

Global Media and Cultural Domination: Strategies for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) for Arica

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Abstract

The thrust of this paper is to assess the efficacy of establishing African Global Media channel to strike a balance in communication between Africa and the rest of the world. This paper is a reaction to the imbalance in communication flow as engineered by the global media. Global media has contributed greatly to cultural domination in Africa by Europe and the Western world. These channels of communication such as), Cable News Network (CNN), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBQ, DeutseWelle Television (DWTV) including a host of other transnational print media, transmit programmes with cultural values from Europe and America to Africa. Consequently local African media and their attempts to preserve African culture are frustrated. This paper therefore recommends African governments' committed investment in local industrialization, re-structuring information and communication industries to serve African developmental purposes and the establishment of a unified African Global Media Channels.

Introduction

Political, economic and socio-cultural activities of African states are regulated by Europe, America and some developed nations in Asia like Japan and China. By this development, some African countries, famously referred to as "third world" nations among other countries in North America and Eastern Asia, occupy a peripheral position on the world global ladder while the developed countries remain at the apex. Reasons for Africa's underdevelopment and the development of Europe cannot be overemphasized. Rodney (1972), in his book; *How Europe Under-developed Africa*, clearly analyzes the tactics employed by the Western world to subdue the growth and development of African economy.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the Afro-European contact witnessed the beginning of cultural erosion in Africa and marked the commencement of cultural domination by the European powers as well. The advent of the Europeans on the shores of Africa appears to have been instigated by the quest for raw materials to feed the growing industries in Europe during the period of industrial revolution around the 16th Century. This was followed by the traumatic exportation of slaves from Africa, the search for markets and later the urge by the European powers to colonize the world under the guise of introduction of western education and religion through the missionary activities. Following the colonization of African nations by the western countries, it is clear that foreign cultures may have been transmitted to Africans in all ramifications. This of course marked the beginning of Africa's journey to the global world.

Kappelman (2001:1) attributes the term *global village* to Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan in the early 1960s, predicted the intensification of the world community into its present expression. The present expression of the world community is evident in the state of transformation of local or regional phenomena into global ones; the process by which people of the world are unified into a single society and functioning together. Toyo (2000:36)

describes this process as globalization, which he views as a strategy by developed nation to hold the under-developed under subjugation.

The global media have been discovered to be viable agents of globalization. By definition Saugstad (2000:1) states that global media are international channels of communication that caught across borders of the nations in the world with their messages. He opines that the global media are contributing to the domination of African culture by foreign cultures. Examples of this global media include Cable News Network (CNN), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), DeutseWelle Television (DWTv) and other satellite radio and television stations. International magazine like *Turns* is in the print category. Ordinarily, globalization would not have been a problematic discourse if information, education and entertainment programmes emanated not only from the Western countries but also from the African countries.

The problem of this discourse therefore is that the technological advancement of the Western countries has made information and communication of their cultures possible to Africans without the Africans having the opportunity to possess all equivalent capacity of media channels ' to communicate the least of their cultures. The need for a redress of this ugly trend of one-way flow of information gave rise to the formation of the concept of "New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The fundamental objective of NWICO is to evolve possible ways of re-directing the current world information and communication order especially to suit the third world countries. The global media are also to participate in this order. It is in the light of the foregoing that this paper seeks to evolve strategies for new world information andcommunications order for Africans.

Cultural domination in Africa

Culture is a term that is used in general terms especially associated with the way of life of people within a geographical region. The Nigerian cultural policy (1979:33) has

categorized culture into material and non-material forms. The former refers to physical items such as beads, bracelets, and cloths that are associated with a group of persons, while non-material culture refers to the ideals, norms, and values of a given people. Said (1994:12) defines culture as all those practices, like the arts of description, communication and representation That have relative autonomy from' the economic, social and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims in pleasure. Broom and Selznick (1968:50) on the other hand define culture as social heritage which includes all the knowledge, beliefs, customs and skills that 'are available to thememberof a society.

