

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



*Scroll down to read the article.*

## **Sub-Saharan Africa's Media and Neocolonialism**

*Jerry K. Domatob* \*

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the relationship between mass media and neocolonialism in sub-Saharan Africa.

It starts with an attempt to define neocolonialism, reviewing the opinions of prominent African politicians and scholars on this concept.

It then proceeds to outline the role of the media vis a vis the problem of neocolonialism. It is the author's submission that while media in sub-Saharan Africa serve as weapons against neocolonialism, there are many ways in which the media also support this ogre.

The paper ends by discussing policy options for sub-Saharan African media, and concludes with the suggestion that a high degree of planning and coming to grips with neocolonialism are mandatory.

---

\*Jerry K. Domatob is a Lecturer and Acting Head of the Department of Mass Communication, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria.

## Média et Néo-colonialisme dans l'Afrique sub-Saharienne

### RESUME

Cet article parle de la relation entre les mass médias et le néo-colonialisme dans l'Afrique sub-Saharienne.

Il commence en essayant de définir le néo-colonialisme en examinant les opinions des politiciens africains proemnants et des chercheurs sur ce concept.

Ensuite il souligne le rôle des médias vis a vis du problème de néo-colonialisme. La thèse de l'auteur est que dans l'Afrique sub-Saharienne le media est une arme contre le neo-colonialisme, mais en même temps, de plusieurs maniere il supporte aussi cet ogre.

L'expose finit en parlant des options politiques pour le media de l'Afrique sub-Saharienne et conclut avec la suggestion qu'un degré élevé de planification et la prise en compte du neo-colonialisme sont obligatoires.

## Introduction

Although most sub-Saharan African States have been sovereign entities for over two decades now, it can be submitted that they are still under the shackles and fetters of neocolonialism. The legacy bequeathed by former colonial masters, except in a few instances, is still intact. In fact the social, religious, economic and cultural bequests of these imperial overlords still permeate all facets of sub-Saharan African life. In many respects sub-Saharan Africa's media technology and practice bear manifest testimony of this neo-colonial grip. As the late Professor Frank Ugoajah rightly observed:

No attempt has been made to decolonize the Western model of communication or to integrate the traditional model. In other words, reconciliation of the Western media model with existing African models in both structure and content is completely oversighted by ruling elites. What is apparent is a change of name and ownership in some cases. The radios and television still talk with a minority in the same format, same content, the same style as in the colonial era. In general, independence era mass media talk to and not with mass heterophyllous traditional audience in the villages .....<sup>1</sup>

The neo-colonial reality makes nonsense of such nationalist slogans as Ghana's first President Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things would be added onto it".<sup>2</sup>

Beginning with a clarification of the term neocolonialism, this paper examines the phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa media. It argues that sub-Saharan Africa's media training, policies, technology, news values, language and advertising heavily favour the neo-colonial status quo. The paper argues that some degree of indigenisation,

planning, research, adaptation are appropriate policy options which can reduce this lop-sided trend: What, however, do we mean by neo-colonialism?

### **Neocolonialism**

Much as neocolonialism is a dominant pattern of our times, it has sundry definitions. Neo-colonialism therefore has no universal explanation. Rather, there are a proliferation of explanations just as there are authors. However, Ghana's first President Dr. Kwame Nkrumah suggested that in sub-Saharan Africa neo-colonialism acts covertly, manoeuvring men and governments free of the stigma attached to political rule.<sup>3</sup>

In his view, it has created client states, independent in name but in point of fact, pawns of the very colonial powers which are supposed to have given them independence. Nkrumah asserted that this was one of the diverse forms of dependent countries which, politically are formally independent, but in fact are enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence. The former colonial overlords force the conclusion of pacts with balkanized African states which give control of their foreign policy to the former. In some cases as in parts of Francophone Africa, they provide for military bases and standing armies of the alien power on the territories of the new states. The independence of these sub-Saharan African states is thus in name only, for they have no liberty of action.<sup>4</sup>

Professor Bade Onimode shares Dr. Nkrumah's perspective.<sup>5</sup> He argues that in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the British, French, Portuguese and Spanish meticulously cultivated a domestic petty bourgeoisie consisting of chiefs, businessmen, labour leaders, lawyers, doctors, engineers and military officers before flag independence. It was to this elitist class that they handed over political power while retaining, with other powers, the economic domination of the states during the neo-colonial phase of imperialism which has persisted since 1960 to date.

Unlike the colonial period, sub-Saharan Africa no longer depends on Britain, France, Spain or Portugal alone but on the whole international capitalist system. Imperialism in sub-Saharan Africa despite the survival of the colonial

structures has changed from a bilateral to a multi-lateral basis. Other imperialist powers especially the U.S. and Japan have seriously challenged British hegemony in the framework of multi-lateral integration of the countries into world capitalism. The neo-colonial mechanisms for this include import-export trade, foreign investment, foreign aid and cultural penetration. In particular, the giant multinational corporations have emerged through the vehicle of foreign investment as the dominant agents of neo-colonialism.

