
POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND RADIO BROADCASTING: THE IMPACT OF OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL ON NEWS PRODUCTION IN THE IBADAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION OF OYO STATE (B.C.O.S.)

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is a revised version of the author's dissertation submitted to the University of Ibadan as part of the requirements for the award of the Professional Degree of Master of Communication Arts (M.C.A.) as a foundation Postgraduate of the programme in March, 1984. The earlier version titled The Impact of Ownership and Control on News Production in a Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation; The Radio O-Y-O Example, was supervised by the late Dr. Sybil James, B.A. (U.W.I.); M.A.; M.Ed.; (Ed.D. (Colum.)) who was then a Senior Lecturer in the University of Ibadan in the then Department of Language Arts, which itself was converted to a department from the former Reading Centre, University of Ibadan.

Tributes and Reminiscences in Honour of the Late Dr. Sybil James

Today, I am proud, delighted, pleased and honoured to be in the midst of those first class scholars assembled in different fields in the Universities and blended with private educationists, communication experts and leading consultant practitioners with different background from all over the world's multi-racial, multi-faith, multi-cultural and diverse international communities to pay a lasting tribute to a great woman, an international scholar and mentor, who has touched so many hearts and minds the world over, Dr. Sybil Leonora James.

The Author's First Encounter with Dr. Sybil James

I had always looked and admired Dr. Sybil James as a University Senior Lecturer from distance. The opportunity offered by the then Department of Language Arts (now Dept. of Communication and Language Arts), my involvement as a foundation postgraduate student of the Professional Degree of Master of Communication Arts, M.C.A. 1982, and Dr. Sybil James role as my foundation supervisor brought me in close contact with this academic, education and communication icon, a guru and an institution. The first thing that struck me was her simplicity, humility, sagacity, assiduity, honesty, responsibility, reliability, indefatigability and high sense of humour despite her wealth of experience, wisdom, knowledge, expertise, qualifications, rich background and professionalism. Dr. Sybil James was the coordinator of post-graduate programmes in the then Department of Language Arts, University of Ibadan.

In my acknowledgements in the M.C.A. dissertation supervised by Dr. Sybil James, I asserted:

First and foremost, I express my profound gratitude and deep appreciation to my supervisor and the coordinator of Post-graduate Programmes in the Department of

Language Arts, Dr. Sybil James. Dr. James has gone through my work meticulously, tirelessly, constructively and efficiently. I will remain eternally grateful to her for making me a consciously serious-minded budding researcher. I am also grateful to Dr. James for taking a special interest in my project" (Olayiwola, 1974).

I still stand by these encomiums and I will always remember Dr. Sybil James and remain eternally grateful to her.

Dr. Sybil James as Postgraduate Programmes Coordinator

As the coordinator of postgraduate programmes, Dr. Sybil James encouraged students to explore different areas of Communication Arts. As a result of her advice, I ventured into the areas of political communication, legal aspects of communication, Islamic religious communication all of which are now parts of my area of specialization in comparative politics. Dr. Sybil James also headed the then Department of Language Arts, University of Ibadan. The profile of Dr. Sybil James is intimidating, stimulating, challenging and encouraging. I do not have any doubt in my mind that Dr. Sybil James must be honoured. It is never too much or too late to appreciate this worthy international scholar. By dint of hardwork, determination, perseverance and dedication, commitment to scholarship, Dr. Sybil James rose to the top of her chosen career. She made her mark for posterity. She left a lasting legacy. She performed something close to a miracle. She taught, researched, contributed immensely to community services and published papers with very high quality and standard. This is not surprising because Dr. Sybil James was an international woman of standard and quality. What makes Dr. Sybil James achievements remarkable is the totality of her contribution to humanity, education, communication, literacy, and global academic excellence. She would not compromise the integrity of academic excellence and freedom.

In her paper published in the Africa Media Review in 1987, Dr. Sybil James addressed the important assignments which development communicators should undertake (Sybil James, 1987). Dr. Sybil James was born great; she achieved greatness and also had greatness thrust upon her, a rare combination meant for a genius. It is highly and only hoped that the various papers presented at this International Conference in honour of this great illustrious South American, an international scholar and mentor, will generate more robust discussions and hopefully will contribute in no small measure to help reshape Readings in Literacy and Communication.