Given the colonial and neo-colonial experiences" of African nation, it is valid to assert that most cultural practices of Africans today are foreign. Citing an African (Gold Coast) nationalist, CaselyHayford (1992), Rodney (1972:40) posits that "before even the British came into relations with our people, we were a developed people having our own ideas and government. However, the Afro-European contact, formerly through colonialism and now through" global- media -has altered every aspect of the African culture. For example, the cloths we wear to work and the common songs on the lips of an average Nigerian are hardly reflective of African cultures.

Whereas the Western cultures adopted by Africans may not be harmful all the way, such cultures are very expensive to adapt. The high cost of adaptation is perhaps the sole factor behind most of the problems in Africa. Corruption and all sorts of malpractices are measures that citizens of the Third World nations adopt to stay afloat and maintain a high and cozy standard of living. The foreign cultures are no doubt alien to African cultures, yet Africans' zeal to adopt every western culture grows daily. Foreign cultures have therefore displaced most African cultures and sub-cultures. From Rodney's analysis in his book *Hon.' Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (op cit), the domination of African cultures did not begin as an accidental process. It was carefully planned and nurtured by the European and other "super

powers" of the western world through exploration, intervention, colonialism and neo-colonialism. The long term plan was designed to subject the undeveloped nations of the Third World to Europe and other developed nations in the West.

The Afro-European relationship was ignited by several factors among which are the need and search for new markets in Africa, and the geometrical evolvement of the Industries in Great Britain and other parts of Europe such as France, Germany and Italy, the search for raw materials and the quest for the initiation of missionary activities including Western education. Fafunwa (1987:7) holds that African traditional education was primarily embedded in the African cultures and formalized in physical training and development of African children's talent skills. The development of character such as teaching the child how to gather refuse, how to respect elders and vocational training in areas of fishing, weaving and so on were the core of African education. Community participation in trades and crafts and Agricultural education were also part of it. Immorality, nudity, and disrespect for elders, insults, theft, and fornication among others according to Fafunwa (op cit) were forbidden.

The above examples attract an inevitable question on the efficacy of the African cultures, African traditional education and African religions. To state the least, Evans and Newnham (1998:79) hold that African cultures were and are still very effective and much valued by the "faithful," yet they have been dominated and the domination was made possible by colonialism which is a variety of imperialism that involves the acquisition of foreign territories, the maintenance of rule over a subordinate population and the separation of the ruling group from the subject population. The relationship between the 'mother country' and the colony is usually exploitive. Historically, foreign powers that have dominated African countries are European powers such as Portugal, Spain, Holland, Britain and France. These were joined later by Belgium, Germany, Italy, the United States, Japan and Russia. Toyo (2000:35-36) states that:

The domination of African cultures has" been made possible and sustained by several factors such as the sluggishness of the third world economies, the rebuilding of new technologies in 1970 by the industrial powers of Western Europe and Japan, development of new technologies such as computers, electronics, artificial fiber and biotechnology, sudden involvement of all the trio-industrialists — USA, Western Europe and Japan in the world of electronic and information age, the rise of very large transnational firms in the USA, Western Europe and Japan, the financial edge of most transnational companies offer African governments and the great depression setting in around 1970 and its intensification after 1980.

From the foregoing, African cultures still remain dominated because they fall under the category of non-industrialized capitalist states. The struggle by the imperialists and highly industrialized nations to preside over the nature of world culture or "global culture" is an issue in the concept of globalization. The issue is further worsened by the continuous and unrestricted transmission of foreign cultures to Africa through the global media.

Global Media Dimensions

Ike (2005:94), reiterates that the word "global" is a derivation from the term global village which was a concept first articulated by Canadian communication theorist, Marshal McLuhan. The term suggests that we live in a world in which everyone can share simultaneous experience because of advances in telecommunication technology. The global media, according to Ike (op cit) is a term that refers to international channels of communication that transmit messages or signals from originating countries across the borders to different nations at the same time. Famous among the global media stations are the Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) stations

signals transmitted through Digital Satellite Television (DS'TH⁷)- McChesney (2008: i) opines that the global media are contentiously viewed as global commercial system dominated by a small number of super-powerful; mostly L S based transnational media Corporation.

