like Ghana, many democratic nations across Africa and the world have accorded the media a legally guaranteed status of "fourth estate"; the 21st-century media practitioner could still be described as a "lone-ranger" and unprotected because the very state institution (police) they seek refuge in the event of assault by other society actors are also perpetrators. This appears to have created some sort of a "chain of assault reaction" within the public sphere emanating first from the security/intelligence agencies, then by ordinary citizens and party enthusiasts.

Communities/Individual Citizens

Apart from public officials, especially security agents, who assault media practitioners, local communities and individuals also attack media practitioners (Arnaldo et al., 1998).

Although the informant below reiterated that such assault and intimidation are uncommon in Ghana, they happen intermittently. He recounted an incident where local inhabitants of a community in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana attacked a radio outlet on the claim that it flouted orders of their traditional ruler (King) who attempted to censor the program of the station. Conversely, Ghana's fourth republican constitution provides for media autonomy and abhors any form of censorship. The structure of African societies is such that chieftaincy is at the core of defined communities, and the massive loyalty, rulers command from their subjects, tends to pose a challenge to the coexistence of constitutional and chieftaincy authority. It appears that in such settings, refusal to abide by the orders of the king is interpreted as disrespect to authority irrespective of the supremacy of the constitution and its position on said matters. Communities and/or some of its members even go to the extent of occasionally assaulting entities that criticize the sitting government because they are affiliates of the party and feel offended.

> Physical violence against journalists and photographers in Ghana is rather rare. These attacks occur from time to time and are typically isolated incidents. For instance there was a case where youth attacked a radio station in Brong Ahafo region for not obeying the orders of their chief [king] who apparently tried to censor the station. Local communities sometimes detain, arrest, or harass critics of the government.

The situation becomes even more challenging when state officials do not condemn such behavior but rather take the stance that further incites communities against media practitioners. This threatens and aggravates their already precarious working environment. For instance, in Kenya, Assistant Minister Fred Gumo repeatedly commented, "Luhya journalists who write negative stories against leaders from their community will be beaten." Speaking to journalists in Busia (another town), the office of the President Assistant Minister said his recent threat was not a joke and should be taken seriously (The Nation, May 11, 1999, cited in Tettey, 2001). A renowned Ghanaian politician remarked, power to rule belongs solely to the kings but they have decided to sit on the fence to give some leeway to democracy. Thus, the media always suffers whenever the political front and chieftaincy seem married.

The informant below identified the court as one of the places where individual members of society attack media practitioners because they take pictures of their acquaintances who are suspects in specific cases for publication. This informant cited an incident at the court where Mr. Agude, a former presidential candidate of the Convention People's Party (CPP) in Ghana (the then suspect), assaulted a photojournalist because he was taking a shot of him. To this informant, apart from the security services, ordinary members of the public also attack media practitioners because they likened them to the work of the *paparazzi* (see quote

below). This finding is consistent with the definition of "arrest, assault and attack" of journalists, as "physical incarceration or harm, including—for example, death threats—directed at journalists in the course of their work" (Ross, 1999, p. 6) without distinguishing whether such acts of assaults were perpetrated by official or nonofficial actors. Ross further noted, "A physical threat is a physical threat, regardless of who administers it."

> There have been situations where private people [citizens] have had problems with journalists because they had taken photographs of their friends or colleagues so they engaged them in some sort of quarrel. Such incidents occur in court proceedings where family members of a suspect engage the media in unhealthy attacks because they think you [the journalist] want to expose their relation. For instance, a photojournalist was manhandled by Mr. Agude at the court. This scenario shows that individuals also do assault journalists.

In related incidences, a female journalist and another photojournalist of a newspaper outlet were attacked just in front of their office in Accra and Tamale, the northern regional capital city of Ghana, respectively, while trying to cover a confusion that broke out. This informant also narrated an incident where colleagues of Castro, a Ghanaian music artist who went missing in a river in Ada (a town on the coast of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana), manhandled journalists from *Joy FM* and *Ghana Broadcasting Corporation* claiming that they had visited the town to take shots of them. By this comment, it can be said violence meted out on media practitioners while in the field have not stopped in Ghana:

> A lady photojournalist of our newspaper was assaulted right in front of our building when she attempted to take a shot of a commotion. Apart from this, one of our photographers was also physically assaulted and his camera smashed in Tamale. By this, it is not only officials who attack media practitioners, but individual members of the public also attack. Quite recently, a Ghanaian musician got drowned in the Ada River, and some journalists trying to report on the search for the artist after he was reported missing were attacked by that same group of people believed to have gone there with the victim. They molested some of the reporters for coming there to take pictures of them. So, physical violence in the line of duty is still on.

