From Indigenous Communication to Modern Television:
A Reflection of political Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper discusses the development of modern mass media as a necessary attribute of the evolution of an integral Nigerian nation out of the many traditional ethnic communities. It shows that the traditional media which were the precolonial channels of communication were limited in the conduct of national commerce, religion, education, politics and government. The paper, however, contends that the potentials of the traditional media have not been fully explored, and calls for research to establish what roles such media can play in modern politics, and in grassroot development generally.

Résumé

Cet article traite du développement des mass média modernes en tant qu'attribut nécessaire de l'évolution d'une nation nigériane intégrale en dehors des communautés ethniques tradionnelles. Il montre que les média traditionnels qui étaient les canaux de communication étaient limités à la conduite du commerce, de la religion, de l'éducation, de la politique et du gouvernement. Cependant, l'article affirme que les potentiels des média traditionnels n'ont pas été pleinement explorés et recommande des recherches pour établir quels rôles ces média peuvent jouer dans les politiques modernes et en matière de développement de base en géneral.

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Attempts at evolving an integral nation from the multi-farious ethnic groups in Nigeria led to an emphasis on the modern mass media. The traditional media which were the pre-colonial channels of communication were limited in the conduct of national commerce, religion, education, politics and government. There are no less than 178 languages having various physical and metaphysical channels: oral literature, market-places, festivals, gong-men, age-grades, cult-societies, charms, witchcraft etc.

The struggle for national independence and the subsequent formation of a national government in 1960 stimulated the establishment of newspapers, radio and television stations. As state governments were formed, more media of mass communication were established. The broadcast media were significantly used and abused by political parties to win supporters nationally. At the local levels, political parties used indigenous communication systems, along with radio announcement, to summon people for campaign rallies. Nonetheless, the potentials of the traditional media have not been fully explored. Research should be designed to show what roles the traditional media can play in modern politics, and in grassroot development generally.

Before the introduction of printed material, radio, film and television, mass communication in Nigeria was done through the indigenous systems of communication. Western commerce, religion, education, politics and the form of government, imported from Britain from the 19th century, found the indigenous communications systems inadequate for several reasons: (1) the systems use local languages, (2) they are interactive in the form of several chains of face-to-face activities from the source or sources to the receivers, (3) they are exclusively integrated into local cultures, (4) they do not depend on Western technology and (5) they are dissimilar from the Western model of mass communication. The languages of communication especially posed formidable obstacles to the British, for, as Harrison and Trabasso (1976, p.109) put it,

> The truth of the matter is that Africa is one of, if not the most linguistically diverse continents in the world. Linguists estimate that 850 to 1,000 languages are spoken here. Initially confronted by this diversity, the European explorer was faced with a dilemma.
> There was a need for a system of communications. How best could this be accomplished with a minimum of time and effort? It would have been preposterous and an act of denigration for the European to learn the indigenous languages. Furthermore, there were too many to master. On the opposite side of the situation, the African obviously could not be expected to learn the European language. The dissolution of the dilemma was to promulgate a pidgin language(s).

The indigenous communication systems served the pre-colonial socio-political structures of Nigeria at the level of ethnic groups. The towns and villages then had traditional rulers (or community leaders), supported by a body of chiefs who represented various interests in society. The rulers and the chiefs governed their ethnic communities and communicated with them through

various channels. Some common forms of indigenous media are oral literature, market-places, festivals and gong-men (or town criers [1]). Indigenous communication is not only vertical, from the rulers to the subjects, it is also horizontal. Individuals communicate with society through physical and metaphysical means. A farm owner, for example, may mount a charm conspicuously on his farm in order to stress private ownership and to scare off human intruders. The fear of herbalists and witches influence social behaviour considerably. Rainmakers communicate their power to distrupt events through various psychological means. The distant bull-roar of the Oro cult (Yoruba, Western Nigeria) in the night warns women to stay-off the streets at the approach of the cult men. Special drum beats communicate various messages.The gbedu rhythm, for instance, signifies a royal occasion: coronation, funeral, the traditional dance of a king Ugboajah (1980, p.49) describes the general nature of indigenous communication networks thus:

> Village sectors in Africa communicate mostly via the market-place of ideas contributed by traditional religion, observances, divination, mythology, witchcraft, cult societies, age-grades, the chief's courts, the elder's square, secret and title societies, the village market square, the village gong-man indeed the total experiences of the villager in his environment.