Global media stations have different connotations from global media systems. Intact, global media stations effect their transmissions through global media systems. Global media systems have digitalixed communications through satellites, fax machines and computer networks. Hirst and Thompson (1999:268), have shared the opinion that global media systems have rendered the licensing and control of information media by the state all but impossible. Thus, global media merely undermine ideological dictatorship and also subvert all attempts to preserve cultural homogeneity by state force. The effects of global media are clearly captured by Hirst and Thompson (1999:226) thus:

Modern Communication? Form the basis for an International civil society, people who share interests and associations across borders. The international media also make possible a set of cosmopolitan cultures, elite and popular, scientific and artistic, linked through the medium of English as a universal rather than a national language. Such cultures from watching Torn and Jerry cartoons on TV to physicists gossiping on e-mail are inevitably international.

Wikipedia online (2009:1) states that, the Cable News Network, commonly referred to by its initials CNN, is a major news cable television network founded in 1980 by Ted Turner as a division of the Turner Broadcasting System. CNN introduced the idea of 24-hour television news coverage and has combined branded networks and services that are available to more than 1.5 billion people in over 212 countries and territories. The network has more than 900 affiliated local stations and several regional and foreign-language networks around the world. It runs among its programmes, "Inside Africa", which is a half-hour current affairs weekly programme that provides global viewers with an inside look at political, economic, social and

cultural affairs and trends in Africa. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is another global media station that operates several television networks, television stations and produces a large number of its own programmes in-house, forming one of the world's largest television production companies. The Corporation, broadcasts globally on television, radio and the internet with a stated mission "to inform", "to educate" and "to entertain".

It is no longer strange that the global media are agents of cultural domination in Africa. They are famous and known for dictating the cultural directions of the globe by transmitting adverts about products from the originating country. Products such as Coca-cola, Pepsi and fast foods such as UAC products are advertised through local and global media. lyorza (2009:30), states that the global media co-modify all aspects of the ideal and material cultures of their host nations through other various programmes such as news, music and dances. By these programmes, the manners of dressing, talking, singing, dancing, eating, walking and general attitudes of people from the developed countries of the West are portrayed. While western cultures are reinforced in these programmes, the African culture is suppressed because Africans prefer the foreign alternatives.

Consequently, Belch and Belch (2001:678) hold that cultural problems have emerged and constituted great threats to the success of global advertising. Customs, tastes, attitudes, lifestyles, values and ethical/moral standards of the audience in the third world countries often make it difficult for advertisers to penetrate market in Africa. Most multinational companies have even employed appropriate strategies through competent advertising agencies to tackle the global media transmission challenges. Other advertisers find it difficult to penetrate certain sub-regions of the third world nations due to cultural multiplicity and differences. Belch and Belch (op cit) state, for example that Pepsodent Toothpaste advert sponsored by an American multinational was unsuccessful in Southeast Asia because it promised white teeth to a culture where black and yellow teeth are symbols of prestige. In

Mecca, alcohol and pork cannot be advertised and nudity or global adverts with pictures of anything sacred such as images of a cross are forbidden.

Fully aware of these challenges in the global media, most stations have persisted in finding penetrative strategies to communicate with their audiences across the globe. The arrival of the BBC 2 for instance allowed the BBC also to make programmes for minority interests in drama, documentations, current affairs, entertainment and sports. Examples include "Claudius", "Civilisation", "Tonight" "Monty Python's Flying Circus" and "Pot Black". The export of BBC programmes, the BBC World Service and BBC World have also been experienced world-wide. Many scholars have capitalized on the fact that as the third world experience information flow from the western countries, so the western global media experience change from the Third World nations.