Africa's distinguished Professor of Political Economy, A.M. Babu, provides a deeper explanation of neo-colonialism. In his conception, during the colonial era sub-Saharan African ties with the mother country were politically integrated, in the sense that political and economic decisions were taken on the territories' behalf.<sup>6</sup> Decisions were unilaterally taken by colonial powers in their own interests. Credits, aid and investment were all designed to strengthen dependence as did foreign trade. After independence sub-Saharan Africa never ceased to be dependent, because the states are still tied by that umbilical cord, the purse string, to the imperialist powers. Babu suggests that we truly have an illusion of independence as decisions are now taken bilaterally between sub-Saharan Africa and the ex-colonial masters, although they are clearly still in the interest of the latter. Babu, like the African scholar Samir Amin, stresses that at the outset of the cold war, imperialist powers ganged up to safeguard their interests against the communist menace. Sub-Saharan Africa like most emerging states entered a period of multi-lateral decision-making between themselves and the collective organs of imperialism - the World Bank, the I.M.F., GATT and so on - but still in the same imperialist axis, and with the imperialist powers as the only beneficiaries.

Neo-colonialism in this paper therefore is the imperialist net in which sub-Saharan Africans are nicely trapped, evolved since World War II. Post-war capitalism has taken a new form which ties sub-Saharan Africa closer to its interest and keeps bourgeoisie hegemony operational long after it has exhausted its usefulness. Indeed most of the imperial powers realized that the epoch of force and gunboat diplomacy was definitely over and capitalism must be made to work on a world-wide scale through setting up institutions which would facilitate profit.

Neo-colonialism accepts sub-Saharan Africa's contractual or juridical independence, and supports it to the hilt since direct colonialism is not suited to the post-war economic needs of imperialism. However, neo-colonialism does not recognise Africa's economic independence. As far as they are concerned such a thing does not exist. Institutions like GATT, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have been established and all sub-Saharan African states are drawn into them - their sole aim being that these states remain as suppliers of raw materials and cheap labour in the service of world capitalist profits.

The editor-in-chief of the *African Guardian* in the June 4th, 1987 edition summed up Africa's neo-colonial status thus:

After the apparent demise of the colonial empires, the structures of hegemonic relationships have persisted. So, although you can talk of so many independent states and their edifice of self-gratification, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the historical reference continues to be domineering. There are Anglophone states as against those that are part of the French and Portuguese and nay, Spanish families.

The erstwhile metropolitan countries in new gang-ups defined sometimes in the most paternalistic of terms control a world economic order, in which they can't possibly be the losers. Sub-Saharan Africa, it seems, must continue to be a net importer of manufactured goods and a primary producer of raw material, with nearly absolutely no say in the determination of prices.<sup>7</sup>

### **Media's Role**

Small wonder one of Black Africa's visionary leaders, Ghana's first President Kwame Nkrumah, foresaw the emergence of neo-colonialism. He therefore envisaged the media as a revolutionary tool of sub-Saharan African liberation from the fetters of colonialism and imperialism. In Nkrumah's view, the struggle between the weak and underdeveloped sub-Saharan African states and the advanced

industrialised countries gives a revolutionary mission to the African mass media. According to President Nkrumah:

"Our revolutionary African press must carry out revolutionary purposes. This is to establish a progressive political and economic system upon our continent that will free men from want and every form of social injustice and enable them to work out their social and cultural destinies in peace and at ease. (In this respect) ..... the African newspaper is a collective educator - a weapon, first and foremost to overthrow colonialism and imperialism, and to assist total African independence and unity".<sup>8</sup>

### **Weapon Against Neo-colonialism**

In many respects, sub-Saharan Africa's media have in some ways emerged as weapons against neo-colonialism. In almost all the states within the heterogeneous region, newspapers and some radio and television stations have striven through articles and programmes to explain this new trend. At various times papers like the *Nigerian Guardian*, the *Zambian Times*, *Le Soleil of Senegal*, *Cameroun Tribune* and above all Nigeria's *Triumph Newspaper* and *The Analyst*, have vehemently lashed out against the forces of neo-colonialism and the damage it wrecks on the African continent. Similarly, radio programmes related to these topics are occasionally broadcast explaining, educating and sometimes mobilising sub-Saharan Africans on the role and the devastating impact of neo-colonialism in the region. When Nigeria's President Ibrahim Babaginda came to power in 1985, he re-established some liberal policies such as press freedom and human rights which the Buhari administration (1983-85) almost pulverized. The possibility of his administration taking the IMF loan, arguably may have been changed by the persuasive articles in Nigeria's vibrant dailies and news magazines which vehemently opposed that policy option on the grounds, among others, that it was a weapon of imperialism and neo-colonialism. Thus in some instances like the above, sub-Saharan Africa's media are veritable weapons against the exploitative influence of neo-colonialism.



