



## **Peoples, Culture and Mass Media as Agent of Cultural Imperialism**

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**Abstract:** Culture comprises the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, intellectual and emotional features that characterize society, our thought about life, and our ideas. Culture shape the way we see world, it has capacity to bring about the change of attitudes needed to ensure peace and sustainable development which we know form the only possible way forward for life on planet earth. This paper examined increasing in cultural dominance that one culture exerts over another as a function of the relation of both overall efficiencies, in the sense that flood of cultural elements pour from dominant culture on the dominated. Mass media was studied under the three theories: the limited effect theory, class Dominant theory and Culturalist theory. Mass media is found represents one of the most significant institutions, the powerful tool for socialization as well as cultural domination. Domination here means holding superiority or mastery in our strength and to suppress or overshadow us in dominance, recognition and prestige. It involves the exercise of great influence in the society as well as political and economic influence. The work suggests that, since communication is interwoven with every aspect of life, the future of mass media must be considered of utmost importance in overall social, cultural, moral, economic goals of the nation. To ensuring a bright future for our cultural heritage, we need a revolutionary Nigeria mass media which can present and carry forward revolutionary purpose of promoting our heritage.

**Key Words:** People, Culture, Mass media and Cultural Imperialism.

### **Introduction**

Man as a social being cannot live outside his society and other governing agents that conduct the affairs of his existence. One of these governing agents is culture. Every person is born into an existence

culture, which must be learned and which shapes his/her life. Thus explains why the social scientist sees culture as the entire way of life within a society. Culture refers to what group share or hold in common. When a thing or a

situation is said to be cultural, what is implied is that such development is not only shared but are deeply rooted and stable; it is not easily transitory. To this end, culture could be said to be “the sum total of the learned behavior of a group of people which are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation” (Sitaram, 1970) . Lotman, (1973) sees culture as “the aggregate of all non-genetically inherited information, the modes of organizing and preserving information”

Cultures emerge as shared historical experiences of a given society which of course is continuous and ever changing and developing. Culture is not merely a return to the custom of past, but it embodies the attitudes of people to the future of their traditional values faced with the demands of modern technology which is an essential factor of development and progress. Cultures do not exist in isolation as human groups relate to one another, which result in borrowing and fusion. For example, culture could evolve from that of others who are their immediate neighbours. This could be deduced from the language, religious worship, festive and other cultural element (Ayakoroma, 2011). Culture is often used as a starting point when expressing our identity to others. Yet culture, like identity is complex and it includes characteristics beyond ethnicity and religion.

Olaide (2000) submits that what many Nigerians refer to as our culture are traces of achievement of our forefathers at various levels of stages of their development and the cumulative knowledge of these various achievements. Culture can then be found in our political institutions, our literature, and our language and even in our moral values. The moral value of a particular group of people is an embodiment of their culture. Morality varies from place to place and what individual learns morally and values he acquires depend on the culture, in which one develops, and the activities and institutions that surround one’s life.

The community life of a set of people is based on their culture. Community life is almost the same with culture of the people and this entails activities within the regulation and scope of culture which morality also takes cognizance of. The number and kinds of people in a community have a great influence on type of community, and this is where the traditions of such people have a great role to play. Traditions are the customs, practices, bits of legend and folklore and legends go a long way in establishing the community life, that tangible quality which makes it different in spirit from other communities in the same circumstances (Warren, 1965).

Posner (1988) describes culture as constituting to the community and to society what memory is to the

individual. It shapes individual and group attitudes and behavior because it is based on shared history and the human needs for recognition (Shils, 1981). Thus it could be said that cultures cult across identities and boundaries because of historical relations between groups in term of trade, inter-tribal marriages, and diplomatic. The cultural policy for Nigeria defines culture as totality of the way of live evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization that distinguishing a people from their neighbours.

It is interesting to note that the policy states that culture comprises material, institutional, philosophical and creative aspects. The material aspect referred to include artifacts like tools, clothing, food, medicine, utensils, housing and so on; the institutional deals with political, social, legal and economic structures erected to help achieve the material and spiritual wellbeing of the people; the philosophical is concerned with ideas, beliefs and values; while creative concern peoples literature (oral or written) as well as their virtual and performing arts, which are normally molded as well as help to mould other aspects of culture. Culture connotes how we live our lives in relation to our society, that is, our mode of dressing, marriage, religion, festivals, child naming,

family life and our economy, politics technology through which a distributive identity of that society is established.

