

Broadcast Media and Political Education : The Impact of Radio and Television Drama Programmes on the 2011 Elections..

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Abstract

It has often been stated that the critical and functional role of broadcasting is the advancement and promotion of democracy. Some scholars have argued that the oxygen of democracy is broadcasting. Many have also commented that indeed the only valuable role for broadcasting away from the functionality of entertainment and education is the enhancement of democracy. That is why broadcasting and broadcast regulation is all about the enhancement of the democratic ethos..

This paper examines the role of broadcasting and in this particular case radio and television drama as a means of promoting democracy, and curbing the problems of bad governments, political ignorance, poor voter education and post election violence in Nigeria. It notes that television and especially television drama has always played a role in promoting democracy. During the 2011 elections, the Nigerian broadcast media played a role in the democratic process, but how much of that contribution came from radio and television drama and with what effect?.

It is the finding of the paper that there appears to be no programmed and orchestrated effort to use television drama to strengthen political education, save for the efforts of a few Non Government Agencies. The paper submits that radio and Television drama can indeed be a most effective tool for advancing democracy in Nigeria if properly explored and exploited.

INTRODUCTION

According to Wikkipaedia(2011:1)"political drama" can be described as Theatre play film or TV program that has a political component, whether reflecting the author's political opinion, or describing a politician or series of political events. Some famous English dramatist who have written political dramas include Aaron Sorkin, Robert Penn Warren Sergei Eisenstein , Bertolt Brecht , Jean Paul Sartre Caryl Churchill and Federico García Lorca and in Nigeria we have people like Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and others .

In England some Television series that can be classified as political drama include "Yes Minister ", its sequel "Yes, Prime Minister ", "The West Wing (TV series)|The West Wing ", "Jack and Bobby", "The Bold Ones: etc. There have also been notable films that have been labeled as political dramas such as "Thirteen Days (film) Thirteen Days ".

Drama for Development

The role of drama (Radio and Television) is a long and well established arrear of study in popular culture. In many countries of the world, there is an increasing import of the role of drama and how it can stimulate development. In rural Afghanistan to urban Nigeria BBC World Service audiences have been tuning-in to mass mediated drama with 'instructive' messages for many years. Each 'drama for development' reflects the interweaving of development goals, donor objectives, processes of cross-cultural translation, creative dialogue and debate between local and expatriate dramatists and, not least, the responses and interpretations of dramatic narratives by audiences. It is from such a perspective, organisations such as the BBC World Service Trust, the BBC World Service's charitable arm, can be seen to be actively engaged in crafting complex development concepts and issues into local frames by applying specific cultural, social and political filters to render these concepts and narratives intelligible. The BBC World Service Trust drama for instance is informed by formative and ongoing audience research and evaluation that feeds into production in ways that enable audiences to play an active role in the evolving serial narratives that influence political thought and thinking.

Perhaps a classical example of Television drama with political influence is ***Yes Minister***. ***Yes Minister*** is a satirical British sitcom written by

Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn that was first transmitted by BBC Television and BBC Radio between 1980-1982 and 1984, split over three seven-episode series.

Set principally in the private office of a British government cabinet minister in the (fictional) Department for Administrative Affairs in Whitehall (the sequel was set in the Prime Minister's offices at 10 Downing Street), the series follows the senior ministerial career of The Rt Hon Jim Hacker MP, played by Paul Eddington. His various struggles to formulate and enact legislation or effect departmental changes are opposed by the will of the British Home Civil Service, in particular his Permanent Secretary, Sir Humphrey Appleby, played by Nigel Hawthorne. His Principal Private Secretary Bernard Woolley, played by Derek Fowlds, is usually caught between the two.

Inspirations

The writers of 'Yes Minister' according to Wikkipaedia were inspired by a variety of sources, including sources inside government, published material and contemporary news stories. The writers also met several leading senior civil servants under the auspices of the Royal Institute of Public Administration, a think-tank for the public service sector, which led to the development of some plot lines.

'Yes Minister' is a reference model because the series have been cited by political scientists for their accurate and sophisticated portrayal of the relationships between civil servants and politicians, and are quoted in some textbooks on British politics. The series was highly rated by critics and politicians. The shows were very popular in government circles. .