Politics

There is, in the minds of many people, some confusion over what politics is all about. Some people view 'politics as a dirty game'. Perhaps, they mean the players may be dirty especially if the rules are not observed with decency, ethics and fear of God.

Politics consist of five elements:

- (1) First, there is what one might call consciousness formation, that is, the evoking of awareness amongst a collectivity of the issues and problems confronting that collectivity.

- (2) Secondly, there is social mobilization, which is the organization of a collectivity for joint, collaborative action.
- (3) Thirdly, politics is, as the continentals would put it, contestation; the contesting of the determination of national priorities through the process of argumentation and debate.
- (4) Fourthly, there is institutionalized struggle, that is, the conversion of fights into games and debates; and
- (5) Fifthly, transcendence, the bringing about of change both at the level of the person and at the systemic and sub-systemic levels (Dudley, 1975 – 1976).

Political Communication

Political communication refers to the process by which information and values are communicated, that is, the transmission of political messages between the system and its environment (Olayiwola, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996, 2001). Lucian Pye pointed out many years ago that there is a 'peculiarly intimate relationship between the political process and the communication process and Karl Deutsch suggested that a study of the nerves of the body politic – its decision-making processes-gives insights into the performance of its bones and muscles – the exercise of power (Pye, 1963, Deutsch, 1965). Blumler and Gureritch argue that if politics is about power, then this must be conveyed by power wielders. If politics is about participation, then the desires of citizens must be communicated to leaders and vice versa. If politics is about legitimacy, then regime norms must be symbolically expressed. And, if politics is about choice, then policy options must be circulated (Blumler, 1983).

Radio Broadcasting

"This study is on the impact of ownership and control on news production in a Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, the Radio O-Y-O Example. The main focus of the study is on the gravity and awesomeness of the burden which those in control and ownership of the broadcasting media bear for the society. We are interested in examining the power which they have for good or for evil over a vast territory and countless number of people. Radio broadcasting is a form/medium or channel of communication from a sender to a receiver. In the opinion of Lasswell in his model of communication, the whole business of communication concerns the issue of "who says what, in what channel, to who, and with what effect?" (Berlo, 1960). Human-beings, associations, organizations, societies and the nation – state are all built upon and held together by communications – by perceptions, by decisions, by the expectations which people have for one another, by transactions and by their willingness to validate a considerable portion of the expectations by appropriate reciprocal behaviours. Karl Deutsch wrote, "It is communication, that is, the ability to transmit messages and to react to them that makes organizations"; hence any thorough analysis of political organizations or social systems must at least include a consideration of the role of communication.

Communication enables a group to think together, to see together and to act together. In the words of Robert C. North, "Politics could not exist without communication, nor could wars be fought. In these terms, a modern nation – state may be viewed essentially as a decision and control system which relies upon the exchange of messages in both its domestic affairs and

its foreign relations. "The spoken word has always been powerful and mighty. It has incited men to wars; and at the same time, it has inspired men to peace and to acts of historic achievements and greatness. An example of this can be traced to the happenings of killings, assassinations, destruction of human life; properties, arson and vandalism which ensued after the post 1983 elections in Nigeria. In Oyo State, the governorship candidate of the banned Unity Party of Nigeria used Radio O-Y-O in a broadcast which lasted about four days consecutively. In the broadcast, he spoke with all emotions, sentiments and sensations asking the people of the state whether they did not vote for him in spite of his free education, free health programmes and friendship with, as he claimed, all the local government areas. He said if on the contrary, they voted for him massively, they should come out to fight and reject those who wanted to rig/steal their votes.

After this broadcast, there were sporadic, spontaneous fighting, demonstrations, civil disobedience and rioting in some parts of Oyo State. This is also the power of Radio broadcasting.

Broadcasting is the most pervasive and therefore one of the most powerful agents for influencing men's thoughts and actions, for giving them a picture, true or false, of their fellows and of the world in which they live, for appealing to their intellect, their emotions and their appetites, for filling their minds with beauty or ugliness, ideas or idleness, laughter or terror, love or hate (Qualter, 1962).