Unfortunately, despite these isolated incidents, it can be argued that sub-Saharan Africa's media are supportive rather than antagonistic of neo-colonialism. Indeed, the media foster neo-colonialism through training, advertising, news, technology etc. to which we will now turn.

### **Training**

Although most African states attained political independence in the early sixties, media training to a large extent is a colonial legacy. So far the grooming of media professionals has taken three forms; the attachment of experts from the industrialised countries to media in sub-Saharan African countries, courses and attachments in industrialised states offered to media practitioners in sub-Saharan Africa and courses taken at media centres in the region. In fact the pioneer technicians and broadcasters in the sub-Saharan states of Ghana, Nigeria, Gabon, Cameroun, Burundi, Zaire etc. were trained either by experts from reputed media establishments like the British Broadcasting Corporation or Radio France International. Others were sent for courses in schools like Cardiff in England, Institute Francais de Presse in France, Voice of America in U.S.A. and Radio Netherlands.

In the post independence era, several colleges and institutes of journalism have been established. The departments of journalism in the Universities of Lagos, Nsukka, Kano and Maiduguri, ESTI and CESTI in the Universities of Yaounde and Senegal respectively; as well as those in Zambia, Malagasy, Liberia, Kenya etc. bear manifest testimony.

However, the training scheme bequeathed by our neo-colonial masters still holds sway. Using Nigeria as an example, Matt Modgekwu submitted that for a long time we have been training Nigerian journalists for the non-Nigerian audience. Stressed he:

A cursory examination of journalism educators in Nigeria would show that a high percentage of them had Western, and especially American training. In the Universities of Nigeria Nsukka and Lagos, the staff are almost a hundred percent American trained. The

picture is not much different in Bayero University Kano, University of Maiduguri and the Polytechnics that offer the journalism or mass communication programme. Where the staff are not directly American or British trained, they are likely to be pupils of American trained teachers. The result is that there is a continuous transfer of the Western (American) (British) journalistic psychology from one generation of Nigerian journalists to another. The end point is that the system either produces an alien journalist for the Nigerian audience or a Nigerian journalist for a non-Nigerian audience.<sup>9</sup>

This situation is aggravated by the fact that the curriculum, course content, textbooks and methodology are either French, British or American. It can be argued therefore that media training in Africa reinforces the neo-colonial state since it champions values, skills and practices which serve that goal.

### **Philosophy**

Besides the dominance of Western trained teachers, there is almost a total absence of any impact of African thought or philosophy in communication education. The communication shot is called by the USA which dominates about 70% of what is delivered in the training of young journalists and communicators.

Although communication studies are still at the infancy stage in African schools of journalism and centres for mass communication training, there is exponential growth in the number of Africans who are obtaining advanced degrees from Britain, France, the United States and Germany. These graduates are returning to university positions with the avowed goal of teaching and researching. More than ever before they are consulted on frequent basis on communication matters affecting Africa by international agencies and experts.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, a body of thought about communications in African societies which can provide the grounding for course organisation and basic textbooks, define key questions and provide a theoretical framework for more systematic

research, as well as outline the fundamental objectives of a national or Pan-African communication policy is conspicuously absent. However, such a body of thought is needed to trace the outlines of a public philosophy of communication, based on research, in the context of the realities of the African State and the socio-cultural milieu in order to gradually evolve theories of communication for testing empirical research. This philosophy of communications will also draw extensively on studies of African literature and drama and other forms of African cultural studies for a critical reflection on the role of the mass media (both structural and content) in the development of African cultures.

Consequently, communication scholars depend on the philosophical foundations of the Eastern or Western bloc. This tends to perpetuate neo-colonialism in the media.

### **Content**

To some extent, significant progress has been made in increasing the African content in sub-Saharan Africa's media. Coverage of local events even if they are elitist in character has remarkably improved across the sub-Saharan African region. News and features on sports, music, arts and culture now abound. Papers like the *Zambian Times*, *Cameroun Tribune*, *Zimbabwe Herald*, *Nigerian Guardian*, *New Nigerian*, Senegal's *Le Soleil* and Ivory Coast's *Fraternite' Martin* strive to give adequate coverage to local events in their respective countries. Unfortunately, it can be suggested that the content still has a heavy Western bias in orientation, style, approach and analytical frames of reference. Moreover, it can be argued too that most Black African television stations rarely show Africa or explain Africa to Africans. What Black Africans see on their television is "Target", "You Asked for It", "Dallas", "I Love Lucy", "Good Times", "Stanford and Son" etc. as well as Western police films and other imports with little redeeming social values.