Unlike the mass media, access to the indigenous media is culturally determined and not economic. Only the gong-man model approaches the mass media in disseminating information generally. In most other cases, information received in dependent upon social status. There is a hierarchy of the right to speak and the right to receive information. Indigenous communication vividly demonstrates the maxim that "information is power" and that is why certain messages, although neither economic nor political, are restricted within select groups such as secret societies and age-grades. Nwuleni (1981, pp.1-79) documents this in his study of the indigenous media in two Nigerian villages, pointing out that the media are limited to only purposive communication. That is, certain messages are disseminated to certain people to achieve certain purposes.

The various indigenous media are used for specific types of messages. Oral literature serves to socialize new generations into the history, culture, morals and ethics of society.The literature also serves as a means of entertainment with the use of folklores. Market-places provide price index and news from other villages. These are also where advertising of goods (food crops, crafts, metalwares, herbal drugs, etc.) and services (medical treatment, dressmaking, beauty treatment, musical entertainment, etc.) are undertaken. Festivals serve the triple purpose of supplicating local deities for improved political and socio-economic conditions (e.g. fair weather, health, human fertility, agricultural productivity and victory over enemies), socializing the young ones into local cultures and entertaining in a dramatic form. Gong-men disseminate general information about events and the social welfare of their communities. With the use of conve-

ntional journalistic terms, Ugboajah (1980, p.49) explains the work of a gong-man as follows:

> Chief Osukute of Akure in Western Nigeria is the senior newsman of the Omode-Owas. The 'chief editor' of the palace news, Chief Osukute is also a liaison officer of the palace and the feedback channel for the views of the people to their king. He sends his 'reporters' on 'news beats' to herald dates of traditional ceremonies, warnings of epidemics, dates for cultivation and harvesting and social observances. The post of the village announcer or the 'gbohun-gbohun' in Yorubaland is in most cases a hereditary position. An Ijebu village announcer trains his children in the communications jobs that await them. Thus, the young village announcer must be briefed in his early years about the magnitude of his job — about the Oba's area of influence, about the time, place and utility of the news and about technicalities in the usage of the gong.

The interactive nature of indigenous media suggests effective communication, but their localized nature limits their range. There are 178 languages (Ugboajah 1977, p.185), each with several dialects. Since the indigenous media are language and culture bound, they are confined within tribal groupings. This had fragmented Nigerian society into several ethnic groups, a situation antithetical to the evolution of a common national culture and identity. Awolowo (1947, pp.47-49) describes Nigerian society thus:

> Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographic expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English', 'Welsh' or 'French'. The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not.

There are various national or ethnic groups in the country. Ten such main groups were recorded during the 1931 census as follows: (1) Hausa, (2) Ibo, (3) Yoruba, (4) Fulani, (5) Kanuri, (6) Ibibio, (7) Munshi or Tiv, (8) Edo, (9) Nupe and (10) Ijaw. According to *Nigeria Handbook*, eleventh edition, 'there are also a great number of other small tribes too numerous to enumerate separately, whose combined total population amounts to 4,683,044.'

It is a mistake to designate them as tribes and clans. There is as much difference between them as there is between Germans, English, Russians and Turks, for instance. The fact that they have a common overlord does not destroy this fundamental difference.

The languages differ. The readiest means of communication between them now is English. Their cultural background and social outlooks differ widely; and their indigenous political institutions have little in common. Their present stages of development vary.