Furthermore, other incidences where individuals or groups have attacked media were evident. For example, Bishop Daniel Obinim, the general overseer of International God's Way Church and another two pastors stormed the premises of Accra-based *Hot FM*, vandalized and attacked the program host and panelists on the claim that their discussion offended and provoked him ("Bishop Obinim Runs Amok," 2011). A female journalist, Afia Pokuah, who works for *Adom FM* was beaten by Israel Kwame Layea and a coworker of the Ablekuma Branch of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) in Accra; they seized her recorder

when she went there with other journalists to enquire why the registration process for the issuance of the scheme's identity cards was delayed (Sarpong, 2014). Also, *Daily Graphic* Journalist, Daniel Kenu was attacked by Baffour Gyan, the brother of Ghana Black Star captain Asamoah Gyan and some groups (GIBA, 2017). Ironically, "where journalists are most in danger is where journalists' work is most important for promoting human security" (Tumber & Webster, 2006, p. 192). This appears to suggest that the very society that media practitioners are devoted to ensuring their security by conveying information about their plight to the larger local, national, and international communities, are invariably persecuting the media. Thus, on a continuum of interests, the orientation of each society player is utterly different and an understanding of these postures will help ensure coexistence within the public sphere. Whereas the media has a public interest objective, the other public, whose interests the media advances, rather have a self-protection interest, shield information, and react negatively on the least purported provocation.

Party Supporters

Loyalists of a political party are another group of people who collectively or individually have had encounters with the media. Describing the media's relationship with affiliates of political parties, this informant recalled an incident where a colleague he accompanied to a press conference of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) after it lost the 2000 Presidential elections was consistently interrupted and harassed by supporters while interviewing a leading functionary of the party. The informant explained that eventually, they ran away because party supporters assaulted them with *pure water*. "Pure water" in the Ghanaian context is potable packaged sachet water sold at many vantage points and it is demeaning to be beaten with it. From the view of this informant, there appears to be an element of media–partisan alignment situation in the media landscape, where party enthusiasts target and harass media practitioners they perceive as critical of their government or flag bearer. In Bangladesh, for instance, media and politics are connected and violence against the media is perpetuated by the youth wing of political parties when they perceive a report to be malicious (Ross, 1999). In Turkey, the president's speech against purported opposition media outlets provoked his followers to storm the *Hurriyet* publications headquarters, smash windows, and chant profanities (Yeginsu, 2015). This is consistent with Lord Holt's 1707 argument that provocation is triggered by hearing angry words (Madsen, 2012). Although brutal assaults of practitioners have reduced in Ghana, members of political parties continue to assault them.

> I remember I had a personal experience when the NDC lost power in 2000. They [the NDC party] had a press conference at the Trade Fair Center and I went there with a friend who was

then working with a Kumasi-based FM radio. At that time they [the party] had lost the election and were bitter and against that FM station. When this guy [my colleague journalist] began interviewing a senior member of the NDC, I saw some of these party enthusiasts heckling and pushing him so I tried to separate them but they threw "pure water" at us so the guy [journalist] had to quickly run into a taxi and I also ran away. At their press conference when they know that you are a so-called unfriendly journalist, you see some of the party supporters and members heckling you. Some will even drive you away. In as much as that kind of violence coupled with molestation and brutality has become minimal, party people still harass journalists.

Criticality of media reporting informs the reactions of party affiliates toward media practitioners. This informant narrated three occasions where political party supporters attacked media practitioners in Ghana. First, Peter Apesewu, who works for *Insight* and is critical of the National Patriotic Party (NPP), was attacked at the head office of the party. Second, Raymond Archer, a former editor of the *Enquirer* and also critical of the NPP administration, received verbal threats and his vehicle was damaged by alleged supporters of the same party. Third, some reporters at a press conference of the NPP after it was defeated in the 2012 elections were assaulted. Beyond these, whenever party supporters embark on a protest, they assault journalists.

> Sympathisers of the NPP attacked some journalists. One journalist called Peter Apesewu with *Insight* who was very critical of the NPP government went to interview the party chairman, Haruna Sekou at the party headquarters and he was attacked by supporters. I also remember that, Raymond Archer, who was then an editor of the *Enquirer Newspaper* and very critical of the NPP government was also threatened verbally and some people suspected to be members of the NPP even attacked his car and destroyed it partly. These incidences of assaults on journalists went quiet until recently when the NPP lost the 2012 elections and some journalists going to cover a press conference at the flag-bearer's residence were brutalised by some party members. These situations also happen during demonstrations by partisan groups.