Developmental Challenge in Nigeria.

The reality today is that the contemporary political space in Nigeria is dominated by calls and agitations for Good governance. Good governance has been identified by several commentators as the key ingredient to development and economic growth in Nigeria. It is Akosile(2010) who states that as long as the ruling class believes that the electorate is powerless or too apathetic to call leaders to account in a bid to check their excesses and make them deliver democratic gains to the people, good governance in Nigeria will remain a mirage; landmark year notwithstanding. He states that the earlier everyone begins to put

structures in place to ensure the delivery of the desired good governance to the people, the better for everyone.

It is somewhat of a puzzle that Good governance remains a quest in a country described as the eighth largest exporter of crude petroleum in the world, and among the top ten exporters of natural gas; a country that has no business being poor or corrupt; a nation that ought to be a shining example to other 'lesser' African brother nations like Ghana and Botswana, which are now success stories. Akosile (2010) notes that the issue of good governance, is so important for Africa and Nigeria's development because bad management, institutional instabilities, and internal political shocks impede investment - domestic and foreign, with a corresponding effect on the citizens.

In October 2009, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation released its 2009 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG). Nigeria emerged a distant 35th position out of the 53 countries in Africa, which were assessed and ranked on good governance. She however improved on her 2008 ranking, which was 39th out of the ranked 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The country scored 46.5 marks out of 100, scoring below the overall continental average, which was 51.2 marks, and also scored below the West African regional average, which was 51.7 points.

Akosile further reveals that for good governance to reign and be sustained in Nigeria, some concerned stakeholders believe those in positions of power must justify their actions, in response to the demands of the citizens. The suggestion according to him was made by the Secretary General of Nigeria Network of Non-Governmental Organisations (NNNGO) Barrister Ayo Adebuseye, while delivering a position paper at a recent seminar organised by Lagos State Civil Society Partnership (LACSOP) on 'Strengthening Voice, Transparency and Accountability in Lagos State: the Imperative for Collaboration of The Legislature, the Media and Civil Society'.

Drama in Nigeria and the 2011 Elections.

Olusola(1981:370) notes that as early as 1960 Wole Soyinka was commissioned to write a play for television which was subsequently produced and broadcast for television at a cost the television managers found objectionable, for any playwright, the contract fee was 200

pounds. The managers felt that if a half and hour programme of **Highway patrol** a foreign programme was as cheap as 10 Naira, compared to Soyinka's 4000 Naira or Hubert Ogunde's 50 Naira, then it was common business sense to patronize foreign contents.

According to Olusola the first generation of television producers with some claim to competence in the dramatic arts were Ekwere John, Patrick Itioghe, and Christopher Kolade. Wole Soyinka's **My Fathers Burden** according to him scored a number of firsts when it was televised in august 1960. It was the first television drama in English language on Nigerian television and also first ever Commissioned play on Nigerian Television. Olusola recounts that live transmission of this programme with all it's attendant difficulties resulted in the first published review of a television play satirically captioned WNTV's Burden.

Television drama in Nigeria received a boost in 1965 with the weeklong, festival of TV drama, scheduled to mark Nigeria's independence in that year. Among the productions featured during the festival was **Song of a Goat**, and **Masquerade** by J.P Clark, **The Trials of Brother Jero**, by Soyinka and **Oba Koso** by Duro Ladipo. But perhaps the high point of Nigeria's drama development occurred in 1968 with the inception of regular drama series, the **Village Headmaster**, with Ted Mukoro as village headmaster and Roseline Birch as Faita, his young daughter. But Television drama like **Village Headmaster**, were characteristically social commentaries and though they addressed the social concerns of the Nigerian state and in consequence developmental challenges, they were not truly speaking particular to the issues of governance and political challenge.

Broadcast Drama and Political Change in Nigeria .

Perhaps the most notable effort to use television drama for political change in recent time is in the activities of the organization CFC. Communication for Change (CFC) is a dynamic, state-of-the-art communications organization raising Africans' awareness of environment and development issues (including economic empowerment, gender, health, education, agriculture, debt relief, forests, climate change, water, pollution and democracy & good governance) to create positive change to develop the continent and improve lifestyles.