Politically, the best organized groups are the Hausa, including the Fulanis, who form the ruling class in the north, and the Yorubas. They had a highly developed system of government long before the white man came. The political institutions of the others, however, were primitive and are still amorphous. The constitution of the Yorubas is analogous to what is known as constitutional monarchy. The dictatorial powers which some Yoruba chiefs are wielding today are the making of the British Government, who, at the beginning, misconceived the true nature of Yoruba monarchy. The Fulani conquerors were autocrats pure and simple. They were just consolidating their conquest over the Hausas and a small portion of Yorubaland when the British came in the 'scramble' to strengthen their hands. The Ibos, on the other hand, are essentially indivi-dualistic. The unit of government is the family; and the biggest autonomous aggregation for all purposes of government is the clan, with all the heads of families combining to form a governing body. The Ibos or Ibibios cannot tole-rate anyone assuming the authority of a chieftain among them. For this reason, the experiment of the 'Warrant Chiefs' in the Eastern Region failed.

Modern national government in Nigeria began with British colonialism in 1914. By the 1930s, radio was introduced to link Britain with her colonies. Newspapers were used to counter colonialism and pave the way for indepe-ndence. Films brought newsreels of British activities into cinema theatres and as well provided entertainment. The political and social changes (e.g. urbani-zation) which took place before and after independence involved the mass media much more than the indigenous systems of communication. The advan-tages of the mass media rest on the use of national language, English, the use of local languages and access to a large widely dispersed audience.

Political Changes and the Media

Nigeria attained independence with a parliamentary constitution which provided for a federal system of government consisting of one central admini-stration based in the capital, Lagos, and three regional administrations in the northern, eastern and western parts of the country. The regional divisions ref-lected the three major ethnic groups (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba). The attempt to forge a united, democratic political entity out of the ethnic groups led to social conflicts, inter-tribal distrust and hostilities. As such, within seven years of independence, there were visible signs of tension. There were disruptions in parliament, a situation of unrest in society and two military coup detats. These culminated in a civil war (1967-1970) because the oil-rich eastern region of the country attempted to secede (Obasanjo 1980).

Following the civil war, a period of reconstruction, reconciliation and reuni-fication was proclaimed. The country then was divided into twelve regional administrations, called states, in order to satisfy the desires of minority ethnic groups and to ease the tension of distrust. A military regime established in 1967 continued to administer the country. The execution of the post-civil war

programme of "rebuilding", however, led to some new problems. The mass media courageously featured allegations of public corruption, mismanagement of resources and generally misplaced priorities. But the military government repressed the media. Some journalists and broadcasters were maltreated. The media men were intimidated (Onagoruwa 1978). A few social reformers attempted to voice their opinions with pamphlets and advocacy journalism. They were silenced (Aboaba 1979). Gradually, the military regime appeared to have changed its focus from that of rebuilding the nation in preparation for a speedy return to a democratic form of government to entrenching itself in power. The Head of the Military Government categorically announced on television that the earlier set date for a return to civilian government was unrealistic. He did not indicate an alternative date.

In 1975, with a classical use of the radio, a group of military officers, in a bloodless coup, toppled the government. The new regime proceeded to tackle the ills of society, particularly in the "sick" civil service and government parastatals. The regime made innovative use of broadcasting to mobilize distinguished personnel at short notice for its administration and to make strategic changes with pronouncements and decrees which took immediate effect. The regime promises three things: to return the nation to a democratic form of government within four years; to evolve a new constitution, based upon historical experience; and to lay the foundation for a stable government. In order that government might reach the "grass roots" (rural areas) and to further preserve minority rights, the country was again divided into 19 states. The local government areas were split into small units with independent sources of funding as so to insulate them from states' domination.

In 1979, the military regime handed over power, as promised, to a civilian administration which had a new constitution that emphasized American-type presidential democracy. While the various political changes were taking place, the mass media institutions were employed in explaining the changes far and wide, and in bringing into general awareness the various governments' policies. The media institutions were also charged with the responsibility of providing a public service in order to contribute to national development.

