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# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

**SPECIAL ISSUE ON MEDIA, POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIC CULTURE IN  
NIGERIA AND ZIMBABWE**

**GUEST EDITOR**

**ANTHONY A. OLORUNNISOLA**

**THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY,  
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# CULTURAL FUNCTIONS AND DYSFUNCTIONS OF MEDIA IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The possible influence of mass media on culture has attracted remarkable scholarly efforts which have understandably left in their trail series of hanging questions. Right from Wright's influential theorization on the issue of media and culture, researchers have often returned a low score for the media. But studies which have adopted a comprehensive, stakeholders' approach to the study of media and culture are few. Through a qualitative approach, this study attempted to examine the assessment of Nigerian media as cultural agents by stakeholders—audiences, producers, culture experts and cable vendors. Interviews and focus group discussions showed that the media in Nigeria promote cultural growth as they transmit cultural skills to newer generations and facilitate intra-national cultural contact through intercultural education. As they transmit cultural values, they also indirectly set the standard but the media alone cannot be expected to standardize culture. In their bid to please their audiences so as to be on the good page of the advertiser's book, the media permit foreign programs thereby permitting cultural invasion. Backed by the advertiser's money, the audiences have become a rather strong factor in the cultural programming decisions which producers make, and if blames are to be apportioned for cultural dysfunctions, the audiences therefore have a share.*

**Key words:** *Nigerian mass media; media and culture; cultural values; powerful audience; youths and media*

## INTRODUCTION

An explicit faith in the ability of the media to influence culture is shared by many policy makers, media personnel, researchers and theorists (Wright, 1974; Littlejohn, 1999; Mboho and Idiong, 2007). In some countries, this faith has been translated into elaborate objectives for media, and in some others, such as in China, the objectives are real prescriptions (Chadha and Kavoori, 2000). In Nigeria, the government has elaborate cultural objectives for the mass media, spelt out in the National Cultural Policy (See Federal Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, 1988); in the Nigeria Broadcasting Code (See, National Broadcasting Commission, 2002) and in the National Mass Communication Policy (See Report of Core Working Group, 2004). Therefore, the media in Nigeria, whether commercially- or state-owned, have an official cultural mandate to be deliberately targeted.

With the deregulation of the broadcast sector in Nigeria, the adoption of neo-liberal policies by government, and media globalization marked by the virtual disappearance of borders, however, observers have raised doubts about whether or not, and how well, the media are fulfilling their cultural mandate (Akpan, 2003; Okoro and Ogbalu, 2008; Onwumere, 2008). On their part, researchers too have paid considerable attention to the issue in the Nigerian context. Many have analyzed media content (Fadeyi, 2004; Alawode, 2006) and from there made extrapolations on the performance of the media as agents of culture; others have interviewed media personnel (Ojebode, 2007; Olorunnisola and Amadi, 2007) while yet others—and these are the majority—have interrogated issues in a discursive analytical manner that, nonetheless, excludes the voices of media personnel and the audience (Ojebode, 2004; Salawu, 2006; Nwodu, 2006; Odunlami, 2006; Mboho and Idiong, 2007; Orhewere, 2008). Valid and fruitful as these attempts might have been, they seemed not to have factored in a fundamental grain of culture, that is, culture is about people and it is only they who can adjudge a cultural agent, such as the media, as successful or otherwise. It is certainly methodologically sound to explore media content or analyze the views of media personnel. However, an approach that combines either or both of these with the views of the audience promises a more rounded outcome. The current article is an attempt to explore the terrain through this less-trodden path.

This article examines the performance of the Nigerian media as cultural agents as perceived by five categories of stakeholders: the media audiences, the media personnel; the regulatory agency; cultural experts and cable vendors. Because our focus is on how well the media perform their cultural functions, we adopted, as a theoretical framework, Wright's functional model of the media which itself is a theory of cultural outcome (Wright, 1960; Wright 1974; Littlejohn, 1999). Informed by the adopted theory, our broad guiding questions are: what cultural functions and dysfunctions do the media produce? What possible causes are there of the dysfunctions?

## THE CULTURAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

A former British colony, Nigeria is a multiethnic, multilingual and therefore multicultural country in which exist 389 ethnic groups (Otite, 2000). Nigeria achieved political independence in 1960 and faced the task of forging a nation out of this motley collection of ethnic groups some of whose cultures were highly incompatible. For a number of reasons, this task of nation-building proved difficult.

First, the system of administration adopted by the colonial government, the indirect rule, was such that perpetuated the differences among the major ethnic groups. In fact, "the trend of opinion before 1914 favored the division of the territory into a number of units which could develop into the components of a future federation" (Osadolor, 2004:35). Second, ethno-cultural groups assumed greater political significance as the nation approached independence. Leading political parties were deeply rooted in and drew their largest following from the respective ethnic groups of their leaders (Ashiwaju, 1989; Osadolor, 2004). Third, even after independence, there was not a national cultural policy for almost three decades. Formal cultural agents such as the media therefore had no official guidelines as to what to promote or discourage (Ashiwaju, 1989).

It was in this state of cultural staccato and ambivalence that Nigeria entered the era of globalization and its cultural implications. Even by 1980, when the MacBride Commission published its articulation of measures to, among others, help developing nations preserve and advance their cultures, Nigeria did not have any policy document that articulated what the Nigerian culture was and how it might be preserved and promoted.

This certainly is not to suggest that there is no such thing as the Nigerian culture. If we take the broad definition of culture: a people's complete pattern of living, their values, beliefs, arts, language, artifacts and attitudes, learned in the process of social interaction and passed from one generation to the other (Samovar and Porter, 1995; Griffin, 2003), proving the existence of a culture that is fairly distinctly Nigerian then requires little argumentation. This culture, arguably an amalgam of the cultures of some of the constitutive ethnic groups, informed the content of the National Cultural Policy of 1988.

