

JOURNALISM EDUCATION AND MEDIA PRACTICES IN NIGERIA: A CONFLICT ANALYSIS

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Abstract

It is expected that formal training in journalism should reinforce the professional media practices otherwise education becomes a mere pass-time. This article articulates the ideological conflict between media education and media practices in Nigeria as well as identifies the sources of such dislocation, blaming it on the admixture of American libertarianism and European Public Service media philosophies. The scenario here is that media education and media practices are founded on different ideological orientations, making it extremely difficult for graduates of Journalism in Universities and Polytechnics to fit properly into the industry.

INTRODUCTION

High on the agenda of the citizens of Nigeria should be the twin issue of consolidation of participatory democracy and dispensation of social justice. The last decade of the 20th century witnessed the dismantling of the worst dictatorial regimes and socio-political systems among which can be named the triumph of people's power in South Africa, Cameroun, Republic of Benin and Central African Republic.

In 1999, May 29, Nigeria installed a civilian president produced by a general election, terminating the military stranglehold on the political leadership of the country for twenty seven years. It is significant to recall that the declining standard of living and worsening conditions of poverty, political repression, corruption and political impurities characteristics of military regime had been blamed on the undemocratic style of the national leadership. In spite of the abundant human and natural resources in the country and huge revenue accruing from the national economy, the life of Nigerians continued to sink into the morass of squandermania and wastages.

The general expectation was that democracy would rekindle generation of more wealth and a mere equitable of the national resources. The reason was that a mere responsible and accountable political leadership would operate on the bases of consensus, consultation and ensure wider political participation, which is a virtue of citizenship as well.

One of the key assumptions of this paper is that the development of a responsible and accountable political leadership is possible in this 21st century and the mass media have significant role to play. The paper is equally advancing the position of mass communication are inadequate for the discharge of this important component of national development. We equally hold the view that formal teaching and learning of mass communication could provide the framework to reposition the norms and values of media professionalism for the 21st century Nigeria.

In this connection, the paper will examine the institutional obligation of the mass media in Nigeria, its occupational norms and values, the dominant value content of mass communication syllabuses in the universities and the sources of academic personnels and instructional materials for the teaching of journalism. How relevant are all of these in the pursuit of the political development objectives of Nigerians in the 21st century? We shall consider the role expectation and obligation of the press to the citizens of Nigeria. This will provide the perspective to assess the relevance of the current value content of mass media education in Nigeria

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, there are two broad self-conceptions of the role of the reporter in the society. The choice is between active participation and engagement with the community processes on one hand, and a neutral, detached and disinterested perspective. The neutral reporter perspective refers to the idea of the press as informer, interpreter, and instrument of governance. The participant press is based on the notions of the traditional fourth estate which covers the idea of the press as a representative of the public interest, critic of government, advocate of policy and general watchdog (Denis McQuail, 2005:284).

The dominant perspective according to McQuail in any country depends on its social or political system which provides the context for such occupational self-conception. Citing Siebert, et al.'s classical work on the four theories of the press, he posits that the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structure within which it operates. Especially it reflects the system of social control where relations of individuals and institutions are adjured (McQuail, p.242). The framework for McQuail's position turns on the press, state and civil society relationship which has been greatly influenced by the fundamental power struggles and the people's historical antecedents.

Nigeria, from colonial times to the present has been characterized by a predatory state system and a weak civil service that have been subjugated to the repressive powers of the state. At the same time, a modern state system that promises good life and protection to the citizens but failed to deliver. The social and political history of Nigeria is therefore the case of a failed state (Mathew Kukah, 2003:42&49) where the ability to provide for the citizens is the basic of legitimacy. When this could not happen, the people begin to feel alienated and disengagement with the state. The unity of the country is threatened and the power of the state to manage the society continues to decline.

A common platform for the analysis of this process of "citizens' disengagement" with the state is the political leadership. The assumption is that a democratic leadership that responds and accountable to the citizens would release the creative powers of the citizens for accelerated national development.

The recognition of this perspective of social analysis probably informed the prescription of section 22 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The section, titled this "obligation of the press" in Nigeria stated that the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives

contained in this chapter (Fundamental objectives and Directive principles of state policy) and uphold the responsibility of and accountability of the Government to the people.

This duty imposed by the people of Nigeria through the constitution recognizes the press as a social institution that has the capacity to monitor, probe, criticize and defend the citizens rights at all times. It is a civic responsibility which accords a high degree of autonomy that requires some reasonable distance from the pressures of commerce and state to be able to discharge the national assignment effectively.

The national obligation of the press is instrumental to the actualization of the imperatives of a democratically accountable political leadership in the 21st century Nigeria. Do the prevailing norms and values of mass communication theory and practice guarantee the capacity of the media to discharge this function? What role can the teaching of mass communication play in preparing the graduates of the journalism training schools to perform in the 21st century Nigeria? In response to some of these questions, we shall focus on the norms and values that inform the philosophy of mass media education in Nigeria.

