Global Drums and Local Masquerades: Fifty Years of Television Broadcasting in Nigeria: 1959-2009

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Abstract

TV broadcasting has been in Nigeria for more than 50 years (1959-2009). Its development has brought about a series of local responses to global socioeconomic and political environments and “soft” stimuli. This conclusion is based on a critical, interpretive reading of the history, form, and content of television in Nigeria from Obafemi Awolowo’s Western Nigeria Television in Ibadan through the federal government’s reactive establishment of the national network: the Nigeria Television Authority, and later, states and private television stations. The ultimate deregulation of television broadcasting in 1992, perceived as Babangida’s “politically-correct” reaction to the pressures from the Bretton Woods institutions, opened up national media markets for global penetration, and fast-tracked media globalization and its effects in Nigeria. While television stations in Nigeria have multiplied in numerical terms, programming/content/form have followed the global market/technological determinism turning Nigerian TV into localized versions of commercialized western master-scripts with very little local ideological direction.

Keywords

Africa, area studies, humanities, communication studies, communication, social sciences, radio/TV/film, journalism, mass communication, global communication, media and society, media systems, political economy, economic science

Introduction

There appears to be intersections and convergences in theoretical approaches to the study of national and/or international communication, probably because of the apparent cyclical nature of human progress. Thussu (2000) notes that “it’s not surprising that theories of communication began to emerge in parallel with the rapid social and economic changes of the Industrial Revolution in Europe” (p. 53). Communication at the international level also reflects its significance in the growth of “capitalism and empire” following advances in science and technology. This becomes obvious when we recognize that a theory like Daniel Lerner’s modernization theory essentially runs through many other theories. Modernization theory gained patronage from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a way of spreading modernity, and also later in the 1990s by international nongovernmental organizations and global media corporations to spread “capitalism on the wheels of electronics” characterized by calls for open airwaves and free flow of information. This move was to allow global media multi-nationals to operate without hindrance anywhere in the world. The dependency and structural imperialism theories also exemplified how colonial “centers” (political and economic) perpetrated and benefited from continual maintenance of their “peripheralties” as dependents.

The capitalist-empire-states, according to Amoda (2000), reconstitute the developing world with structures and functions, which ensure their dependency; thus, export-import dependency equals structural dependency in the third world.

The beginning of empire service broadcasting by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in December 19, 1932, to British colonial outposts typalizes these theoretical tendencies. It is noteworthy that Galtung’s structural imperialism theory earlier identified five types of imperialistic exchanges between centers and peripheries (viz: economic, political, military, communication, and cultural flows), which tend to recur in contemporary Information society; and in media globalization theories’ identification of what Appadurai calls “homogenizing scapes” (viz: ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes; Appadurai, 1996). It is therefore not surprising that even in the 21st century Information Age dispensation, there seems to be the prevalence of a blend of “critical political-economy” (Thussu, 2000, p. 81), whereby transnational

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businesses, which are supported by their respective national states, increasingly push for the creation and maintenance of different “links” and “scapes” in global structures and relationships. In essence, therefore, the theoretical backbone of a historical narrative such as this is the persistence of modernization/dependency theories whose links can be seen in other theories like structural imperialism to 21st century media globalization theories. We tend to see national broadcasters replicating global broadcast structures and content on the one hand, and mutual cooperation between national/international organizations or grants/aid towards modernizing broadcasters in the periphery. What is the nature of this “soft influence” or subliminal power that these assistance and aids mean to the receiving nation, or is aid really gratis and without conditionality in our contemporary globalization setting?

This reading is based on literature and decades of personal field observation of TV broadcasting in Nigeria, especially in its first 50 years, and it looks to see the various subtle, indirect methods and approaches that dominant centers and hegemonies deploy to shape the development of the broadcasting industry in a “peripherality” like Nigeria. However, it must be stated that this “soft-power” exercised by regional/global or extra-governmental influences may or may not have directly influenced the form and even content of public service TV broadcasting in Nigeria.

**Historical Influences in the Development of TV Broadcasting in Nigeria**

The development of television broadcasting in Nigeria in the last 50 years has brought about a series of reactive jerks to the multiple local and global environments. With its umbilical cord in the Radio Distribution Service of the BBC, which became operational in Nigeria since 1935, this colonial contrivance was designed to “provide communication link between the colonial officer with the imperial home” (Nwuneli, 1985, p. 240). To begin with, the development of Western Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (WNBC) Television as first TV in Nigeria (or Africa), in 1959 as an act of protest against the colonial governor, John McPherson, by Obafemi Awolowo, then premier of Western Nigeria, spawned a model for the spiral of new TV stations as a way of managing political propaganda through the airwaves. Both acts conceived later years’ paradigm of undue bureaucratization and political domination of state media. This trend has continued today among the nation’s public service broadcasters, whereby the medium is governed by authoritarian principles with the political leadership and power elite dominating and interfering with media content, management, and ownership (Lasode, 1994; Maduka, 1998; Opubor, 1985). Like its beginnings, the evolution of TV broadcasting has continued to be a series of local responses to global socioeconomic and political promptings.

Folarin (2000) breaks the timeline for television broadcasting in Nigeria into four distinct phases. The first phase took off with the establishment of the Western Nigeria Television/Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service (WNTV/WNBS) Ibadan in 1959 to the outbreak of the civil war in 1967. The second phase continued from the hostilities in 1970 till the Federal government takeover of television services and establishment of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). Even though Folarin considers the beginning of the civil war as a disruption of broadcasting services, it needs to be mentioned that the civil war, especially in Eastern Nigeria, contributed to the evolution of guerrilla-style or revolutionary practice of broadcasting even though it was only transitional within the Biafran experience. That experience may also have later contributed to Wole Soyinka’s Radio Democrat (later Radio Kudirat) during Sani Abacha’s despotism.