As a means of disseminating news, information, opinions and entertainment, Radio has been rated as the most effective medium of communication in any given society. Of the five means of perception, and of receiving impression or sending messages that is, seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting - the most effective are hearing and seeing. But of these latter two, the more powerful is hearing, and Radio broadcast reaches the society through the ears. Time was when the pen was mightier than the sword. But today, the broadcast word is mightier than any weapon of construction or destruction ever invented or fashioned by man. Evidence of this can be seen in what happened in Ibadan, the Oyo State Capital when the Military took over the government and administration of Nigeria. Some hoarded commodities such as rice, tyres, vehicle windscreens and a host of other essential items were discovered. Immediately the Oyo State Military government announced over the Radio that these things were to be disposed off at controlled prices, people converged upon the sites in an attempt to purchase the articles. And in the process some persons were injured while others had a field day stealing and looting. This is the power of Radio. Radio broadcast has little or no limitations since it covers the whole of the earth and its atmosphere and goes far beyond to all the earth's sister planets. Through broadcasting, millions and billions of people hear the voice of the speaker, with all its pathos, passion and emotional appeal. They are thus, educated, persuaded, informed and entertained. This all-pervasive, ubiquitous impact of broadcasting explains some other rationale or needs for our choosing to write on the topic.

Ownership and Control

There is a common saying in regard to mass media control in Nigeria, which has now become a cliché, that "he who pays the piper dictates the tune," meaning that the owner of a mass media channel controls what the medium publishes and how it is published. Surely, control through ownership is a fact of life in every society, but then the nature of this control usually varies greatly, depending upon the political system, the orientation of political leaders in control of the government, the political climate prevailing, the caliber of journalists and other professional communicators, the economic situation of the mass media, and the stated objectives and policies of the media organizations. The objectives of the media channels further vary considerably in line with what the owners hope to achieve with the media organizations. Is it profits or the promotion of government policies and programmes? Is it the espousing of certain political or religious ideologies and dogmas? Or is it any other objective which the owner fancies or is it any combinations of these aims that the media channel is established to further? In Nigeria control-by-ownership has not operated as orderly as has been described here for reasons which will soon be clear.

Controls over the mass media also are exercised by many other forces than media owners, such as advertisers, the economy, government, the general public, the courts, law enforcement agencies, pressure groups, suppliers, information sources, and professional communicators and other media workers. These forces exert controls over the mass media in the sense that their individual or combined influences could shape the contents, activities, and orientations of the mass media quite considerably, depending upon the magnitude of the influences. Problems of mass media control in Nigeria are myriad, but four of them are the most serious. These are (1) political meddling, (2) lack of professional responsibility, (3) excessive sensitivity by rulers and government functionaries to unflattering news reports and criticisms by the mass media, and (4) the absence of a well articulated and effectively implemented national communication policy. Even though this country is blessed with journalists and other communicators of very high professional competence and integrity, the occupational opportunists and the faint-hearted who are easily pushed around with brown envelopes and numerous other pressures are unfortunately still in the majority. Lack of effective enforcement of professional codes of ethics helps to perpetuate this problem.

Due to inexperience, lack of understanding of the role of the press in a democratic society, or lack of commitment to public accountability, Nigerian officials often react too rashly to unpleasant news and critical comments by the press. The reactions usually range all the way from veiled threats through enactment of repressive laws to arrests, imprisonments, kidnapping and killing of journalists.

The fact that all journalists and other employees in all the radio and television broadcasting organizations, as well as those in a vast majority of daily newspaper houses and major weeklies in the country are government employees whose conditions of service are governed directly or indirectly by regulations of the civil service means that government has a tight grip on the information that Nigerians receive day by day and on the views which they express through the mass media. There is a common saying in regard to mass media control in Nigeria, which has now become a cliché, that "he who pays the piper dictates the tune,"

meaning that the owner of a mass media channel controls what the medium publishes and how it is published. Surely, control through ownership is a fact of life in every society, but then the nature of this control usually varies greatly. The ownership is a status that confers on a person the greatest range of rights over a property, having title to property and having property in an object. The first known major work on the impact of ownership and control can be traced back to the writings of a political philosopher known as Karl Marx in 1848 in his Communist Manifesto. Karl Marx had argued that the ownership and control of the means of production, that is, the mode of production or sub-structure, determine the relations of production or super-structural activities. In his analysis of states and organizations including Corporations, philosopher Karl Marx believes that ownership will definitely have some impact on whatever goes on in any organization because, as we stated earlier, "He who pays the piper, dictates the tune." Karl Marx relates this principle to the continual class struggle between the owners of an organization and the employees. He believes that the owners will always use their power of ownership to exploit, oppress, and repress the employees or the workers; since the fact of ownership confers on the owner/the power to hire and fire the workers as he pleases. They work at his mercy. Marx calls on the workers to struggle to gain ownership too so as to free themselves from the shackles and tentacles of the exploitative owners of businesses.