3. Mass Media Education in Nigeria

Mass media practitioners are not craftsmen and women concerned with the technical skills of their daily functions but also need an internally organised body of knowledge reflecting a clear understanding of the their society and cultural values. Communication education therefore demands more than technical knowledge and skills from its practitioners. The same goes for the journalism component of mass communication. It is good enough that the journalists acquire the skills required for writing, editing, reporting and producing news and features, but they do not do so in a value-free environment (Kwane Boafo and Francis Wete, 2002:2).

To a greater extent, these values, beliefs and sense of purpose go along way to determine how the journalist employs his skills. Journalists who believe that the purpose of the press is to provide all the information there is on a neutral basis would conduct his activities unlike those who believe that they have a commitment to social change for greater social justice, equitable use of power and political empowerment of the society. These occupational values are acquired in different ways. These are socialization among fellow peered senior members of the profession, in-service training, public seminars and mere significantly in formal academic institution like the universities and polytechnics. The department of mass communication has a pride of place in several of such institutions in Nigeria.

Given the large turn out of university and polytechnic graduates of mass communication and the emphasis placed on diplomas and degrees, it means that the responsibility of which arguing the obligations of the mass media in Nigeria falls on this group. What is the state of communication education in Nigeria? A perusal of the situation in African continent might provide an insight into the prevailing situation. According to Boafo and Wete (2002), Communication education in Africa, like modern mass communication on the continent, is an important from West Europe and North America. The source of inspiration of teachers, curricula and textbooks be Western. Teachers are mostly western educated, curricula are drawn from Western models and most textbooks are authored and published in the West and North America. Under these circumstances, communication training in Africa can hardly be said to be culturally relevant (p.1).

It is as significant to understand the fact that these textbooks, other teaching aids and the foreign exposure of the pioneers of mass communication education did not start and end with a documentation of how and what to report, these skills are ideologically determined.

Even in such basic courses as reporting and editing which seem universal to all the department of journalism, there are the dicey issues of what constitute sources of news, how to determine news values, the purpose of news and the limitations allowed a reporter or an editor in news writing, particularly as it affects editorializing and news interpretation. All of these are influenced by the occupational role perception dominant in the country concerned.

Bofo and Wete (2002) are not alone in their concern for the foreign sources of journalism education in Africa. As Matt Moge kwu (2006:7) observed, "different curricula of various media programmes in the continent would give the impression that we are striving to produce clones of American or Western journalists in most parts of Africa".

Moge kwu (2006) holds the view that academic programmes in mass media are patterned after what exists in famous American schools of journalism like the schools of journalism in Missouri, Wisconsin, Indiana, Syracuse and Africa aspiring to groom students to see and identify newsworthiness as the New York Times and Washington Post correspondents.

Agreeably, Peter Golding (1977) in his analysis of the media professionalism in the third world surveyed some national mass media systems in Africa, particularly Nigeria and found that professional media development amounts to an "integration into a dominant global culture of media practices and objectives as developed in the advanced industrialized societies" (1977:293) through training and education among other sources. And if for us in media education, that is how it should be because of what we think is the universality of journalism and media education, then journalism is in real crises.

Based on the British and American news determinants and values, Nigerian universities and polytechnics teach the students journalists that journalism is dissemination of information that the receiver can also be a source, that stars and experts without telling them that the society has diverse and complex interests that cut across the rich and the poor, ethnic, regional and political divides, all of which constitute the public interest and must be permitted significant space in the mass media.

The students are taught that "neutrality" is a golden rule of an impartial press which must not annoy or offend the significant section of the society with their reports and comments without knowing that neutrality in a society where there is endemic inequality of power and wealth is immoral or irresponsible. This is the spirit in which one of the tabloids in Nigeria, *Leadership* newspaper declared in its mission statement that; *in a straight forward contest between good and evil, justice and injustice, truth and falsehood, we refuse to be objective (neutral). We shall stand up for good governance. We shall defend the interests of the Nigerian state even against its leaders and we shall raise our pen in defence of what is right. These are the values by which we intend to be assessed.*

In spite of the full participation of the press in defining and shaping the evolution of Nigeria, students of Mass Communication are taught to observe the credo of objective and unbiased reporting of events and that the sphere of politics can be best observed from a neutral or non-partisan perspective. How does this prepare the student graduate to be relevant in a political culture that demands partnership and advocacy of Government policies and performances? Invariably, the performance of the Government and the attitude of its officials are often contrary to popular expectations.

Some media scholars (Babatunde Folarin, 1998) strongly believe that Nigerian press has no ideological framework because there is no clear-cut national ideology as it is with the British social welfare or the American Liberalism guided by naked market forces. This can only cause more confusion in a state of professional dependency in the graduates. The danger is that the void would be filled by the value content of much of the international sponsored in-service training programmes led by the British Broadcasting Service' train the trainer

programmes for Africa. The International Press Institute and other donor foundations are quite active in this field.

