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THE MASS MEDIA AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF AFRICA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

BY

**Ifeanyi F. Didiugwu
Department of Mass Communication,
Enugu State University of Science and
Technology, Enugu, Nigeria.**

ABSTRACT

Today as never before, the role of the mass media in information dissemination in the world is no longer in doubt. It is in short, the mass media more than anything else that has made the world a global village, hence, we talk about globalization. Of course, the driving force in international diplomacy and international relations find expression more on the basis of interests which impinge on economic, political and cultural considerations. These interests are championed mainly by the mass media which in most cases, assign images and sets agenda for relationships among nation states. The mass media in this regard is a powerful weapon of public opinion that can very easily influence decision makers as well as actions of people around the world. If this is the case as it is, then the understanding of the mass media is therefore crucial in international relations for a good grasp of the new shape of world politics. This paper is therefore aimed at exploring how Africans can define their own priorities and partnerships, and with which voice(s)? The paper equally explores the role of the media in Africa's international relations. The paper recommends that African governments and leaders should promote healthy media environment through deliberate communication policies that will strengthen the capacity of media practitioners to mitigate negative Western media influences on Africa.

Introduction

The need for communication and interaction have continued to assume a central position in human history, and in shaping the affairs of man in society. Salmon, cited in Udeze (2005:18) made this point succinctly when he said: "man must always have an organ with which to express himself, if he is denied

of pen and paper, he raises his arm and writes, instead of with pen, with the sword; and instead of on paper, on men's bodies. Authority demands restriction, the press demand freedom". Rather than diminish with the passage of time in importance, every epoch in human evolutionary process poses its own communication challenges, as to the mode of human interaction and information exchange. Jiboku, (2008:324) asserts that interactions among people and nations are as old as history. The mode, method, and intensity of the interactions, exchange of ideas, goods and services have however varied in history".

As nations moved away from the medieval age to the age of modernity, fuelled by wars, and achieved through wars especially the First and Second World Wars, the need for relationship among nations through dialogue and diplomacy become not only fashionable, but inevitable. Udeze (2005) adds his voice on this by saying that "without communication, individuals cannot interact and relationship between nations will be very difficult if not impossible to conduct. Communication can lead to wars or end wars". Nwosu (1996:1) said that "the important contributions of mass media in the beginning, progress or continuation and end of wars in the world have long been realized... And that is why it is stated clearly in the UNESCO constitution that since all wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men the defences of peace must be constructed". The complexity of human society has ever since then been on the increase, and this reality compels individuals, groups of individuals and nations to seek answers to their myriads of problems beyond the confines of their immediate environment and national frontiers, hence the need for international relations.

The Nature of Africa's International Relations

In spite of all prejudices by the great powers in their initial narrow-based conception of international relations, and who plays what role(s) in the sector, the developments in global events have opened up the international windows to

accommodate other interests, which included then emergent African states. Top on the list of these developments was the agitation for and granting of political independence to the erstwhile colonized territories of Africa by the Europeans. To this end, young African states assert their positions to play recognizable roles in the field of international relations, of which Nigeria is one of the big players. This is as it should be, since no nation is an Island of its own. Interconnections among states, societies and individuals form an increasingly complex web of factors including identity, information, technology, and natural resources. The broader global phenomenon we are witnessing is the blurring of the traditional line between domestic and international issues. International issues increasingly pervade domestic politics and vice-versa, whether the topic is immigration, global warming, the spread of disease, terrorism, or the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan". We can also add the intransigence in Cote D'ivoire, corruption and internal insecurity in Nigeria, and the on-going North Africa's contagious revolutions etc.

The question to be asked now is: what is International Relations? So far, there is no consensus among scholars as to what constitutes a one-shot, and all-purpose definition of the concept of International Relations. Narrowly defined, (IR) concerns the relationships among the world's government (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2011).

Other definitions of International Relations with state-centric character include that of Leeds, cited in Asogwa (1999:1) "International Relations pertains to the study of the behavior of states in their relations with one another. Nnoli (1986), defines international relations as, "the sum total of the transactions, interactions and exchanges among states in the economic, social, cultural and political spheres". Both Morgenthau (1948) and Aaron (1978) conceive International Relations as relations among states.