Tangible aspects of Nigerian culture include Nigerian arts such as weaving, sculpture, painting and dyeing; literature including oral poetry; festivals such as fishing, new yam and other socio-religious festivals; music and dance such as juju, fuji, *swanger*, highlife, Afro-beat, religious music and versions of Ivorien and American pop music; and colorful and sometimes amply flamboyant dressing; elaborate and situation-specific forms of greetings. Nigerian's love for elaborate ceremonies and rites of passage is also nationwide. Intangible aspects of Nigerian culture include respect for elders expressed in different ways among different ethnic groups; hospitality; community, honesty and hard work. Several years of military rule and agitation for democracy seem to have built into Nigerians a vocal and sometimes aggressive culture. Nigerian culture is not a closed-door culture: foreign cultural elements, especially music, dressing and



sports freely permeate. Nigerians are religious (Christianity, Islam and traditional religious practices are found in varying proportions in most places). Some of these values, especially honesty and hard work, have come under international attack in recent times as Nigerians have come to be associated with fraud and crime.

## **MEDIA AND CULTURE IN NIGERIA**

The media are culture carriers (Samovar and Porter, 1995). This explains why efforts whether at preserving, transmitting or transforming cultures always rely heavily on the media. The Nigeria Cultural Policy is no exception in this regard. It calls on the media to be active cultural agents. For the media to actually perform their cultural role, the Cultural Policy specifies that 80% of broadcast content should be home-made. The Nigeria Broadcasting Code of the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC (2002) is another document that places cultural demands on the media. In fact, the Code has a section of its objectives tagged 'Cultural Objectives'. It states that broadcasting shall, among other cultural functions stated therein, "seek, identify, preserve and promote Nigeria's culture; select critically, the positive aspects of foreign cultures for the purpose of enriching the Nigerian culture" (NBC, 2002:14). For terrestrial stations in Nigeria, the Code specifies 60% local content; for cable stations it specifies 20%. For stations engaged in satellite transmission originating from Nigeria, content must be 60% local and 25% African. Observers suggest that commercial stations conform much less to these stipulations than government stations (Akpan, 2003; Fadeyi, 2004; Ojebode, 2004). Most commercial stations exceed their quota for foreign programs. Often cited as reason for this is the perception that foreign programs appeal more to the youths which constitute the major target of commercial stations.

The new National Mass Communication Policy is another policy that seeks to commit the media to the task of cultural preservation and promotion. The policy, a product of a 22-person committee set up by the former president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, was produced in 2004. Among the ten principles propounded by the Policy is the one on cultural promotion and preservation. According to the policy, in its Section IV, the media are to "promote cultural identity and natural cultural patrimony and enhance the development of cultural and artistic capabilities and instructions for public communication"; they are to "champion and enhance the positive aspect of our national values, image, corporate unity and stability."

As we demonstrate in the next few paragraphs, the mass media had been performing cultural roles even before the government articulated its cultural policy or saddled them with any cultural functions. For instance, the earliest mass medium in Nigeria, *Iwe Irohin fun awon Egba*

*ati Yoruba*<sup>1</sup>, which debuted in December 1859, set out to promote a culture. The founder, Reverend Henry Townsend, in a letter to his friend declared the objective of the paper thus:

*I have set on foot a Yoruba newspaper. My first number is out, I am writing the second. My objective is to get the people to read, that is, to beget the habit of reading. (Tentacles, 2004:3)*

The paper, a later assessment showed, not only achieved the objective of creating and promoting a culture of reading but also influenced the Egba people on a broader cultural plane. According to Oduntan (2005:301):

*...the impacts of the newspaper on the Egba and the resolution of their cultural dilemma were acknowledged by the Egba people themselves. The paper was very popular among the people, and has (sic) assumed folkloric status.*

Oduntan (2005) made a critical point which turned out to be relevant to the methodological choice of the current enquiry, one which we mentioned earlier. That is, the people have a crucial role in assessing the performance of a cultural agent. Culture is about the people.

The cultural influence of *Iwe Irohin* went beyond the Egba people; it reached a good part of Africa. Oduntan (2005:301) goes on:

*The contributions of Iwe Irohin cannot be divorced from the whole spectrum of European cultural penetration of Africa. The totality of European cultural influences and their interplay with local traditional forces helped to produce what the Egbas became afterwards. The people now pride themselves with being the gateway to modernization for the whole of the Nigerian state.*

As the quote implies, *Iwe Irohin* was a medium through which European culture penetrated Africa, not in its purely undiluted European form but, in some ways, mingled with the Egba culture. In today's terms, the paper would be considered an agent of cultural imperialism and cultural hybridism. And finally, *Iwe Irohin* affected journalistic culture in Nigeria as well as the vocational life of the Egba people.

*As a pioneering media experiment, the paper contributed immensely to the history of newspaper publishing in Nigeria. It is no coincidence that, although no other newspaper developed in Abeokuta until the 1920s, many of those who established and worked in the Lagos newspapers were Egbas. In Abeokuta itself printing became a cultural vocation. The street on which the Iwe Iroyin was published remains a major vocational center for printing (Oduntan, 2005:302).*

<sup>1</sup> Meaning: *Newspaper for the Egba and Yoruba people*. The Egba people are the predominant people in Abeokuta, southwest Nigeria.

Here, therefore, was the case of a newspaper that had a short life span (1859 to 1867) but whose influence reached several aspects of the lives of several peoples across several generations. Many newspapers that followed *Iwe Irohin* contributed their quota to the cultural evolvment, preservation and transmission in Nigeria (Omu, 1996; Salawu, 2006). As one might expect, opinions differ on the nature of such contributions.

Government publications, though may not fall into mainstream journalism, had input into cultural preservation and promotion in Nigeria. As *Iwe Irohin* is to journalism, so is the *Nigerian Teacher* to such publications. The *Nigerian Teacher*, first published in 1923, was a government publication dedicated to the promotion of Nigerian education, art and culture. The title was changed in 1927 to *Nigeria*, and is now known as *Nigerian Magazine* (Fasuyi, 1973).

