

Revisiting Media Imperialism: A Review of the Nigerian Television Experience

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Abstract

This paper examines media imperialism as it affects television broadcasting in Nigeria. To achieve the set task, it adopts the historical approach to trace the evolution of imperialistic tendencies in the Nigerian broadcast environment to the evolution of television in Nigeria. It contends that apart from putting the Nigerian broadcaster in a dilemma of some sort, the various forms of the phenomenon do not help in any significant way to integrate the rural populace into the mainstream of socio-cultural and socio-economic growth and development of Nigeria and thus the prognosis of the situation is precarious for the Nigerian television media. It further argues that as a phenomenon, media imperialism will continue to recur in the foreseeable future because an enabling ambience needed for its displacement by local television broadcasting is yet faltering. Therefore, it suggests that a deliberate and concerted effort should be made to change the situation. Such effort should include better funding, investment in the development of home-grown media technologies, investment in high manpower development, innovative programmes and more specialized programming with indigenous flavours by both the public and private television outfits operating in the Nigerian broadcast climate.

Key words: deregulated broadcasting, globalization, world media culture, mediascape, cultural imperialism, NBC.

Introduction

Although many scholars are wont to say that media imperialism is an unfashionable area of research in a 21st century world media culture, it is important to note that the issue is still very germane to Africans, particularly Nigerians because there is limited research and academic writing coming from scholars based in Nigeria (Africa) on it. It is in the realization of this drawback that this paper revisits media imperialism with specific attention on the Nigerian television (TV) experience, using historical approach to give a picture of the dilemma faced by Nigerian TV broadcasters. Deregulated broadcasting became a reality in Nigeria in 1992 with the establishment of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). The NBC's functions include the issuance of licenses to operators of TV and radio broadcasting, setting standards as well as upholding the principles of fairness, objectivity and balance in the broadcasting industry. The NBC was established through Decree No 38 of 1992 (Now Act No 38), promulgated by the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. Thereafter, following applications by different

organizations and individuals, General Babangida presented the first licenses for private broadcasting in June 1993. The establishment of the NBC was thought by many scholars and media professionals to be the panacea for the nagging problem of foreign broadcast of news and programmes that pervade Nigerian TV screens. Apart from setting standards for the technical areas, the NBC was expected to encourage TV stations to generate about 60% of their programmes for broadcast locally (Okhakhu, 2001). Standards ought to cover all facets of content as it affects socio-cultural development. But close to two decades after the establishment of the NBC, the Nigerian TV has not moved substantially away from the feature of programmes and news items whose origin and content is basically foreign. This is even besides the manufacture of media technologies which Nigeria is yet to find its feet in.

With regard to the general African situation, Omoera (2008) observes that imperialistic strictures have compelled most growing democracies in Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Burundi, Cameroun, among others) to tag along established Western democracies in virtually all facets of human endeavour. This portends a possible “arrested” development for most African countries, if not frontally addressed. This, perhaps, also explains why the TV as a form of media production in Nigeria has continued to grapple with the hydra – headed phenomenon known as media imperialism. Media imperialism discourse is particularly significant in Nigeria, the continent’s biggest country in terms of population and also home to one of Africa’s most vigorous media industries. Nigeria has also traditionally been exposed to American or Western media more than many other nations in Africa, aside South African, which in the context of this paper, is regarded as part and parcel of the Western/imperialistic media.

Media imperialism as a notional framework has been subsumed under the broader umbrella of cultural imperialism. According to White (2001), cultural imperialism has been used as a framework by scholars of different academic backgrounds and persuasions to explain phenomena in the areas of international relations, anthropology, education, sciences, history, literature and sports. He therefore reconsiders the concept of cultural imperialism theory as it relates to communication discipline. White (2001) contends that a review of the international communication literature will reveal different terms such as “media imperialism” (Boyd-Barrett, 1977); “media are American” (Tunstall, 1977); “structural imperialism” (Galtung, 1979); “cultural synchronization” (Hamelink, 1983); “cultural dependency and domination” (Link, 1984; Mohammadi, 1995); “electronic colonialism” (McPhail, 1987); “communication imperialism” (Sui-Nam Lee, 1988) “ideological imperialism” and “economic imperialism” (Mattleart, 1994) – all relating to the same basic notion of cultural imperialism.