The recurrence of attacks on the media after political parties (NDC and NPP) lost elections is a caution to practitioners to be extra cautious during and after the declaration of election results. In Burkina Faso, the CEO of a private radio outlet, *Horizon FM*, was attacked by party loyalists of the Congress for Democracy and Progress Party (CDPP) triggered by sharp utterance during the station's phone-in program dubbed *Sondage Democratique* that enables listeners to contribute to public discourse (IFEX, 1997, cited in Tettey, 2001). Beyond this, generally, the job description of media practitioners makes them vulnerable to violent environments such as the stadia, protests (Bridge, 2004; Spiliopoulos, 2007), political party rallies, press conferences, national ceremonies such as swearing-in of presidents, independence day celebrations, and reporting from war fronts. Due to the risky nature of the

job while in the field, Bridge (2004) opined that one needs to be ready mentally before becoming a journalist.

Recounting on the lapses of the newfound democratic system in Africa and elsewhere on the globe, Karikari (2011) reiterated, "the excitement of a new dawn of media freedom, autonomy and pluralism was now turning into a nightmare of fear, torture and the threat of death" (p. 141). In Nepal, security services, minority groups, and owners harass journalists (Neupane & Zeng, 2014). Also, religious bodies and their belief systems, followers of political parties, and corruption are complex subjects that spark attacks on media practitioners. For purposes of safety from assault, journalists tend to report cautiously (Hanitzsch & Hidayat, 2012), which affects their independence and subsequently their development. By this, provocation becomes evident in situations where people hold divergent views. Thus, people or groups that share similar values and ideologies are less likely to be provoked and vice versa. Debunking what seems to be the perception of many people with regard to the source(s) of assault and violence against media practitioners, a senior practitioner argued,

> Many times we [media associations and regulatory bodies] have issued statements that these [assaults and violence] are not from officialdom. These are not official positions of the government whether NPP or NDC but rather by organisations or individuals. For instance, you will get a policeman attacking a journalist and ordinary citizens do the same in a demonstration. I remember an instance where some workers were demonstrating in Takoradi Harbour and they picked up one *Daily Graphic* journalist. Obviously, it wasn't the government that said they should do it. So, this kind of intervention by people, yes, it happens once in a while and we [media associations and regulatory bodies] try to educate people that the media is not on anybody's side.
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> . . .
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> We have had instances where media personnel have been attacked in the line of duty but it is also important to point out that it is never the position of the government; sometimes, not even by the hierarchy of the organisation. For instance, the IGP might not have said that when journalists anger you beat them . . . No! But some irresponsible policemen who are not smart enough to know that they will do harm or out of overzealousness, will go and seize a camera from a journalist because he [the journalist] is taking photos of police people doing something fishy. That [attack] happens but does not result in killing as in some parts of the world. We are grateful it hasn't come to that but sometimes there are physical attacks on journalists and especially after every election, journalists were beaten.

To the above informant, assault of practitioners in the Ghanaian context are not staged by the government or instigated by institutional heads such as the Inspector General of Police (IGP) but sometimes done primarily through negligence by some police officers and other citizens during protests. Security officers assault media practitioners, confiscate and destroy their recording devices to hide evidence of possible brutalities captured on camera. For instance, to hide wrongdoing,

> in April 2014, police in Kumasi arrested and detained Muftaw Mohammed of *Metro FM* for attempting to take photos of some personnel of the Police Motor Traffic and Transport Unit (MTTU) who he suspected to be taking bribes from drivers. (GIBA, 2017)

Despite the occasional incidents of these attacks, the Ghanaian media has at least contented that no deaths have been recorded compared with what pertains elsewhere around the globe. In the United States, the Illinois Eavesdropping Act makes it an offense to record actions of a police officer so a media practitioner could face up to 15 years in jail for filming protests and actions of the police to inform the public (Madsen, 2012). The perception that the media is a spy for a section of society instead of being the fourth estate that serves as the eye of entire society through the execution of its watchdog role requires constant education and conscientization of the public to forestall future assaults. This is consistent with a study conducted by Whittle (2005), who maintained that the media cannot afford to be deemed as an extension of the security and intelligence services.

