

# Thinking Beyond Policy in Engendering National Cultural Identity, through the Broadcasting Media

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## Abstract.

As policies evolved in the development of the broadcasting media in Nigeria, they delineated the volume of cultural and identity content envisaged towards nationhood in these media. The paramount cultural vision was to use these media to propagate cultural learning of the ideologies and elements of the numerous ethnic groups; in order to facilitate the transmission of the cultural heritage, foster national identity and unity, and generating international flow. Given the strong affiliation of partisan politics to broadcasting media, public radio and television made efforts to enforce cultural content according to the government regulations, while market trends and forces directed the private stations. Even with the cultural content, specifically propagating national cultural identity as a constant motif was an issue. There is concern on the threat to national cultural identity occasioned by access to global media content and motifs through the national media industries. This has been further challenged by the influx in media content with diverse cultural, social, political and economic ramifications in the tide of globalization. With the possible lack of a committed and structured agenda on projecting national cultural identity, what can the broadcasting media do to counterbalance media content that would project national cultural identity for both the local and international audiences? Using conceptual analysis and theoretical framework of agenda setting and Neoliberalism, this paper examines how the broadcasting media, within the national communication system, responds to the articulation of national cultural identity in the light of the multilateral forces of globalization.

**Keywords:** national, cultural identity, broadcasting media

## Introduction

The issue of national cultural identity in Nigeria was construed on ethnicity, characterized by its social, economic and political contours, since independence. Elements of cultural commons and cultural diversity such as, common ancestor and history, language, dressing, norms and values, artifacts, geography, etc.; are sustained through transmission institutions that include the different media forms. Historically, radio and television are the foremost in this role.

The Nigerian broadcasting media of radio and television grew from local or regional to national reach and content motif, which were often economic, political and cultural motifs. The first was the British Empire Service, 1932 with the signals Radio Distribution/ Diffusion System (RDS) that ensured economic, political and cultural relationship with the colonies

under their control (Ihechu and Okugo, 2013). The Nigerian Broadcasting Service 1951 and subsequent radio stations in Nigeria focused on cultural content of their audience while serving the communicative objective of the government in power. Television started with the regional government of Western Nigeria as a political opposition tool, but still served as a means of promoting development through education and sensitization (Umeh, 1989). This was eventually replicated by the other regions and later culminated in Nigerian Television Authority in 1992. Cultural content from the different ethnic groups were relayed to the local and the diverse audience while towing the packaged political standpoints. Their messages in covert and overt forms, and within the diversities, construct a sense of culture. The extent to which they communicated national cultural identity was more a question of whether they communicated nationhood in their ethnic diversity, particularly with the political cleavages. The ones instituted as national media leveraged on policies in their concerted efforts to reflect national cultural identity. The policies covered the print and electronic media, but with time, the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation was enacted to cover radio, television and films.

The first attempt at a national communication policy formulated in 1987 but adopted as a national policy in 1990 had generated other enactments as media or communication policy, broadcasting communication policy, mass media policy or national communication policy. Whatever the nomenclature, the different policies focused on ownership and control, content, regulatory structure, funding and sustainability of the media and communication industry. Therein lies the concern on the extent of the projection of national cultural identity featured in the objectives. From 1990, through 2004 to 2010 policy the objectives include, among others, to harness the immeasurable cultural wealth in order to develop an authentic Nigerian identity; to cultivate a deep sense of patriotism in our people and propagate a distinctive national identity globally, the preservation and promotion of the nation's culture and values and enhance the development of cultural and artistic capabilities of institutions for public communication (Suleiman, 2018; Uwom and Alao, 2013).

Hence, this paper examines how the broadcasting media, within the national communication system, responds to the articulation of national cultural identity in the light of the multilateral forces of globalization. It interrogates the new visions and perspectives of national cultural identities, and their implications for the broadcasting media industry. Through agenda setting theory and neoliberalism, it argues that globalization should stimulate a balance in media flow. A strategic consolidation of the local media content reflecting all the constituents of national cultural identity, such as national history and icons, customs and traditions, norms and values, languages, geography and natural resources; through domestic and external patronage is a requisite. The broadcasting media should be recharged with cultural factors, contributing local content to the global media, and indigenizing global media for local benefits. These are measures within the realms of the national media and communication systems; but better achieved with an appropriate notion of national cultural identity.