The third phase was marked by the return of broadcasting to the concurrent legislative list from 1979 through 1990s when the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) was established in 1992 (vide Decree 38 and later Act 55 of 1999) to deregulate the industry. The fourth stage is the era of deregulated and competitive broadcasting in Nigeria in the present day, which has witnessed an astronomical rise in the number of terrestrial and cable TV stations to more than about 166. This periodization can also be articulated politically in terms of the First Republic: 1960–1966; First Military Intervention: 1966–1979; the Second Republic: 1979–1983; Second Military Intervention-Buhari Years: 1983–1985; Babangida Years: 1985–1993; Abacha Years: 1993–1996; Shonekan Transitional Government: 1996–1999; and Third Republic: 1999-date.

The dominant character of these regimes, as perceptively noted by Osaghae (2002), was their susceptibility to the “new-found benevolence” of the West that “could not disguise the self-serving policies of the advanced capitalist countries, which aimed at perpetuating the peripheralisation of the underdeveloped countries” (p. 314). Continuing, Nnoli adds that during the 1980s and 1990s, “Nigerian governments became powerless to influence not only economic activities in the international system but also within the country” (cited in Osaghae, 2002, p. 314). The foregoing “soft” influences may be read against the above periodization and dispositions of the various administrations.

Conceived as a medium for “mass information and instruction,” Awolowo during the commissioning of WNBC in Ibadan asserted that television “is a powerful influence for good” that will make our country greater (cited in Lasode, 1994, p. 15). True to his prediction, the station produced immediate reaction from the eastern and northern regions. Eastern Nigeria Television (ENTV) followed in October 1960, while Radio Kaduna Television (RKT) took off in March 1962, as TV service of the Broadcasting Company of Northern Nigeria (BCNN).

The Federal Government in response initiated moves in 1962 to establish the Nigeria Television Service (NTS) with the National Broadcasting Company International (NBCI) of
the United States as managing partners. This followed the promulgation of the Wireless Telegraphy Act No. 31 of 1961 (now Cap 469, Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1990; cf. Osinbajo & Fogam, 1991). This Act, however, only authenticated the already established regional stations. With it, both state and federal governments could establish and run broadcast stations on appropriate licenses from the Federal Ministry of Communications. This Ministry, a forerunner of today’s NBC, was by this Act charged with allocation of wavelength, regulating output and station location, and ensuring compliance in line with the International Telecommunications Conventions.

The objectives of the various stations were the humdrum roles of educating, informing, and entertaining. Even though there was a National Communications Policy which drew inspiration from the Cultural Policy and Constitution, there has been no definite policy thrust for broadcasting in terms of grassroots cultural development (Opubor, 2005). This tendency is corroborated by a two-time (1977-1983, 1984-1986) Director-General of NTA, Vincent Maduka, when he regretted the general lack of form in TV broadcasting in Nigeria: “we have not attempted to use television for any purpose. We just ran it as a freewheeling medium, without any clear-cut objective . . . so any gain we have made is accidental” (Ukoha, 2000, p. 9). Television has been and remains a “manipulative one way” medium for governments both at the federal and state levels to achieve their short-sighted political ends (Opubor, 2005, p. 236).

With the creation of the Midwest region in 1963 and the 12 state structures in 1967, new TV stations were established in those states. This was given impetus with the proposed hosting of the Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977. Color TV transmission was introduced first at Benue Plateau Television, Jos, in July 1974. Other states’ TV stations took off accordingly: Rivers State TV (1974), North Western State TV, Sokoto (1976), Kano State TV (1976), and Kwara TV (1977). By the end of 1976, there were nine television stations in Nigeria. The First World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC ‘77) also made it possible for the television in Nigeria to acquire a Domestic Satellite System (DOMSAT) to improve transmission and networking that took effect in April 1976. Apart from this acquisition, funding improved, with the consequent acquisition of hard and software broadcast materials.

The establishment of the Broadcasting Organizations of Nigeria (BON) earlier in 1973 contributed to improve and establish more coordinated broadcasting. Formed as a child of necessity at the instance of Christopher Kolade, then Director-General of Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), the members, made up of all regional and state stations, wanted to present a common front at a West German organized seminar on broadcasting in Nigeria. The new organization now served as a platform for exchange of professional advice, programming, and programs, as well as personnel exchange, and so on. This also initiated the television network idea (Maduka, 1998, p. 113).

The Federal Government in April 1976 annexed state-owned TV stations that are now about 19 in number. This authoritarian move was to stem their proliferation, make for increased central coordination, and enhance program exchange and networking as well as promote unity. The first network program was telecasted on April 1, 1976 from NBC-TV in Lagos. Even though this system created its own editorial management problems due to diverse cultural differences, it forged some mythical ancestral fireside oneness among Nigerians through its network news, which, however, remains government-centered, manipulative, politically partisan, and serving more of the ends of leadership than that of the people (Nwuneli, 1985). This happens most often in momentous events like mass protests, strikes, or unpopular elections, which pitch the people against the government. Probably due to the authoritarian control of state-owned media through legislation, appointments of chief executive officers and funding are done by central and state governments.

The NTA was established in May 1977 through its enabling Decree No. 24 of 1977. According to Maduka (1998), the Decree gave NTA monopoly over broadcasting just like it was with Radio as it stated that “[t]he Authority shall, to the exclusion of any other broadcasting authority or any person in Nigeria, be responsible for television broadcasting” (p. 115). It was also established to carry out the duties of providing “public service in the interest of Nigeria, independent and impartial television broadcasting” for Nigeria, and emphasizing the unity in diversity of its cultures, but with a duty to the federal government. The Decree also provided for the zoning system with a zonal management structure. The six-zone structure was politically motivated to cater for the diverse national cultures and grassroots coverage and networking, with zonal headquarters in Lagos, Benin, Enugu, Kaduna, Maiduguri, and Sokoto. Section 11(1) specifically obliges NTA to broadcast government programs and announcements at its own expense and whenever requested by an “authorized officer,” in the public services of the Federation as may be declared by the President or governor of a state. This also includes a provision that the Authority shall broadcast materials from an “authorized public officer” during an emergency (Osinbajo & Fogam, 1991, p. 37). This provision makes television and radio the first port of call for power-hungry coup plotters in Nigeria as well as popular media for political abuse by the so-called democratic leadership.