The study shows that postelection assault and attack on media practitioners are evident in Ghana especially from the camp of defeated political parties and these possibly prompted the need for both the NMC and the GJA to provide guideline directives on reporting of elections (GJA, 2011; NMC, 1993). In as much as the NMC and GJA require that all acts of violence, intimidation, or attack against media personnel, their property, or premises are reported to them and the police, the GJA further cautioned,

> Journalists shall not report any allegation about or a dispute at a polling station without a comment/reaction from the Electoral Commission (EC) or the Returning Officer. Media houses shall not allow or grant interviews concerning allegations against any party candidate without providing equal opportunity to the other candidate to react. Hosts of radio and television programmes should intervene when unsubstantiated allegations are being made by panellists or during phone-ins. (Guideline 16 of GJA Electoral Coverage)

This guideline appears to show that the media and its umbrella organizations to some extent reckon that an element of probable provocation from practitioners is evident in the landscape and that there is a need to conscientize its members.

Instead of assaulting media practitioners, security agencies should rather protect the media against attacks from citizens and party supporters on one hand, and also protect the entire public on the other to bring a "win–win" situation in their interaction through information sharing. With this smooth

interplay of coexistence, the following becomes evident: (a) the media enjoys a safe environment to work and (b) the media can easily approach the public (citizens and partisan groups) for its most vital raw material ("information") without which it has no business to exist. This is consistent with the position of Whittle (2005) who explained that the public is better served when the media tells them what is happening in their communities by getting inside the minds of people, and (c) the security agencies stand to benefit from firsthand information (tip-offs) relayed to them by the media and individual citizens (entire public) for its intelligence work without which their relevance, like the media, fades in society.

Implications for Media Industry, Practitioners, and Society

The work of media practitioners is paramount in every society but the extent of their performance is dictated by the cooperation they receive from the different facets of the general public at whose service the media operates. Although the Ghanaian media have made strides on the global media freedom rankings such as the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) and Reporters Without Borders, the current study shows that her landscape continues to witness intermittent physical assault and harassment against media practitioners perpetuated mainly by three major entities. First, the activities of the police and other security agencies interfere with the work of the media, for instance, they have been known to seize cameras, tape recorders, manhandle individual practitioners violently, among others. The other level is supporters of political parties who have attacked journalists because of an assumption that some practitioners from some stations are hostile to their party so they do not want them at their events. The last group that creates problems for the media are alleged criminals and other citizens brought before the court. Journalists covering court cases involving alleged offenders and other persons have been attacked by the supporters of those under trial when journalists attempted to interview or take photographs of the people who are being tried. The interplay of the fourth estate on one hand, and security agencies, individual citizens, and party supporters on the other hand, through information sharing is a precursor to successful electoral processes especially in Africa.

Media practitioners are susceptible to these forms of attack because of the nature of their profession, which makes their constant encounter with the aforementioned entities inevitable. Basically, attacks on the media are rooted in the perceived notion that the institution is a spy ("the paparazzi") that meddles in the privacy of others instead of being viewed as a strategic partner who contributes to the overall development of society through their unflinching uncovering of wrongdoings.

Some traces of provocation emanating from the camp of the media are evident. The driving forces that necessitate such actions are (a) the belief that media is not nonpartisan; (b) media programs, especially those that host panelists sometimes discuss unsubstantiated issues that offend individuals and/or contravene societal norms and values; and (c) the media sometimes obstructs security measures because practitioners occasionally go beyond marked security boundaries during national events and other ceremonies. Tracking provocation from the perspective of ethical lapses, Nyarko and Teer-Tomaselli (2017, p. 14) contended that the media has compromised the profession's own integrity and its independence of working in an environment without fear. Moreover, in Ghana, practitioners who carry visible multimedia devices are the most assaulted and intimidated because their equipment easily makes them stand out. The question of whether practitioners should be blamed for assault meted out to them transcends the three aforementioned provocative forces and intertwines into the complex facets of society that cannot be satisfied entirely at a point in time. This is because actions and nonactions of practitioners still attract provocation. For instance, Neupane and Zeng (2014) noted that practitioners have suffered abuse, torture, and death for "publishing" or "desisting to publish" a story (p. 88). Education of the public is imperative in this regard especially with a public that perceives security services as "government" due to their role as enforcers of the law. By this, some sort of a "chain of accommodative reaction" develops, where if security agencies demonstrate "accommodation" in all encounters with the media, there is a probable chance that ordinary citizens and partisan groups will toe the line. Despite the intermittent incidences of assault of media practitioners in Ghana, overall, society frowns on these acts to the extent that it receives massive public condemnation whenever they occur and occasionally, police authorities and individuals apologize.

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