## **1. National Cultural Identity**

The concept of national cultural identity integrates a sense of cultural identity with nation and nationhood. A nation was originally conceived as a people sharing a common and immutable ethnicity, evident in a shared language, history, culture, character, habits, and manners. The people might not be within a common geographical territory or sovereignty (Bradburn, 2017). Realities emerging from colonialism, imperialism and modernization spawn nation into a diverse collection of peoples bound in a nation state. They might have different ancestry, diverse languages, but common sovereignty. This provoked an argument of a construed and manufactured quality of national identity out of a diverse collection of polities, amongst sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, historians, philosophers, and critical theorists (Inac and Unal, 2013). Some posited that the spirit of community that characterized relationship in a nation is expanded over a large territory that is the modern state. Others insist on a national uniformity born by industrialization, an identity made possible by modernization of communications, the spread of literacy, and print capitalisms. Thus, an invention of a political program that sought to control development (Bradburn, 2017). Nation stands as a territorially concentrated group of people who typically not only value their territory, but share a history and a culture bequeathed from one generation to another. The culture consisted in the norms, beliefs and values create a space within which they bond, and are secured, just as within a home (Uberoi, 2017)

This paradigm imbues cultural identity, nation and nationhood with some new elements: territorial and imaginary space, political or economic entity, philosophical ideologies, institutions, continuity or sustainability, etc. Klerides (2009), argues that the concept of national cultural identity in a changing world is renegotiated as one of consolidation and maturity that builds cumulatively, confidently and critically upon past achievements. Accordingly, an interpretation of the concept lends itself to a review of ideas to be kept, adapted or discarded, based on both traditions and new ideas of nationhood and national identity. A nation and her identity, in this realm could arise from intended boundaries and established commonalities.

Though Nigeria as a nation manifests a number of significant differences in her histories and cultures as well as in languages and ethnic composition, the populaces have taken identical political paths and have played identical roles in their own cultural histories. The pre-colonial Nigeria consists of ethnic groups, each an archetype of a nation. For example, the Yoruba in the southwest, trace their origin to Oduduwa and celebrate their identities in all ramifications; same as Fulbe or Fulani in the northeast and the rest of the ethnic groups. The colonial experience merged the different ethnic groups to form a sovereign nation, giving rise to a common political history of the diverse ethnic groups with all the cultural and identity variations.

From independence, the language of the colonial powers was retained as the national language, whereas the cultural traditions of the ethnic groups were accorded recognition and protection under the ideology of unity in diversity. This was evident in the content of the local

media and their target audience, and a balance of the cultural content of different ethnic groups in the media forms with national coverage. Given the number of the existing ethnic groups and the discrepancy in their sizes, some of them were marginalized in the scale of coverage. Even with the balance of cultural content, the reality was laden with determining the specific items in the scale of balance.

A modern thought of national cultural identity would contemplate the notions of ethnicity, religion, language, ideologies and political philosophies (Klerides, 2009). The cultural framings embrace language, artifacts and ethos born of common ancestry and historical experience. The identity is construed beyond the expressions of the nation's life and culture to include ethos that would reduce the psychological and ideological distances among the ethnic groups. Such ethos is the pedal of cohesion, typical of national unity and identity. What are these ethos and how aggregated are they to be assessed and channelled by the broadcasting media in Nigeria?

Beyond specific cultural norms and values within the ethnic groups, national cultural identity dwells on a cultural normative structure that encompasses a host of values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour (Blake, 1995, p 129). They absorb the multi-ethnicity and diversity; and form the roots of the citizens' reactions to situations and conditions. The commonalities of shared cultural norms and values in Nigeria are evident in the culture of respect, hard work, sound morality, communication, harmony, mental creativity and symbolic life, reflection and communalism (Ugolo, 2017). An effort at a national cultural identity lies in harnessing all into a Nigerian national culture that is for the Nigerian nation state. Then, documenting and channelling them into the national and global knowledge systems. The Nigeria Broadcasting Code in its successive editions, demonstrate recognition of this need in their formulating objectives.

### **National Cultural Identity in Media and Communication Policies in Nigeria**

Policies are based on assessed needs of the people within the policy environment. Media policies represent the social, cultural, political and economic contexts in which they are formulated. In spite of the differences in the ideological preferences of the government that generated them, they share some common elements that stand them out as media policies. They have set goals and objectives informed by identified values and criteria, defined content, communication and distribution services (Opubor, Akingbulu and Ojebode, 2010). The goal and objective are basically to protect and promote public interest, assailed interpretation of public interest or the substantive reality that they address in the society. They may be social, political or economic welfare, each with certain underlying values and criteria. Example, the substantive reality of a democratic government assumes participation and freedom of expression in media policy.