These concepts and positions have been refigured and reformulated in the light of current debates on globalization, the public sphere, and the potential of the internet for empowerment to the effect that new

communication technologies and the opening up of global markets are transforming the world's media and cultural industries (Boyd-Barret & Thussu, 1993). While advocates of globalization contend that such change has brought greater freedom, opportunity, choice and diversity (Cowen, 2002), it is also clear that globalization has served the economic, political and cultural interests of certain parties more than others, raising concerns about a new era of American or Western imperialism and attendant cultural homogenization or standardization (Jameson, 2000). Colonizing the imagination of consumers worldwide, the virtual empires of the electronic age have a profound effect on national media systems and cultural sovereignty. For instance, about three decades after "Media are American", Tunstall (2008) posits in "Media were American" that the American era of media dominance has passed. This is pretty much explained by the development of national, transnational and regional media over the past quarter century in China, Brazil, India, Iran, Australia and elsewhere. Similarly, Thussu's "Electronic Empires" X-rays the effects of large transnational media corporations on national and regional media and one of the articles in the book (contributed by Boyd-Barrett) admits that there is no questioning the fact that there are emergent media "powers" in the ecology of media influence in contemporary world (1998). The painful scenario is that Nigeria is in the periphery of this emerging media "power" shift or expansion notwithstanding the much vaulted flow pattern of contents especially in the new media era and in particular the spread of Nigerian drama around African TV stations, foreign-based Africa-focused satellite TV and in the form of videos/DVDs among African diasporas.

Although so much redefinition has taken place, the dependency syndrome which this paper is referent on presupposes that imperialism itself implies a process of dominance and dependency between nations in which the identification of the role of the media in extending or containing given cultural orientations, conventions and influences is under focus. Perhaps that is why Golding (1977) earlier contextualized cultural imperialism as a problematic in the structural relations of dependence between advanced and developing societies and submits that the phenomenon includes the results of international media, educational and cultural systems. Consequently, scholars agree that mass media in Africa, Latin America and Asia have developed, almost invariably, as derivatives or appendages of those in the advanced industrialized countries. In a relatively recent work, some scholars sought to examine the interplay between cultural studies, media studies and Caribbeanist anthropology and how this interface has impacted on the consumption cultures of the Caribbean peoples. Pertierra and Horst (2009) observe that although media consumption has become a factor of everyday life in most regions around the world, there are several specific reasons why the Caribbean makes a particularly interesting case study for examining the

cultural practices, relationships, micro-political encounters and identities that surround the distribution and use of media systems and technologies.

In much the same way that John Sinclair (1999) has reported for the region of Latin America, the history of Caribbean media is inevitably entangled in a relationship of dependence on the economies and industries of the United States, such that by the 1980s the Anglophone Caribbean was measured as the world region most penetrated by foreign media (Brown, 1995). While countries in the Caribbean share some underlying features that could shape the possibilities for how mediascapes develop through local creation and appropriation of media content, the cheerless fact remains that virtually the entire Caribbean mediascape is a footnote to the United States of America's and Britain's media imperialistic hegemonies. In other words, Caribbean media content tend to rely a great deal on programmes, programming and information from the United States (and to lesser degrees from Europe and Mexico). Thus, media consumers in the region are simply passive recipients of the output of the global North (Dunn, 1995). For example, Pertierra (2009) captures the Cuban scenario where media content has not been particularly controversial, as the vast majority of citizens have had relatively free access to the categories of capitalist-produced media programming and programmes that they mostly desire, namely Hollywood films, Latin American *telenovelas*, international sporting events and popular music from around the world. Perhaps, this scenario has remained unchallenged because local programmes and programming are trite and too pedestrian for the growing Cuban population. Pertierra corroborated this view when she affirmed that the residents included in her study, especially younger people, did frequently complain that most Cuban television and radio programming is boring.