The electronic media have been described as agents of cultural promotion in Nigeria. Atanda (1996:27), explaining the resilience of Nigerian, especially Yoruba, culture, praised radio and television for promoting "Yoruba intellectual activities ... which form an aspect of Yoruba culture and civilization". Using various formats, radio and television seek to educate their listeners on Nigerian values.

But more than the print media, the electronic media in Nigeria have been walloped for being agents of cultural imperialism and overall cultural pollution. An example of such thumping comes from Akpan (2003:14) who lamented that "promiscuity and other immoral behavior run rampant on our television...vulgarity and profanity are prominently displayed on television's family hour". These, according to him, are directly contrary to the cultural values of Nigerians. As for the opinions of the audience on the role of these media as cultural agents, the jury is still out.

From a one-station extension of the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1932, the broadcast sector in Nigeria has grown to 283 stations: 101 radio stations; 143 television stations and 39 cable, direct-to-home and direct broadcast satellite stations (NBC, 2008). The print media sector has also expanded in horizon. As listed on the website of the Nigeria Press Council, in Nigeria, there are 308 newspapers, newsmagazines and tabloids some of which are in the native languages of their readers (Nigeria Press Council, 2008)<sup>2</sup>. It is indeed important to assess the performance of this legion of media outfits with reference to culture.

## WRIGHT'S FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

The question of the probable cultural function of mass communication was first tackled by Harold Lasswell and this he said was the transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to another (Littlejohn, 1999). He listed the function along with two other non-cultural functions:

<sup>2</sup> We have reason to doubt the absolute accuracy of the Nigerian Press Council figures: the oldest existing newspaper in Nigeria, the *Nigerian Tribune* is not listed on the website. Also missing is *the Nation*.

surveillance and correlation of the environment. These three have been expanded to include entertainment (Wright, 1960) and mobilization (Ugboajah, 1976) functions.

Combining Laswell's, Merton's and his ideas, Wright (1960:610) structured a twelve-category broad research question he hoped would guide subsequent research efforts: "What are the manifest and latent functions and dysfunctions of mass communicated surveillance, correlation, cultural transmission and entertainment for the society, subgroups, individual and cultural systems?" He went ahead to design a "partial functional inventory for mass communication", a further expatiation of the broad question.

He distinguished among communication activities, "mere effects and significant functions" (Wright, 1974:205). He named surveillance, correlation, cultural transmission and entertainment, as activities performed through news, editorial and drama. Effects are surface-level outcomes of communication such as diverting leisure time to viewing a program while significant functions are deep and may arise from effects—such as decline in family time-together and social interaction as a result of diversion of leisure time to viewing a program. Functions and dysfunctions are "the consequences of routinely carrying out [the four] communication activities through institutionalized processes of mass communications" (Wright, 1974:205)

Wright (1960) and Wright (1974) also distinguished between manifest functions which are intended results of mass communication; and latent functions which are unintended results. Functions of mass communication are deep effects that are desirable; dysfunctions are "effects which are undesirable from the point of view of the welfare of the society or its members" (Wright, 1960:610). The first of mass communicated activities is surveillance (news) and news may have cultural functions such as cultural contact, and cultural growth; and cultural dysfunctions such as cultural invasion. Correlation can result in cultural functions such as maintenance of cultural consensus and deceleration of cultural invasion. It may result in dysfunctions such as impeding cultural growth. Cultural transmission may serve the function of standardizing cultures and maintaining cultural consensus and the dysfunction of reducing variety of cultures. For entertainment, Wright (1960) and Wright (1974) have no cultural function but a dysfunction: weakening aesthetics by producing "popular culture".

Since our concern here is media and culture, we have limited this review to only cultural functions and dysfunctions. As seen in his broad research question, Wright (1960) and Wright (1974) articulated functions and dysfunctions for individuals, the society and the subgroup as well. In this paper, we asked: what are the functions and dysfunctions of mass communicated activities for the Nigerian cultural systems "from the point of view of its members"?

## THE STUDY

For this research, we adopted the qualitative approach for the reason that we are dealing with culture which is a subjective reality. The approach therefore prevented us from imposing our understanding of reality on participants and pigeonholing them. We identified five categories of people directly or remotely involved in matters relating to media and culture in Nigeria: media audience, media personnel, regulatory bodies, culture experts and cable services vendors. The idea of culture experts, to our knowledge, was first mooted by Egbokhare (2008) who identified certain Nigerians who have clearly distinguished themselves in what she referred to as the culture industry as researchers, inventors, artists and critics. Cable services providers and vendors were considered given the importance cable television has assumed in Nigeria especially in discussions around culture and cultural invasion.

We conducted focus group discussions at four different locations in Nigeria: Offa in Kwara State; Ibadan and Eruwa in Oyo State and Asaba in Delta State. These states, in that order, were from the North Central, South West and South South geo-political zones of the country. We conducted discussions among urban adults and youths, and among rural adults and youths. An urban youth discussion group held each at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan and the Federal Polytechnic Offa; an urban adult discussion group held each at Asaba and Offa. Two rural youth discussion groups and two rural adult discussion groups held each at Eruwa<sup>3</sup>. There were eight discussion groups in all, each group having between eight and 14 discussants. Altogether, 110 discussants took part in the focus group discussions. Our selection of discussants was guided by convenience sampling. Although we ensured that youth discussants in academic locations (University of Ibadan and the Polytechnic Offa) were from different departments, we did not achieve the same level of mix in selecting youths and adults in other locations.

Since adults and youths often hold different, even opposing views, especially in cultural matters, we decided it was better to hold separate discussion groups for them<sup>4</sup>. Again, this was to ensure that data and conclusions reflect the plurality of the cultural landscape in Nigeria. Our choice of group discussions rather than isolated audience interviews was consistent with our conviction that culture is lived and expressed in group. Its assessment and evaluation will thus benefit maximally from the group dynamics that group discussions offer.