The summary of global media dimensions holds that satellites and other global media carrying television signals as well as foreign newspapers, magazines and books now enable Nigerians or Africans to be exposed regularly to a wide range of cultural stimuli which influence the modes of behaviour and their culture generally. Before now, the situation has been common worldwide. Rothkopt (2000:446) states that Russian viewers are hooked on Latin soap operas, and Middle Eastern leaders while African elites prefer CNN as a prime source for even local news. The Internet is an increasingly global phenomenon with active development underway on even' continent, More foreign newspapers and magazines have flocked the African market and the United States of America dominates this global traffic in information and ideas. Consequently, Rothkopt (op cit) asserts that American music, American movies, American television and American software are so dominant, so sought after, and so visible that they are now available literally everywhere on earth. They influence the tastes, lives and aspirations of virtually every nation. In some countries, they are viewed

as corrupting and antagonizing subcultures of the Third World countries. This imbalance has instigated a need for a re-direction of a new world information and communications order.

New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO)

The influx of antagonistic cultural elements commodified and transmitted directly or indirectly and the general problems of reporting Africa internationally as well as the rest of the Third World gave rise to the conception of NWICO. Mogeckwu (1991:229) claims that the problem of reporting Africa is not due to insufficient news about Africa but due to essentially the angle of news stories and absence of facilities. Mogeckwu (op cit) therefore states that although Africa is reported internationally, the reports always portray a very poor image of the continent which is likely to reinforce the negative stereotypes about Africans. This information and communication order fails to address the positive and cultural potentials of Africa. The contention is that in the global media, oddity, recency, magnitude, proximity and so on are very strong news determinants about the western world while events in Africa, that are 'normal' and similar to those in the developed world are not perceived as newsworthy for the western audience.

The fundamental issues of imbalances in global communication had been discussed and the contention is that the flow of news among nations is so thin that much attention is given to developed countries and little to less developed ones while important events are ignored and reality distorted. Thus, New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) is a term that was coined in a debate over media representations of the developing world in UNESCO in the late 1970s and early 1980s. A 16 member body was created by UNESCO to study communication issues. The Commission which used the term widely was chaired by a Nobel Prize Winner, Scan MacBride, and was charged with creation of a set of recommendations to make global media representation more equitable. The MacBride Commission produced a report titled "Many Voices, One World", which outlined the main

philosophical points of the New World Information Communication Order. The 312 page document summarily outlined that:

- (a) this new world information and communication order could be based, among other considerations, on:
 - (i) elimination of the imbalances and inequalities which characterize the present situation;
 - (ii) elimination of the negative effects of certain monopolies, public or private, and excessive concentrations;
 - (iii) removal of the internal and external obstacles to a free flow and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and ideas;
 - (iv) Plurality of sources and channels of information
 - (v) Freedom of the press and information
 - (vi) The freedom of journalists and all professionals in the communication media, freedom inseparable from responsibility;
 - (vii) The capacity of developing countries to achieve improvement of their own situation, notably by providing their own equipment by training their personnel, by improving their infrastructures and by making their information and communication media suitable to their needs and aspirations;
 - (viii) the sincere will of developed countries to help them attain these objectives;
 - (ix) respect for each people's cultural identity and for the right of each nation to inform the world public about its interests, its aspirations and its social and cultural values'
 - (x) respect for the right of all peoples to participate in international exchanges of information on the basis of equality, justice and mutual benefit;

- (xi) respect for the right of the public, of ethnic and social groups and of individuals to have access to information sources and to participate actively in the communication process.
- (b) this new world information and communication order should be based on the fundamental principles of international law, as laid down in the character of the United Nation
- (c) diverse solutions to information and communication problems are required because social, political, cultural and economic problems differ from one country to another (UNESCO).

Another UNESCO convention on cultural diversity was held in 2005 with regard to unbalanced global flow of information to the detriment of Africans. However, this convention was not supported by the USA. Issues discussed include news reporting on African countries that reflect the priorities of news agencies in London, Paris and New York, an unbalanced flow of mass media messages from the developed world, effects of mass media adverts from developed nations, an unfair division of the radio spectrum among others.