Boyd-Barrett (1977) had previously pontificated that any academic analysis of international media activities has two outstanding features of the "influence process". The first, according to him, is the unidirectional nature of international media flow. He argued that whereas there is a heavy flow of exported media products/technologies/content from the United States of America to; say Asian, African and Caribbean countries, there is only a very slight trickle of Asian, African and Caribbean media products/technologies/content to the United States of America. Even where there may appear to be a substantial return flow, as is sometimes the case in news and Nigerian home video dramas, the apparent reciprocity only disguises the fact that those who manage or handle this return flow are primarily the agents of major Western media systems, whose criteria of choice are determined first by their domestic market needs. The operations and activities of Western media behemoths such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC World), Cable News Network (CNN), Sky News, Fox News, Voice of America (VOA), among others, in relation to, and with other regions of the world clearly exemplify the point being made. In the theorizing of

Boyd–Barrett, the second outstanding feature of the influence process which actually stems from the first is the very small number of “source” countries accounting for a very large share of all international media influences around the world. These countries are mainly the United States of America, then Britain, France, Germany, Russia, followed by relatively emergent centres of international media influence including Italy, India, China, Japan, Iran and Brazil. Eregare and Afolabi (2009) argue further that if “sources” are identified only by country of origin, however this obscures the fact that the real sources are even more limited, located as they were, in a handful of giant media conglomerates, then the rest of the world is under media iron-grip of some sort.

However, the concern here is not whether the idea of media imperialism in world media culture is desirable or has advantages or disadvantages. Rather, emphasis is on the historical development of the phenomenon, reasons for its prevalence as well as the obvious but regrettable fact that it will continue to be part of the African media arrangement, specifically the television system in Nigeria for some time to come. A good way to proceed further in this discourse is to examine the issue from the three perspectives enunciated by Fejes (1981). According to him, media imperialism should be analyzed with reference to:

- (i) the role of the media in maintaining or changing a nation’s power structure and how it is tied to the international system of domination and dependence.
- (ii) as a historical phenomenon; and (iii) under culture. The phenomenon is thus analyzed from these three perspectives. The different modes exhibited by the phenomenon are situated within them.

Perspectives and Dialectics of Media Imperialism

The term “media imperialism” connotes a situation whereby the media system of a particular area of focus is subjected to the dictates of the media system of another area. A concise definition of media imperialism is provided by Boyd–Barrett, however dated. According to him, it is the process whereby ownership, structure, distribution, or content of the media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantial external pressure from the media interests of any other country or countries without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected (1977). The pertinent issue here is culture. From the concept enunciated by Boyd – Barrett, it is obvious that the result of the pressure is acculturation. Ordinarily, the hardware of media systems (that is, the technology), which Nigeria is used to, is Western. The hardware is intended for use in aid of development. But when the hardware comes with all its cultural appurtenances, then whatever

development it would bring would be Western-tainted, if not a complete implantation of Western culture.

It must be noted that the country or countries that initiate this imperialism do so either inadvertently or as a deliberate or intentional policy or commercial strategy. On the other hand, the country so affected accepts or adopts the influence resulting from the invasion as a deliberate commercial or political strategy. It may otherwise absorb it, ignorant of its consequences.

It is equally true that the country so invaded may just be powerless and is unable to resist the invasion even if it had wanted to do so. Several factors are responsible for the inability to resist, chief amongst which is poverty in all its ramifications, which may prevent an invaded country from evolving its own media system that is strong enough to resist imperialism. In this regard, Eregare and Afolabi (2009) rightly note that media imperialism is a critical theory regarding the perceived effects of globalization on world's media.

They contend that when a single company or corporation controls all the media in a country or countries, standardizing and commercializing products of one culture for the media consumption of another, media imperialism is in operation. For instance, the influence of the American media content only intensifies consumption values instead of production values in many countries which are compelled to depend and view the world through the prism of Western values, ideas and civilization. It is probably this dependency syndrome Boyd – Barrett (1977) envisaged when he identified four modes of media imperialism. These are: (i) the shape of the communication vehicle; (ii) a set of individual arrangement for the continuation of media production; (iii) the body of values about ideal practice; and (iv) specific media content.

To this could be added, language as distinct from the shape of the communication vehicle and specific content. A little explanation of these modes is germane to this discourse. The shape of the communication vehicle refers to the communication technology. The early advance of the developed nations of the West (France, United States of America, Britain and Germany) has given them the leverage to equally develop communication systems to link great distances just to enhance their business interests.