It becomes even more dangerous in teaching the roles and responsibilities of the mass media in the society in a context that tends to tie it to prevailing official ideology on public information. For example, the "social responsibility theory of the press" is taught from an official restrictive perspective that protects those in public offices rather than a vision that is rooted in the popular assumptions of the unique characters of journalistic information that professionally empowers the press to monitor, probe, criticise and distribute general information about the social order. We need to know that a socially responsible press in America and Britain cannot be the same in the third world, especially in Nigeria, yet they subscribe to the same responsibilities of reflecting and presenting the society factually and honestly.

A socially responsible press is measured by the degree of its reflection of the state of affairs in the society which is a common denominator in all press systems worldwide. It is unlikely that any media would gain public acceptance by declaring itself a liar and impartial observer. Even the section of the press that considers itself advocates do not by any means promote one-sided information or false hood. Ideologically in Nigeria, we teach that the journalists should be conscious of the consequences of his or her reports or comment to the society no matter how truthful or fair. To that extent it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish journalism from other forms of public communications such as advertising, public relations and propaganda.

In controlling the agenda of news media in Nigeria, it is assumed that there is "harmony" and "stability" in the society which the journalist should be careful not to destabilize. The question of harmony at whose advantage and the pervading issue of social justice is swept under the carpet of political expediency. Journalists should not be trained to promote graveyard and harmony. A genuine harmony must be founded on the pedestal of human dignity and equality of opportunities.

In Nigeria, the theory of development journalism appears to provide a point of convergence for the government, practitioners and intellectuals alike. For once, media scholars have found themselves in the good books of state officials when they teach that journalists ought to mobilize the public in support and publicize the activities of government and help to explain the benefits of government policies to the citizens. Would this responsibility also include the mandate to uphold the civic rights of the citizens against the excesses of Government and a medium of cultural participation of the masses? The answer is emphatic yes!

Does it really matter whether the political leadership is tyrannical, repressive or democratic? Does it matter whether the policies are wasteful or self serving like the privatization of public enterprises in Nigeria or the self aborted national census? Government appreciates criticism as long as it is constructive. Who defines the parameters for determining what is constructive or the voice of political enemies?

I do not agree that the press is a department of government, otherwise how can the press fulfill its constitutional obligation of checking and prodding the government through criticisms and independent inquiries into the activities of those entrusted with state powers? In all of these there is gainsaying the fact that the teaching and learning of journalism in Nigeria as well as the professional expectations of fresh journalism graduates are found in the context of routine and intellectual framework of dependency. We should agree with Kwame Bofo et al (2002) that; *the goal of communication training in Africa in the 21st century should be to produce competent practitioners in the different communication areas who are*

deep in the culture of their societies and knowledgeable about the political, economic and ... social realities of their countries, region and the world (p.3).

This is why mass media educators in Nigeria should begin to extricate themselves from dominating influence of American and British and embark on the full indigenisation of the mass communication curriculum in Nigerian universities and polytechnics. The purpose of mass communication education should be to realize the development imperatives of Nigeria in the 21st century by transforming the prevailing political leadership style.

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the dependency and foreign network of media education and professionalism and the dichotomy that exists between the value orientation of the media scholarships and the duties which the graduates of these schools are called to discharge. The verdict is that the prevailing This paper has highlighted the dependency and foreign network of media education and professionalism and the dichotomy that exists between the value orientation of the media scholarships and the duties which the graduates of these schools are called to discharge.

The verdict is that the prevailing mass communication education is quite inadequate to equip them for the national task. We hold strongly to the assumption that with the tenure of an democratically elected political leadership, the expectations of the citizens in the 21st century cannot be achieved. This position has been reinforced by the UNESCO document on media education in Africa, which states that; *the overarching political agenda for the region in the 21st century consists of the establishment and consolidation of democratic structures and institutions, institutionalization of public accountability of the political leadership and encouragement of greater participation of individuals and civil society in the affairs of the state and governance (Lewis Odhiambo, et al, p.11).*

Less than providing an elaborate curriculum content for mass communication education in Nigeria, the paper has argued that academic endeavours do not exist in a void, and underscores the need to be more Nigerian oriented and re-examine their values in the context of the needs of Nigeria and requirements of the mass media in this 21st century. The curriculum planners and researchers in the field of journalism should be guided by the statutory obligation of the mass media in a democratic Nigeria.

To achieve the purpose which has been advocated in this paper, it is not up to one person to draw curricula for mass communication education. It is therefore recommended that a national conference for the reconstruction of mass media education for Nigeria be summoned urgently for brainstorming and cross fertilization of ideas among scholars and professionals.

The implementation of a reformed mass communication curriculum will definitely meet peer and official resistance because it will alter the present government-press relationship in favour of the citizens. Even in the present democratic dispensation, government has shown extreme intolerance to criticisms and press inquisitions into the official conduct of public business.

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