According to Hoppal (1992) “culture has been defined as blueprint for living” It is a collective memory of a people; their storehouse of traditions and identity-forming lexicon of symbols. When two groups interact, there is what one could scientifically refer to as “cultural pluralism”. Each party in such situation of interaction brings to the relationship its particular ways of life which might be strange to the other. Culture differentiates between groups and in the process provides an excuse for the politics of otherness. Both Arnett and Morris agree that culture has ability to accept integrate the external values of culture. This they said it leads to increase of cultural diversity. Arnett asserts that cultural hybridization is a result of globalization. He argues that the integration of local and global culture increase local culture diversity. Such diversity according to him does not damage traditional culture. He uses the example of young I.T workers in Indian, who simultaneously use global and local culture as the form of their bilateral identity (Arnett and Morris, 2002). This means they do not only continue to develop global cultures value in their work, but they also retain their local culture, such as marriage, custom and other family value.

Furthermore, she argues that cultures have never been pure, that they have always been influenced by notions from other cultures, but resiliency of culture making prevents its own value being contaminated by extrinsic influences. Although there is a little evidence entailing the damage to local culture or homogenization of traditional culture identity, local cultures are not eroded by foreign culture effects. She emphasized the fact that accelerated pace of technology in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries though is quicker than before, and the changed speed of technology therefore lead to a different way for cultures to adopt. Hence, this leads to some cultures being at risk of being overwhelmed or unable to resist foreign cultural and influence. Nevertheless, these analyses are significant for further research, since she has neglected the power differences between the influencing culture and the receiving culture.

For instance, the merging cultures are usually of different degrees of synthesis and therefore, they are concerned, to different extents, by the deletion of cultural elements caused by the transfer of elements from the respective other culture. One culture loses more of its own elements than it receives others. The inferior has nothing to oppose the superior, and consequently, in the course of synthesis, their inventory of cultural elements with its respective information is deleted more or less completely and replaced

by the externally induced equivalences. Cultural dominance that one culture exerts over another is a function of the relation of both overall efficiencies, in the sense that flood of cultural elements pour from dominant culture on the dominated.

Mass media is a significant force in modern culture, for example, American sociologists refer to it as “mediated culture” as media reflects and creates cultures. Communities and individuals are bombarded constantly with message from multitude of sources including TV, Billboard, Radio and Magazine to mention a few. What roles do media play? Legislatures, media executives, local school officials, and sociologists have all debated this controversial question. While opinion vary as to the extent and the type of influence the mass media wields, all sides agree that mass media is a pennant part of modern culture. With this, three main sociological perspectives on the medial role are discussed; the Limited-effect theory, the Class-dominant theory and Culturalist-theory.

### **The Limited-Effect Theory;**

It argues that because people generally choose what to watch or read based on what they already believe, media exerts a negligible influence. This theory originated and was tested in the 1940s and 50s. Studies that examined the ability of media influencing voting found that well-informed people relied more on

personal experience, prior knowledge, and their own reasoning. However, media “experts” more likely swayed those who were less informed.

### **Class-Dominant Theory;**

Argues that media reflects and projects the view of a minority elite which control it. Those people who own and control the corporations that produce media comprise these elite. Advocate of this view concern themselves particularly with massive corporate mergers of media organizations.

### **Culturalist- Theory;**

It combines the two theories and claims that people interact with media to create their own meaning about the image and messages they receive. This theory sees audience playing an active rather than passive role in relations to mass media. Theorists emphasize that audience choose what to watch among a wide range of options, choose how much to watch.

There is no doubt about the fact that the impact of mass media on human societies is tremendous. By the revolution in the communication industry, mass media represents one of the most significant institutions of the twentieth century and the powerful tool for socialization as well as domination. Domination here means holding superiority or mastery in our strength and to suppress or overshadow us in dominance, recognition and prestige. It involves the exercise of great influence in the

society as well as political and economic influence. There is no doubt about the advantages in modern communication that is obviously continuous. But the world of information has fostered cultural imperialism leading to serious consequences for Nigeria and other third world countries as a result of Western domination. The dependency however, not only limited on communication system, but also on media culture.