However, the narrowness of these definitions which tend to limit the field of international relation only among governments, and the exclusion of other non-state actors, will not lead to a good understanding of the contemporary

field of International Relations. With “the growing interdependence of the states leading to the turning of the world into a global village and the increasing roles of the international organizations in world affairs” (Asogwa, 1999:2), came a paradigm shift in the conception and definition of International Relations. Asogwa also identified the growing complexity of International Relations as another factor that gave rise to the re-definition of the subject:

Thus with the growing complexity of International Relations, other non-state actors such as multi-national enterprises, private groups operating across borders whether they are religious groups, international organizations or associations, and individuals have been recognized as important players or actors in international system. International Relations therefore, has come to include transactions between sovereign states as well as between private individuals, groups, international organizations or institutions, taking place across national boundaries.

With these developments, scholars like Inozemtsev, Hoffman etc, provide definitions which embraced other actors. For Inozemtsev, “International Relations represents the totality of economic, political, ideological, legal, diplomatic, military and other ties and interactions among states, and systems of states, among the principal classes, principal social, economic forces, organizations and social movements active on the world arena i.e. among peoples in the broadest sense of the word”. Also Stanley Hoffman points out that International Relations encompasses all the activities or actions by the state and other non-state actors whose autonomous decisions influence resources and values and who interact with other similar actors across state borders”. Merle defines International Relations as “the totality of public and private exchange that extend beyond national frontiers”.

These later definitions opened up a vista of events that may lead to a better understanding and appreciation of the nature of Africa’s International Relations. What is the interest of the powerful and rich foreign nations in Africa? a continent that nothing good comes from, as negatively portrayed by

the Western media. Again who are Africa's real partners to march side by side with her peoples in their quest for development?

That the continent of Africa is richly endowed with natural resources is not in doubt. The concern however is that in spite of the continent's wealth in natural resources, developments in the area have stagnated to an embarrassing level, causing the majority of her peoples to live in poverty and consequent untold hardship. "With oil, gas, timber, diamonds, gold, coltan and bauxite, Africa is home to some of the largest deposits of natural resources in the world. Revenue from their extraction should provide funds for badly needed development, but instead have fuelled state corruption, environmental degradation, poverty and violence. Rather than being a blessing, Africa's natural resources have largely been a curse". (Mandy Turner)

There is no doubt that these resources which was the reason for the scramble for Africa in the 19th century, have continued to attract foreign interests in the continent for the sole purpose of exploiting these resources. And "as the industrial powers race to extract the continent's natural resources to feed their own consumption, they are fostering environmental degradation, corruption and human rights abuses". So, while the 19th century scramble witnessed a mad rush to Africa by the great powers, to partition and control the land for exploitation of natural resources, the same scramble is taking place today, and the continent has again become a vital arena of strategic and geopolitical competition between the US, France, Britain, China and India. America's interest in the region is understandable, what with West Africa alone supplying over 12% of US crude oil imports, and a prediction by America's National intelligence that the share might hit 25% by 2015. Again US sees Africa as a cheap and reliable alternative to the Persian Gulf that has become increasingly volatile and unsafe to transact business.

This accounts for the US maintaining a permanent military presence on African soil. Usually military involvement often follows closely behind trade. And that is why US had set-up an Africa command (Africom), with an access

deal already signed with Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Gabon and Namibia. The West it could be argued is also interested in the continent of Africa as an outlet for the sale of arms. They discover that the continent is crises-ridden, and so more wars more markets for arms deals with African leaders, to replace used or damaged ones during fightings.

With the continent of Africa richly blessed with oil in Nigeria, Angola, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea and now Ghana; copper and cobalt, in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); Iron Ore and platinum in South Africa; timber in Gabon, Cameroon and the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) etc, the lure by powerful and highly technologically developed countries of the world, to relate with African countries in various ways will always remain high.