However, this has impacted quite negatively on the media systems of the developing countries as it ensures the perpetuation of the world information order that has consigned the developing world to a position of mere consumers of information, even when the information originates in their own environment. Ultimately, then, the early technological advance of these countries compels other countries in quest of the development of their media systems to follow the examples set by these countries. In Nigeria, emphasis is on transmission facilities just to keep pace with international broadcast standards as dictated by the global north and rural integration and development is paid lip service. Yet rural integration and grassroots

development ought to be the paramount focus of media operation in a developing nation like Nigeria (Ibagere, 2002; Omoera, 2006).

The industrial arrangement for the continuation of media production is linked to financial facilities which the media utilize for stability. Western countries have established a solid foundation that enables their media systems to be financially independent. This ensures their continuous production of content which they can dispose of to developing countries cheaply. The structure of Hollywood, for example, gives it an unassailable advantage that enhances the invasion of Third World cinema and television by American film and television products. The strong foundation of Hollywood is a development which was encouraged by the American government in various ways including the formation of the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA) in 1946 (Ekwuazi, 1991). This body was formed to regulate film making as well as deal with the exploration of films and garner whatever advantage was needed abroad. This ensured that America maintained the lead while others followed. Thus, Hollywood has been able to consolidate and intensify its grip on global distribution and exhibition of motion picture as a result of neo-liberalism on trade practices and terms (Hjort & Petrie, 2007).

The body of values about ideal practice refers to the codes or ethics of the profession of broadcasting. The compendium of ethics of broadcasting was first evolved by the developed countries. Because of this pioneering position, the code of ethics or its derivatives tend to ape their developed societies. Thus, it is what is conceived to be good television fare that must be the standard. It is what constitutes “good news” in the Western sense that should also hold for the rest, especially in Nigeria and other countries in the south of the Sahara. Moreover, in quest of attaining the appropriate professional standards set by the West, many African stations procure foreign programmes to fill their air time which local programmes cannot fill because of the prohibitive cost of production. Golding (1977) earlier made this point when he observed that the factors which have forced television into this situation include the demands of a largely elite population having cosmopolitan tastes and interests as well as the high cost of local production.

The reference to tastes and demands of the elite are equally relevant in the discussion of content as a crucial element of media imperialism affecting television broadcasting in Africa particularly in Nigeria. In the area of news, most television organizations depend on foreign news agencies such as Reuters, Associated Press, United Press, BBC World, to mention a few. And because these agencies view the world with their home country imperialist socio-political and cultural biases, Africans become inundated with news that is skewed in favour of stereotypes which Western nations have stamped Africa with. Correspondingly, when a news item about Africa gets into the broadcast circuits of these agencies, it is more or less carried to validate such stereotypes or it is about war, violent crisis or some uncanny event.

Language as an element of media imperialism in Nigerian television is quite significant. The major language of broadcasting is English. It is only in special programmes that indigenous languages are used. Most of the time indigenous languages are used for news translations. But the time allotted for such translations is not more than a few minutes per language. Thus, not more than one item of news is broadcast in the news translations. The inclusion of such translation, is therefore, not for any purpose of integration or grassroots development through communication, but merely to show that no language area is marginalized in a political sense. It must equally be noted that the use of English to broadcast news and other programmes has communication problems of its own, especially as regards the influence and integration of the rural and illiterate populace who may not understand the English language adequately.

From the foregoing, it is clear that, in concept, imperialism pervades the critical sectors of the Nigerian television. To further clarify the phenomenon, it is, perhaps necessary to show, in concrete terms, its pervasive extent.

Imperialism in the Nigerian Television Broadcasting

All the enumerated modes of imperialism exist in the Nigerian television broadcasting. The situation has become even more acute since the deregulation of broadcasting in the early 1990s. A careful look at the daily offerings of many of the TV stations would reveal the pervasive nature of the phenomenon. In terms of technology, Nigerian TV broadcasters are far behind their Western counterparts as lean finances incapacitate most of them in their bid to acquire up to speed equipment and technology needed by the medium. Stations' broadcasts do not extend beyond a few kilometres. In other words, the area of signification of a majority of the stations is far less than what is expected. For instance, the broadcast signals of Edo broadcasting service (EBS) TV, a state owned TV in Nigeria is only received in the state capital, Benin City and a few areas not too far away. The implication of this is that a larger proportion of the people living in the state do not get EBS TV signals, needless to say those outside the state. This is the scenario in most of the federating states of Nigeria. This ultimately limits the options available to viewers. Needless to say that it also reduces the size of the audience as well as advertising range because the TV stations cannot boast of large areas of signification or coverage. Consequently, advertising patronage may not yield the fund needed for such stations' expansion in terms of technology acquisition, transmission and area of news coverage.