The African content on most Black African stations is dominated by political speeches in English or French, reports of visits by foreign emissaries, so-called development experts theorising to poverty-ridden masses telling them how they should develop; or dramas with noisy characters featuring

upper class protagonists operating in a typically Western style and setting.<sup>11</sup>

It can be submitted therefore that such media content in the region champions the cause of neo-colonialism.

### News

The most powerful outside influence on the content of all the mass media in any sub-Saharan African country is the news. For the bulk of world news, including that of other countries in the region, African media depend on one or more of the five main international news agencies: Reuters, (UK), AFP (France), AP and UPI (USA), and TASS (USSR). Even those countries whose mass media have steadily reduced their dependence on foreign sources for other types of material, the reliance on one or any combination of the five agencies for world news is almost complete. Reuters and AFP are the most significant, both in their coverage of Africa and in the number of customers using their services. A study by Olatunji Dare of Lagos University confirmed the fact that these two news agencies dominate coverage in the African region.

Table 1

#### SOURCE OF MAN'S FOREIGN NEWS STORIES

	N	%
AFP	92	34.6
REUTERS	73	27.4
NAN	67	25.2
AP	25	9.4
TASS	5	1.9
OPECNA	2	0.7
COMBINED SERVICES	1	0.4
IPS	1	0.4

---

266 100

---

Source: Onunkwo: et. al. Mass Media & Society in Nigeria, Forthcoming, 1987, Kano, Nigeria: Zell Publishers.

Among sub-Saharan African national news agencies like NAN - Nigerian News Agency, Zimbabwe News Agency, ZIANA, and Zaire News Agency, dependence on these foreign news distributors is still very high.

Small wonder the celebrated African Professor of Communication, Frank Ugboajah, contended that it is rather disquietening to realize that Nigeria - sub-Saharan Africa's leading Black nation - still subscribes directly to the four big international news agencies even after the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) has been set by law to be the exclusive clearing house and the only news agency permitted to deal directly with the media houses.<sup>12</sup> The comparative table below clearly reveals that although NAN plays some role by providing 24% of total wire news to media houses, still the big news agencies AP, AFP, UPI and Reuters provide 47% of the total news used in the Nigerian media. The Pan African News Agency, the Middle East News Agency and the Inter-Press Services, IPS are scarcely resorted to as news sources catering only for 3%.

The Nigerian trend vividly reflects sub-Saharan Africa's news dependency situation on these international agencies. In almost all of the sub-Saharan African states, foreign news is selected from these international wire services for home consumption. The regional news agencies such as the Pan-African News Agency follow the same pattern.

More than anything else, in most sub-Saharan African states there are personnel in media establishments who solely monitor and copy verbatim, the latest news from the Voice of America, British Broadcasting Corporation and Radio France International etc. for home consumption. In fact in almost all newsrooms in Cameroon, Nigeria, Zambia, Gabon, Ivory Coast and Zimbabwe, this is the standard practice.

Table 2 further illustrates the fact that international dominance of news in the Nigerian media is accentuated by the contributions of the BBC which provides 20% of the news from giant wire services. This is followed by the Voice of America, 17%, London Times, 12%, New York Times, 11%, and International Herald Tribune 11%. The degree of dependence by other sub-Saharan states could even be higher.

By still relying on foreign news agencies, particularly the unholy big four and international broadcast and other sources for news coverage, the African mass media

Table 2

SOURCES OF NEWS USED BY PRACTITIONERS OUTSIDE OWN SOURCES

News Agencies	(N)	(%)
NAN	20	24
Reuters	8	10
AP	11	13
AFP	3	4
Tanjung	3	4
GNA	3	4
PANA	7	9
MENA	3	4
IPS	3	4
UPI	9	11
TASS	2	2
Other	2	2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>100</b>

International Mass Media	(N)	(%)
BBC	13	20
Radio France International	3	5
Radio Moscow	4	6
VOA	11	17
Deutschewelle	1	2
Radio China	1	2
Radio Cameroon	1	2
Radio Ghana	1	2
New York Times	7	11
London Times	8	12
Le Monde 3	5	
International Herald Tribune	7	11
PRAVDA	4	6
	<b>65</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Frank Okwu Ugboajah, "The MacBride Report: It's Implementation by Nigerian Media Practitioners and Trainers" Communication Socialis Yearbook, Vol.IV 1985, pp.35-48.

practitioners champion neo-colonialism by promoting values, life styles and issues that are anathema to theirs. They further assist in pulverising their own cultural identity and norms thereby fostering media imperialism.