This monopoly and centralization of broadcast service on NTA were unpopular with state governments who felt disempowered by the central government. The Constituent Assembly sitting in 1978 returned to the states the rights to own broadcast stations, enshrining it in the 1979 Constitution (Section 26(2)). The NTA was directed to be fair, objective,
and impartial at all times in matters of public and industrial controversies and other “competing ideas or interests, within the country” (Maduka, 1998, p. 119). The 1979 Constitution also provided for private broadcasting in the country even though this was not realized until 1992 by the Ibrahim Babangida administration, a move Shehu (2004) considers ironical as “it took the military to deregulate the broadcast industry” in Nigeria (p. 19).

However, the fairness and impartiality doctrine could not be realized by NTA due to continued undue bureaucratic interference, ethnic politics, and the role conflict in-built in Nigerian public service radio and television. In spite of NTA’s house codes on electioneering responsibilities, the Second Republic (1979-1983) pushed the NTA to the lowest depths of abuse as even NTA personnel rights were threatened with flagrant political interference and domination by the power centers. In the 1983 and 2003 elections, the media also acted irresponsibly in consort with the political and ruling party leadership of the time. Interestingly, Nigerian TV and other media acted as true watchdogs during the 2010 general elections, which validated Goodluck Jonathan’s presidency. State media performance in Nigeria, therefore, becomes a barometric test for the disposition of political leadership.

As a result of all these political manipulations, the states began to establish their state-owned stations. This was to counteract the NTA stations that had been installed in all the states of the federation, thus demonstrating Maduka’s (1998) observation that the reason for establishment of TV stations in Nigeria have always been politically motivated, far and removed from the prosessed inherited roles of education, information and entertainment that BBC public service broadcasting means. Meanwhile, the cyclical and reactive development in the media continued.

By 1983, with the abortion of the Second Republic, the economy had been vandalized and run-aground by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) political class; the cost of running NTA became too high and NTA was running at a deficit. The new interventionist Muhammadu Buhari government cut down on subvention, and NTA stations were asked to commercialize in line with the administration’s International Monetary Fund (IMF)–engineered austerity measures. This development took its toll on the quality of journalism and programming on television, thus proving as it were that “intense commercialization” could not cohabit with public service broadcasting (Maduka, 1998, p. 133). The Buhari administration promoted a national re-orientation through radio and television (through his War Against Indiscipline), promulgated the draconian Decrees 4 and 7 (Public Officers Protection Against False Accusation Decree and Detention of Persons Decree), and finally abrogated the NTA Zonal structure.

The latter action was based on the recommendations of the Christopher Kolade Committee set up in 1984 to consider rationalizing the NTA. Part of the committee’s recommendations was the two-tier public service model, whereby “state-owned television (was) left to carry on with the communication effort and mobilization at grassroots level while NTA concentrated . . . on national activities” (Maduka, 1998, p. 136). It is noteworthy that a management structure that encourages the development of professional policy and the government’s approach to media regulation reveals what that government expects from or how it views its citizenry as well as its attitude to power.

According to Lasode (1994), Ibrahim Babangida’s administration embarked on seven government policies, which directly influenced the development of Television (and radio) in Nigeria. These policies included the abrogation of Decree 2 of 1984, the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), Transition to Civil Rule Program, Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Reconstruction and Recovery (MAMSER), Commercialization (Decree 25, 1988, in Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1990), and later, the deregulation of broadcast industry.

These programs again needed the popular promotion and support from the media as a way of getting legitimacy and support from the people. Moreover, the Structural Adjustment Program, privatization and commercialization programs, were the “market driven” programs promoted by the IMF, which Babangida freely espoused in traditional Nigerian leadership’s deference to the dictates of Bretton Woods’ institutions.

Decree 25 of 1988 gave birth to the Technical Committee on Privatization and Commercialization (TCPC). Among the 90 agencies slated for the exercise were the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), NTA, and News Agency of Nigeria (NAN). In May 1990, Christopher Kolade again headed another Committee in conjunction with TCPC, to examine “modalities for commercialization of the NTA and exploring the feasibility of private radio and television stations” (Lasode, 1994, p. 43). The final recommendations of the Kolade/TCPC Committees resulted in the promulgation of Decree 38 of 1992, which established the NBC and gave it the enabling instruments to license and regulate operations of private broadcasting organizations in Nigeria.

The NBC Decree 38 of 1992 was later amended and strengthened by Amendment Act 55 of 1999, which expanded the NBC’s role to regulate all federal, state, and private stations; collect television and radio licenses on behalf of the broadcast organizations; and ensure qualitative manpower development in the industry. The argument for deregulated broadcasting industry was not unconnected with Babangida’s “politically correct” desire to please his western overlords, especially neo-liberalist USA’s Ronald Reagan and UK’s Margaret Thatcher whose economic policies planted the seeds of modern day economic globalization. The argument was that “a free market would become the new driving force for economic growth,” and satellite technology was going to
be the arrowhead of deregulation (Shehu, 2004, p. 19). In addition, the already thriving example of a deregulated print media in Nigeria provided a local paradigm to support the broadcast deregulation argument.