National cultural policy was designed by Nigeria government as an instrument of promotion of national identity and Nigerian unity as well as of communication and cooperation among different Nigerian or African cultures, while the federal states’ cultural policies stand for the affirmation and development of particular cultures. Some of the set directions of cultural policies are:

- analysis and understanding of the Nigerian cultural life, cultural values, cultural needs and expectations of people.
- affirmation of the authentic cultural values and cultural heritage;
- building up of a national cultural identity and parallel affirmation of cultural identities of different ethnic groups;
- development of cultural infrastructure and introduction of new

technologies in cultural activities;

- establishment of links between culture and education, as well as between education and different cultural industries, particularly mass media.

Nigerian mass media message however, are so influential that they in turn influence the thought process of receivers. They can influence the value systems of the audience positively or negatively, depending on the intent of the mass communicated message. Many social changes evident today are at least partially attributed to mass media. The electronic media in particular provide a global view that has allowed us to become involved in concerns far beyond the scope of earlier generations. Communication and culture reciprocally influence each other. The culture from which individuals come affects the way they communicate and the way individuals communicate can change the culture they share. In everyday communication, the understanding of the receiver of a message is very much dependent on the medium and the field of experience of the message sender. A word, a concept, an understanding is potentially brimming with layers of meanings, allusions, possibilities for further adaption, and so on, depending on the historical/cultural background of the decoder of such information. Therefore, information managers, processors and disseminators must

constantly get the type of training which makes us more familiar with our background, those features and phenomena which we take for granted as our own and therefore have not cared to critically analyze. On the contrary, when we allowed our minds to be completely cluttered by concepts processed externally, there is no doubt that our people we see the world through other people's view. And the dangerous implication is that our media representatives have been carrying us along with a path of self immolation.

Nigeria like most third world nations hires western communication expert to establish and assure roles to the mass media institutions to accelerate the rate of national cultural development. The result is that the patterning of the media institutions especially radio and television as at then were structured in management and contents to those of the industrialized western societies. This pattern of development also contributed to what critics refers to as medial imperialism. The term media imperialism refers to the overwhelming universal influence the mass media product of industrialized countries exert over the media programme preference of media administrator in Nigeria that however, have contributed to the imbalance in international flow of media products and contents where by local cultural autonomy and awareness are threatened and relegated by external cultural values (Cees, 1983).



Cees Hamelling argued further that cultural imperialism implies that a particular type of cultural development in the metropolitan country is persuasively communicated to the receiving countries with the result that the whole process of local social inventiveness and cultural creativity is thrown into confusion or is destroyed. He summaries the effect of cultural imperialism into four points as;

- adoption of western professional media tradition in the development of print and electronic media in Nigeria and other areas in the third world.
- the media of formally colonized territories depended on those of metropolitan Europe and the U.S.A for programmes standard and format.
- unpatriotic acts that subordinate internal economic and developmental goals that manifest in the award of international media contract and kick-back in foreign exchange transfer of funds when placing orders for foreign media programme hardwires by the local media administrators.
- exploitation of the third world media markets to ensure maximum profit by selling action packed movies that impede the development of cultures and artistic creativities in local media.

Boyd-Barret, (1977) for example in his discussion on media imperialism stated that: the thesis of a considerable one-way dissemination and export of media related technology, values and content from a small handful of countries to all others, and that this occurs on such a scale as to place severe restraints on the likelihood of adaption of new media system to the purpose of indigenous cultural expression or demand for such expression. The handful of countries refers to the United States, Japan and those European countries like the United Kingdom, France, Italy and German which have built up strong media industries. The theoretical basis of media imperialism hypothesis arises from the study of media's role in Western society. Marxist analysis of ideology and hegemony has equally made large claims for the multiple media as manipulators of proletarian or peasant consciousness. Much of these analyses derive from Marx's asserted that: a dominant class at a particular stage of history, particularly when it has recently consolidated its position is compelled to present its interest as common interest of all members of society....it has also give its ideas the form of universality and present them as the only way rational, universally valid one (Karl Marx, 1976).