It claims on its web site on Wikipedia (2011:p1) that it is a non-governmental organisation limited by guarantee and is run entirely on a not-for profit basis. It is funded by grants received from international and local donors and is increasingly supported by private sector funding. CFC also generates income from fee based communications services, film sales and office space rental to support its development communications work. CFC's mission is **to raise Africans' awareness of environment and development issues to create positive change to develop the continent and ultimately improve lifestyles.**

According to its Wikipedia site (2011) Radio and Television messages are produced from a distinctly African perspective to counter the ever-increasing flow of foreign, often culturally inappropriate programming. Besides awareness rising, CFC plays an important role in promoting partnerships between public, private, academic, and NGO sectors by providing excellent, appropriate, and cutting-edge communications support, products and training.

In the build up to the 2011 elections CFC committed its time and energy to produce Dramas that were geared towards the promotion of good governance. They produced a series of television drama to drive home the point for good governance. Let us examine two of them briefly.

1. COME OVER Directed by Mellanby Ileogben-Duration 9 mins

Synopsis-Ahurije village is a community where people are improvised. Government workers are on strike and nothing seems to be working. However the elected chairman is living large at people's expense. In his quest for re-election he comes to the village with gifts and other inducements to win the peoples votes. He rides into the village in big and intimidating jeeps and luxury cars. The road is bumpy and dusty and the people live in squalor. They are discussing their poor state when the Chairman arrives with his police orderly and begins to distribute rice and other provisions. The people reject the provisions and send him out of their town. Querying him for visiting them only when in need of their votes, not minding that he did not do anything concrete during the period to improve their lot.

2. ONE VOICE MAKES A MAJORITY-Directed by Remi Richards

Synopsis-Baba Mogaji is an ex chairman who ruled his village with maximum might and terror. He promoted thuggery and armed

banditry. The chairman is able to plant anger among the people. He is however determined to continue hold on to power and hold sway even after he relinquished power. He is feared and becomes indomitable. It is election time and he brings in his own candidate against the choice of the people. A bold and courageous leader Meto comes out to challenge the candidate of Baba Mogaji. The people are able to foil the attempts of the Mogaji thugs to disrupt the electoral process.

A critical review of the two programmes, indicate several issues 1.that power of choice actually belongs to the people. It was the will of the people that led them to resist the attempt of the Chairman to bribe them for votes when in actual sense he had not used his past position to improve their lot. The story proves that the power of the ballot belong to the people. It is that same power of the people that led the people to reject the violent leadership to challenge violent behaviour during elections.

Radio Drama

Like television the radio has also played a key role in political education in Nigeria. The recent efforts are however propelled by the activities of NGOS like the BBC Trust and the MESSAGE initiative(.Media Support for Strengthening Advocacy Good Governance and Empowerment) The key objectives of Message as stated on the BBC Trust site on Wikipedia(2011) is in answering the question why media matters.

Message explain that the real reasons are that we live in a poor and an ever more complex global society, on a planet where more than 2 billion people try to survive on less than \$2 a day. Many people in developing countries are confronted with massive, desperately difficult challenges: hunger, HIV and AIDS, population growth, climate change, war and the daily struggle of poverty.

The Media also matters because it underpins how societies respond to the problems they face. This makes media not only relevant to the most urgent problems of poverty and marginalization - it makes it critical to solutions designed to address them. It is also to draw public attention - especially in rich countries - to the plight of people living in poverty. Sometimes the media is also considered important because it can provide a more rounded and positive insight into the realities of life in developing countries and can counter stereotypes.

Message also states that media matters more than as a source of information on poverty. It matters too because it is a critical part of strategies designed to address poverty. There is one very simple reason for this, and several less simple reasons. The simple reason is that humans are uniquely successful as a species because they are uniquely able to communicate with each other. This capacity underpins all development in all of history.

The media, and increasingly new technologies, is increasingly how humans communicate with each other. How well we communicate with each other has a good deal to do with how successful we're likely to be in confronting the massive problems we face.