By 2004, there were more than 97 federal government-owned NTA stations, 32 state-owned stations, 14 private stations, three Direct-to-Home TV stations, two private direct satellite television (DSTV) stations, and 37 cable-multipoint microwave distribution system (MMDS) re-broadcasting stations in Nigeria, out of a combined total of about 350 radio and TV stations (NBC, 2004). Today, there are more than 166 TV stations (terrestrial and cable inclusive) in Nigeria.

**Public Service Television**

An evaluative narrative of the development of TV in Nigeria cannot be completed without TV’s public service function, especially as both NTA and states’ TV stations profess to be public service in orientation in view of their BBC ancestry. Public service broadcasting or the trusteeship model refers to the operation of broadcasting services in the interest of the public good. It was a creation that sought to diversify the airwaves as a way of providing access for other voices and views, which are excluded by a commercialized broadcast media. Public service broadcasting, considered as an invention of the British BBC, is designed to be a nonprofit broadcasting organization that is operated through public funds from taxation. Like the BBC, it is charged with the duty of providing “information, education and entertainment,” in the public interest, even though it becomes problematic to define the content of the term “public good” (Media Network on the Review of the Constitution, 1999, p. 30).

However, the trusteeship model of broadcasting aims at catering for a “pluralist society” with a commitment to the basic tenet that “radio and TV have specific civic functions and not simply ways of selling programming or commodities to the public” (Hutchinson, 1999, p. 156), while its programming is basically aimed at informing and enriching the listener and viewer. But to meet these public or social obligations, some basic conditions have to be met by the organization and the government that run this system on behalf of its people. These conditions include a secure method of finance, a strong broadcasting organization with freedom of programming, a commitment by the organization to universal coverage, and a regulated system (of management) designed to encourage the media practitioners to take both cultural and political risks (Hutchinson, 1999). Other reputable national public service television with a reasonable degree of public service content and structure include South Africa’s South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), India’s Doordarshan, Iran’s Press TV, Germany’s Deutschwelle TV (DWTV), and Canada’s Canadian Broadcasting Network (CBN).

Even though the Nigeria Broadcasting Service was fashioned after the BBC, and the many enabling acts, decrees, or edicts were to provide broadcasting services for the new plural entity called Nigeria, Maduka observes that the enabling laws of the NTA (1977) and FRCN (1978) did not give specific guidelines on the media’s involvement in the promotion of Nigerian cultural values and entertainment, but rather concentrated more on news, politics, and other controversial matters. To complicate this scenario, commercialization, politics, and its propagandist tendencies, systemic problems of state-appointed managements have posed great challenges on the NTA in the discharge of its functions in Nigeria. Because most media enabling laws in Nigeria were crafted during military regimes, government control of the nation’s public media is very visibly authoritarian (Media Network on the Review of the Constitution, 1999, p. 23).

In spite of this apparent debilitating scenario newly compounded by a deregulated broadcasting market, Yaya Abubakar (1998), erstwhile Director-General of Voice of Nigeria (VON), notes that public service broadcasting in Nigeria has played a remarkable positive role over the years:

> These stations bridge distances and cross language barriers, and mobilize rural masses for development. They also provide an exciting platform for political communication and debate; promote local culture; provide the medium for educational broadcasting, stimulate national dialogue and consensus; as well as providing the market place for locally produced goods and services. (p. 12)

The hyper-capitalism of media globalization has challenged the practice of public service broadcasting in its pure form. Beyond this, media globalization with its tradition of penetrative, market-driven trans-national media practice has like Buridan’s ass placed the management of public service broadcasting organizations between two opposite attractions: the nobility of public service broadcasting and the capitalistically attractive though relentless pull of market-driven broadcasting.

It is noteworthy that even the BBC, the grand model of public service broadcasting, has gone through this chequered threat of restructuring due to changing political dispositions, cut funding, and the new challenge of the digital information revolution. But the BBC management responded through innovative programming, creation of advertising-financed channels, and the commercial-driven BBC Worldwide, and like the Indian TV Doordarshan, created more local language stations all over the world.

The Indian Doordarshan example is a rather unique model of television broadcasting. The corporation, which also inherited the BBC model, was deliberately designed to serve not only the ends of state hierarchies but also for the upliftment of the people in furtherance of an economic nationalism, which the then Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Sushma Swaraj, called “swadeshi” (Fernandez, 2000, p. 624). Indian TV broadcasting system combines the best tradition of BBC public service and American market-driven broadcasting, but within a regional protectionist policy. According to Chin (2003) “even though transnational media pose a challenge to a national media system and culture, the
local state still plays a crucial role in regulating domestic cultural policies and guiding the development of broadcasting” (p. 17). This goes further to show that developing economies can and should tailor their media systems to fit their development contexts.

The South African SABC picture shows an equally competitive television environment that has leap-frogged into the Information Technology Age as though to make up for the lost years of apartheid. The liberalism and commercialism that drive the independent cable/satellite and terrestrial broadcasting sectors is equally matched with a determined, policed, multi-channel national public service broadcaster (SABC-TV). The software and content infiltration from the West and its consequent dissemination over the African continent appear to be taken for granted by the South African TV regulators and managers, because of the belief that South Africa’s integration into the world economy will strengthen her international bargaining power, even at the expense of weaker African countries. In essence, therefore, the type of broadcasting system a nation prefers would depend on what function is expected of the media as well as the nation’s economic and cultural orientation.

Global Influences and TV Programming in Nigeria

Schupman identifies the threefold purpose of broadcasting to be the “maintenance, extension and transmission of a culture”; even though broadcasting concerns itself with emergent values, it “must concern itself even more with those transmitted values without which no society can achieve continuity and stability” (Peigh, 1979, p. 9). Programming is the art of planning, producing, promoting, and placement of a program package for broadcast in a broadcasting station. It involves the planning and identification of values and the packaging and transmission of those values to a critical audience. Unlike production per se, programming is a cardinal management function in any television establishment, even though the actual spade work is done by the producer who is a line person in the establishment. A program, which is the end product of programming, according to the NBC Code is a unified presentation on radio, television, or cable retransmission that occupies a distinct period with a beginning and an end (2002).