Unfortunately, in this era of globalization, Africa, in broad day light, is still carrying her lamp in search of who to relate with on equal terms, - terms that will reflect Africa's development in relation to the quantum of her resources. For the moment Africa's International Relations could therefore be understood to mean, relationships entered into with foreign countries in unequal terms; and which favours those countries more than Africa, because of their advancement, and because of Africa's underdevelopment. The emergence of a global regime as globalization now determines the terms of the contemporary world, manifesting in the integration of markets, finances and technology in a way that shrinks the world, and propelled by rapid and unrestrained communication. This global regime creates both possibilities and problems. It is uniting the world and generating enormous new levels of wealth on the one hand, and greater inequalities on the other. In this relationship, African countries particularly Nigeria has been massively exploited by the global north (Agbo, 2009:199).

The changing nature of Africa's International Relations

Life is dynamic, just as the society itself is dynamic. But change is the only law that is constant in life. It therefore goes without saying that Africa's

International Relations has continued to undergo changes over the years depending on the prevailing circumstances that characterized its emergence in world affairs. As the world changes, international relations among nation states change also.

There is no doubting the fact that the African continent has undergone many stages in its history. But despite these stages, it could be argued that corresponding shifts in the conduct of African international relations have not been noticed, probably as a result of low technological development, and lack of press freedom and political will among African leaders to provide good governance. Ike (2004:8) articulated these stages to include:

- The first stage was **slavery**, when global traders for the benefit of Arab, European and American countries, stole the continent's most precious resources, African women and men.
- The second stage was **colonialism**, when British, French, Belgian, Italian, German and Portuguese interests dictated the way that map boundaries were drawn, transportation and communication lines were established, agricultural and mineral resources were exploited religious and cultural patterns were introduced, and political alliances were arranged.
- The third stage was **neo-colonialism**, the form taken by political pressures and economic forces that set trade patterns, investment policies, debt arrangements, technological introductions, political alliances etc with a hidden advantage for the West.
- The fourth stage is now **globalization**, as we know it today and about which we ask: what does it mean for the future of Africa.

The changing nature of Africa's international relations centered on the last two stages, when most African states were free to conduct their affairs as independent nations. The socio-political and economic challenges that characterized each of these epochs, dictated the foreign policy thrust of the African governments and also the nature of their international relations.

'National interest' is the major factor that directs the conduct of international relations among nation states. For the Africa states, stability, economic progress, peace and security are top priorities on the national development agenda that shape the nature of their foreign policy initiation. In all these stages, till the present era of globalization Africa has continued to maintain a subordinated position in the international arena.

An Overview of the Role of the Mass Media in Africa's International Relations

In the modern world, much of what people know about foreign countries is learnt more from mass media. Media experts suggest that the influence of the media on our social realities correlates with the extent of our dependence on the media for information (Adoni and Mane, 1984) cited in (Oduko, 1991:23).

Nwosu (2007:1) also asserts that "it is an incontrovertible truism that professionalism and value-added performance in any field of human endeavor is based on sound and solid knowledge base. This is more so in the contemporary globalizing world that is driven by a knowledge economy, the forces of competitive marketisation, unpolar political system and a conflict-ridden world that is characterized by seemingly intractable problems or challenges like terrorism, unending wars, the AIDS pandemic and environmental cataclysms".

That the mass media influence our actions, beliefs and perceptions about peoples and nations cannot be in doubt; even though such influence may not evoke similar reactions that attended the broadcast of 'Orson Welles' in "The Wars of the Worlds". But definitely they have some effects.

We cannot therefore run away from the reality that the multiplicity of media platforms, exemplified in new/social media, (courtesy of advanced technology), have increased access and exposure to media contents, and consequently their influence exponentially. The implication is that our

knowledge of our environment and the world around us have also increased, injecting into our heads various pictures and images of people(s) we relate with, and how we relate with them. These pictures and images may be true or false, depending on who is behind the message(s) being sent out, and the purpose such message(s) intend to achieve. In this regard, Africa is disadvantaged in the global phenomenon tagged globalization, and how it could be utilized to improve the lives of her peoples. For whatever it connotes to the originators of the concept, Africa's stand on this appears to be clear. From an African perspective writes Odoziobodo (2009), globalization is viewed from the point of view of another colonialism or imperialism. This view receives the support of Tamuno (2006:33) who is of the opinion that globalization is about exploitation, inequality and polarization in world politics. Others with similar opinion include O'Neill (1997:19) Iyayi (2004:24) and Nnoli (2004:174) who see globalization as imperialism. Like imperialism, globalization is a dynamic phenomenon, which changes in accordance with the laws of capitalist expansion. Consequently, it has assumed different focus in the past, such as slave trade, legitimate trade, colonialism and neocolonialism. Today it is simply called globalization. However, in spite of the vagueness of the concept, what remains constant is that in the vast and expanding literature on globalization, majority of contributions on it seem inclined to focus on the economic dimension.