Discussants were asked to identify their favorite broadcast or print media outlets, columns and programs. They were asked to describe what they considered to be the influence of the media on culture in Nigeria, and to discuss if the media influenced them culturally. They were also asked to describe themselves as authentic or hybridized Nigerians, and to describe their

<sup>3</sup> In determining if an area was rural or urban, we considered arguments in literature which depended mostly on population, government presence and infrastructure (Akinleye & Ojebode, 2004; Agbola and Hodder, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> I acknowledge fieldwork assistance from Kamil Gazal, Depo Agboola, Foluke Jegede, Idayat Alimi and Nelson Fadoju—graduate students of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria—and from Mbakeren Ikeseh.

attitudes to programs and columns that seek to promote Nigerian culture. More specific questions followed these steering requests.

We conducted interviews with 23 media personnel. These were producers, presenters, writers and editors in their various organizations. Fifteen of these worked with broadcast media organizations; eight with print. We interviewed the director of the Benin Zone of the National Broadcasting Commission, Mr Chris Okoyomo; a culture expert, Dr Tunde Adegbola<sup>5</sup> and a vendor of cable services who had worked with a cable services provider for over six years. Media personnel were asked to discuss the cultural functions of their programs or writings and how well the functions are performed. Emphasis was on how their media and programs influenced culture. They were asked to identify considerations that influenced the content and focus of their programs or writings. They were also asked to discuss the kind of reception that their programs received from the audience, and how they got to gauge the reception.

We analyzed our data by constantly comparing emerging themes and patterns within and across the various categories of interviews and discussions rather than isolating data based on category. In reality, culture develops or wanes out of a dynamic interplay of actions among various segments of the society. It was our intention to reflect this interplay even in our approach to data analysis. In the discussion that follows, we use the term 'discussants' to describe those who participated in the discussion groups and 'interviewees' for those interviewed. Where reference is made to both groups, we used the term 'respondents'.

Our analysis shows that among group discussants, the broadcast media were more readily mentioned than print media with regards to influence on culture. The heavy presence of the broadcast media, low literacy rates, and a declining reading culture most probably account for this (Ojebode and Sonibare, 2004; Ojebode, 2008). Deliberate effort was made to prompt comments on the print media from the discussants but that yielded tangible points only occasionally. The discussion that follows thus tilts a lot more to the broadcast than to the print media.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Given the wide disparity in the backgrounds of our interviewees and discussants, it was not a total surprise that we came up with a body of data that manifests as much divergence as convergence. However, adopting the guidelines provided by the theoretical framework helped in sorting responses out into useful categories which informs the following presentation. Following the guide provided by Wright, we sorted responses broadly into cultural functions and dysfunctions of the media. Then working inductively, we sorted out responses into specific forms of functions and dysfunctions.

<sup>5</sup> Dr Tunde Adegbola is a broadcast engineer, film producer and a computer scientist who also obtained a PhD in African languages. He is Executive Director of African Languages Technology Initiative (ALT-I). Dr Adegbola developed, among other relevant things, a keyboard able to handle the tonal complexities and alphabetical peculiarities of the Yoruba language.

## FUNCTIONS

The dominant view among all our interviewees and discussants was that the media in Nigeria do promote Nigerian culture. A youth discussant in a rural discussion group summarized that as the objective of all broadcast and print media: "Directly or indirectly, the media tell us to imbibe our culture and discard foreign culture". Mr Chris Okoyomo, our NBC interviewee strongly affirmed this and connected it to social responsibility: "the media in Nigeria are socially responsible. They have the passion to promote culture. It is not because the NBC is policing them. It flows from the noble hearts of the producers". To Dr Tunde Adegbola,

*Cultural promotion started from the very beginning of television broadcasting in Nigeria. Alagba Adebayo Faleti and his team ensured that traditional values, wisdom and language, and other aspects of our cultural heritage were part of television content right from the beginning...and much earlier than that the print media have been promoting our cultural values.*

Dr Adegbola's claims were similar to those of the media personnel we interviewed. Funke Olaode, who writes a weekly biographical column that focuses on elders and statesmen in a national newspaper, told us that her central motivation for focusing on the elderly was to "set them up as cultural models for the youths. My aim is to ensure that the culture and values of our people personified by these old achievers are not just celebrated but documented for the incoming generations. I believe that the actual purpose of communication is to promote culture".

Malcolm Oteri of Delta Broadcasting Services (DBS) stressed:

*Our culture is one of the major export commodities we have as a nation. It is thus service to the nation to promote it. And this is what we do. We promote our languages. DBS broadcasts in local dialects and languages and broadcasts cultural programs of our people to our people and to their neighbors.*

The media personnel whom we interviewed mentioned the different offerings that they employed in promoting the people's culture: musical programs, culture-based quiz competitions, features, editorials, news analyses, native language programs, traditional fashion, and special features on cultural festivals including new yam, boat and fishing festivals.

Considering that the above point was too broad, we asked our group discussants: what significant thing about Nigerian culture have you learnt from the media? We asked media personnel: what significant message does your program or columns transmit to your audience about the Nigerian culture? We worked through the responses and came up with three major functions of the media: transmission of cultural and traditional skills; cultural education, and promotion of cultural values.

## TRANSMISSION OF TRADITIONAL AND CULTURAL SKILLS

Our respondents affirmed that the media in Nigeria promote and transmit traditional skills. Combining program titles and columns with their descriptions by media personnel and the audience, we came up with three categories of traditional skills that the media transmit.

First is what we would call *practical or survival* skills. Our respondents testified that both broadcast and print media transmit traditional skills of survival. An urban youth said:

*I am ashamed to say this...I am Ijebu but I learnt to cook ikokore<sup>6</sup> from reading the recipe in a newspaper and from Sokoyokoto<sup>7</sup>...everyone praises my ikokore now...even my grandma, but they don't know where I learnt it from.*

Many female discussants made reference to such programs as *Sokoyokoto* citing different examples of traditional and not-so-traditional culinary skills they learnt from those programs. Others referred to different styles of dressing they learnt from the media. Adult female discussants were very specific about head-tie styles learnt from soft-sell magazines especially *City People*, *Ovation* and *Encomiums*<sup>8</sup>.