### **Advertising**

Advertising exerts a potent influence in the process of sub-Saharan Africa's neo-colonialism. Indeed the role of advertising can be surmised among other things from the fact that whereas in the West, trans-national advertising agencies have seized only half of the market, they still account for over 80% in sub-Saharan Africa. These TNCs are bent on extending their advertising to practically all strata of the population in developing countries to attain this goal. In Kenya and Nigeria, for instance, they finance over 80% of all advertising in Swahili and Hausa as well as over 75% of all newspaper advertising in English. The special strategic role of advertising in sub-Saharan Africa is manifested in the fact that its relative value is higher in developing countries like those in the region. So what is the West advertising in sub-Saharan Africa? Nothing else but consumerism; a way of life centred on the consumption and assigning consumption the priority in the set of human values.<sup>13</sup>

It is hard for sub-Saharan Africans to resist the aggressive push of the Western "mass culture", which keeps telling them day-after-day: "The world is cruel but, that's the way it is and it's no good trying to change it. Success comes to those who are strong; everything is admissible for the sake of success and money; sympathy and commiseration for the weak are old prejudices."

In the meantime, radio and television broadcasts are swamped with Western programmes advertising by all means the best samples of bourgeois mass culture. The values, mental and life-style stereotypes praised by them are at variance not only with the national cultural traditions of people but with the universal human values as well. These values promote Western ideals and facilitate the process of neo-colonialism.

## **Private Monopolies**

The capital of multinational firms play a crucial role in the strategy of media imperialism - and invariably neo-colonialism. The phenomenal growth of monopolies and the creation of military-industrial-information conglomerates in the 1970s and 1980s have been reflected in the international exchange of information and projected among others, in reinforced inter-linkage of monopolies and mass communication systems in sub-Saharan Africa.

These monopolies do not only dominate the transfer of software into the region but the hardware as well. Small wonder Western firms enforce controls over sub-Saharan African states' electricity lines, radio and television stations and satellite links.

## **Technology**

The use of technology in sub-Saharan Africa thus ensures the broad penetration on neo-colonial ideology and the whole Western culture because it is a process acting on all areas of the various states of life. As A.O. Herrera argues: "Every transfer of technology assumes a transfer of culture". In other words - the transfer of technology is a form of alliance because it transfers social information. This form of communication is particularly effective because it is covert. The information it transmits is not expressed overtly. However, it influences people in the receiver country, changes its manner of operation in production, organisation and consumption sooner than society realizes the consequences of this technology".<sup>14</sup>

Thus France, which lags behind the U.S.A. in producing the latest communication technology, is struggling in severe competition against firms of other imperial powers in an attempt to impose information imperialism and sustain neo-colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa's media by using foreign monopolies and by joining regional and national organisations, while carefully masking its expansion under various kinds of aid.

Unfortunately, this "selfless" co-operation by the French and the other neo-imperial powers in sub-Saharan African states leads to the link up of these receiver countries with the



Western information system, to strengthen the former's dependence on Western communication structures. This strategy of the "trap" is based on speculation about the efforts of sub-Saharan African states owning and mastering the modern techniques of mass communication media and is carried out in various ways. One of the main directions is "aid" by the French, British, American, German and other Western patrons in setting up radio and television systems in sub-Saharan African states. The Thompson CSF electronics firm supplies the Maghreb countries with radio communication equipment and has taken part in setting up and equipping television studios in Zaire, Gabon, Cameroun, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Upper Volta, Chad and Senegal.

Much as the new media technologies have brought a quantum leap in the ability of sub-Saharan African states to communicate with each other and the rest of the world, problems related to neo-colonialism still abound. These encouraging developments do not mean, however, that the gap between the developing countries and the advanced information societies is closing.<sup>15</sup>

In Francophone Africa, Hachette like its British counterparts Caxton, Heinemann and Penguin, which has about 50 branches in 33 countries, operates on the newspaper and book markets of these sub-Saharan states. These firms do not only distribute journals but are also steeped in textbook production for the region.

### **Satellite Communication**

One other media strategy which reinforces neo-colonialism is directly linked to the use of satellite communication. At the beginning of the 1970s, French, British, American, German and other Western firms - especially Thompson CSF - offered developing countries "prestige" opportunities to utilize telecommunication satellite, i.e. through the Symfonia system developed jointly by French and West German firms. France like its other Western counterparts which still maintains telephone links with its former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa through Paris, is trying and has succeeded to compel them work through the communication system utilizing the French satellite Telecom1, intended for links between Antilles, and

Paris. It is really not by accident that the satellite's entire output is planned for the whole African continent. To some degree, it can be argued that this dependence on satellites and other new technologies reinforces neo-colonialism.

