

# **MEDIA GLOBALISATION AND THE RESPONSES OF THE NIGERIAN BROADCAST MEDIA**

## **Implications for Democracy and Development**

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*The globalisation of the media of mass communication has been praised for being one of the major catalysts for the spread of democracy and development especially in the developing world. But discussions of the impact of media globalisation have by no means been homogenous. There are strong arguments that rather than being beneficiaries, democracy and development have been victims of the globalised media world. As a result, nations and institutions are responding to media globalisation with caution. This paper examines the possible impact of global media on Nigerian democracy and development. It attempts to categorise the responses of the Nigerian broadcast media to media globalisation as reflected in how they handle products of global media. Four such categories were discovered acceptance, replication, metacasting and blackout. The paper discusses the implications of these responses for our democracy and development.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Globalisation refers to the processes of integrating the nations of the world in all dimensions of human life. Initially understood in relation to national economies, it now covers all areas: technology, governance, social development, culture and communication, and is manifesting in the form of trade liberalisation, reduced national protection, disappearing national borders and an unbridled flow of labour and information across nations (Pinstруп-Andersen and Pandya-Lorch, 2001; Kankwenda, 2003).

Globalisation and communication form an egg and chicken relationship. Globalisation makes the internationalisation of the media of communication possible. And improvement in communication technology, along with other factors is expected to bring about globalisation (McLuhan, 1964; Samovar and Porter, 1997). Whichever way this is resolved matters little. Democracy, development and the media are equally interdependent. The media thrive well under democracy. But it is hard to imagine the evolution of democracy or the pursuit of development without the kind of education, information, popular participation and a public sphere that only the media can create.

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From media studies perspectives, globalisation is only a new term not a new phenomenon. It is a term that captures an undercurrent that has generated and sustained over five decades of scholarly and political debates because the erosion of national borders and cultural integrity as a result of transborder flow of information has caught media scholars' attention as early as the 1950's. In fact, before the celebrated prophecy by Marshal McLuhan that communication technologies would shrink the world into a global village (McLuhan, 1964), Johan Galtung had come up in 1961 with a clear articulation of much of the thoughts and concepts that shaped later debates on the imbalance in global information flow. His explication of centre-periphery relationship and its variants; the four worlds and the twelve criteria used by the world media to judge events as newsworthy, was an attempt to describe a world order in which the weak and vulnerable nations were fast losing their sovereignties and identities under the waxing influence of the rich and the strong.

### **Media Globalisation, Democracy and Development**

Media globalisation has received the lion's share of the credit for the sweeping gale of democracy across the globe. As Chan (2002) points out, it is through cross-border information flow that the elite of a country learn about social change in another, get encouraged and press for similar changes in theirs. Nigeria's recent history somewhat demonstrates this. The late military head of state, General Sani Abacha, uncomfortable with mass media positions on the incarceration of the acclaimed winner of the annulled presidential election, and their criticism of his reckless looting of the national treasury, tactless assassination of members of pro-democracy groups, and his self-succession bid, took his first step in media control by pocketing government owned media. Not in the least satisfied, he went ahead to silence independent ones. Those who resisted were shut down and, as was later revealed, assassins were sent after the proprietor of *The Guardian*, one of the few surviving credible newspapers of the time. Dissenting journalists were jailed, and some, such as Bagauda Kaltho, were assassinated in mysterious circumstances. But the BBC, VOA and Radio Kudirat (founded, hidden and allegedly run by Nigerian pro-democracy groups) continuously fuelled the flame of democracy. And as, more than ever before, more and more Nigerians, including those who understood only Hausa, tuned to these foreign stations, the thirst for democracy could no longer be assuaged by make-believe alternatives. Media globalisation indeed undermines "the capacity for maximum rulers to rule with impunity" for long (McChesney, 2001).