Recommendations

Based on the preceding, this paper recommends that:

- a. African governments should invest in the industrialization policy and accelerate their rates of industrialization by more than 300% against low industrialization level in Africa. Toyo (2004:46) reveals that Europe, America and Japan as well as other nations at the apex of globalization control the flow of information because they are highly industrialized and independent of other capitalist countries. After the Second World War, East European countries became developed because they furiously became industrialized. China, North Korea and India are examples in this category (Toyo, 46).

- b. The African bourgeoisies should have a rethink; shun corrupt practices like embezzlement of funds meant for development of public infrastructure. They should encourage industrialization by investing in the discourse and its practicability instead of maintaining huge savings in foreign accounts for their selfish gains. The African bourgeois must refrain from their embezzlement attitudes that make them multi-millionaires with properties in London, New York, Paris and Rome while their countries crawl in slavery and backwardness.
- c. African countries should invest in the importation of machine making industry and should also invest in the acquisition of the *type* of information and communication technologies and skills that would grant Africans a forum to voice out their views. While African countries allow for free flow of information and ideas, the foreign nations of Europe, America and other developing nations in Asia must be ready to eliminate internal and external obstacles to a free flow and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and ideas, once African nations create their global media. The communication satellite launched by Nigeria is not in use for reasons undemystified. China, at a point in time, shot their airwaves against foreign adverts that would impede their cultures. If such nations cannot open up to the African countries to advertise their goods or pass information, their information and ideas should equally be banned from being transmitted to Africa.
- d. The Imperialist or G7 countries as well as other highly industrialized capitalist countries like USA, Japan, Canada and highly industrialized transitional socialist countries like Russia and Czech Republic must develop a sincere will to help the African nations, whom they earlier exploited, to develop and attain their objectives.
- e. All world information and communication channels should be regulated by a constituted international broadcast organization made up of skillful employees from

diverse cultural background across all continents to ensure that global channels respect the right of all people s to participate in international exchanges of information on the basis of equality, justice and mutual benefit, based on the fundamental principles of international law as laid down in the charter of the United Nations.

- f. The African Union should establish global media channels in their individual countries under the umbrella of African Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) where African news would dominate and cultural goods and services could be packaged and transmitted to the other parts of the world. The Corporation should monitor its transmission against other global media and should place high tariffs on foreign multinational sponsored adverts as a way of bringing commercialization of foreign good to Africans to the barest minimum

Conclusion

The Afro-European contact that was driven by the need for the Europeans to acquire slaves from Africa, and later raw materials to feed the growing industries during the period of industrial revolution in Europe was quite beneficial to Europe, but precarious to the African Societies. Worst still, the Europeans' search for markets in Africa in order to sell the finished products and maximize profits which later led to the scramble, partitioning and further colonization and exploitation of Africa's human and natural resources was a deliberate ploy to uproot or replace African cultures with the European cultures in order to create possible avenues for the Western world and America to sit comfortably at the apex of a globalized world.

The trend of cultural domination persisted even after the political independence of most African states as the Europeans left the shores of Africa but left behind multinational

companies that operated and are still in operation in their previous colonies. Coca cola; Nestle, Cadbury, Lever Brothers, (now Unilever) and other big multinationals still operate in African countries with profits derived and used for development of the Western world.

For their markets to sell, the European, American and now Japanese powers have been creating a need for their products for Africans through adverts in global television, radio, magazines and newspapers and other international channels of communication. The global media, considered in this discourse as international channels and systems of communication across national and international borders, have therefore remained the biggest agent of cultural domination in Africa, with an attitude of oneway flow of information and general communication from the Western worlds to Africa. The one-way traffic of information from Europe and America to Africa would not have been problematic if there was no imbalance created in the communication process that has placed the "super powers" at the apex and the "African cultures" at the periphery of the global world. Critical reflections, discussions of values, philosophy and culture should be an important part of modern information world. As third world journalists engage in developmental journalism to enlighten the people, the global media should cease from been exploitive of African cultures.

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