Generally, the policies guiding the media and communication systems in Nigeria do not lack in articulated policy statements to preserve and promote national cultural identity. All the editions of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code recognize the utilization of its audio and video

technology in reaching the audience simultaneously. In affirmation of the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy set out in Chapter 2 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the broadcasting industry is to inform, educate and entertain in accordance with the national interest, unity and cohesion of Nigeria's diverse social, cultural, economic, political and religious configurations (0.2.1, NBC, 2016). Thus, the Codes emphasize the capacity of such media to influence society positively through setting the agenda for the social, cultural, economic, political and technological development of the nation (NBC, 2016, p8). It is specifically provided that the programs in the broadcasting industry shall provide services essential to the maintenance and enhancement of national identity and cultural sovereignty. They shall serve to safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, political, social and economic fabrics of Nigeria. The broadcasting communication which encompasses the airwaves and films shall seek, identify, preserve and promote Nigeria's diverse cultures. Such media shall promote Nigerian content and encourage the production and projection of Nigerian life within and outside its borders; strive to attain 100% local content. They shall ensure that Nigerian music constitutes 80 per cent of all its musical content. The foregoing provisions dwell on the broadcast and consumption of internally generated content within the nation.

The robustness of the various editions on maintenance and enhancement of national cultural identity is contained in the demand to select critically, the positive aspects of foreign cultures for the purpose of enriching the Nigerian culture. This is intended to respond to the developments in the advent of digitization and emerging new media. The democratization of all the airwaves, the subsequent connectedness and availability of content resulting from globalization tilt the balance of consumption of local and transnational content. Hence, the need to guide the quality and quantity of foreign content in the broadcasting media. In addition to an adherence to the general principles of legality, decency, truthfulness and the specific guidelines for their genre, the foreign content shall convey intrinsic relevance to the education, information and entertainment of the Nigerian citizenry; and ensure respect for Nigerian cultural sensibilities as well as reflect the developmental needs of the nation (S. 3.14, NBC 6th Edition).

In furtherance of the need for preservation, the industry shall develop and promote the application of indigenous aesthetic values; promote the development of a high level of intellectual and artistic creativity; and foster generally acceptable moral, ennobling and spiritual values. In all, the cultural objectives are directed at various aspects of community like the aesthetics, religion, ethics, philosophy, language, history and the arts. These measures add to the growth of the creative economy.

The social, economic and political objectives of the various editions, all tie in with the cultural objectives in promoting national cultural identity. They are all articulated to strength the social, cultural, economic, political and technological fabric of the nation as well as achieve unity and cohesion of Nigeria's diverse social economic, political and religious configuration. The social objectives direct the broadcasting media to provide a functional level of general education for the Nigerian populace, irrespective of their educational background, whereas the

economic objectives drive a united, strong and self-reliant, nation through a just and egalitarian society and a great and dynamic economy. Politically, such media shall contribute to the development of national unity and participatory democracy. Obviously, these objectives are informed by the substantive realities that tell on the national identity as well as the cultural identity: projecting Nigeria's culture peculiar characteristics and the spirit of national consciousness.

To this effect, a media scheme for national cultural identity in Nigeria is more than a policy issue. The National Broadcasting Code, from the 1st to the 6th Edition, has a wealth of objectives that engender national cultural identity. The question lies in interpretation and implementation. For example, S. 4.2.2a and b, NBC 6th edition stated that a programme which violates social values, shows disrespect for law and order or departs from an honourable life-style; containing sexually explicit or obscene material; shall not be transmitted. Yet, African Magic on cable television air local movies on fetishism and criminalized sexual orientation that contradicts social values. This demonstrates that there is an obvious policy intention to preserve and promote a Nigerian cultural identity, but not supported by strategies of implementation or formulated tactical means to carry out the strategy.

The second arm of the challenge is the consumption of foreign content that mitigate against national cultural values, either through the airwaves and films covered under the Code or transnational broadcasting made possible through the internet and mobile phones. The individual consumption is outside the control of the policies. The boundless realm of the internet, especially the social media takes the global media out of national control. The media policy climate and technological advancement in Africa pose an insurmountable barrier to content intrusion from the global north. Efforts are geared more towards media literacy and individual ethical standards, and also generating more culturally rich local content.