Karl Marx also relates the issue of ownership and control to how a state is administered. He believes that the executive class which owns and controls the state uses the power of ownership and control to oppress the governed. Increase Coker argues that government ownership of media has been precipitated by a number of factors which included the willingness to go to the people with Government's own ideas, its own explanations, its own plans and projects and to propel Government's own image especially since non-Governmental media reveled in discomfiting the Government. In his own contribution to discussions on ownership, William Robson holds a different view of ownership particularly public ownership. In his book, Nationalised – Industry and Public ownership, Robson laid down a number of objectives that constitute the purpose of public ownership.

These are:-

- (1) providing the best possible service at the least real cost to the community;
- (2) improving the wages and conditions of employment for the workers;
- (3) attaining a higher degree of equality;
- (4) ensuring increased public control over the economic system;
- (5) maintaining full and stable employment and
- (6) Increasing industrial democracy by means of greater opportunities for joint consultation.

If we relate these analyses on ownership and control to broadcasting and particularly news-production, we shall see that ownership has always had a tremendous impact on Radio broadcasting, programming and news-production in any Broadcasting Corporation.

News Production and what is News

News has been defined in various ways by various people. To some, news refers to the accurate and timely intelligence of happenings, discoveries, opinions and matters of any sort which affect or interest the readers, the listeners or the viewers. Whatever concerns public welfare, whatever interests or instructs the individual in any of his relations, activities, opinions, properties or personal conduct is news. Carl Warren identifies ten (10) elements of the News. They are immediacy, proximity, consequence, prominence, drama, oddity, conflict, sex, emotions and progress. For Warren, news refers to the unpublished reports of those activities of mankind calculated to interest, inform or entertain the reading, the listening or the viewing public (Warren, 1934). A guide to advanced techniques in journalism prepared by the Editorial Study Centre of the Thomson Foundation lists 20 categories of what make news (Kamath, 1980). They include novelty, personal impact, local news, money, crime, sex, conflict, religion, disaster and tragedy, humour and human interest. Other categories of those things that make an event newsworthy are mystery, science, health, entertainment, fame weather, food and minority interests. Anything that interests the public may be characterized as news. But there are many publics, each with its own interest. And each medium has its own standard of news. Generally, the traditional who, what, when, where, why and how provide useful directions, but the procedures of recording and dissemination varies with the medium.

As professional gate keepers, the editors also have several other guidelines which determine what will pass through the gate and what will be jettisoned – Management policy, time-lines, the editor's perception of reality, opinions of editor's colleagues, recency of the news item, relative importance of the protagonists, saliency of the message, a rather surreptitious knowledge of what the competition is going to report, and of course the editor's own idiosyncrasies. (Folarin, 1984). Because of the nature of their own medium, television gate-keepers in particular often tend to attach undue weight to the availability of postage to go with the news item. We tend to attach too much importance to the idea of recency in our handling of news. Hence we often abandon issues too hastily. Our news mention tends to be unduly concentrated on public figures. Lesser people come in for mention mainly as objects of human interest or human angle stories – either as objects of pity or of gossip. Yet that enterprising second-hand clothes dealer, road-side mechanic or canteen proprietor we pass by daily on our way to the big offices also deserves mention, provided he/she can be shown to have a unique way of organising his/her trade to make it maximally profitable or serviceable. The same goes for the little noticed secretary or messenger in the big office. There is the almost total neglect of rural news, leading to what has been characterized as "the urban centrality syndrome". This idea is not limited to the undue concentration of news establishments in the cities but is also concerned with the neglect indicated above.