The evolution of programming in the Nigerian broadcasting industry, like the broadcasting organizations themselves, has a chequered history. From early 1960s when programs were wholly imported, and were “equally divided between local productions and foreign films . . . for the so-called elite” (Lasode, 1994, p. 157), television broadcasting programming has evolved through a systematic “Nigerianization” orientation to the programming boom by the close of the 20th century. Farounbi notes that television at this stage could not be said to be serving any definable national interest . . . (as) over 80 percent of the total programmes (which stood at twenty-one hours per week) were foreign; with the remaining 20 percent being news bulletins, interviews and a few school programmes. (Lasode, 1994, p. 159)

The programming philosophy and objectives have also evolved accordingly from pure entertainment in the 1960s through national self-identity and reconciliation of the many years of military politics and civil war, through the political ego-massaging of civilian democratic experiments, to the present market-driven deregulated democracy of the new millennium. Maduka notes the “professionalism” of the 1990s but bewails the endangered species of serious developmental programming driven under by commercialized broadcasting. “The trend with independents (producers),” he says, “permeates of freshness, competition and merit. It is also opening up the medium to anyone who has a claim,” adding that it is “clearly a movement in the direction of democratization” (Lasode, 1994, p. 174).

Programming for any effective developmental broadcasting is a painstaking management process, which requires research into media habits, socio-statistics, and the cultural environment of the target niche audience, as well as their opinions and biases concerning the content of the communication. This process becomes necessary if a two-way collaborative communication is desired, a situation where “everyone generates information (and) everyone receives information” away from the prevalent medium abuse where political leaders promote a “manipulative one way form of communication” in clear breach of the NBC Code stipulations and the political leaders’ oaths of office. This abuse is most prevalent among state-owned stations, which are invariably treated as extensions of the states’ Ministries of Information and Public Relations, and not public establishments kept alive by tax-payers’ money (cf. “The Good, the Bad & the Bungling,” 2003; “Whose Voices, Their Master’s or the Peoples?” 2003). It is interesting to note that to date the January 2012 mass protests against Goodluck Jonathan government’s removal of petroleum subsidy, NTA and state TV were clearly on the side of government: spreading propaganda, under-reporting, misreporting events, or running down labor and civil rights personalities, while the private stations like African Independent Television (AIT) and Channels TV provided more balanced stories to the admiration of audiences. Even the blood-letting activities of the Islamist group Boko Haram are hardly reported by public TV in Nigeria; all these in the name of what state media would call developmental journalism.

Maduka notices that even though broadcasting laws in Nigeria are modeled after state controlled public trusteeship model, the stations’ programming still gets dominated by news, politics, and other controversial matters with little
attention to Nigerian cultures, values, and indigenous entertainment, concluding that over the years, television has been run “as a free-wheeling medium, without any clear-cut objectives” (Ukoha, 2000, p. 9). This lack of clear-cut policy and programming direction stands out when one compares NTA with public service stations like Iran’s Press TV and India’s Doordarshan, which appear more objective in their news reporting.

Despite increased programming and the presence of independent production, commercialization and market-driven media altered the content of local programming, abolished and re-introduced the former zonal administrative structures, brought about rationalization and multi-skilling in NTA and other TV stations. With deregulation and the entry of private broadcasters, the motives for most private or some public licensees have become more commercial, political, and often personal. One clearly sees a predominance of commercial and pure-entertainment programs over development programs that have local cultural relevance. Even a public service network like NTA has come under great stress for the above reason. While NTA headquarters in Abuja and Lagos do fairly well, network stations are left to their wits to fill up airtime with cheap commercial and tele-evangelical programs without consideration for the commercial viability of their local environments. Where there is local production, the stations design their programs after western global “formats that sell” like game-shows, pure entertainment and so-called actuality programs that ape the Big Brother phenomenon. This tendency negatively affects the creativity of well-meaning local producers and artists who still bother about local cultural content beyond postmodern market-oriented programming (cf. Betiang, 2009).

In the Nigerian broadcasting environment, the following factors, events, and happenings have been contributory to shaping the development of television form and programming since its inception in 1959.