During the first three years of experimenting a presidential-type constitution, agitation for the creation of more states attained such a height that the government had to establish a committee to study and report on the issue. The Committee on Creation of New States in Nigeria recommended the establishment of 21 more states to bring the number of states to 40. This recommendation was accepted unanimously by the House of Representatives. The next stages before the bill became law were the passage of the bill in the Senate and in the Assemblies of two-thirds of the 19 states followed by a national referendum. If the trend in regional divisions from the original three at independence, to twelve, then to nineteen and now to proposed forty is anything to go by, it suggests a gradual drift back to pre-colonial ethnic groups. This is a matter of interest to political scientists. What is of sociological concern is that the trend

in creating more states may indicate a desire for as many political units as the Americans whose political system has been adopted and whom Nigerians "tend to copy wittingly or unwittingly, in almost everything" (Okoli 1982, p.3269). If this second view is the more accurate posture, then the concern for cultural imperialism is well placed.

But another military takeover on December 31, 1983, marked the failure of the experiment in presidential democracy. The new military regime suspended the 1979 Constitution and prescribed all political parties, political activities and state creation movements *(West Africa* 1984, p.53). Some portions of the 1979 Constitution (especially in regard to the media) were, however, retained in a new set of decrees issued by the military regime. Generally, the change in administration has effected a change in the loyalties and ideological orientations of the media.

The Development of Television

A pioneer of television engineering in Nigeria and former General Manager of the first television station, Teju Oyeleye (1972, p.1), traces the development of human communication thus:

> Human communication has passed through four distinct phases of development. The spoken word differentiated the early man from the lower animals. The second phase of development took place at about 3000 B.C. when man was able to convey his thoughts in writing thereby achieving permant records. The printing press invented in the fifteenth century brought the multiplying effect which technology confers. Many copies of the same text can be prepared within a very short time. The discovery of electro-magnetic waves in the 19th century brought with it such applications as radio and television broadcasting. Thus, the distance factor shrank as a communication problem.

Television broadcasting in Nigeria was born out of the conflicts of ownership, control and access. Following a parliamentary crisis in 1953, arising from a call for national self-government to be awarded in 1956, the Governor of the Central Government, Sir John Macpherson, made a chiding radio broadcast against a Regional Premier, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Much as the Premier attempted to reply to the Governor, he was denied the right of rebuttal through radio by the Chief Secretary to the Central Government (Egbon 1978). This further precipitated the crisis and it led to a Constitutional Conference later in the year, July, 1953.

An aftermath of the conference was the removal of broadcasting from the Central Government exclusive list to become a concurrent item. As such, the Nigerian Constitution of 1954 provided that regional governments could establish broadcasting services. The Western Nigeria Government was the first to

take advantage of the new Constitution by establishing, in partnership with a British firm, the Overseas Rediffusion Ltd., the WNBS-WNTV for the operation of radio and television broadcasting. Thus, the first television station in Africa was officially commissioned on the 1st October, 1959. It started broadcasting in Ibadan with a 500 watts transmitter which had an effective radiated power of 15 KW. In 1972, the station upgraded its transmitter to 10 KW with an effective radiated power of 60 KW which widely propagated the station's slogan "First in Africa" (Ikime 1979). One year after the establishment of the WNTV, the ENTV, belonging to the Eastern Nigeria Government, was established in Enugu and the station chose the slogan "Second to None". The government of the Northern Nigeria followed the trend with the establishment of a third station, RKTV, in Kaduna between 1960 and 1961.

The political change from a colony to an independent nation made the Federal Government at the centre much stronger than it was before independence, and so the centre attracted the nation's top politicians. With that, came the realisation of the need for a television station owned and controlled by the Federal Government. In 1962, the fourth station, NBC-TV was established in the federal capital, Lagos.