### **Cultural Synchronization**

The dominance of sub-Saharan African media content, programmes as well as technology by Western gadgets and material foster cultural imperialism. According to the distinguished Professor of Communication, Cees Hamelink, cultural synchronization implies that the traffic of cultural products goes massively in one direction and has basically a synchronic mode.<sup>15</sup> The metropolis of Britain, France, Germany and America offers the model with which the receiving parties synchronise. The whole process of local social inventiveness and cultural creativity is thrown into confusion or is definitely destroyed.

If cultural autonomy is defined as sub-Saharan Africa's capacity to decide on the allocation of its environmental resources then cultural synchronization is a massive threat to that autonomy. Indeed global cultural synchronization locates decisions regarding the allocation of sub-Saharan resources extra-territorially. Such exogeneous developed techniques, symbols and social patterns are introduced more on the basis and needs of the metropolis of France, Britain and the U.S. than on the needs of the states. This cultural pattern of course favours neo-colonialism.

Arguably, therefore, the relationship between sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world is an unequal one in which the rich, mainly Western nations, dominate the media both in terms of technology and content. Few African countries have the resources or expertise necessary to design, establish or maintain communication systems which would present a true and appropriate reflection of their own culture. Poverty makes cheap foreign merchandise all irresistible. Thus, often through so-called foreign aid programmes, the less developed sub-Saharan African states are led to rely not only on the technology of the West but also on its films, television programmes, gramophone records, syndicated newspaper material and the international news agencies. Although these Western and Communist sources are cheaper

than most material which may be produced in Africa, they tend to promote neo-colonialism. Even the distinguished American Professor of Communication, Everett Rogers, recognises this neo-colonial reality. Little wonder he submitted that:

During the past decade or so television audiences have expanded tremendously in such Third World nations as Mexico, Brazil and sub-Saharan African states. These millions of new television viewers offer a huge potential audience for development communication messages. Unfortunately, however, almost all the television programming which is broadcast consist of entertainment messages, a part of which consists of imported re-runs from the United States. Such broadcasts contribute almost nothing toward the development goals of Third World nations. Much of the broadcast content is anti-development, such as advertising and entertainment programmes that depict urban life as attractive and which thus encourages over-urbanization.<sup>16</sup>

### **Policy Options**

Faced with the reality of neo-colonialism in the African media what policy options do sub-Saharan states adopt to tackle this problem? What should they concretely do? A number of options to which we will now turn can be embarked upon to redress the situation.

### **Planning**

If sub-Saharan African media are to emerge as a counterforce to neo-colonialism, then planning is mandatory. Media planning here means the preparation of both long-range and short-range plans (i.e. strategic and operational) for the efficient and equitable use of communication resources.<sup>17</sup> Planning can also mean the creation, allocation and/or use of communication resources to achieve socially valued communication goals in the context of a particular social image or images.

Most communication projects in sub-Saharan Africa are haphazardly conceptualised and implemented. Several media

organisations in the region were brought into being due to political expediency. For example, the first television station in sub-Saharan Africa, WNTV-IBADAN, was established by the then Premier of Western Nigeria - Chief Obafemi Awolowo, as a counterpoise to the Federal Government controlled radio stations.

Similarly, one of the newest television stations in the region, Borno Radio Television (BRTV) in Nigeria was the brain-child of politicians. During the heydays of civil rule in that large and diverse African state, the then governor, Mohammed Goni, established it as a counter-strategy to the propaganda which was being pumped out of the Federal Government owned and sponsored Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). In fact the manifest lack of planning is such that one doubts whether Black Africans have associated the development of their communication systems with the information needs of the larger majority of its peoples. They have tended to acquire the channels first and then found that they can neither programme the channels properly nor can the bulk of the people afford to acquire and utilize the pre-selected ones. This is a chaotic situation of planlessness, which must be addressed.

### **Local Programming**

It can be argued that the media fosters neo-colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa through the mass importation of programmes. In some instances these programmes are cheaper and the quality is excellent. However, sub-Saharan African states are not compelled to purchase them. Despite the fact that good programmes are expensive, every effort must be made to produce local ones. In sub-Saharan Africa there are lots of human and material resources which can be utilized in indigenous programming. For instance, traditional dances abound. Various ethnic groups have sundry forms of dramatic art. With some ingenuity backed by government support, programmes can be locally produced for the home market. However, the production of indigenous programmes requires a great deal of time and money, more of both than most poor sub-Saharan states in a hurry can afford. That is one major dilemma they must tackle.

## **Advertising**

Sub-Saharan African states should embark upon studies on the social, economic and cultural effects of advertising. Such researches could enable them identify problems and suggest solutions at both the national and international levels. The study could also envisage the practicability of introducing an international advertising code which can become the foundation for the preservation of cultural identity and the protection of moral values, of sub-Saharan African journalists, reporters and media executives.