Traditional crafts were also mentioned as part of the skills taught by media. Respondents mentioned, among others, *Scrap Palace* on African Independent Television (AIT) and *Children's Workshop* on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Minna as skills-inculcating programs. Examples of print media columns mentioned included *Junior Guardian* (published in *the Guardian*) and *Kiddies' Hands* (published in *Daily Outlook*).

Secondly, Nigerian media are also said to transmit *relational* skills. Skills mentioned included greetings. A discussant explained:

*If you watch Yoruba television programs and home videos, they teach you how to greet your elders. Children are growing up and parents are not teaching them these things again. Some think it is outdated. But our people still practice them. It is our culture and we should teach our children. That's one thing the videos teach very well...*

The above point stands in stark contrast to the position of Alawode (2006:323) that in Yoruba home videos, one in every three occurrences of greetings was likely to be in "bad taste" and "home-video makers are ignorantly promoting and legitimising the variant (deviant) forms of cultural practice". Alawode (2006) conducted a content analysis in which he, quite subjectively, operationalized what he considered to be 'variant' forms of greetings and cultural forms and found that a third of greetings on home videos were at variance with the referent culture. Our audience respondents thought otherwise. It is also noteworthy that Wright (1960) and Wright

<sup>6</sup> *Ikokore* is the ethnic delicacy and staple food of the Ijebu people of southwest Nigeria.

<sup>7</sup> *Sokoyokoto* is a radio program that teaches culinary skills broadcast by Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State. Literally, the expression means 'fatten your husband' and is the name of a vegetable.

<sup>8</sup> *City People*, *Ovation* and *Encomiums* are soft-sell magazines that focus on celebrities and their social often affluent activities. Often sex, sleaze and gossips are combined in *City People* and *Encomiums*.



(1974) had no functions for entertainment; he had only dysfunctions. Our respondents identified a cultural function of entertainment.

Through stories and talks, the media also instruct parents on how to relate with children. Examples of programs cited included *To omo re*<sup>9</sup>, on Radio Kwara.

Many of us parents are losing touch with our culture and values. Each time I listen to *To omo re*, I am reminded that we are Africans and even though our children attend western education, we have to train them in the African way. I beat my children. I know white people don't beat their children or they will call police.

Again, this position contrasts with the near popular position that the media are anti-tradition (Akpan, 2003; Okoro and Ogbalu, 2008; Onwumere, 2008). Other relational skills respondents have learnt from the media include how to observe the limits of intimacy between the different sexes, and how to relate with people from different backgrounds.

The third and the final category of cultural skills our respondents gained from the media were *linguistic skills*. The media, especially the broadcast media promote the indigenous languages of the people and this increases audience's proficiency in languages. Dr Adegbola stated:

*Watch a good Yoruba home video or listen to a Yoruba program on radio or TV. Think of the proverbs, idioms and anecdotes used in these programs. Think of the eloquence of the presenters. These things rub off on the listeners. Consciously or unconsciously, they become a part of the listeners and they are perpetuated in the unwritten store houses of the people.*

Like Dr Adegbola, Mr Chris Okoyomo, the NBC regional director, eulogized the media for what he called "linguistic recovery role of the media". According to him, *many more of the local languages are being spoken on radio now. Some of them are endangered languages. Thus the languages are not only being preserved, but also new and younger members of the communities in which these languages are used are learning them from the media, especially radio. And when news is translated into native languages, we're telling people, don't jettison your languages. News is coming to you in it.*

Mr Okoyomo heads a zone of the NBC that covers one of the most ethnically diverse regions of Nigeria, the Benin Zone. Thus, he is quite well positioned to talk about endangered languages and linguistic recovery. Our audience respondents share similar thoughts. "I grew up in Lagos but since I came to school in Kwara state; Radio Kwara has improved my knowledge of Yoruba and I speak the language better now" said a discussant.

<sup>9</sup> Literally means 'train your child'.

## CULTURAL EDUCATION

The media in Nigeria educate Nigerians on the different cultures of the different peoples. In all the discussion groups, mention was made of one new thing or the other learnt about the culture of some remote ethnic group from the media. Commonly mentioned programs were *AM Express* and *African Pot* both network programs of the NTA. The print media also share in some of the praise. A discussant said:

*I learnt that in Calabar, if you want to marry, they treat you like a Queen. They keep you somewhere for weeks and feed you and decorate you. They teach you everything like how to walk. I read it in Tell. But their king is trying to amend that culture. He says it makes women too fat which is not good for their health. The king is a medical doctor.*

We want to describe this aspect of cultural education as *cross-cultural* education: the media educating a people about the culture of another people. This claim by our audience does not support those of Chadha and Kavoori (2000), Opubor (2000), Akinleye and Ojebode (2004) and Ojebode (2007) who observed that the process of evolving a national culture often involves enthroning the cultures of the dominant groups and silencing those of the minority groups. Our audience did not think so. A discussant said:

I learnt a lot about the Egun people through *Lin Lin*<sup>10</sup>. And the other day, *AM Express* told us about the culture of a tribe I never heard before somewhere in the North.

In line with the above, Mr Okoyomo opined that the media are able to bring the endangered cultures of minority groups into the limelight by its use of a lingua franca to educate people on these cultures. And that is why "I won't condemn the use of pidgin in broadcasting".

There are also instances of *intra-cultural education* by which we mean the media reaching out to members of an ethnic group to educate them about their cultural heritage. In Offa, a discussant said, and the group agreed:

*Our local stations, such as AIT, are good. I appreciate them. They take you down to your roots. They let you know what is happening about you and your culture... they tell us what is happening here, what concerns us rather than what you are less concerned about.*

By "what you are less concerned about", our discussant was not referring to events in neighboring ethnic groups but to occurrences in foreign nations especially the west.

Our media personnel made similar claims. For instance, Pastor Nelson, staff of a state broadcast media, said:

<sup>10</sup> Lin Lin is a program for and about the speakers of Egun language, a minority group in Ogun State, southwest Nigeria. The program is aired on Gateway Radio.