- Like South Africa’s SABC and India’s Doordarshan, the beginning of broadcasting in these colonial outposts grew out of the need for imperial Britain (BBC) to connect with its colonies abroad. This expansion and program syndication were achieved through a redistribution or “wire service” located at the “bridgehead” of the colony in Lagos in the case of Nigeria.
- The formation of the Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria (BON) in 1972 facilitated subsequent networking, which improved programming quality, sharing of management, and professional techniques (Maduka, 1998). This also applies to later deregulation days’ networking like the defunct State-Owned Broadcasting Organizations of Nigeria (SOBON) and the many independent TV and radio production guilds.
- The nation’s hosting of international festivals like the All Africa Games in 1973, as well as All Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC ’77), the Under-18 World Cup in 1999, Commonwealth Games (COJA) 2003, and the Under-17 World Cup in 2009 somehow stimulated the content of TV broadcasting industry. The impact on TV form and programming came through corporate sponsorship and local funding for infrastructural upgrading/development in the media houses to enhance competence and coverage, as well as skills sharing and transfer between national and international content producers. The aborted Miss World Beauty Pageant in 2002 due to Muslim religious riots in Northern Nigeria also produced similar multiplier benefits because some media establishments were upgraded to global standards to meet the challenge of providing coverage for the beauty contest. Maduka (1998) considers this phenomenon as a symbiotic growth between the arts, sports, and the broadcast media.
- There has been some form of collaboration between the TV in Nigeria and foreign media and development organizations and governments. Some of these include the German Deutschwelle TV, former West German government, Mitchell Beazley Television, and Greater Washington Educational Television Association (NETA). Other influences and collaborations include Commonwealth Broadcasting Organization, BBC-World Service Trust, Population Communication International (PCI)/Media Impact, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United States’ Agency for International Development (USAID), Planned Parenthood Federation (PPFN), Department for International Development (DFID), and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), as well as the McArthur Foundation, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Aid (UNAID), Global HIV/AIDS Initiative in Nigeria (GHAIN), European Union-Support for Reforming Institutions Program (EU/SRIP), and the Australian High Commission. These organizations, through program sponsorship and collaboration, have contributed to program output and quality as well as empowered local content providers through training, man power development using collaborative production and donation of broadcast equipment. While one may want to consider these foreign interventions with some sense of gratitude, it is also disconcerting that sometimes, these foreign bodies use the local media to propagate their national/cultural ideologies/hegemonies and fill up the gap created by the irresponsibility of local/national governments with foreign propaganda programming.
- Television has been part and parcel of propaganda and development programming in Nigeria. The many programs that administrations have used to legitimize and launder their images include Ethical Revolution, War Against Indiscipline, Green Revolution, Mass
Mobilization for Social and Economic Reconstruction, Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI), National Directorate on Employment (NDE), Rebranding Nigeria Campaign, and National Orientation Agency/Campaign. Others include Women Trafficking and Child Labor Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF), Subsidy Re-Investment Program (SURE-P), and of course what has become the goldmine of HIV/AIDS advocacy. Because of their intrinsic government propaganda content, these programs attract very high budgets but whose trickle down effects on the broadcast media remain significant. The popular program formats that these government propaganda programs engender have remained some kind of contribution to the programming history of television in Nigeria.

- There are also programs and television festivals that have gingered the development of programming and production on Nigerian television. Through sheer managerial ingenuity, NTA network and BON initiated and have continued to organize arts and television festivals that have become avenues for talent hunts and promotion of new program formats and creativity among content providers. Such festivals include Festival of Plays (begun in 1965), Television Festival (Telefest, first in 1979), and subsequently Nigerian Festival of Television Programs, which have been held annually since 1985. Private broadcasters have also made their contribution. The local BOB-TV Program Expo among Nigerian universities’ media departments have made significant impact on local content generation in the television industry. Today, the national Abuja Cultural Carnival and the famous Carnival Calabar have not only engendered the development of the performing/promenade arts in Nigeria but have also provided the raw materials for TV programming. This new-look form of carnival culture is however not indigenous to Nigeria. The Carnival Calabar for instance has a technical relationship with Trinidad & Tobago. There are also other sponsored big-budget, long-running reality shows like the “Gulder Ultimate Search” and the “Maltina Dance All” TV shows sponsored by Nigerian Breweries, Plc. The “Star Quest” music talent hunt has also produced new music stars as well as cloned content for TV programming in Nigeria.

With the deregulation of broadcasting in Nigeria, the birth of independent producers has enriched programming and content production in the industry. This development would not have come without the in-house standards of professionalism and on-the-job training that forms part of the personnel development policy of government operated public service television stations, especially NTA and FRCN. The Television College at Jos, which has currently been upgraded to a degree awarding institution (with its Radio Nigeria training corollary in Lagos) has made significant input to the broadcast industry. The public service tradition of training and retiring staff without consideration for indispensability has seen many a trained personnel out of job but who have joined the independent producers’ movement. In addition, the now fashionable downsizing and rightsizing in 21st century media globalization, and the poor working civil service conditions invoked on broadcasters, have seen increased motility of talent among producers who have joined the army of earlier brain-drained names like Laolu Oguniyi, Jab Adu, Lola Fanikayode, Eddie Ogbonna, state-murdered Ken Saro Wiwa and Mabel Oboh, etc. It may not be far from the truth that most producers who have now spawned new private stations and independent production companies are products of these public service mother stations.

This tendency has also seen the formation of trade guilds like the Independent Television Producers Association of Nigeria (ITPAN), and Frontline Independent Television Association of Nigeria (FITRAN). The advent of deregulated broadcasting has also brought about the formation of other guilds like the Motion Pictures Practitioners Council of Nigeria (MPPCN) with all its other composite guilds. The many productions of these guilds have no doubt enriched local content creation in television broadcasting in Nigeria; as well as encouraged professionalism, standardization, networking and professional discipline. However, this may not be said of return-on-talent for their members in view of the rampant acquisition of programmes’ composite rights by global cable companies and the prevalence of digital technologies, which have encouraged piracy of local creative output. Cheap pirated DVDs contain as many as twenty home movies; in the same way as cable TV stations float whole programmes like “Africa Magic,” Nollywood, etc, which play Nigerian movies continually round the clock, with little returns-on-talents at home.

- Despite shortcomings that border on cultural imperialism, deregulation/commercialization of television broadcasting (handmaids of media globalization) has also affected Nigerian television content creation. It will be recalled that following Christopher Kolade’s report on commercialization in 1987, the Babangida regime drastically reduced government subvention and expenditure by 40%. Earlier in 1984, 20 FRCN stations had been shut down, while the rest, NTA stations and state-owned stations, started commercial drives. This in a way made the stations to become for the first time more innovative in programming, even as it signaled the death-wish for public service broadcasting. Profit motive became privileged over public service as commercial programming increased through the sale of airtime, spots, sponsorships, and
commercial news coverage. In spite of all these, television at both national and state levels has remained under the bureaucracy of the Ministry of Information and Culture.