Global media have also been praised for spreading development to the world's nooks. The classical, materialistic concept of development sees

economic growth as well as abstraction after the west as development, and wherever the western media are received, their ideas and ideals are sold bought and utilised. Receivers are gingered up to emulate the west in their desires, choices and tastes, a phenomenon regarded as development. Not only this, as Hornik, (1988) and Bourgault (1995) among others, point out many a scholar believed that a mere introduction of the media would automatically lead to development, and the more the right kind of media, the more the development. Equating development with modernisation, such scholars, among them de Sola Pool (1977) and Rao (1966) cited by Beltran (1974), find a high positive correlation between the quantity and variety of mass media presence and development indices.

However, the question has been asked whether media globalisation will bring the realisation of a dream or a nightmare (Barnlund, 1997). There are worries that media globalisation does some, if not more, harm to democracy and development. Democratisation is an equitable reconstitution of the power structure but media globalisation is not based on equitable relationship among nations. In the globalised media world, "certain regions...speak and the rest listen" Ganley and Ganley (1983). And so, media globalisation stifles equalitarian relationship among nations with the developing world being at the losing end (Aina, 2003). Genuine development is not brought about by telling people what to do even if they obey. Development, that is, the multidimensional betterment of the lives of the people, the expansion of the scope of people's choices, the empowerment of people to utilise their resources maximally and to sustainably change their fate, is premised on access to media of expression. It requires horizontal social relationship based on genuine dialogue, among and within nations (Beltran, 1974:15).

More critical however, is the fact that media globalisation is not just a disequilibrium relationship between rich and poor nations. Rather, it is a one-way, injurious deal between a small number of powerful multinational firms at the sending end. These firms have seized the control of their countries' print and electronic media to shape news and entertainment in a way that feathers their economic nests. At the receiving end are unsuspecting consumers in poor nations. The main catalyst behind media globalisation is neither the empowerment of people nor the diffusion of democratic ideals but crass commercialisation. With emphasis on money and market, entertainment is promoted above information and education. Press freedom is equally put in jeopardy because the owners of these powerful firms allow only news and entertainment of the type and tilt that suit their economic interests, no matter how dangerous such may be to the democracy and development of developing nations. Though, not the political leaders of their countries, they have a disproportionate private influence on the leaders and public policy. And so, rather than ushering in democracy, medi

globalisation has only replaced brazen national rulers with subtle international ones (Baran, 1999; McChesney, 2002; Sridhara, 2003).

Another irony that exemplifies media globalisation as a threat to democracy is its non-inclusiveness. Inclusiveness is a claim made by celebrants of the foreseen global village but today we see that the audience of these global media are, as Sparks describes them, "too small, too rich and too English-speaking to be considered inclusive" (Chan, 2002). Media globalisation violates what Jürgen Habermas calls the principle of non-excludability (Winseck, 1997) and so stands in opposition to popular participation on which both democracy and development thrive.

*...nations cannot be built without the popular support and full participation of the people, nor can the economic crisis be resolved and the human and economic conditions improved without the full and effective contribution, creativity and popular enthusiasm of the vast majority (African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation, 1990: Paragraph 7)*

Media globalisation hurts cultures both ways. Media moguls with vast holdings in a variety of non-media businesses promote practices and fashions that will ensure their all-round economic successes, and so manipulate cultural practices even in the west at will. Worse hit are the cultures of developing nations which are being capitulated and displaced by cultural practices contained in the products of invading foreign media. Most mildly put, the tendency is a "universal application of some ... cultural practices" of some countries (Diaz-Bonilla and Robinson, 2001:226). A UN Country Resident explains it:

*Since the cultural integration goes to some extent with the economic globalization, it is obvious that the culture and cultural expressions will be dominated not by small and developing countries, but rather by powerful economic countries and their transnational corporations. Globalisation is, in its cultural dimension, a denial of cultural identity (Kankwenda, 2003:40) Emphasis mine*