*One shocking thing we discovered in Ta n mo o<sup>11</sup> was that young Yoruba people know very little about their cultures, especially those living in the cities. Ask them who is Oduduwa<sup>12</sup>, and they tell you he is an OPC<sup>13</sup> man. That was why we decided we must tell people about their sources. That was what informed programs like Orirun<sup>14</sup>, Kekere Akin<sup>15</sup>, and Gelete. The programs are well received especially because if you participate you may win prizes.*

Another media person, Mr. Henry Uzor, Manager News and Current Affairs, Delta Broadcasting Services (DBS), said:

We want people to be proud of their cultures yet they know little about those cultures. How can they be proud of what they are ignorant of? In DBS, we raised an onslaught against ignorance by designing magazine programs such as those for the Okpe, Ika, Ezon and Ndokwa<sup>16</sup> peoples, and *Egwu ala anyi*<sup>17</sup> to expose people to the richness of *their* own culture and to educate them.

Intra-cultural education was thus seen as the first logical step in cultural preservation and promotion.

Print media personnel Funke Olaode, Kay Balogun among others also referred to sections of their papers that perform the function of cultural education. Examples included *Memoirs* and *Arts and Review* (*ThisDay* newspaper); *Arts and Culture* (the *Guardian* newspaper).

## TRANSMISSION OF CULTURAL VALUES

The cultural values of a people are a product of their beliefs and philosophy about what is of worth. Values are intangible, normative and are usually broad based. Cultural values define what a people hold dear, what they consider worth protecting. They act as guide for evaluating an action as good or bad, right or wrong, true or false. The media have been criticized for eroding cultural values especially in Nigeria (See Akpan, 2003; Nwosu, 2008). While not completely absolving the media of all the blame, our respondents affirmed that the Nigerian media do indeed promote the cultural values of the different cultures.

<sup>11</sup> This literally means "Who knows it?" It is a quiz program in which questions are based on Yoruba language, folktales and riddles.

<sup>12</sup> Oduduwa is the legendary founder of the Yoruba nation.

<sup>13</sup> OPC, Oodua People's Congress is a Yoruba ethnic militant group.

<sup>14</sup> Orirun means 'origin'. In the program, origins of towns and cultural practices among the Yoruba are discussed.

<sup>15</sup> Kekere Akin means the little brave one. It is a program designed to test young people's knowledge of Yoruba language, riddles, beliefs and myths.

<sup>16</sup> Okpe, Ika and Ndokwa are sub-ethnic groups in Delta State: Okpe speakers are members of the larger Urhobo ethnic group; Ika and Ndokwa people are Delta Igbo. Ezon, on the other hand, is another term for Ijaw, a major ethnic group in Delta.

<sup>17</sup> *Egwu ala anyi* literally means 'songs from our land'. It is a musical in which numbers are interspersed with talks about the culture of the people.

Values such as hospitality, community, honesty and hard work are, according to our audience, cherished in their cultures and are being promoted by the media. Interestingly, our respondents cited drama more often than they did any other genre as a format for promoting values. A discussant said,

*If you watch Super Story<sup>18</sup> or Tales by Moonlight<sup>19</sup> or Tunde Kelani films or Mount Zion films, you will understand my point. At the end, there a strong message that cheating does not pay or honesty is the best policy or it is good to be nice to strangers. These are what we value, being your brothers' keepers. Compare that with the message in American films in which there is always shooting and violence. If and only if we apply the message of these stories...for instance, if a politician watches Agogo Eewo<sup>20</sup>, he should be careful about corruption.*

As it is with the above quote, *Super Story* was a recurrent mention in all discussions. Other genres were equally praised. Again, we found our audience's views departing from those of Wright (1960) who saw drama as performing only dysfunctional roles.

Jingles by BCOS Radio and Radio Kwara, and *Our Fathers say*, a short talk on DBS were mentioned for promoting these values as well. Respondents recited some of these jingles. When asked to give specific instances of jingles promoting values, a discussant said:

*That one (jingle) that says Ise eni ni ise eni<sup>21</sup>, I like it. When people ask me about my job, and I get reluctant to tell them, I remember it (the jingle) and I tell them 'I am a cleaner'. A person's job is, after all, their job. Before I heard that jingle, I used not to answer such a question.*

Like the above discussant, a teacher testified to using another jingle to discourage cheating in examinations. Examples were also given of programs that promote valor and endurance.

## DYSFUNCTIONS

Our respondents did not leave us in any doubt as to whether or not the media in Nigeria had cultural dysfunctions. The mass media in Nigeria, they claimed, performed functions that are detrimental to the cultural well-being of the people. Three cultural dysfunctions stood out as most recurrent in the discussions and interviews.

<sup>18</sup> Produced by former cartoonist, Wale Adenuga, *Super Story* has been a widely successful peak-time serial on national television network. Its various themes centre on social and natural justice. It is reputed for attracting the largest viewership in Nigeria.

<sup>19</sup> This is a television weekly story-telling programme for children. Stories are adaptations or direct reproduction of Nigerian folktales with emphasis on moral lessons.

<sup>20</sup> *Agogo Eewo* is a film by leading film company, Mainframe Productions. It is a hopeful commentary on corruption in Nigeria in which corrupt government officials die mysteriously as punishment for being corrupt.

<sup>21</sup> Meaning 'a person's job is his job', this is the title of a jingle broadcast by BCOS Radio, Ibadan. The jingle preaches dignity of labor, encouraging listeners to be proud of whatever job they do.

Many discussants believed that the media promote immodesty and eroticism which they considered unacceptable in the context of the Nigerian culture. Respondents accuse producers of films and musicals aired on television of promoting immodest dressing by featuring “half-naked dancers and people who dance in suggestive (sexy) ways”.