## **Infrastructure**

Despite the problems of poverty and scarce foreign exchange which bedevil sub-Saharan African states, every effort must be made to install the required infrastructure. Without the radio, television and satellite stations, these nations would still be dependent on the industrialised states. Whenever and wherever possible, sub-Saharan African states should try to acquire the required hardware.

## **Develop Radio**

Although television is a very glamorous medium, it is my firm conviction that the sub-Saharan African states harness radio for national development in lieu of television. Radio demands few public resources, has a greater channel capacity to reach the remote populace through multi-ethnic or multi-linguistic programming as well as less technical vulnerability. Radio, especially in countries like Cameroun and Senegal, have proven in a relative degree to be useful in promoting literacy, health information and other development campaigns.

By contrast, television is an expensive medium. The cost of a set is exorbitant. Programme production is complicated by the need for team work. However, the greatest hurdle as of now is the fact that large sums of scarce foreign exchange are spent on the importation of programmes.

## **Training**

A major obstacle in changing the neo-colonial orientation of the African media towards communications for development is training. In almost all sub-Saharan African states the majority of writers, producers, directors and journalists were either educated in the west or use Western programming as their inspiration for productions. Because the media men, essentially, are part of the educated urban elite, their programmes tend to be neo-colonial in approach and they focus them on Western educated elites, a majority of whom are based in urban centres.

Katz and Weddel suggest that the first step towards making the media more responsive to development goals and creating a uniquely African radio or television is to introduce media men to concepts of development for communications and expose them to rural village and shanty town life.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps the luxury of immersing sub-Saharan African producers in their own cultures and forming creative groups of broadcasters, scholars, journalists and carriers of tradition who will plan schedules and invent programmes together, holds out hope that broadcasting might live up to its promise of contributing to cultural continuity.

A step has been taken in the right direction with the introduction of African schools of journalism (for training mass communicators), engineering faculties (for media engineers) and technical schools (for technicians). However, every effort must be made to adapt the training to African realities. The situation where communicators are trained as if they would serve in Europe must be adapted to incorporate some facets of African socio-cultural realities. It is particularly grievous for African countries with visual and oral cultures of their own, to find that only very little of their traditional stores of symbols and imagery of their societies passes into the media for public consumption. With proper training, African mass communicators would be able to improve this situation.<sup>19</sup>

## **Appropriate Technology**

The issue of technology is also crucial. What kind of technology is appropriate for sub-Saharan Africa? Is it the latest and most sophisticated technology being used in France

and the U.S. or simple radio and television equipment which can be easily repaired at the local level? Is it the creation of paper mills and local printing presses in order to found a small-scale newspaper industry, or is it the use of half-inch video tape which reduces the level of skilled professionalism required but places maintenance and replacement beyond the scope of the village society? These are cardinal questions which must be examined by the various governments in order to fight neo-colonialism. Sophisticated technology is certainly expensive and may tend to foster dependence. Outmoded but simple technology may encounter the problem of spare parts and constant breakdowns. The dilemma therefore is whether to transfer technology at a labour-intensive level reached by America and Europe in the 19th century, or to offer an advanced but small scale technology which is extremely cheap but creates a certain dependence. A possible solution to this question depends upon the country and context. In some instances, sophisticated media technology may be most appropriate. In other cases, rudimentary technology which calls for the utilization of the abundant human resources in some of these territories may be the answer.

### **Regional Co-operation**

Regional co-operation would also be very instrumental in curbing neo-colonialism fostered through the media. Through such co-operation, training can be fostered, programmes with an African flair exchanged at a possibly cheap rate and scarce media resources rationally allocated. In this effort however, cognizance must be taken of the petty nationalisms, suspicions and jealousies that have ruined many an effort at co-operation in African states. However, if such co-operation agreements are properly planned with careful attention paid to the costs and benefits of the participating states, a measure of success could be attained. This, to a certain extent, can reduce the degree of neo-colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa's media.

### **Curtail Air Time**

In the case of broadcasting air time can be reduced so as to curtail dependence on foreign media products. The continuous

broadcasting tradition creates a voracious demand for foreign entertainment series to fill the day especially during prime time. This problem is particularly remarkable in states like Mali, Chad, Niger and Burkina Faso which cannot afford to support an adequate supply of indigenous artists, talents and programmes. In such situations, broadcasting hours can be cut down without invoking any form of conflict or struggle since the decision is partly at the national level. This policy has been experimented upon in Canada, Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan and most of Europe. Even the United States of America, which prides itself on being a free country, has adopted cultural policies restricting the flow of foreign media and cultural products into the country. Although such a stern policy may be difficult to implement in the African context due to the strings of dependency and poverty, efforts could certainly be made to reduce some of the very cheap films, programmes and technology being dumped into sub-Saharan African markets at very exorbitant rates.