Making Informed Choices

Message also believes that media enables people to access information on issues that shape their lives, without which they cannot make choices. Media enables people to hold their governments to account and provides a critical check on government corruption. Media and communication enables people and communities to understand, debate and reach decisions on the issues that confront them. Media enables people to understand the risks they face, such as from HIV and AIDS, and the steps they can take to protect themselves.

Message believes that media and communication can be immense and powerful instruments for change and empowerment in society. Media can be an important part of the solution to development challenges. The character of a country's media tends to determine the character of a country's democracy and society. It underpins how people learn, understand and shape change.

It is in view of the above that CFC has engaged itself in the production of television drama for change. During the last elections, a major focus of MESSAGE was to develop and equip the Nigerian media to play their part in the coverage of the key issues at stake in this election; for civil society to better engage with the media and for the audience to use channels created through the programme to make their choices, as well as make duty bearers accountable to citizens.

The focus was also to confront voter apathy and unwholesome practices that characterize the contest for votes, and the organization of voting. Additional themes, such as learning how to live with HIV/AIDS, how to enthrone transparency and accountability in community level

governance and other issues, are woven into each series as part of an individual character's story. The drama productions are captured in the series **Story-Story-**

Story is the drama that captures the objectives of **Message**. The weekly half-hour episodes are fictional depictions of life in a typical Nigerian community. The main characters include: traders, farmers, drivers, touts, people with money and power, religious leaders, civil servants and health workers. Each of its series has an overarching theme, such as how to reduce poverty and corruption, ethnic tension, local campaigns to repair roads and renovate a medical facility.

The Programme treats issues of good governance and human rights, livelihoods and health. The objective of the programmes is to stimulate personal and community action to secure better public services, better job opportunities and better governance in Nigeria. Let us review two episodes of **Story- Story**.

Zoning System.

The story is situated in Motor Park, where there are also groups of artisans and professionals. There is a political contest between three groups that emerged in the park. The people in the motor park are broken into three separate groups each seeking to lead the motor park union. They are apparently committed to use all means including thuggery and electoral fraud and violence to achieve their ambition of becoming the chairman of the park. The main three contestants are Montu, Areak and Lukeman.

On the day of the election, there is an attempt to take the vote counting to some obscure location where the votes can be fraudulently counted, but this is resisted by the people. An attempt to also snatch the ballot box is repelled by the people. At the end the people decide to count the votes in the public glare. The votes are counted and Montu is declared winner.

As seen in the preceding synopsis the plot is apparently to set the conditions for a free and fair election where the votes of the people can count.

According to Eze Eze Ogali (2011) the over 38 episodes of the series were created during the elections to educate Nigerians on the need for political participation and political choices. Asked if he is convinced that the radio series had any impact on the outcomes of the 2011 elections, he asserted that indeed the programme played a key role in

getting voters to register and participate in the electoral process. He particularly mentioned the case of a physically challenged man who confessed that he got the conviction to go and vote because of the radio programme.

Conclusion.

Akosile(2010) is the one that puts the image thus - Imagine a situation where there is uninterrupted power supply across the national grid, with every village and urban centre enjoying electricity and its accompanying benefits. Imagine a scenario whereby agriculture is given pride of place and there is efficient storage facilities to ensure enough food for local consumption and export. He also imagines a condition whereby every child has access to basic education, adequate healthcare, and decent accommodation in mosquito-free environment; with a drastic reduction in infant mortality across all six geo-political regions.

Also imagine a case whereby all corrupt public officials are swept into deserving jails and those in the private sector are railroaded out of service, with both classes exposed to public odium and ridicule, to serve as deterrent to would-be looters.

Consider a case study whereby the average citizen knows the actual number of barrels of crude petroleum being drilled on a daily basis; where the tax-payer sees the employment of his/her tax in ensuring a good livelihood for the citizens; and where industries are revived again with multiple transportation options providing swift mobility of labour across the country. To some that sounds like illusion. Others may call it a figment of this writer's 'warped' imagination. But to those who enjoy the same services in other countries in Africa and beyond, it is called gains of good governance; and in Nigeria it is possible.

The question of good governance shall continue to agitate the minds of all Nigerians so long as the challenges of underdevelopment continue exist. Radio and television drama in Nigeria must continue to play this role of educating and enlightening the people for good governance and the promotion of development.

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