Beyond policies and structure, the broadcasting media can assume the role of both a causal agent and a defining agent in engendering national cultural identity through agenda setting. It is not enough to state the nature of programs and the level of foreign content in relation to indigenous, but to define national identity along the cultural elements. Considering the outreach of radio and television, also accessed through mobile phones, they can advance enduring national cultural identity with the tools of media roles in the society.

### **Theoretical Framework of Agenda Setting and Neoliberalism**

Communication scholars have established the capacity of the media to influence what the mass public believes, feels, and attends to, through agenda setting. (Russel, Dwidar and Jones, 2016). The agenda setting theory, posits that the media influences public opinion formation, evaluation, and engagement, when they focus on key issues and determine the issues and the direction of the issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Though a theory more at home in political communication, the media's agenda-setting can focus on media coverage of indices of national cultural identity. Radio and television have great outreach to the populace, thus their

capacity to drive public attitudes, acceptance, identification and evaluations of icons of national cultural identity. They determine not just what is understood as national cultural identity, but how they are generated, accepted, preserved and promoted.

The media agenda setting approach impacts on the global media flow once identity and culture are developed and created. The global north has their identity hinged on the fundamental pillars of culture-value orientation, religion, economic and political ideologies. The scale of cultural differences between them and emerging national cultures tilt in favour of the global north because of their dominance of the media industry, with their international conglomerates distributing their media products all over the world (Voltmer, 2008). It is a distribution, enhanced by their developed use of technology to document, store, disseminate and retrieve data. In contrast to Africa, where planning is an obstacle to accessing and disseminating information, the information and communication sectors have the advantage of access, aggregation and channelling of cultural artifacts (Blake, 1995). They consolidate the media market to the extent that it is a struggle for emerging media systems like Nigeria to gain entry and maintain a balance.

Overcoming this challenge is tied to the pressure of globalization on sovereign states with emerging media markets. The development of media market is a relationship between the media and the economic contexts (Voltmer, 2002). Neoliberalism encouraged by globalization push international free trade policies that give the international media conglomerates a high advantage in the media market. It is entrenched in economic policies that drown struggling nation states to the extent that media content from poor nation states face tough entry into the global media, whereas they consume media products from the global north. It is a capitalist orientation with some social and cultural consequences that weaken the sense of national cultural identity among the underdogs.

Balancing indigenous content and foreign content in developing national cultural identity demands an appreciation of globalization and neoliberalism. The audience inclination to patronize media products are integrated into the institutional, economic and cultural structures of the nation. Consequently, the broadcasting media in Nigeria need to deal with the nexus of media consumption and media markets. Much has been done by way of policies, but they are fundamentally regulatory approaches through licensing, sanctioning, arbitrating and monitoring. Planning, generating elements of national identity and crafting strategies that will impact on media flow are gaping lacunas. It is important to also look at the challenges facing them.

### **Engendering a National Cultural Identity through the Broadcasting Media in Nigeria**

Globally, cultural identity was instrumental in the politics of nationalism. The Baltic nations of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania under Soviet powers serve as examples here. While the communist ideologies controlled the media, their common heritage triggered the sense of cultural identity that gradually surmounted their predicament to (Balcytiene 2011). Prior to Nigerian independence, party development emerged on the basis of cultural autonomy within

the geographical regions of North, West and East. The minorities were consolidated and subsumed in the geopolitical cultural divide, until recent times. This was the national cultural identity postulated in the media history and media policies up to the advent of media digitization and new media, with the attendant negative consequences of globalization. A nation already envisioned as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious political entity needed a conscientious media agenda to engender a common cultural national identity. Thus, the challenge of specific national cultural identity in the broadcasting media in Nigeria is the inability to begin the process of inventing a national culture and consequently a national identity. The multi-layered codes of cultural meanings of Nigeria are recognizable in music, theatre, movies and other cultural products, consumed across nations. There is the need to consolidate them for both cultural, economic and political advantage. On the contrary, Nigeria remains at the periphery of global ideas and economies.