- New developments in satellite communication technology and media globalization have also affected TV programming and production. This phenomenon has made it possible for broadcasting organizations, especially for satellite and cable re-broadcasting stations, to access the stream of programming on global channels. These signals are re-broadcast to subscribers, and even on terrestrial channels owned by state/government. Sophos argues that with the deregulated media of the 1980s, new networks evolved that were “designed to provide subscribing stations with twenty-four hour a day programming formats delivered in high fidelity stereo via satellite”. One such was erstwhile South African content provider TV-Africa, whose activities were promptly arrested by NBC in view of the many illegalities in their contractual operations with Nigerian TV stations. Other commonly syndicated global and regional transnational media content providers include BBC World, DW-TV, Cable News Network (CNN), FOX TV, and British Satellite TV. Today, MultiChoice/MNet’s Channel-O and local content music providers: Nigezee and Proudly African dominate the airwaves with foreign and local clones of western hip-hop culture.

In the same way as these digitized media facilitate content distribution, the problem of piracy and monitoring have also quadrupled. This development in digital technology has in some way also spawned the pervasive Big Brother template of reality shows, where like the American “McDonalization” of junk fast food, the Big Brother format has become a global franchise; a practice that promotes a tradition whereby the mass medium of television has been reduced to a cultural apparatus for the mass production of what Turner calls “celetoids,” defined as the studio production of celebrities from “ordinary people” outside the circle of the “famous” (2006).

- The introduction and popularization of the global system of mobile telephony and its convergence in Internet and other computer-mediated communication have also influenced content generation and packaging in the Nigerian television industry. Multi-media production and interactive two-way broadcasting have been enhanced even though with mixed consequences. The evolution of citizenship journalism through social media networks, using mobile handheld devices, has in some ways enriched broadcast content with less gatekeeping and monitoring. While this trend has frustrated state-owned media like NTA and others who traditionally tailor news stories to suit their paymasters, the masses’ participation and right to know and talk-back have been strengthened. While interactive programming on both radio and TV becomes commonly abused, down-loading and uploading of satellite/Internet media fare have also become common, as well as increased cloning of cheap commercial-oriented formats. This scenario has created an ongoing discourse in media chat rooms about media democratization and the need for responsible journalism.

The consequences of the foregoing on TV programming and production are obvious in the increased number of independent producers, increased number of television stations, increased AM-broadcasting with ever increasing number and popularity of telethon programs and programming. There is also increased and more balanced news reporting on public service NTA due to the influx of competing private broadcasters who have liberated Nigerians from the surfeit of “government say so news,” and unfair and non-balanced news reporting (Uyo, 2000, p. 24). This credit hardly extends to “state-owned” public TV stations who still degradingly abuse these stations as propaganda outfits for state governors and ruling parties much to the alienation of the citizenry. But Salihu (2002), an NBC broadcast monitor, concludes that “essentially, however, whether privately or government-owned, broadcasting is still largely its master’s voice . . . as the question of true independence is in fact the biggest challenge before Nigerian broadcasting today” (p. 154). Moreover, TV screens have continued to pander to western consumerist values, while entertainment has “surrendered more or less to foreign programmes that have little or no redeeming values as far as our culture is concerned” (Uyo, 2000, p. 25). There appears to be a dearth of indigenous comedy on our TV stations and the emergence of some unholy marriage between TV and home videos (VHS), which have tended to dwell more on occultism and superstition with melodramatic plots on the ill-informed belief that that is what the audiences want. TV stations and content providers have failed to understand that the content provider creates and deserves the audiences they have through the mass pacification process.

TV programming and production have been besieged by a myriad of interlocking problems. From all indications, there is an abundance of imaginative program producers in Nigeria today, but these also must depend on the “simultaneous availability of performing, writing and production talent and production facilities” (Akpan, 1994, p. 87). Such facilities include what Nigerian producers go to South Africa to access like the (Sasani) studios, equipment, and technical crews, as well as Nigeria’s God-given variegated scenery from the Atlantic coast to the Sahara desert, and the multiple traditions and colorful costumes of 400 ethnic cultures.

Other challenges include the paucity of script-writers and informed directors who are not necessarily market- but
art-driven, and lack of corporate sponsorship. There is also the preponderance of foreign and free-to-air cable tele-evangelical programs, which get aired with the false assumption that they are free-to-air, but which actually carry heavily embedded western consumerist values that socialize Nigerians the wrong way. The low motivation of government-employed TV producers and hard-to-come-by sponsorship encourage this over-dependence on foreign programs that are of course cheaper and easier to acquire than local culturally relevant productions.

The continued attachment of federal/state-owned TV stations to Ministries of Information constitutes a cog in the smooth functioning of stations’ programming and production. The creative artist cannot achieve professionalism with the strictures of civil service whose goals are not those of creative culture. The bureaucracy that guides approvals, unpredictability and changes in appointments and funding create discontinuity in programming. Other complications of this situation include politicization of personnel recruitment and remuneration as well as equipment acquisition. Ministries’ boardrooms recruit staff and personnel and acquire equipment on behalf of stations; most of which turn out to be unusable. The civil service attachment has also contributed to the high motility of staff from public stations to the private ones (who do not provide security of tenure anyway). Incidentally, the silver lining behind this staff motility phenomenon is that public stations have become training grounds for the industry as most of the staff in private stations and independent markets passed through these public stations. This can be considered as some kind of silent fulfillment of the public service personnel development calling of public TV in Nigeria.

Other Local Impacts

Even though TV “bends blurs and blends” (apologies to Gerbner), its impact is relative. It is obvious from the foregoing narrative of TV’s history in Nigeria that television has made various prismatic impacts because there are different media environments. Beyond the multiplication of stations, which the global phenomenon of deregulation has engendered, one doubts whether such fragmentation has equaled access to media for the alienated rural dwellers that neither have electricity to watch TV nor even get the signal. Consequently, well-placed persons in both urban and rural areas resort to patronizing satellite TV as terrestrial TV is out of reach or nonexistent; Nigeria provides the biggest market for cable television regional corporations like Multichoice.