Later generations of Marxist scholars have also provided more details for the way dominant class as dominant culture maintain ideological control

over subaltern classes. Gramsci,(1971) identified traditional (bourgeois) intellectuals as “experts in legitimating who help in reproduce the origins of social control through the instrumentality of art, education, science and creativity, which helps the dominant class to maintain hegemony by making its interest to the subaltern class’s common sense perception of reality. Similarly, in Althusser’s view the ideological state apparatuses of church, education and mass media act as a more effective, less blatantly violent method of reproducing class relationships than through the coercive agencies of the police and the army (Althusser Louis, 1971). An emphasis on the furtive power of ideological state apparatus has been particularly noticeable in neo-Marxist analysis of multiple media. Theorists of the Frankfurt school have accused the mass media, of creating a manipulated, consciousness. Horkheimer for example, suggests that the overpowering machine of education and entertainment unite the individual with all others in a state of anesthesia from which all detrimental ideas tend to be excluded. Marcuse believes that mass media reduce all potentially subversive social forces to harmonizing pluralism while Milliband too asserts that mass media contribute to the fostering of a climate of conformity, not by total suppression of dissent, but by the presentation of views which fall

outside the consensus as curious heresies (Swingewood Allan, 1977).

This intellectual tradition which sees the media as potent instruments of state hegemony has been applied to the history of imperialism as a way of explaining the power of Euro/America capitalist metropolis to exert ideological control over the third world countries. This explanation is linked to Lenin’s view of capitalism as requiring economic imperialism to find cheap new materials and expanding markets for its surplus production. Media imperialism at this juncture becomes an important agent for keeping the southern peripheries economically, culturally and psychologically dependent upon the Northern metropolis. In the post-colonial era for example, flag independence such as cultural dependence helps mask the naked aggression behind the continuation of economic imperialism, achieved through the activities of multinational companies, indebtedness to international finance agencies and global inequalities in the commodity exchange. Schiller asserts that marketing system developed to sell industry’s outpouring of (largely inauthentic) consumer goods is now applied as well as to selling globally ideas, tastes, preferences and beliefs (Schiller Herbert, 1976). The mass media thus serve as essential lubricant in the transfer of ideology from Northern to Southern states, particularly through demonstration effects. This refers to the tendency



on the part of many people in poor countries to attempt to emulate the consumption pattern of rich nations about which they constantly read in their press, hear on the radio, or see for themselves on their television and in the movies (Cohen 1977).

Though, media imperialism hypothesis has been challenged. A major alternative viewpoint has been provided by Liberal bourgeois school which sees the proliferation of media systems in the third world as a temporary phase of technology transfer, an inevitable stage in the modernization of the whole world. For proponents of the modernization, school, media technology is value free, an empty bucket into which each culture can pour its indigenous culture. For example, the Nigeria popular film maker, Ola Balogun while recognizing the danger of imported television program argues that:

It would be ludicrous to attempt to equate the cultural modes of indigenous to the Western world with universal norm that is linked to development of Western technology. The mass media are essentially a technique of communication and can therefore be utilized for the point of view of needs and orientation of our societies and not necessarily as vehicle for Western culture (Balogun, 1985).

Other attacks on media imperialism have come from theorists who accept the power of multiple media, but feel it is ultimately a progressive force. Such ardent proponents of modernization stress the positive role the multiple media can have in the promotion of nation building and development. Schramm typifies the optimism of that view point when he declares that mass media by bringing what is distant hear and making what is strange understandable can help to bridge the transitions between tradition and modern societies (Schramm, 1964). More common were devout hopes that media would help in the process of nation building. Even as at late 1979, the Kaula Lumpur declaration put much faith in the positive role multiple media could play in the third world countries thus: the mass media of the developing countries bear responsibility for contributing to the common task of nation building and to the further development of the cultural identities of peoples and ethnic minorities, so ensuring national cohesion and creating abilities to derive the utmost benefit from enriching information carrying from outside (Mackaie, 1971).

However, the increase poverty and ethnic division which constituted the reality of national development in most of African states belied the pieties propagated by the prophet of modernization. The failure of mass media to provide panacea for the problems of economic social development, has given the

opportunity for re-strengthening of the media imperialism hypothesis. Katz and Wedell for example note that third world countries complaints about cultural imperialism are in part of reflection of the “morning after” mood of those new nations that were the least discriminating in their adaptation of the mass media (George Katz, 1973). Rita Cruise further emphasized the subtlety with which Western countries use media to maintain their dominance over the third world in and on the concept of professionalism in broadcasting when he notes that:

Organizations like BBC, NBS and CBS export not only their structures but their philosophies of operation, the traces of which remain in varying degree in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These traces are reinforced through continued transfer of personnel training forms and imported programmes and programme types (Crisse rita, 1976).