While this is lacking, it also adopted openness and tolerance to global cultural influences through different media forms. Two issues are generated: what can be described as authentic national cultural identity based on the indigenous multiethnicity; and the pressure mounted by the new cultures that penetrated through the global media. An appraisal of the reviews of the Nigeria Broadcasting code shows the efforts of the editions in their successions, to consolidate the preservation and promotion of indigenous culture; and also expanded to accommodate the technological challenges in the information and communication arena. However, the provisions failed in specifying the elements to be infused in the intended local content.

Even the curricula of the Broadcasting Training School as provided in the code was more on the structure of the training, without emphasis on the content of culture and identity of the nation to be projected. The effect is that the personnel of the broadcasting industry from the beginning of their training are professionally empowered without much to the image of the nation.

The training of the personnel in projecting national cultural identity is more than what the broadcasting industry can engender within their purview. Their efforts would be deemed as a continuity of collective national efforts through other institutions. According to Balcytiene (2011) arts served as an alternative medium for the Baltic nations of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania under Soviet powers. Despite the total control of the media by the 9state, a common heritage allowed cultural communicative processes across the ethnic groups, but with some special literacy that aided common understanding. They devised apt methods to develop national cultures. In later Lithuania, the press acted as the public catalyst to the ideological control through the cultural bombardment that made Lithuanians Lithuanians, as they said. Balcytiene (2011) argued that Baltic experience demonstrates that culture is inseparable from national identity. A threat to national identity invigorates culturhkal awakenings. The cultural sphere in forms of theatrical performances, literary and cultural press, national songs and folklores stimulate the development of national consciousness, political mobilization and national reform movements. With the state media censorship, the cultural sphere emerged as a national survival project, communicating meanings on their gain and losses. In the same vein,

the cultural, social, economic and political reality of Nigeria can be redirected through the broadcasting media by engendering a national cultural identity.

## **2. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The broadcasting media in Nigeria have made appreciable efforts in engendering national cultural identity through policy enactments. It has consistently demonstrated a recognition of its importance towards national development. The issue of national cultural identity in media policy in Nigeria would embark on a project of historical dimensions, not in utopian manner, but driving the needs along a structured national ethos informed by the national social, economic, political and cultural realities and public interest. The goals should be advanced in terms of the substantive reality that they address in the society; each with certain underlying values and criteria. A multi-ethnic nation, would envisage indices of centralization and divergence; sacrificing some cultural traditions to achieve integration.

Extant studies show different degrees of cultural mixing and the formation of multi-ethnic societies emblematic of different models of interaction and developing cultural identity in multi ethnic and multicultural societies (Frangipane, 2015). The socio-political and economic contexts have divergent capacities to drive change. In some it is a hybridization, with a substantial acquisition of the main features of the dominant cultures, resulting in new societies with centralized systems. In other cases, the integration process is along the lines of economic and political systems, while the ethnic cultural components are retained. However, the lack of cultural integration could be a source of weakness as the symbols of the diverse identity would continue to be exhibited, and might undermine the solidity of the state. The media, though powerful, is only one out of other agents of socialization or institutions employed in driving change. As such the broadcasting media could still be limited in this role of engendering national cultural identity.

Language is a fundamental element of national cultural identity. There should be concerted and constructed efforts to preserve the ethnic languages through all the agents of socialization, better promoted through the media. The Lithuanian national consciousness persevered during the 19th Century Russiatification with all its attendant cultural implications, through the preservation of their language. The children were taught in secret, Lithuanian literature was consistently published in secret until they were able to mount an up rise that enabled the lifting of the Lithuanian press ban. The cultural press and literature preserved the tradition and language which became the object of the pursuit of national self-expression; actions that deepened national consciousness and awakenings (Balcytiene, 2011).

The national broadcasting media like the Nigerian Television Authority and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria make some efforts in this regard, but the private stations are driven by the market force. The government should go beyond monitoring policies and institutions. Research and content creation along the lines of the components of national cultural identity should be encouraged. This demands that policy-making in the communication industry should be proactive and future oriented, and should recognize international best practices.

Nigeria, with other African countries needs more than policies to generate an identity and contribution to the global media. African involvement is at best as users or consumers, not creators or manufacturers. In the words of Blake (1995), planning to participate in the

communication revolution is needed in Africa. Africa cannot continue to maintain a ceremonial presence or simple spectators, but must make a conscientious effort to learn, replicate or modify, thus reducing dependability. The Nigerian broadcasting media success in engendering national cultural identity will be determined by the strategies in this regard.

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