*I hate Nigerian music videos. It is all about girls with mini-skirts and open breasts gyrating (twisting) their waists. Such things should not be on TV...and Silverbird is the worst of all of them. It is always showing naked people, naked dances and even sex.*

Most discussants felt this has contributed to indecent conduct especially in the area of dressing among youths. They more strongly attributed misconduct to the invasion of the airwaves by foreign programs or foreign programming styles. Even our cable-vendor interviewees agreed that access to foreign programs indeed contributed to “controversial conduct” among viewers. But in the urban youth discussion group, the dominant opinion was different:

*Things are changing. We follow the trend all over the world. Our culture too is changing. We are the culture. If I find that mini-skirt makes me feel cool, I will wear it. Jeans makes you feel cool, you wear it. Sagging makes him feel cool, he's sagging. The media too must wake up.*

Here, we have our first sharp disagreement among discussants. Urban youth discussants seem to be challenging the immutability of culture.

Mr Chris Okoyomo explained that eroticism was “grossly unacceptable” to the NBC and had attracted

*severe penalty in the past. The simple fact that people speak and write against it shows that it is unacceptable in our culture, and NBC stands by the people.*

Mr Okoyomo mentioned some stations which had been penalized not only for eroticism and immodesty but for other kinds of contravention. Some of the media personnel we interviewed believed that were it not for the NBC, eroticism would have been more pervasive in the media.

Even the print media came under criticism with reference to eroticism. A discussant said:

*The dirtiest papers are Yoruba papers, especially Alaroye and this other one they call Iroyin... What they write in those papers, like the story of Baba Alagbesun<sup>22</sup>, is immoral. Imagine a writer (columnist) who says his own name is Olabanisun<sup>23</sup>? Those papers are raw (erotic).*

This came as a surprise to other discussants who knew *Alaroye* only for its tireless anti-government and pro-Yoruba posture. Their doubts, loudly expressed, prompted the discussant,

<sup>22</sup> This pen name literally means “One who picks a woman and sleeps with her all night long”.

<sup>23</sup> This too must be a pen name and has meaning close to Baba Alagbesun.

who also doubled as the host of the discussion, to produce a 2004 copy of *Iroyin Yoruba* from which she read some lurid passages. This put an end to the protest.

Discussants also accused the media of focusing on the rich and the affluent and neglecting honest hardworking people. A discussant said,

*Take the case of [the] nine o'clock program on Sunday, Newslite, as an example. They begin with interesting events and then move on to show weddings of rich people etc. which is not a way to promote culture. You are making poor people sad and you are not promoting hard work and contentment.*

Our discussants implied that most of those who could afford to pay *Newslite* to televise their weddings are rich people, the sources of whose wealth are popularly claimed to be questionable. Openly broadcasting the display of such wealth promotes questionable acquisition of wealth rather than hard work. Soft-sell magazines and private television stations came under criticism with regard to promotion of affluence. Again, our urban youth groups disagreed. They did not feel that affluence was antithetical to Nigerian culture. Quickly equating modesty with poverty, one of them said:

*The fact that people have been impoverished by the military for many years does not mean poverty is our culture. If people have money, honest money, let them show it on television. That will encourage others to work hard and make money too. I read Ovation and I say 'God, I must be rich'.*

It appears that the disagreement is a matter of attitude to affluence rather than that of definition. We noticed a striking consensus among urban youth discussants on this point: most urban youth discussants did not consider display of wealth in the media to be wrong.

The media were accused of portraying the Nigerian culture as fetish. Again, the heavier blame fell on movies:

*Most Nigerian movies show juju people or native doctors. And they show all of them as dirty and wicked. They dress like the devil and do evil things using their secret evil powers. It is as if everywhere in Nigeria, you have wicked juju people. It's not true. These movies debase our culture. They focus on witchcraft etc.*

Our discussants recommended that the media need to sieve their culture and promote only the aspects considered desirable. If the undesirable must be featured, it must be in the right proportion and with the aim of discouraging it.

In a fit of self confession, Dr Tunde Adegbola stated that the media had contributed to low standard of language usage especially among the Yoruba. By this he meant the decline in the use of pure Yoruba and the growing use of colloquialism and code-mixing, especially by radio and television presenters. He traced this to *Arambada*, a project of the Mainframe Productions in which he participated. In *Arambada*, they decided to use the Yoruba language as was spoken

by the ordinary street person in order to reach such people with their message. The unintended result was that “many presenters in Lagos abandoned pure Yoruba and copied *Arambada*, even when they were trying to reach an audience different from that of *Arambada*. Again, our urban youth discussants held a different view. To them, code-mixing and colloquialism did not mean corruption or fall in standard. It meant people speaking the language that “feel cool”.

To get them sum up their positions, we asked discussion groups to decide which outweighed the other between the positive and the negative contributions of the media to culture. In all the discussions and the interviews, it was agreed that the media do a lot more to preserve and promote the Nigerian culture than otherwise. The positions of Atanda (1996) and Wright (1960) were shared by a predominant majority of our respondents.

### THE BLAME GAME AND THE EXPLANATION FOR DYSFUNCTIONS

For the cultural dysfunctions, the audience blamed the media. The primary motivation for the media, they claimed, was money.

*Even when they know that this is not good, but they know that people will like it and that will bring more money, they will do it. What about our culture does “Who wants to be a millionaire?” promote? But MTN is pumping money into it.*

This need to please sponsors is responsible for the influx of foreign programs some of which have offensive content.

Interestingly, the media personnel we interviewed agreed with this but returned the blame on the audience. One of them, Mr Malcolm Oteri, said,

*You are at the mercy of the audience because you are at the mercy of the advertiser. We cannot continue to air programs that we know the audiences do not want. Your advertisers will not be happy sponsoring such programs. The audience has become a tyrant. As we are talking now, the European Champion League is being played and broadcast live. We have no choice but to tune in and give it live too. Otherwise nobody will tune to your station. The audience is the tyrant.*

In strikingly similar expressions, the views of another media person, Oye Oyewole agreed with Oteri's:

*NBC has tried by specifying the ratio of local to foreign programs but how can we fold our arms and ignore the fact that we are being ignored. Often, we have no choice but to join the bandwagon of broadcasting foreign programs. The audience forces us to do this. Even when we know this is good for our culture, we do not broadcast it if we are sure the audience will not receive it well.*

Five broadcast media personnel said they had designed and begun to air cultural programs but had had to cancel the programs because of poor audience acceptance. Literature is replete with discussions and disagreement about a powerful media. Not much has been said about a powerful audience at whose mercy the media are.