The influence of media will be significant where dependence on media is high. Many years ago Walter Lippmann (1934) cited in (Oduko, 1991), explained how we formed "the pictures in our heads". People could not possibly experience most events of the real world first-hand. Hence, people derive their knowledge of the world through a "window" provided by the mass media.

Writing on national images, Okigbo (1995) asserts that in "in this age of modern communication more than any other, the international media are playing an ever increasing role in the process of national image cultivation and management..." "The Cable News Network (CNN) and similar satellite news

organizations have revolutionized international news operations, and in the process added new dimensions to national image cultivation and management. Their coverage of news developments in Africa always focuses on the bizarre and absurd”.

In today’s knowledge economy, “you are what you know”. And people relate with you, accept or reject you, based on what they are made to believe or know about you. It therefore goes without saying, that no relationship can thrive in the contemporary world, without the mass media providing useful information that either strengthens or weakens such relationship.

Mass media and public opinion formation

As a strong political weapon that drives and shapes the direction of world politics, and invariably international relations, the infectious revolutions which engulfed the countries of Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Lybia, Syria (and others that may follow), present a picture of the capacity of the mass media, especially the ‘new media’ not only to sway public opinion but also to co-ordinate the protests: Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia reports as follows:

We are all Khaled Saeed is a facebook group which formed in the aftermath of Saeed’s beating and death. The group attracted hundred of thousands of members worldwide and played a prominent role in spreading and bringing attention to the growing discontent. As the protest(s) began, Google executive Wael Ghonim revealed that he was the person behind the account. Another potent viral online contribution was made by Asmaa Mahfouz, a female activist who posted a video in which she challenged people to publicly protest.

The report also revealed that the usage of social media has been extensive, and as one Egyptian activist succinctly exclaimed during the protests there, “we use facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to co-ordinate, and YouTube to tell the world”.

Hague and Harrop (2004:105) rightly observed that “society, and with it politics is created, sustained and modified through communication. Without a

continuous exchange of information, attitudes and values, neither society nor politics would be possible... Because communication is central to politics, the ability to control its content, style and flow is a crucial if indirect source of power". About the revolutions in Egypt and North African countries, the mass media, through satellite broadcasting channels like the CNN, ALJAZEERA, Euro News and BBC etc, have continued to follow events in the affected countries, and transmitting and analyzing same to the world as the events happen. In the case of American-Vietnam war, media reports, especially television coverage of the war revealed the depth of war atrocities and heavy losses on the part of US, contrary to government claims of victory. As the television coverage were relayed in the homes of Americans, opinion about the war changed, which forced the American government to change its policy from war to peace-making, and final withdrawal of its troops from Vietnam.

In Nigeria for example, the mass media were at the fore-front against the self-succession bid of the late General Abacha, and subsequently, president Obasanjo. They massively mobilized public opinion against that undemocratic move. Again the mass media gave the military government of Ibrahim Babangida a real fight when he annulled the supposed election victory of Moshood Abiola. In all these instances, government policy had to change in line with public opinion. Presidential debates of candidates in advanced societies, cover a wide spectrum of issues in the political, social and economic life of these countries. Such information, in turn set the political and economic tone in other countries as well as set patterns of relationships between the developed and developing countries. Since we cannot divorce the economy of any nation from its political interests; and since world trade has become increasingly dependent upon the flow of information, international communication facilitates such information flow. Also the political intransigence in Cote D'Ivoire is beamed to the whole world simultaneously through the powerful mass media systems of the West.