On the other hand, urban or metropolitan areas are suffused with TV stations, which fight and glut public space for niche audiences. But what is the content that they trade with advertisers for these populations in the developing world? Advertising admittedly provides the cash for the stations. But what about the ostensible or subliminal values that advertising carries? This is why arrowheads of media globalization shop for cultural converts to sell western consumerist and cultural values. A 2009 study by this author shows the ignorance or unpreparedness of our media managers to manage media globalization due principally to the managers’ inclination to see the world from the perspective of their pay-masters, who obviously are in business to make money. Government in Nigeria perceives globalization as an elixir of development without its post-industrial imperialism with all its baggage (cf. Betiang, 2009). At the moment, stations nationwide are struggling to digitize to meet global media 2015 digital migration standards which the country cannot input into but must comply, as nations must live or die by global standards.

From inception in Nigeria, TV has existed for the subversive use of political leadership against the people it pretends to represent. NTA and public service stations in the states that are terrestrial and actually have grassroots coverage often behave like hegemonic extensions of government. The private stations in the bid to win the people over to themselves become sensational, consumerist, and nucleating around high-population urban zones. Their adventurous programming accounts for the high rate of NBC breaches committed by these stations (Udekwu, 2002). Walter Ofonagoro (2002), former NTA’s DG and Minister of Information rightly noted that “in Nigeria, there is a strong co-relation between the posture of those in control of the media and the professional performance of their workers” (p. 26).

While the economic impact cannot be quantified in an article of this scope, one can look at it from the point of view of the global media players, the regional media representatives, the public service stations, and the private-owned stations. Because one cannot be privy to their annual statements of accounts, it can only be said that TV broadcasting is a capital intensive venture, which one dares say has capital intensive returns, especially in this information age where information is power. The cost of public TV cannot be quantified. For instance, what is the real cost or opportunity cost of installing and running three politically motivated NTA stations littered in almost each of the 90 senatorial districts of the country? The drain on the economy in terms of imported broadcast software, hardware, and overheads can only be imagined.

Culturally relevant local programs like Village Headmaster, Ichoku, Samanja, Mirror in the Sun, Cock Crow at Dawn, Nigerian Dances, and Food Basket, Master Mind, Adio Family, and Checkmate that ruled the airwaves have disappeared. The reasons are not unconnected to the ever-present commercialization drive, now cheaper foreign programs that have come with satellite and media digitization, the dearth of cultural-minded sponsors and banks that do not understand the need to provide credit facilities for local content production; and probably, the ever-present Nigerian home video. This also invites one to question as to what real cultural values our Nigerian TV stations promote beyond materialism, consumerism, and magic quick-fix methods of
making money which inundate Nigerian airwaves. Neo-Pentecostal material-minded pastors preach on open airwaves on prosperity that amounts to sanctification of crime; a phenomenon that was not there in the early days of TV. The family with its values has been sacrificed on the altar of consumerist-minded television (cf. Didigu, 2002).

The real impact of TV can therefore be perceived if broadcast managers and content providers contemplate the manner of children and future they hope to create through TV programming. This tendency is worsened by the paucity of community media, which have the potentialities to counterbalance these new consumerist values and political-economic hegemonies. Even though the family belt is being re-introduced on NTA, not much is done about other purveyors of TV content. The TV content monitor in contemporary Nigeria needs to broaden his/her periscope to go beyond mere classification and exhibition, because the content that media globalization technology avails through the airwaves and the open market needs re-consideration.

Conclusion

This critical, rather celebratory view of 50 years of TV in Nigeria examined its brief history, public service dimension and programming and the subtle “modernizing” influences that have aided its development. These influences and experiences of some public TV managers show how little of deliberate developmental policy there is in public TV broadcasting and its management. It also shows how much the Industry has relied on developing itself through reactive responses to global challenges and prompting from international corporate media, international NGOs, and other extra-governmental organizations. There is the need to develop the hardware or form of TV in Nigeria along with the issues of content. Dependency theorists suggest that one major way of throwing off this syndrome is to “have some self-sufficiency in the realm of information, ideas and culture” (McQuail, 2010, p. 255). This will check our traditional national dependence on outsiders’ prompting for both form and content. This is because the new convergent TV promises potentialities for more damaging reconfiguration of our ethnic and national cultures and psyches through its new soft imperialism.

While the drive for independent production has geared up in recent times, independent content producers should have better ways of exhibiting their works other than the current practice where regional cable providers buy up their works and rights. Government can persuade the Committee of Bankers to include the culture industries in their Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Schemes (SMIES), while we await the emergence of culture-dedicated banks in the country.

Government could also strive to achieve universal access to TV media through encouraging educational and public service broadcasting. It is not enough to expand the industry along commercially determined lines. Instead of fragmentation of stations, public service stations could establish dedicated channels, like the South African SABC, which may be wholly commercial, news, and entertainment, indigenous languages to make for easier management and reach within a competitive media environment. A deliberate policy on the management of globalizing media, in the manner of India’s Doordarshan, could also provide a policy direction for the industry.

Finally, the need to fully latch into the Internet web-casting age is overdue. Content production and distribution should begin to explore cyberspace as another platform for conquest and content dissemination. While this will engender the acquisition of digital literacy, and digital policing on the part of monitors, it will also expand media access. Above all, in the midst of this media quagmire, media advocates and activists, as well as departments of theatre and media studies should begin to include media literacy and social media practice and management in their curricula as a way of strengthening viewers against local/global subliminal manipulations of television broadcasting hegemonies.

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