More hurtful to democracy, especially the evolving democracies of African nations, is the way developing nations are portrayed by global media. It is such that paints the developing nations as places of war, famine and pestilence, and kept the Western audience convinced of "how fortunate they are not to be there" (Galtung 1984:120). Meyer (1988) discovered that 72%

of the news about the developing nations relayed in western news agencies was negative, focusing on riots, crime and epidemics. He also found out that in spite of this, some national newspapers in the developing nations sourced between 56 to 76% of their news from those western news agencies. The potency of subjective media focus on a crisis in aggravating the crisis is a matter of little doubt. With predominantly negative focus on Africa, global media are likely to topple, not nurture African democracy. The Miss World tragedy of 2002 illustrates how negative portrayal by global media can spell negative consequences for developing countries. CNN had maintained a steady report of the contest until riots broke out as a result of Isiomu Daniel's article, which Moslems considered blasphemous. As soon as the riots began in the North, CNN shifted attention from the contest to the crisis. And so, viewers worldwide who tuned in to watch the events saw ruins and corpses, not contest. After feeding them with horrors, CNN asked them whether or not Nigeria should continue to host the contest. The response was a predictable deluge of 'no' (Sokunbi, 2002).

Most nations across the globe are aware of the threat posed by media globalisation to national sovereignty, democracy and cultural integrity, and are taking measures to curtail it.

### **Media Globalisation and the Response of Nations**

On the surface, the globalisation of the media of communication has to do with liberalising access to media products across the nations of the world. It is the process of internationalisation of the mass media such that media products of a nation are received by citizens of other nations on the globe even without the approval of or control by their governments. The coming of the new media, especially the satellite and the Internet has brought this to reality. The winter schedules of the BBC and VOA reveal that each of them broadcast daily to a worldwide audience in about 40 languages, while China Radio International employs 44 languages so as by-pass linguistic barriers (WRTH, 2001). The CNN uses 14 satellites to transmit to 800 million viewers in about 200 countries (Baran, 1999, 2002). Radio France International (RFI) is making arrangement with Nigeria to establish a radio station in Lagos. When established, the station's programmes will be 70% foreign and only 30% local (Umar, 2003).

The impact of these is a much freer transborder flow of information, so much so that it is commonplace for the media products of a country to enjoy high demands in another. For instance, *Baywatch*, an American film, has been dubbed in 32 languages and watched by about a billion people in 141 countries. *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, another American film, was broadcast in 29 countries while *South Park*, of the same origin, became a must watch in Germany (Baran, 2002:477). In Nigeria, at the beginning of

this decade, Ivorian music became household music and Francophone African music stars such as Kofi Olomide and Awilo Logomba became not only household names but also the idols of young Nigerian music lovers. Ghanaian viewers enjoy Nigeria's Papa Ajasco's comedies on GTV and posters advertising Igbo films are found in large numbers on Accra streets from time to time. The world has become one.

Another dimension of media globalisation is reflected in the ownership of global media conglomerates. The leading conglomerates in the United States for example are owned and controlled by business moguls from different nations whose aim is to maximise profit.

But the global flow of information is not welcome by everyone due to perceived implications of such flow. Seemingly worried by the apparent implications of media globalisation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) inaugurated the McBride Commission to study "the question of how to maintain national and cultural sovereignty in the face of rapid globalization of mass media" (Baran, 1999:468). In its report, the Commission recommended a new order, the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). This entails, among other things, absolute sovereignty of developing nations over all of their information sources; increased control by developing nations over world communication institutions; more coverage of ongoing projects rather than of coups, riots and disasters; increased horizontal communication among developing nations; and better international news ratio in favour of developing nations (McBride and others, 1980).

The New Order recommended by the McBride Commission was essentially stillborn due to the intransigence of the developed world and the developing world's lack of communication resources necessary for integrating and representing their interests (Meyer, 1988). Though the UNESCO accepted the recommendations, the developed nations found them unacceptable. As a result, some threatened to, and some actually did, withdraw from the membership of UNESCO opting for the retention of the old order with a new name: the New Communication Strategy.