Having mentioned these isolated cases, where the mass media excelled in shaping public opinion, it is apt to point out that there are certain characteristics of African media that impede the promotion of Africa's international relations. Firstly, the high illiteracy rate in Africa still sets the mass media as elitist preserve, whose interests and not the majority sways the direction of public opinion thereby making it exclusive rather than inclusive. Due to the robustness and diffusion of mass media in developed societies, citizens are able to play key roles in generating opinions that inform decision making. In Africa mass media is not diffused, and ownership structure and control make it impossible for citizens to make significant input into the foreign policy process. Secondly, the mass media ownership pattern and control reside mainly in the hands of governments. For instance, Kamuhanda (1989:34) report that "the media's coverage of Tanzania's foreign economic relations continues to be characterized by a certain measure of timidity". Despite the country's socialism and self-reliance posture, the government depended heavily on external aid, and the country's media rather, have chosen to remain completely mum over the issue, and have not questioned the political implication of such a trend. Thirdly, the media outfits owned by individuals in Africa are purely run as commercial ventures, where profit making overrides public interest. Finally, on the issue of unprofessionalism that characterizes journalism practice in Africa, some print and electronic media are established purely for political reasons. Editors and journalists who work in such establishments unethically go out of their way to protect their master's interests.

These and other factors are the nature and character of African media that are unhealthy for the conduct of robust international relations.

In order to account for the role and influence of information technologies in international politics, Dartnell (2000) examined several approaches. The first approach is *international regime* theory, in which analysts examine the legal-institutional framework for international communication, the focus of which is

the domination by the media in the north over those in the south. In contrast, theories based in the methods of *international political economy* treat information as a commodity. The forth approach is that of *peace and conflict theories* which focus on the transformation of global system and political identities due to the development of IT and the collapse of the bi-polar cold war order. Fifth, *global communications theory* examines IT as the latest form of international communication alongside maps, telegraph, postal service and other media. Finally, *media theory* argues that IT structures representation and focuses on the role of images in shaping power in contemporary societies. The central theme of all these theories is the recognition of a general shift in understanding political life and international relations.

The change brought on by IT and the new media they carry, can only but be described as enormous, and the shift they occasioned in the understanding of political life and international relations, quite significant. The shift was cited in a report to the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defence which states that the Internet played a key role in Desert Storm, the Tianamen Square Massacre, the attempted coup in Russia, the conflict in former Yugoslavia, and in the challenge to authoritarian control in Iran, China, and other oppressive states. The Internet is playing an increasing significant role in international security. This shows how IT has dramatically increased the amount of available information and diminished the constraints imposed by distance in economic, political and social life. All these changes and events affect relationship among nations.

Challenges of the Mass Media on Africa's International Relations

The challenges of the mass media on Africa's International Relations could among other factors be summarized as follows:

1. Promotion of good governance.
2. Promotion of peace and security in Africa.
3. Setting the agenda for Africa's identity and cultural export.

4. Freedom to operate as agents for positive change.
5. Low technological development.

- **Promotion of good governance in Africa**

The mass media have a major role to play in advocating for good governance in Africa. Good governance goes hand in hand with development, which in spite of its rich endowment in natural resources, African political leaders have failed in utilizing the proceeds from these resources to the advantage of the continent. At the root of this failure is corruption, which has become endemic and almost a way of life among political leaders in Africa. Transparency, accountability, and consequently development, will attract other nation's partnership with African countries on the basis of equality and respect for one another. Unfortunately, the performance of the mass media, especially in Africa in promoting good governance by way of exposing corrupt leaders is below expectation, as a result of overbearing influence of government on media operations. To be effective the mass media need to be independent. In most cases, the media, mostly owned and controlled by governments resort to praise singing thereby failing to engage in objective and constructive criticism of those in power or their actions.

- **Promotion of Peace and Security in Africa**

The question of security is always fundamental in discussing the issue of international relations, in the context of which often is associated with the activities of the state or nation-state. This is so because the state still forms the basic unit of interaction in the international system. This is why "security analysis in mainstream International Relations is mainly concerned with the state and the system of states, despite the multifaceted nature of the concept like social security, economic security, job security" etc. Through their contents and programming, the mass media have a lot to contribute toward promoting peace and internal security in Africa. This is important for any meaningful

relationship to be contracted between and among nations. Unfortunately, many African states are contending with the state of insecurity and instability, which are anti-development. The state in Africa is predatory or prebendal being used as a mechanism for the accumulation and the expropriation of the national wealth by a few privileged individuals who control the lever of political power. It is symbolized by a personalization of political power which is seldomly acquired through legitimate democratic process, but through coups or counter-coups and the adoption of a one-party system. (Quaker-Dokubo, 2001:192).