News Production Chain

In producing news, there are lots of processes involved, ranging from news gathering to news writing, news subbing, dubbing, alignment, news production, actuality tagging, paging, news presentation, rehearsal, casting and dissemination. In the broadcast or electronic media however, news production chain is slightly different. Although there are field reporters and

local news correspondents who cover assignments for news production, there are also releases from public institutions, religious houses, political organization, pressure groups be they professional, economic, religious, cultural, social, voluntary or syncretistic pressure groups and individuals as materials for news production. Also, news is produced in these media through Current Affairs, discussion and interview programmes of the various media. And these news bulletins are produced to suit a particular time, locality or audience.

The Birth and Development of B.C.O.S. Radio O-Y-O

In unequivocal terms, the Oyo State Edict No. 10 of 1977, which established Radio O-Y-O repealed its predecessor, the Western Nigeria Government Law No. 48 of 1959 which established the then Western Nigerian Government Broadcasting Corporation. The Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State, otherwise known as Radio O-Y-O was one of the three Radio stations that sprang from the radio service of the defunct Western Nigerian Government Broadcasting Corporation (WNGBC).

Analysis and Action

From the First, Second and Third Republics and the Military Interregna Radio Stations were used by the Government in power for their own selfish political propaganda. Public Interests were ignored. In the same vein various state radio stations in the 36 States of the Nigerian Federation have been used for private political interest. For instance, our example of B.C.O.S. radio O-Y-O the current State Governor Adebayo Alao-Akala has used the station to propagate his own political ambition for a second if not a third term as governor of Oyo State. Issues of public interest such as the strike of the teachers for non-payment of their salaries and remuneration since the past one month have been ignored by the radio O-Y-O B.C.O.S station. What the listeners are compelled to hear if they care to tune to B.C.O.S is Governor Alao-Akala has been endorsed for second term in office; Governor Akala has been praised for his good work in Oyo State; teachers on strike have been advised to go back to their jobs without getting their salaries e.t.c. all of which are blatant lies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Our argument has been that:

- (1) ownership has prevented the Radio from performing accurately the functions of informing, educating, and entertaining the public;
- (2) that ownership has prevented news producers and editors of the corporation from upholding the ethics of their profession which had been mentioned earlier;
- (3) that ownership has paralysed the management of the corporation; and
- (4) That private ownership of Radio is likely to be better and more responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of the public for balanced, accurate, impartial and objective news items.

Chinua Achebe once posited in his legendary "Things Fall Apart", that, a disease that has never been seen before cannot be cured by every day herbs. This is very true and typical of our interaction with changed circumstances and situations, which due to their novelty or peculiarities, defy common place solutions. The process of finding a valuable solution is often difficult and painstaking given that reason and intellect are often drowned in the cacophony

of sentiment laced ideas reflecting the side of the divide the holders of the view belong. The issue of ownership and control in relation to political communication needs to be addressed through the following:

- (1) The Nigerian constitution needs to be amended with a view to prevent any government or political party in power from using the radio station for private selfish political propaganda. Such an amendment will also ensure that the government owned Radio station is used for the benefit of the public.
- (2) The Nigerian Communication Commission needs to come up with a National Radio Broadcasting Policy that will guarantee the rights of the rural people and the less privileged to be covered in Radio Broadcasting, News production, and programmes and current affairs coverage.
- (3) The government, NUJ (Nigerian Union of Journalists) and the RATAWU need to do more jointly to fight the intimidation harassment, kidnapping and killing of journalists.
- (4) There should be a special salary structure for employees of media organizations as the Nation has for Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU), Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SANU) etc.
- (5) The types of accreditation carried out by the National Universities Commission (NUC) for Universities should be emulated by the Nigeria Communication Commission.
- (6) Equal percentages of News production and coverage should be formulated for members of the public, women, children, the physically challenged, and the rural areas.

The issue of ownership and control must be resolved because of its adverse impact on news production in particular and on the broadcast operations of a Radio Corporation in general. As we said in our introduction, "Broadcasting is the most pervasive and therefore one of the most powerful agents for influencing men's thoughts and actions, for giving them a picture, true or false, of their fellows and of the world in which they live, for appealing to their intellect, their emotions and their appetites, for filling their minds with beauty or ugliness, ideas or idleness, laughter or terror, love or hate". In addition, news dissemination through Radio enables the public to be educated, informed and entertained. Nothing should stand in the way of Radio in performing these laudable roles for the benefit of the society.

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