However, many of these opponents of NWICO have erected practical and ideological walls to ensure the sovereignty of their nations and protect their cultural integrity against the ill effects of media globalisation. France, for example, supported by most members of the European Union, opposed the globalisation of media related trades by resisting tariff reduction on media products entering Europe from the United States. The use of certain US expressions (e.g. cartoon, hamburger) in print is outlawed in France just as it maintains an official bureau to prosecute any attempt to degrade its language by foreign language interference. Canada insists that a certain percentage of all media content should either be produced in Canada or reflect Canadian

culture. In 1989, the European Community (now the European Union) established a regulation which mandates that 50% of all content on all television channels in Europe be produced by European countries (Baran, 1999). In China, the Communist Party banned the websites of oppositional groups, cleansed online messages and detained rule breakers for leaking official secrets. These nations brazenly flout globalisation agreements even in critical issues such as food and agriculture where developing countries largely count on the consistency of the developed (Babinard and Pinstrup-Andersen, 2001:235). Distortion of policies, institution of high tariffs and other measures employed by developed nations make it undeniable that globalisation is adopted only if, and as far as, it favours the powerful.

### **Nigerian Broadcast Media's Responses to Media Globalisation**

In Nigeria, the National Broadcasting Commission recommends a 60:40 local-foreign programme ratio for all broadcast stations. There are serious doubts as to the extent to which this order is being observed. However, events in the country show that her broadcast media respond to media globalisation in a number of ways. The four most prominent acceptance, replication, metacasting and blackout are discussed here. Some of these responses have been before the current democratic dispensation.

Many mass media houses in Nigeria, especially the privately-owned ones, willingly *accept* media products from global media and directly relay them for local consumption. At its inception in the 1990's and for a long time after, the Raypower 100 FM Radio in Lagos consistently relayed news from the BBC. Now, its spin-off, Raypower 106 FM as well as Cool 96.9 FM do that on a daily basis. About five FM stations and an AM station in Nigeria relay VOA news at 7 am and 9 pm daily<sup>1</sup>. The news bulletins are relayed live and unedited. *American Top 40* a musical radio programme sponsored by a multinational brewery dominated the Nigerian airwaves every week for about twelve months in the 1990's. *Germany Today* is a DWTV programme that is relayed on Galaxy TV based in Lagos and Ibadan. Government stations are not completely left out. The Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS) Television broadcasts *Around the World* as part of the programme *Saturday Special* while the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Ibadan, broadcasts *UK Today* also on Saturdays. Added to all these is the consistent dose of foreign films on every TV station. Profit making appears to be the reason behind *acceptance*: the stations seem to believe that global media products are widely accepted and will attract audience and advertisers. Very often, the damage or advantage of these programmes to peace, democracy and development of the nation is not fully weighed.

Closely related to *acceptance* is *replication*. Many media practitioners simply copy programmes of the global media and daub them in local names

with slight modifications. Examples abound: Pat Utomi's *Patito's Gang*, aired on various television stations in Nigeria, was fashioned after *Capital Gang*. Agatha Amata's *Inside Out with Agatha*, broadcast on the AIT, was cloned from the *Oprah Winfrey Show* while Segun Arinze's *No Holds Barred*, aired on the AIT, was copied from the *Larry King Show*. *Celebrating Jesus* by Gina Harry on MBI was a clone of *The 700 Club*. All these are fashioned after American programmes (Omojola, 2002). Galaxy TV's *Your Choice* and BCOS television's *Love Venture* are local replications of BBC's *Blind Date*. NTA's *Second Chance* of the 1980's is an imitation of Mr Brown's hilarious *Mind Your language* of the London Weekend Television, just as its *Voices and Visions* was fashioned after CNN's *Sight and Sound*.