Imobighe (2001:39) puts the picture thus:

Anybody with an intellectual interest in African affairs cannot but be disconcerted by the general climate of insecurity and uncertainty in the continent as we move into the 21st century. Due to the endemic phenomenon of civil strife, socio-political unrest and intractable conflicts within and between African states, Africa's global attention has been diverted from the developmental needs of the various states to the management of tension, human misery and militarism within the continent.

The truth is that till today many African countries still find themselves in avoidable conflicts, be it the post election crises in Nigeria, Cote' D'Ivoire, or the crises Uganda etc. Mass media practitioners at times find themselves in dilemma. This is often the case in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state like Nigeria. Recently in the fratricidal crises that has become a regular feature in Jos northern Nigeria, the mass media have at one time or the other been accused of not being objective in their reportage of the crises.

Through their contents and programming, news and news analysis and interpretation, the mass media are in a better position to educate and mobilize the masses on the right path to follow. Udeze (2005) also observed that "the strengthening of peace, international security and co-operation and the lessening of international tensions are the common concern of all nations. The mass media can make a substantial contribution towards achieving these

goals”. The mass media achieve these laudable goals by mobilizing public opinion in favour of peace and understanding among the nations of the world.

- **Setting Agenda for Africa’s identity and cultural exports**

For the retention of the identity of a people, its culture (which is the way of life of the people) must be preserved and transmitted from one generation to another. The Africa’s rich socio-cultural values were passed on to children through folk tales usually under moonlight, and in open places like village squares and large family compounds. The images conveyed through this communication channel are those of hard work, contentment, honesty, sincerity, diligence, and the fear of God and gods etc.

“With our inclination to the Western style of living, coupled with the complexities of human society, and globalization, which has miniaturized the human family into a ‘global village’, our values, preferences and priorities have been greatly reordered”. (Didiugwu, 2010) In this age of information technologies, sharing of information, ideas, knowledge and cultures across nations have been made easier. It therefore “becomes unrealistic to think that cultures will be isolated and that there will be no cross-cultural influence of any kind”. Film and home videos, for instance have taken over the role once effectively played by folktales as a socializing agent, film as a medium of communication is a force in the portrayal of the image and identity of a nation. In other words, it is a medium through which nations understand themselves and strive to be understood by other nations. They could, therefore, be effectively used in packaging and exporting the rich culture of the African people, thereby promoting cultural intercourse among nations.

- **Freedom to Operate as Agents for Positive Change**

In his book – Presidential Constitution of Nigeria, Nwabueze, cited in Ewelukwa (2004), observed that “free speech and free press are instruments of self-

government by the people. The press that is free will encourage free speech, fight corruption, nepotism, abuse of power and office, dictatorship, lying and other vices in society”.

There is hardly any part of the world where the press is not perceived as enemy by the political leadership, because of its watchdog role. (Didiugwu, 2010). In Umechukwu (2001:12), the following leaders were listed as the worst enemies of the press:

1. Foday Sankoh: Sierra Leone’s Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel leader during the country’s civil war, targeted all journalists as “enemies”. His rebel forces executed at least eight journalists during their three-week occupation of Freetown.
2. Ayatollah Ali Khomeini: The Iranian Supreme Leader during his time carried out a relentless war on the country’s pro-reform press. So many journalists were tried and imprisoned for being outspoken, and so many publications banned.
3. Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia: In his bid to silence all opposition forces, he intensified crackdown on the Independent Serb Media. Independent radio and Tv stations were closed down, equipment destroyed, and newspaper publishers prosecuted and fined huge sums of money.
4. In Ghana, the Catholic Standard and the Free Press were banned by the then Provisional National Defence Council. The papers were accused for providing forum for political debate.

The scenario is not different in Nigeria where media practitioners are harassed, intimidated and suppressed from performing their duties.

A few instances will suffice:

- ✓ In 1970, Minere Amakiri of the ‘Nigerian Observer’ was manhandled by aids of the then Governor of Rivers State, Alfred Diette Spiff, for publishing an article which he perceived as unfavourable to his government.