Adeseye (1991) notes that at inception, television broadcast time was about 75% foreign programmes. Though the NBC is trying to change the situation by requiring that stations broadcast 60% local content in their daily transmission, it has not augured well for the industry as the small turnover

of most of the TV outfits does not allow for the production of programmes that can meet international standards. In fact, private stations are now involved in the broadcast of sponsored programmes which do not serve the interest of integration/rural/grassroots communication in Nigeria where over 70 percent of the people are rural dwellers (Omoera, 2006). Religious programmes take up the largest percentage of weekly broadcasts in the name of local content. Even when some other Nigerian stations, including HiTv pride themselves for bringing innovative solutions in television content and programming, it appears that they do so in crass ignorance, insensitivity and short-sightedness because many of the programmes ape foreign media without regard to the socio-cultural sensitivity and sensibility of Nigerians. A clear case is “Kokomansion” currently on HiTv which shamelessly copies the America’s “Playboy Mansion” with all its moral failings in the light of the Nigerian cultural mores, sense of decency and respect for motherhood and womanhood all in the name of commercial fortune and what Tony Subair of HiTv and other organizers of the reality show calls innovation and creativity. In fact, Ojo (2009) hits the nail on its head when he noted that the quest for fame, money and material pursuit drives Kokomansion.

Inadequate funding is another sore point that makes Nigerian television stations hook on to foreign stations to bring international events to viewers. Many stations even use such attachment to source for advertising from patrons because such events, especially sporting activities easily attract sponsors. A case in point is the European Football Champions’ league final played between Barcelona Football Club of Spain and Arsenal Football Club of England on Wednesday, May 17, 2006. The Nigerian Breweries sponsored the analysis of the match on Nigerian Television Authority’s (NTA’s) “Newslines”. But an important football match like the Nigerian Football Federation final is rarely aired. Notable is the finals of the African Women’s Football Championship, hosted by Nigeria and which Nigeria won for a record fifth time on November 11, 2006. It was only the local television station – the Delta Rainbow Television (DRTV) that aired the match and it is probably because it was the state (Delta State) that hosted the championship on behalf of the country. Other stations chose to broadcast the English Premier League matches played that weekend. About four years down the road the situation is now even direr as many conglomerates, including Guinness, Heineken now bankroll the broadcast of league matches from Europe to the dereliction of Nigerian league matches. Overtime, this and other programming activities of most Nigerian TV stations seem to have accumulatively influenced the attitude and behaviour of Nigerians, especially the youths. Today, it is rife to see Nigerian youths wearing T-shirts, rubber bracelets and caps with inscriptions such as “Chelsea FC”, “Arsenal FC”, “Man U for Life”, “New York Lakers”, to mention a few (Okhakhu & Ate, 2008). In fact, the average Nigerian football fan knows more about football players and their activities in the Spanish League (La Liga), German League

(Bundesliga), Italian League (Serie A), French League (Ligue 1), among others, than the Nigerian sporting scene. The point being made is that gradually but certainly the Nigerian television is being trapped in the web of subtle conditioning of the minds of the people to imbibe values which make their desire for foreign goods, services or ideas to increase (Udeze, 2005). And there is a strong connection between this consumptive social attitude and the globalisation agenda which continuously buoys up the economy of the producing nation and slows down the economic, industrial and technological growth of the consuming nation (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1993).

Perhaps the most significant but regrettable development in encouraging media imperialism tendencies in the Nigerian media ecology is the gleeful announcement by the Federal Government of Nigeria of negotiations between the NBC and the English Football Federation (which holds the broadcast rights of the Premier League) on the broadcast of premier league matches by Nigerian stations. "Following the discussion between the NBC and the FA premier league as well as the follow-up by the Honourable Minister of Information and Communications, Nigeria has been set aside as a broadcast territory for the acquisition of FA premier league rights" (Aihe, 2006). This trend can only perpetuate media imperialism as is the case today where, there are now fans of notable English clubs like Manchester United, Arsenal and Chelsea going for thanksgiving in churches all over the country for their "success" while Nigerian clubs play to empty terraces in different stadiums with their matches not featured on television.