### **Conclusion**

Neo-colonialism is a reality in sub-Saharan Africa. It dominates all facets of life - economic, social, political, religious and cultural.

It permeates the African media through the news and programme content which has a heavy Western metropolitan bias. The neo-colonial status of most sub-Saharan African media is aggravated by the fact that these states live in the shadow of their former colonial masters. Consequently their media lack a philosophy - nay ideology. What obtains is an ideology of dependence which is reflected in the media. This neo-colonial trend is further entrenched through advertising which champions a consumerist culture essentially of Western goods dumped in African markets. Media technology and international corporations which sell these gadgets in the region further champion neo-colonialism in the media. Sub-Saharan Africa's media are therefore trapped in a neo-colonial quagmire. Locked in this tight bind what options are open to these states?

Sub-Saharan Africans have some policy options at their disposal. First and foremost, they can train their personnel in such a way that they realize the intractable nature of this



problem and strive hard to improve it. The training must inculcate new and African values into the students.

Inextricably linked to the above is the production of indigenous programmes so that the foreign content in the region's media can be reduced. To this end the incorporation of traditional drama, dance and other cultural expressions in the media may enhance this process. In broadcasting, rather than embark on continuous airing of programmes as it obtains in the metropolis, with third rate products, air time can be curtailed. More than anything else a high degree of planning is mandatory if sub-Saharan African states intend to tackle the media and neo-colonialism problems. However, to nip the problem in the bud sub-Saharan African states must devise ways and means of coming to grips with neo-colonialism which arguably is one of the major socio-economic challenges they must reckon with.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Frank Ugboajah. Cited in Jerry Komia Domatob. "Communication for Self-Reliance in Black Africa". Amsterdam: Gazette (Forthcoming 1987/1988).
2. See Kwame Nkrumah. *I Speak of Freedom*, London: Panaf Books 1971.
3. Kwame Nkrumah. *Africa Must Unite*. London: Panaf Books, 1974 p.XVI.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Bade Onimode: "Imperialism and Nigerian Development" in Okwudiba Nnoli. *Path to Nigerian Development*, London: Zed Press 1981. pp.76-93.
6. A.M. Babu. *Socialist Africa or African Socialism?* London: Faber, 1982.
7. Andy Akporuogo. "In this issue" in *The African Guardian*. June, 4th, 1987. p.3.

8. Kwame Nkrumah. "The African Journalist". Dar-es-Salaam: Tanzanian Publishers, December, 1965. Cited in *Reporting Africa*, 1985. pp.74 & 86.
9. See Matt Mogeckwu. Training the Nigerian Journalist for the Nigerian Audience in *Communication Training and Practice in Nigeria: Issues and Perspectives*. ed. by Frank Ugboajah, Tom Adaba and Ikechukwu Nwosu. Jos: ACCE Publication (1987)
10. See Frank Ugboajah. "Development of Communication Textbooks" in *Communication for Liberation and Self-Reliance*, Harare: ACCE Publication, 1987.
11. See Jerry Komia Domatob. "Disco vrs. Development Broadcasting", *Tambari*. Maiduguri: University of Maiduguri Publication, 1987. p.3.
12. Frank Okwu Ugboajah. The MacBride Report: Its Implementation by Nigerian Media Practitioners and Trainers". *Communicatio Socialis Yearbook*, Voll IV, pp.35-48.
13. See Jerry Komia Domatob. "Ethical Dimensions of Advertising in sub-Saharan Africa". in *Mass Media and Society in Africa*, ed. by Nwosu, Domatob and Jika, Nairobi, ACCE, 1988.
14. See Yermoshkin. *Spritual Neo-Colonialism*. Prague: IOJ 1984.
15. Cees Hamelink. *Cultural Autonomy in Global Communications*. New York: Norwood, 1983.
16. Everett M. Rogers, L. Arvid Singhal. *Televiston Soap Operas for Development in India*. Paper presented at the Annenberg School of Communications, Univ. of Southern California, University Park, Los Angeles, California, 1987.

17. See Jan Servaes. "Communication Policies" in *Media Development*, London: Association of World Christian Communication, 1987. Vol.1, No.1.
18. Katz & Weddel. *Broadcasting in the Third World*. London: Faber & Faber, 1987.
19. See Jerry Komia Domatob, "Development Journalism in Black Africa" in *Gazette*. No.31 - (1983) 9-33. Amsterdam: Instituut voor Perswetenschap.

Jerry Komia Domatob. "Propaganda Techniques in Black Africa". *Gazette*, 36:121-137 (1985). The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985.

Jerry Komia Domatob. Developing a New Programme: Lessons for Black African Schools, in Ugboajah: *Training and Practice*, Op. Cit., 1987.