Elihu Katz in an article which focus on television suggest that part of reasons for Western media’s influence on the third world lies in the speed with which newly independent nations were pressurized into setting up broadcasting infrastructures and programming. In the short time between the proclamation of goals for the station and beginning of broadcasting, the goals have been

completely overcome by the homogenized formula of television programme that has conquered the world (Katz, 1973). Nigeria researcher, Segun Olusola agrees with the analysis, suggesting that Western criteria acquire training in America or Europe tend to make Africa broadcasters denigrate their own culture. Most African countries he suggests are rich in the variety of artistic resources if only the producers would not judge their own cultural value by standards imposed from outside Olusola Segun, 1986).

Consequently, Nigerian cultural values are not only subordinated but also threatened by the Western culture, since the West controls the system. It use the media to promote is culture, which our youths today see as the ideal way of life and worthy of adaption. The culture dependency here refers to the kind of attitudes engendered in a dependent society through their exploitation by the dominant people such as political association. That is, the process and means by which an individual absorb the norms, values, attitudes and behaviours accepted by ongoing systems to believe and accept as their own

<http://news.biafranigeriaworld.com/archive/2003/dec/05/0284.>) For example, the use of English as our national language and major means of communication, what will happen if we use our local language as our lingua franca the way other countries such as China, Germany, France and Italy do?

Apart from imposing Western value on the citizens, media has also distorted Nigeria's culture and supplement it with Western values. Thus changing the thinking process of Nigeria through expression in the mass media-especially television-determining the way they think and their life styles. For example out of home of the ten Nigerians, there is a video and television set almost on four of the homes and greater parts of the films viewed are largely foreign. Even the Nigeria films supposedly with local themes, have strong "foreign-European, American cultural emphasis". Thus, the result is the control of the people's minds-which is the gradual but steady process of "modernizing" Nigeria culture. Television being regarded as the most powerful in terms of effect on the public, not only because it combines picture with information, but due to the widespread of low literacy level among the majority of the third world citizens, which in turn make up the largely illiterate population. Culture is an important aspect of living endows each group of people with a "we" attitude, but this is no longer so, for our culture has fallen drastically as a result of cultural and media imperialism. Media imperialism penetrates Nigerian television broadcast through programme content; which has heavy western inclination even our daily transmission ends with foreign and almost all the television stations in the country devote most of their time on foreign programmes.

In this manner, the third world markets are flooded with western entertainment such as satellite decoder leaving the vague minds of the youths with chance.

It is believe that childhood is fundamentally a period of information seeking, and socialization during which children learn what to expect from the society and what the society should expect from them. Most of the information the child encounter at this stage belongs to the instructed aspect of his/her world. Children in particular constitute a large number of audiences in television broadcast thus, being attracted to it which makes it very easy for them to form new attitudes and behaviours through the influence of television programmes.

This of course have tendency of influence them and make them more alienated from their roots. Looking at our society, it has been observed that the dangers of moral decay have assumed true, as most of our youths are infested with moral luxury, decay which is intensifying foreign influence on our culture. However, the largely medium use to infect these youths is media and especially "television" because it has the tendency of bringing its audience into direct contact and relationship with particular set of values, attitude and behaviours. There have be a great difference from early nineties when many viewers sat with keen interest and be in good alertness to

watch traditional drama like “Arelu” and other series of Jimoh Alliu and his cultural group.

One cannot argue the fact that, media in Nigeria need a kind of re-orientation or re-direction in their activities for the sustenance of our culture. They should play the role of facilitating public debate, decision-making, and reaching public consensus on vital issues of public interest. They should be devoid of undue influence of government and mere agents of imported culture. Cultural redirection, information flow, education, cultural development, political and social mobilization are all numerous uses the media could be put to. In strengthening the independence and self reliance of nation, it should be recognized that all individuals and people collectively have an inalienable right to a better life which however conceived, must ensure a social minimum.

Since communication is interwoven with every aspect of life, the future

of mass media must be considered of utmost importance in overall social, cultural, moral, economic goals of the nation. In ensuring a bright future for our cultural heritage, we need a revolutionary Nigeria mass media which can present and carry forward revolutionary purpose of promoting our heritage. We need mass media to help create a feeling of nationhood among people traditionally divided by tribal loyalties: to explain the objectives of a new socialist society; to spread information about new and better ways of living; to win support for our country, its culture and its leadership and to motivate and mobilize the entire nation so as to realize its full potentials. Whatever the pre-occupations of the Nigerian media, be their programmes on drama, sports, situations comedy, tele film or news they must continue to promote an integrative indigenous culture, moral and value system in their search for nationhood, identity and national prosperity.

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