In the area of news, a majority of the Nigerian television broadcast outfits cull a large chunk of their broadcast materials from foreign news agencies. There are a plethora cases where international TV broadcasters such as the Cable News Network (CNN), Aljazeera, BBC World, South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), to mention a few, had to report events on important national issues in and around Nigeria before Nigerian TV broadcasters would scurry to pick them as news items. For instance, it was Aljazeera that alerted the world, including Nigerians about the 2010 pogrom in Jos Plateau, north central Nigeria. It would also be recalled that some years back, while most of the Nigerian stations were busying playing pirated musicals, CNN was busying streaming the Lissa Plane Crash in south western Nigeria. Perhaps, the most embarrassing moment for Nigerian TV broadcasters was when the Nigerian president, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua who had been incommunicado with Nigerians for several months, over health related issues, address Nigerians via the BBC Radio, a foreign media concern. Apart from leaving the country rudderless, the incendiary nature of the president's continued stay in Saudi Arabia without letting Nigerians know what was wrong with him was palpably felt across the world. It probably would have been a different scenario if the president that went away without official leave (AWOL) addressed the nation via the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) or the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria

(FRCN) and other TV or radio networks across the world hooked up to them for the reportage of that news item. This incident tells much about the information management system that obtains in Nigeria, which hamstring the average Nigerian broadcast outfit and reduces it to a position where its Hobson's choice is to tag along Western media behemoths due to some ethno-political and economic behests within the country. Needless to say that many of the TV stations continue to feature video clips of foreign TV stations anytime they broadcast international news under the demeaning rubric of "this was culled from CNN, BBC, SABC and so on". At times it is even the complete audio-visual footage of the particular news item that is culled from the foreign TV station. Ibagere and Edosa (2006) earlier noted that Nigerian television at the turn of the new millennium, "resorted to acquiring culturally foreign programmes from TV Africa and other pay TV cable outfits with whom many stations seem to have signed a contract". Imperialism then, seems to wear a new look. Rather than accuse Western nations (particularly America) of invading Nigerian screens with elements of their culture, the focus should now be on South Africa with its robust broadcasting through which Western culture continues to invade Nigerian culture, as signified by the programmes of such satellite stations as Channel O, E Entertainment, MNET and others.

As regards the code of practice for media operations, it is sad to note that Nigerian television appears not to have standards that are indigenous to it. To worsen the matter, viewers seem to have acquired Western tastes without commensurate financial power to satisfy such tastes. Also, the Nigerian television system does not possess the capacity to provide such fare comparable with Western standards. This is why satellite television has become more popular even though it is quite expensive. According to Anibeze (2006) while the cable TV stations broadcasting the world cup in Germany was charging 9.9 Euros (1,800 naira) per month, people were paying 9,000 naira for DSTV monthly in Nigeria, with additional 500 naira if one was paying through an agent. Despite this high cost, Nigerian viewers continue to yearn for foreign programmes. Thus, the economics of scale does not favour the average Nigerian TV broadcaster as it fights tooth and nail to keep hope alive in a hostile business environment where it is compelled to become a dependant of others because of the consumptive attitude of its people.

Attempt to allow viewers a peep into international events either results in a dismal imitation or outright replay of foreign stations' broadcasts. One of such unsuccessful imitations is the introduction of the information bar which drifts from one end of the screen to the other during programmes. This was introduced by the NTA in 2006. The crudity of the imitation is glaring in the inadequate information thereby obscuring the meaning of the message. Again some messages are absurd and without relevance to viewers. For example, on December 6, 2006 on the news bar during the NTA telecast of the daily programme, "AM Express", there were, among others, the

following: “Clooney mourns death of his pig”, “McCartney vies for Icon title”, and “Mary J. Blige wins big on billboard”. These news items are to say the least culturally irrelevant to the average Nigerian. Apart from Mary J. Blige who may be known to a handful of viewers by virtue of her musical popularity in the US, the other two characters are probably unknown to the viewers in Nigeria. The foregoing obviously point to media content that is inherently foreign. The fact of this is revealed in the emergence of programmes having no cultural relevance to Nigeria.