Media personnel blame their woes on the rising affordability of cable television but our cable-vendor respondent saw the role of cable companies as “expanding people’s choices”. According to him:

*The audience is the final decision-maker. We simply expand their choices. We do not take them away from Nigerian stations. We bring water to the horse; we do not feed it with the water, not to even talk of forcing it. On Thursday evenings, most Nigerians, including cable subscribers abandon foreign stations and watch Super Story. That tells us that quality is something.*

Our urban youth discussants agreed entirely with this view as they pummeled the Nigerian media for parading low-quality programs:

*Nigerian stations lack action. They are unattractive. Nigerian movies are not exciting. Foreign stations do it better. If any music is popular, you can be sure such music is more like the American hip-hop.*

The blame game went on. Media personnel blamed government for not equipping the stations with modern facilities. Researchers had alerted that with neo-liberalism, the locus of media control would shift from government to market forces (See Olorunnisola, 2006). The shape of the market forces is becoming clearer with the audience emerging as the bride being courted by the market. In a sense, the locus is shifting to the audience whose influence has been accentuated by market forces.

## **WE ARE NOT LOST; WE ARE JUST DIFFERENT**

One of the media personnel we interviewed described the youths as

*a generation of young people that is cut off from our past and from the present Nigerian culture. They do not even know what we as a people value. They are culturally adrift without an anchor.*

In concluding each discussion, we asked our discussants to describe themselves from a cultural perspective. Most rural discussants, including the youths, defined themselves as authentic Nigerians, but our urban youths described themselves as a hybrid of Nigerian and foreign personalities. When we read the quotation above to them, they protested:



We are not lost...We are just different. I know my past very well but how can I live in the past? Young people everywhere are saying 'no' to living in the past...American youths wear African beads...They don't say because they're Americans they won't touch non-American things...Nigerians are even more considerate: they wear native dresses on Fridays as a way of saying we're Nigerians...We are a different generation; we are not lost at all<sup>24</sup>.

Here we are confronted by a people who think differently. They appreciate the Nigerian culture and are proud to be Nigerians. Yet, they regard themselves as more of "young people everywhere" not bound to "living in the past", proud citizens of a boundless global 'nation' united in their search for something certain but which they cannot define, people "not lost but different". In their self descriptions, Nigerian urban youths are like Grixti's Maltese youth who said "I am Maltese but I cannot call myself Maltese" (Grixti, 2006:112). Grixti (2006) seemed to attribute this paradoxical ambivalence to the political history and geographical location of Malta, a small ex-colonial island at a location where Greek and other cultural paths crossed. Nigerian youths with a different geographical and political background share a self-description that resembles that of the Maltese, which suggests to us that the reason for this paradox is more contemporary than history and geography.

The Nigerian educated urban youths are clearly different from rural youths. They have broader horizons quite logically attributable to growing access to foreign media products and stations, giving rise to "libraries of scripts" that are increasingly hybridized (Grixti, 2006: 105). This forces on us the need to reconsider the monolithic definition of youth, especially youths within a geographical entity. Where attitude to culture is concerned, a monolithic definition, applied horizontally to youth groups across nations, may indeed incur less error margin than when applied vertically across youth groups within a nation.

## CONCLUSION

To return to the theoretical postulations of Wright (1960) and Wright (1974), we would say the media in Nigeria promote cultural growth as they transmit cultural skills to newer generations; they facilitate intra-national cultural contact through inter-cultural education. As they transmit cultural values, they also indirectly set the standards but the media alone cannot be expected to standardize culture.

Contrary to Wright's suggestions, the media are weak in ensuring cultural consensus among the different segments of their population. Not only this, in their bid to please the audiences so as to be on the good page of the advertiser's book, the media permit foreign programs thereby permitting "cultural invasion". Cultural invasion is cultural contact gone awry. The Nigerian media, given the right conditions and resources, can become a bulwark against cultural invasion: the testimonies about *Super Story* illustrate this quite convincingly.

<sup>24</sup> This quotation was from a compilation of chorused and quite chaotic responses. It is an amalgam of what was said by different members of the group at the same time.

Again, contrary to Wright's expectations, there is no evidence to suggest that the media reduce the variety of subcultures but there is evidence that the media promote popular culture. Ojebode (2007) found that the cultural activities of minority ethnic groups in Nigeria took a little proportion of media coverage; the current study shows that the little proportion has not been without impact on the larger society.

Wright left to the society the role of deciding whether activities of the mass media are functional or dysfunctional. It appears that he envisaged a mono-vocal society in which everyone speaks with one voice. In a typical society, as our study area, what a segment considers dysfunctional and couches in terms such as 'indecent', might indeed be considered functional by another segment which might see it as its own way of expressing membership of a borderless youth community.

It seems to us that researchers in media and culture in Nigeria, even the very few that have engaged the views of the people, have focused on those of mainstream society, not on the subcultures such as the youth. And that might explain why the repeated verdict is "thumbs down" for the media, and hard knocks for youth culture.

Researchers need to get engaged with the idea of a powerful audience and the gradual loss of power by the media to a nexus of economic factors. Advertisers back programs that audiences prefer and patronize. It may be argued that the media set the broad range of options within which the audiences select, and so the media are not conceding so much control as the current article suggests. However, the inadequacy of such position becomes obvious when one considers the fact that even that broad range of options that the media offer is conditioned by audience preference and eventually by an eye on the advertiser's money. Other considerations discussed elsewhere (Ojebode, 2009) are the power of the political class and media owners.

It should also interest researchers that the Nigerian audiences have so strong an influence in a country that has no viewer-ship or listener-ship rating practice. And it is not clear yet if the audiences recognize that they possess that power.

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