*Metacasting* is "broadcasting about broadcasting". This term is crafted after older forms such as metaknowledge, metalinguistics and metacomprehension (Weinreich, 1966; Finegan, 1994). These terms explain an inherent quality in human communication that enables it to be used to discuss itself. Broadcasting, a communication process on its own, possesses this too and so is used to reflect on itself. This may be in the form of *procasting*—re-affirming an earlier broadcast or *countercasting*—rebutting it. The Nigerian mass media often do more of the latter than the former as was noticed in the 2003 elections. In such cases, there were direct rebuttals as well as spirited supply of information that proves the opposite wrong. During the 2003 National Assembly elections, while the CNN reported scenes of violence and low voter turnout occasioned by day-long rainfall in most parts of the country, the NTA and others kept emphasising the peaceful, free and fair conduct of the elections and showing scenes to prove that. The following day, NTA, in a news bulletin that lasted about 15 minutes, repeated the expression "the election was peacefully conducted" or its variants 8 times. And the expression "contrary to reports in some foreign media" also featured prominently.

The third response is *blackout*. Occasionally, when the broadcast media in Nigeria perceive that certain global media output are prejudicial to the Nigerian nation or capable of causing a breach of the peace, such output is rejected. The way the NTA responded to the global media coverage of the 2003 invasion of Iraq is an example. Shortly before the coalition forces struck Iraq, there were antiwar demonstrations in Kano and few other cities in the volatile Northern Nigeria. As the war became imminent, anti-American tension in the North rose to a dangerous point. The governor of Zamfara, a Northern state, made a passionate call for days of fasting and prayer in support of Saddam Hussein. Though the BBC, CNN and VOA gave blow-by-blow accounts of the war, the NTA gave the war and its portrayal in the global media a total blackout. Had the NTA carried the reports of the war and the fall of Saddam, dangerous protests with the usual looting, arson and



murders would have followed. In this case, newsworthiness was not determined by magnitude, prominence or impact but by the need to forestall a breach of the peace. However, this is done only occasionally.

### **Implications for Democracy and Development**

Since 1999 when Nigeria returned to civilian rule, the diction of political discussions has been marked by epithets that paint the picture of a precarious dispensation. "nascent", "fragile", "new", "emerging" are some of such epithets which convey a general sense of uncertainty, underscores the need for caution and for concerted efforts in ensuring stability. Hence, the mobilisation of all institutions including the mass media to affirm loyalty to and defend democracy. But the responses of the Nigerian broadcast media, especially *acceptance* and *replication* discussed above raise important issues in view of this call and the overall development of the nation.

First is the possibility of importing a wrong democracy. Western democracy though old, is unfortunately not endowed with principles that have universal applications. Cultures, economies, human resources, literacy levels and orientations differ so widely that the developing world cannot afford wholesale applications of western principles, the very thing *acceptance* and *replication* have the proclivity to engender.

Democracy is more than voting. It is more than the existence of the representative political system even if representatives were truly democratically elected (Somavia, 1981). Democracy involves "the processes that allow the procedures and normative goals of society to be opened to citizen participation through public spheres of communication" (Winseck, 1997:220). Critics of western media argue that they do not fully engender this type of participation. If this is so, *accepting* or *replicating* western media product will hinder the Nigerian broadcast media from facilitating participation.

The response of the Nigerian broadcast media also implies a tilt towards modernisation not development. Modernisation shapes the thoughts, ambition and culture of people making them to ape, and not to shape; to adapt, and not to transform; to be passive receptors, and not active innovators in matters affecting their lives. With glamorous pictures of the west dangled at the audience regularly, pro-western aspiration, as evident in the fever-pitch hustle for U.S. visa lottery, will be on the rise with its attendant damage to culture and the economy.

Development is not only about economic growth, infrastructure or employment generation but about sustained improvement in the general well-being of the people; about enlarging people's choices; about economic and political freedom among others (Iwayemi, 2001:8). Even with the fall of the dominant paradigm and the growing agitation for horizontality and

participation following Friere's "liberation theology", (Huesca, 1995), most of the west still conceive of development and in discrete, statistical, (if not top-down) terms. Western media, like western development thinkers, cannot expand their concept of communication beyond information and persuasion (Bourgault, 1995). Unlike in Asia and Latin America, the mass media in African nations have been quite quick and dogmatic in copying this western style journalism just as their governments have been in adopting western concepts and planning. The outcome of this is *maldevelopment* (Bourgault, 1995 citing Amin 1990).