Yet specific media content betrays a worse scenario. With regard to specific media content, it is obvious that Nigerian screens continue to be buffeted with foreign media content. The so-called Digital Satellite Television (DSTV) continues to attract attention from Nigerian viewers despite the fact that they pay more for signals than anywhere in the world (Anibeze, 2006). This, probably, necessitated the need to break the monopoly of Multi-choice, the sole company with DSTV rights in Nigeria. This deregulation commenced with the rights to football matches of the English Premier League which are no longer the exclusive preserve of Multi-choice but now open for bids from other networks (Aihe, 2007). While subscribers are jubilant over the break of the Multi-choice monopoly because it has reduced subscription price, it is clear that imperialism is assuming a wider dimension. There has been a constant complaint of lopsidedness of broadcasting in particular and the world information order in general. While it is only a few stations such as the NTA and African Independent Television (AIT), among others, that engage in satellite broadcasting in Nigeria, Nigerians know so much about South African stations like SABC, Channel O, MTV Base and so on. It must be noted that imperialism is not only a feature of globalization it is a detrimental development that supplants indigenous media culture with the foreign one. The manifestation of this can be gleaned from the adoption of Western practice as could be seen in the content displayed in Big Brother Africa (BBA) show which was aired for the first time in 2007. This was an imitation of Big Brother America. Tagged as a reality show, BBA featured obscene scenes of inmates having their baths as well as amoral interactions. The Nigerian representative, Ofunneka was first, thought to be the most morally decent. She, however, incurred the wrath of viewers when footages of the show revealed that she was involved in an act with the eventual winner, Richard who was shown fingering her. Commenting on this development, Miebi Senge (2007) says: information is gotten faster on the Net now than from your next door neighbours and would actually put “amebo” to shame. (Amebo is a Pidgin English slang meaning, gossip). But that is the stuff that Nigerians are yet to come to terms with. In fact, it appears that anything goes on the airwaves in Nigeria in the name of TV programming.

According to Senge, there were already 4,584 clicks on the video of Richard fingering Ofunneka (2007). MNET (which transmitted the

programme) had earlier apologized to the Nigerian government over the sexually offensive video clips on the BBA reality show. It can therefore be seen that imperialism continues either through direct screening of programmes from foreign stations or by imitation as could be seen in the BBA which had a Nigerian equivalent (Big Brother Nigeria) in 2008. Some other Western programmes that have been shamelessly aped by Nigerian TV broadcasters are “Don’t Forget the Lyrics”, “Who Wants to be a Millionaire”, “Project Fame”, to mention a few.

From whatever perspective then, media imperialism continues to be a feature of Nigerian television broadcasting to the extent that the involvement in international affairs such as the carnage in the Dafur region of Sudan where Nigeria is an active participant in the search for peace can only be accessed through information from such international media organizations such as CNN, BBC, Fox News, Sky News and so on. A number of reasons account for the continued imperialism, and they are hereby stated.

Reasons for the Prevailing Imperialism

The first factor that accounts for imperialism is finance. The economy of the country is not in a good shape due to mismanagement and outright corruption. The financial crunch resulting from the bad economy acts like an incubus on television especially with regard to such programmes that involve huge financial stakes. Mid January, 2006, ten (10) broadcasting organizations (including some television stations) were closed down by the NBC for failure to fulfil their financial obligations to the commission, to enable the renewal of their broadcast licenses. According to Silas Yisa (then Director General of the Commission) “after a mutually agreed decision in which the affected broadcasters were to pay half of the amount owed, most of them still refused to pay their debt, some as old as the day the stations commenced operations” (personal communication, January 19, 2006). In a situation like this, television stations may find it impossible to do their own programmes. They make do with foreign programmes which are cheaper to obtain. They may also find it difficult, if not impossible to send correspondents to places to get news. It is no surprise then that the likes of CNN and BBC will continue to be the imperial sources of news for Nigerian television organizations. The fact of the paucity of funds to make programmes was acknowledged by Ben Murray – Bruce (then Director General of the NTA and now Chairman Silverbird TV) at the South African organized Sithengi Film and Broadcast Festival in 2000. In a remark to the Nigerian delegation to the festival, he said: But more importantly, let us see how we can work together to produce a full feature film, how we can produce programmes. You don’t have any problem with scripts and artistes. Your problems are in funding and equipment (Cited in Aihe, 2000).