- ✓ In 1983, the then editor of 'Sunday Concord' newspaper, Dele Giwa was wrongly arrested and detained for 14 days for publishing official documents. He was eventually killed through a letter bomb during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida.
- ✓ In 1984 during the regime of General Mohammadu Buhari, a decree was promulgated making it an offence punishable by imprisonment, fine or both for any news media to publish or broadcast information, whether true or false, but likely to embarrass and or likely to bring the military government or officials into ridicule, contempt or disrepute. Two reporters of the Guardian Newspapers, Nduka Irabor and Tunde Thompson were caught up by this decree and were tried and sentenced to one year imprisonment each.

Without the mass media being free to operate as agents for positive change in society through surveillance, there will be impunity in government, and trampling on the fundamental human rights of the citizens, as is the case in Africa. This affects the international image of Africa and consequently the willingness of other nations to relate with African countries.

- **Low technological development**

Technology is the driving force in this era of globalization, and has improved the old ways of doing things in various spheres of life. Unfortunately, the technological development of the mass media sector in Africa is slow. Funds are unavailable to embark on the development of modern mass media infrastructure. Even where some of these equipment are available, there is the challenge of skilled personnel to use and maintain such highly digitalized and sensitive equipment.

THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN GLOBAL POLITICS

In the sphere of international political economy, states have become trade centres and capital flow among them have expanded geometrically (Kegley and Wihkopt 1989). It has empowered the peripheries of power to progressively engage in international discourse on the aims and methods of the international systems.

Politically, international communication has provided opportunity for voices of weaker nations to be heard. Global communication has widened the space for political discourse on such issues regarded as highly sensitive and hidden from public knowledge. Today, many world events, including royal weddings coups, wars, and the United Nations Summits aimed at resolving such conflicts, are instantaneously beamed to the viewers throughout the world, via satellites and other cable networks. All these have homogenizing effects and exposes the audience to similar experiences. Masmoudi (1990) observes that:

Information plays a paramount role in international relations both as a means of communication between peoples and as an instrument of understanding and knowledge between nations. This role played by information is all the more important and crucial to present day international relations in that the international community now possesses... highly sophisticated and very rapid means of communication which makes it possible to transmit information almost instantaneously between the different regions of the globe.

In the diplomatic arena, international communication can be a very useful instrument in influencing public opinion which to some extent shapes foreign policies, and this underlies the agenda-setting function of the media, by focusing the audience more on what to think about. In the Nigerian Civil crisis for instance, critical analysis and commentaries of the Nigeria-Biafia war, received adequate media attention within and outside the nation's frontiers, which initially attracted the sympathy of some foreign, countries. On the basis of information available, photos and commentaries, some West African countries like Gabon and Ivory Coast accorded Biafia recognition as a sovereign

state. By that development, aid in form of relief material were flowing into Biafia from such countries, and diplomatic relations established among these states and sovereign state of Biafia. William Hachten, cited in (Nwosu, 1996:64) observed thus:

The tragic Nigeria-Biafia civil war dominated the news out of Africa during the late 1960s, and strong sympathies were aroused, particularly in Britain and the United States for the plight of the ill-fated Ibos of Biafia.

No doubt, modern technology has given the powerful nations, especially the United States of American, an edge over culture and cultural imperialism. Hiding under globalization, USA is aiming at cultural integration process through the transnational flow of information, ideas, goods and images. As the largest exporter of films and video record cassettes, she is already influencing the various cultures of the world. This process is also enhanced through music, dressing, literature, language and even religion.

Cochrane (2004:171) captures this cultural integration process thus:

Since the cultural integration goes to some extent with the economic globalization, it is obvious that culture and cultural expressions will be dominated not by small and developing countries, but rather by powerful economic countries and their transnational corporations. Globalization is in its cultural dimension a denial of cultural identity.

Another area that is greatly influenced by ICT is the tourism sector following improvement in transportation. This has brought about increase in transcultural exchanges, which in turn is enhanced by international communication. This international intercourse goes with a lot of information on trade and politics, and encourage business investments as well as intercultural marriages across the globe.