Market and profit are the driving forces in western journalism. News is a market commodity meant for sale and so packaged to the consumers' taste. In developing countries, journalism should be a social responsibility. Unfortunately, the deregulation of broadcasting and the "free flow" doctrine championed by the US and which brought privately-owned stations have also brought the American concept of news. The implication of this is that development efforts are treated as secondary while profit becomes the priority.

*Metacasting*, especially *countercasting*, is capable of nursing the siege mentality the feeling of insecurity being already sown in our psyche. It portrays Nigeria as being mostly on the defensive, frantically making sure that her frail democracy is not broken. Development issues may also be treated as secondary if too much attention is given to *metacasting*.

### Conclusion and the way forward

The impact of the responses of Nigerian broadcast media to media globalisation is yet uncertain. Wholesale relay of unassessed foreign programmes is certainly unpatriotic, and it raises a question as to both the creative abilities of indigenous producers and their understanding of the implications of media globalisation on democracy, national sovereignty and cultural integrity. The desirability and effectiveness of *metacasting* also remain questionable. *Replication* on the other hand not only raises the moral questions of copyright but also suggests only partial creativity on the part of the producers and presenters. *Metacasting*, especially *countercasting*, is based on the "power of the large volume". But it is an error, called the "large volume error", to assume that the effectiveness of information is enhanced by its size or by unthoughtful repetitions (Rogers, 1974).

*Blackout* may not be a good alternative too. Not only is it an infringement on people's right to know, it becomes its own undoing by creating curiosity in the audience thereby making them search for alternative means of getting the information that has been blacked out. More often than not, it is the global media that people will turn to for such alternatives. There is the need to train

Nigerian producers and equip the studios so that quality programmes that can favourably compete with the products of global media will be produced.

One of the ways out of the mire of media globalisation is for African countries to re-examine the recommendations of the McBride Commission. There are aspects of the recommendations that can be implemented without the approval of developed countries. These include the establishment and empowerment of pro-African news agencies. The existing ones such as the URTNA and Pan-African News Agency (PANA) should be strengthened to meet the challenges of a shrinking but discredibly disparate world and safeguard evolving democracies.

There is need for media literacy programmes in Nigeria and Africa. This should be included in formal and non-formal school curricula. Media literate citizens will be analytical and reflective enough to rationally question and reject media products that are prejudicial to their culture, democracy and development of their nations.

International radio and television stations in developing countries should be strengthened to improve their reach so that the cultures and positive occurrences can also be projected to the outside world. Most of them, like Nigeria's Voice of Nigeria (VON), are so weak that they have become international voices that reach only inwardly. Syndication and networking such as the ones by TV Africa should increase and be supported by African governmental organisations such as the AU.

Between their independences and the year 2001, African countries and NGO's have inaugurated several movements and adopted many policies to help reposition them and stem the ever-widening gulf between them and the developed nations. Among these were the Monrovia Strategy, the Lagos Plan of Action, the Cairo Declaration, the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation, the Mbeki-launched Millennium African Plan and the New African Initiative that culminated in the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) adopted in Abuja in October 2001. A major undoing of these well-thought-out programmes was their disregard for the *piiper law*. They rely greatly on the developed world for their workings especially in the area of funding, and yet they want to be free from the tutelage of donors. The poor performances of most African development initiatives attest to the fact that any initiative that seeks to deviate from dependency will receive no sympathy from donor countries. It is therefore imperative for African countries to map out ways of liberating themselves from the holds of the Bretton Woods and other similar institutions whose major aim is to ensure the economic prosperity of their nations and multinationals even if others' oxen are gored.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup> The list of the VOA "relay stations" in Nigeria, published in *The Guardian*,

(June 29, 2003, p. 20) includes ITVR, Benin; PRTV, Jos; MG Power FM, Kaduna; Niger State Broadcasting Corporation, Minna; Minaj FM, Obosi; and 1530 AM.

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