This factor, noted in 2000, is still a significant factor in 2010. Another factor mentioned by Murray – Bruce is equipment. Virtually all foreign stations of note have adopted satellite broadcasting. Among the organizations (NTA, HiTv and AIT) involved in satellite broadcasting in Nigeria, AIT remains the most vibrant. Locally, signals from most stations cannot be received more than fifty kilometres from their transmitters. So they cannot even send correspondents to far places to gather news. And when they do, such news cannot be broadcast instantly. To obviate the problem of broadcasting stale news, resort has to be made to foreign stations whose news items are relayed without editing.

The above factor is closely connected with the quality of programmes which is far from the standards of the ones from foreign stations. The lack of funds compels stations to rely on obsolete equipment which may not enhance the production of good programmes capable of sustaining viewers' attention.

So, cheap programmes are purchased from foreign stations to fill their air time and most viewers, especially the urban dwellers rue this and respond by acquiring DSTV equipment to watch quality programmes. For example, the African Cup of Nations (Football Championship) hosted by Ghana in 2008 was seen by DSTV subscribers on Super Sports rather than any of the local stations in Nigeria. And as the financial crunch continues to restrict broadcasting to only urban areas, it makes it worthwhile for those in the rural areas who can afford the DSTV to acquire it for commercial use. It is now a common feature for advertising hoardings to be placed at strategic places advertising upcoming premier league matches to be viewed for a fee.

This is a new dimension that may eventually render Nigerian local stations irrelevant, if not redressed.

The situation equally leads to indolence on the part of broadcasters who now hide under the façade of lack of funds to remain uncreative. Many of the stations lack the funds to train staff. So, the professionals become abjectly ignorant of current trends or latest equipment as a result. Training amounts to a few in-house workshops and seminars which are not adequate for the onerous job they perform.

Prognosis

From the foregoing, it is obvious that media imperialism will continue to be part of the Nigerian television system for some time. Although the NTA has tried to reduce the feature of foreign programmes on its broadcast menu, a horde of other TV broadcasters in Nigerian still depend on foreign TV stations for their operations. Apart from discussion programmes which seem to express personal opinions, the NTA does not seem to have adequate replacement for foreign programmes that have been yanked off the screen.

Again, the Federal Government has evolved a policy which tacitly encourages the proliferation of foreign satellite television systems. In 2007,

the Minister of Information and Communication came up with a government decision granting more licenses to organizations to commence retransmission of DSTV signals. This means there would be more options for willing subscribers. More subscribers will also emerge as the price of acquiring the facility will become cheaper due to competition, as well as the fee for monthly subscription. This is one of the effects of globalization as it encourages the uprooting of values and media systems of one place and supplants them with that of another. The effect in the circumstance is that while there is the increase in the number of subscribers to DSTV, a converse decrease in the number of viewers of local stations would result. Then to generate more interest and sustain subscription, satellite retransmission organizations will begin to focus on the Nigerian environment for new business fields. For instance, DSTV now has satellite channels dedicated to Yoruba and Hausa video films and the process of enlisting more indigenous Nigerian language movies on its broadcast menu is underway. This may eventually put paid to any modicum of interest in local stations as even advertisers would now use these foreign/satellite stations to pursue their ends. Ultimately Nigerians would begin to see themselves from foreign eyes and would become what foreign nations want them to be.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at the issue of media imperialism as it affects television broadcasting in Nigeria. It historically examined the various trajectories of the phenomenon in world media culture and traced the Nigerian experience to the evolution of television itself in the country. The paper further posited that as a phenomenon, the issue will continue to recur since an enabling atmosphere needed for its displacement by local broadcasting is yet faltering. Therefore, it suggested that it is high time stakeholders in the Nigerian television media made genuine and conscious effort to change the situation. Such effort should include better funding, serious investment in the development of home-grown media technologies, investment in high level manpower development, innovative programmes and more specialized programming with indigenous flavours by both the public and private television outfits operating in the country. These measures, this paper believes, would go a long way in reducing the media dependency syndrome that currently pervades the Nigerian television broadcasting space.

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