The multi-national enterprises have become major non-state actors or in the international system, whose activities impact significantly on the economies of nations where they operate. Their international communication network system is such that they are constantly in communication with their home

countries and with the governments of other countries for possible business expansion. They subtly influence policies of governments of the countries where they are based. Powerful as many of them are, they contribute either in the enthronement or demise of governments where they operate, especially, if the policies of such governments are not conducive for their smooth business operations. Once an 'unfriendly' African leader is removed from power, new relationship is built with the new leader by foreign powers, mainly for political and economic reasons always skewed in their favour.

In the field of sports, international communication plays a vital role in the promotion of international understanding and cooperation. The game of soccer in particular, has become a potent political instrument both in terms of image building and international prestige and respect.

Conclusion and Recommendations

An attempt has been made in this discourse to examine the mass media and the changing nature of Africa's International Relations. The interconnectedness of states, made possible by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), has raised the ease of knowledge of nations. Obviously, globalization has still further strengthened the technologically developed and economically powerful nations of the world, to continue in their scramble for, and exploitation of Africa's rich resources.

It is rather unfortunate that Western media have continued to portray the image of Africa negatively, despite the continent's significant contributions to the growth of other world economies. This posture of the western media and their owners, have continued to perpetrate the ever-contentious news-flow imbalance in the global news terrain between the developed and the developing nations of the world.

Drawing from the lessons of Africa's distant historical past and recent events, the continent's underdevelopment, despite her blessings in natural resources, as well as political tension, crises, wars and state of general

instability, could all be traced to insincere, insensitive and bad political leadership, sometimes fuelled by powerful external influences, for selfish reasons. It therefore, becomes instructive at this point for Africans, especially her political leaders, to ruminate on President Obama's statement on Africa's development. He "sees African development as a responsibility to be met by Africans based on good governance. While pledging substantial increases in foreign assistance, he stated that US aid is not to help Africa scrape by, but to forge a partnership in building the capacity for transformational change" (Obama, 2009).

Transformational change cannot be attained through wishful thinking, or the number trips abroad, or bi-lateral talks engaged in by African leaders with their foreign counterparts. The situation rather calls for a patriotic and clear vision of the challenges involved. Here the example of the semi-peripheral states within the global south becomes apt. "States like Singapore, South Korea and other Asian tigers, have successfully grown into advanced industrialized societies (Kegley and Wittkope, 2004:290) cited in Agbo (2009: 203). As wealthy countries, they are now members of the global trade and investment, no longer in need of development assistance. But Africa has remained the hewers of wood and drawers of water in the international economic relations".

To stimulate development in Africa, media pluralism should be encouraged to promote free-speech climate, which is currently lacking in many Africa countries. This makes public opinion and policies that arise thereafter all inclusive, and also encourages sound democratic culture and practices.

Consequent upon good governance, African governments will have the necessary financial muscle to address critical issue areas necessary for its growth and development.

- ✓ African leaders should look at the concept of globalization with caution and re-define it in line with the needs and aspirations of African people.
- ✓ Regional News Agencies like Non-Aligned News Agency, (NANA), PAN African News Agency (PANA), Middle East News Agency (MENA), etc

should be revitalized and adequately funded by governments of African states, and staffed by personnel with requisite knowledge and skills in ICTs. Regional news agencies arose as a result of dissatisfactions over world news agencies negative coverage of developing nations. They felt that protective cooperation will be more advantageous” (Ndolo, 2005).

- ✓ Education planners in Africa must take a second look on the education curricular that must give emphasis on science and technology education. This will cause a shift in the present status quo, where nations of Africa are consumer rather than producer nations. This, in the long-run will stimulate economic growth as well as provide massive employment to the teeming African youths that are unemployed.
- ✓ The mass media should also engage in a deliberate re-branding campaign to earn for the continent and her people, the respect and dignity they deserve as creatures of God, contributing in the promotion of one human family.
- ✓ Without peace there can be no development. The mass media should therefore set the agenda for a peaceful political environment. Food, water, shelter, employment and health care services etc, should form part of media focus to reduce tension and instability in the continent.
- ✓ Commitment to the education sector is the key to Africa’s development and this is not negotiable. The sector should, therefore, be restructured and adequately funded, especially at the tertiary level in order to produce quality graduates whose skills and expertise will be in high demand in all parts of the globe.

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