By 1969, a military regime had taken over the administration and Nigeria had broken up into 12 states. These new states which did not have television stations proceeded to make plans for them. Between 1973 and 1974, the fifth (in Benin) and the sixth (in Jos) stations were established by the Mid-West and Benue-Plateau states respectively.

When another military government emerged in July 1975, Nigeria was further divided into nineteen states: (1) Anambra State, (2Bauchi State, (3) Bendel State, (4) Benue State, (5) Borno State, (6) Cross River State, (7) Gongola State, (8) Imo State, (9) Kaduna State, (10) Kano State, (11) Kwara State, (12) Lagos State, (13) Niger State, (14) Ogun State, (15) Ondo State, (16) Oyo State, (17) Plateau State, (18) River State, and (19) Sokoto State. By Decree No. 24 on April 1976, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) was established with the powers: (1) to take over all the existing television stations; (2) to plan for, establish and operate new stations in the state capitals without television. The concept then was that only a single organization, the NTA, should operate television broadcasting in Nigeria and on behalf of the Federal Government. The charter of NTA required it "to ensure an independent and impartial service which will operate in the national interest; to give adequate expression to culture, characteristics and affairs of the different parts of Nigeria." In the period (1976/77) between the creation of new states and the promulgation of Decree No. 24, four television stations were established at Port Harcourt (Rivers State), Sokoto (Sokoto State), Kano (Kano State) and Owerri (Imo State).

With the establishment of NTA, all the television stations in Nigeria assumed the name "NTV" with the addition of only the name of the state capitals in which the stations are situated. The new stations opened by the NTA are:

1. NTV - Abeokuta (Ogun State), established in 1978/79;

2. NTV - Akure (Ondo State), established in 1978/79;
3. NTV - Bauchi (Bauchi State), established in 1978/79;
4. NTV - Calabar (Cross River State), established in 1978/79;
5. NTV - Ilorin (Kwara State), established in 1978/79;
6. NTV - Maiduguri (Borno State), established in 1978/79;
7. NTV - Makurdi (Benue State), established in 1978/79;
8. NTV - Minna (Niger State), established in 1978/79;
9. NTV - Teju-Oso (Lagos State), established in 1980/81;
10. NTV - Yola (Gongola State), established in 1978/79.

In 1979, Nigeria began to operate a new constitution which permitted states to establish and operate all the broadcasting media. Thus, states began to re-establish television stations to compete with the existing national television network, NTA. By 1983, states had established eleven stations. Table 1 shows a list of the state stations, their locations and the political parties in the states (Oduko, 1985).

The mass media are undoubtedly the major instrument of political competition. The political parties used and abused broadcasting to win supporters nationally. At the local levels, political parties used indigenous communication systems, along with radio announcement, to summon people for campaign rallies. Nonetheless, the potentials of the traditional media have not been fully explored. This is an area worth investigating. It is useful to know what aspects of indigenous channels are amenable to modern politics and rural development.

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Table I
List of State Television Stations in 1983

| NO. | STATION | LOCATION | | POLITICAL PARTY IN POWER* |
		TOWN	STATE	
1.	LTV	Ikeja	Lagos	UPN
2.	ODTV	Akure	Ondo	UPN
3.	OGTV	Abeokuta	Ogun	UPN
4.	BDTV	Benin	Bendel	UPN
5.	OYOTV	Ibadan	Oyo	UPN
6.	ATV	Owerri	Anambra	NPP
7.	IMTV	Enugu	Imo	NPP
8.	Plateau TV	Jos	Plateau	NPP
9.	Borno TV	Maiduguri	Borno	GNPP
10.	Gongola TV	Yola	Gongola	GNPP
11.	City TV	Kano	Kano	FRP

*	UPN	= Unity Part of Nigeria
	NPP	= Nigeria Peoples' Party
	GNPP	= Great Nigeria Peoples' Party
	PRP	= Peoples' Redemption Party

States controlled by the *NPN (National Party of Nigeria)* did not establish television stations because the national network, *NTA*, was under the control of *NPN* at the federal level.