

## International Communication, Africa's Identity and African Values

**Morka Emmanuel**

Department of Mass Communication  
Delta State Polytechnic  
OgwashiUku, Delta State, Nigeria  
nenait3@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

Africa from origin has peculiar identity symbolically etched in her culture including language, music, art, fashion, life style, and diet among others. This study examines the corrosion of Africa's identity symbolized by her cultural values as the continent relates with other continents of the world via international communication while canvassing for better deals for her citizens. International communication was conceptualized, relevant theories including agenda setting theory, centre periphery theory and framing theories were comparatively examined side by side with international communication in international relations to buttress the activity of the mass media in international communication. The result shows that Africa has peculiar identity that has been impaired by western media influence in what scholars referred to as cultural imperialism.

**Keywords:** Africa, values, international communication, media and cultural imperialism,

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### Journal Reference Format:

Morka Emmanuel (2018): International Communication, Africa's Identity and African Values. Humanities, Management, Arts, Education & the Social Sciences Journal. Vol. 5. No. 4, Pp 47-52

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

As no man is an island so no nation is independent of other nations. The interdependency of nations is important for survival as all nations are not equally endowed. This interdependency for mutual benefits by both state and non-state actors is the basis of international communication which oils the wheel of international relations accounting for trade as the major reason for the first European contact with Africa. The European merchants arrived the African coast enroute Asia to trade in spices. In further need of mutual benefits, the slave trade came into being as African men and women were exchanged for European finished manufactured products like guns, cloths, tobacco and other items. Today international relations powered by international communication has gone beyond economic reasons to include economic politics, and social needs such as education, health, agriculture, arts, music, culture, language, life style and human needs generally. Advanced nations of the world today, have taken advantage of the technical knowhow and advanced their media technology to tell their stories. In this way, the developed nations have taken over the airwave, dominated media space and consequently impaired the culture of less technologically advanced nations including African nations. Consequently, while the advantages of international communication cannot be over emphasized, particularly in helping to expose African to development by mutual benefits, the disadvantages that has made Africa continually dependent of Western nations for technological aids and other aids in the name of international communication and relations has become a thing of concern as this imbalance relationship appears to have no end. This imbalance in media capability has resulted in Africa not being able to tell her story.

### **1.1 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study include the following:

- To identify Africa in the concept of international communication.
- To determine the impairment of Africa's culture by exposure to western media.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK**

The concept of international communication can be regarded as an extension of other forms of communication including interpersonal communication, group communication and mass communication. International communication is concerned with interactions and exchanged of ideas between individuals, organizations, groups and government across national boundaries. Agba (2002:250) simplified the concept of international communication as he defined it as the exchange of meaning across national frontier. According to him, international communication is brought about by the interdependent need of man, a situation which makes imperative that the way a man needs to reach out to other men for meaningful existence, so does a country need to reach out to other countries for better life for its citizens.

International communication forms the bedrock for international relations at all levels including personal, organizational and international levels of engagement. Since all nations of the world are not equitably endowed, the need for synergy and co-operation, among the nations of the world cannot be undermined. In this regard, international relations which is made effective by international communication denotes genuine interaction, exchange of ideas and diplomacy among individuals, organizations and nations across the global. In line with this submission, Agba (2002:250) equally submits that international relations would not exist without international communication. As such, he sees international communication as the engine in a boat, car, train or airplane that carries individuals, organizations and nations across national frontiers for meaningful engagement aimed at advantage for individuals, organizations and government of nations. Further describing international communication as the oil that lubricates existing interstate relationship, he added that international communication is the soul that animates, and the body that personifies globalization.

Explaining the concept of international communication, Akakwandu (2014:14), identified the concept as the language of media in international relationship. According to him, bilateral agreements between states are reached through communication. Build up to war, threats of war, war propaganda, war situations, conflict resolutions discussion at United Nations programmes and other activities that require synergy among nations are achieved through international communication. He identified none state actors to have played notable roles in international communication. The non-state actors identified include multinational corporations like Coca-Cola, Shell BP, John Holt and liberation movements like Palestinian Liberation organization (PLO), regional interest groups like the Arab League (AL), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU) as well as humanitarian organizations like Amnesty International and Red Cross. Areas of mutual interest and challenges for both state actors and non-state actors are brought to the global stage for mutual benefits and interdependency for solutions. Since no nation is an island, from time to time nations of the world jostle to secure mutual benefits for it citizens from other nations of the world.

### **2.1 Global News Flow.**

The centre periphery theory provides an insight into the global news flow pattern. The theory posits that most political structures all over the world, have government activities, political powers, economic institutions concentrated at the centre. As such the centre serves as news source for others not represented

at the centre (peripheries). The centre serves as the news hub from where others source for information. The postulation of the centre peripheries theory is quite applicable to global news flow indicating a vertical news flow pattern from top to bottom. In this case, the developed nations qualify as the centre where world political powers, technology, global economic powers and all principal world actors reside. On the other hand, the developing nations or the third world countries qualify as the peripheries that depend on transnational news agencies and global media outfits at the centre for information. This imbalance qualifies the third world countries as passive members in global affairs. MacBride (1980:44) identified that “even in a geographical region like Europe, some more powerful countries still dominate the news scene and cultural and artistic exchange.” Judging news quality from the personality and prominence angle, at the global stage, the super powers again better qualify for what makes news than the third world countries.

Expected horizontal news flow pattern may remain a mirage as long as there is technological imbalance, political and economic superiority and interest which is the basis of international relations. According to Agba (2002:257) “international communication ought to be a situation where major actors in the international scene have the opportunity to spread information about significant events and news to the whole world and in return have adequate knowledge of world issues. All these should happen through depoliticized and objective media. This is the ideal picture that never exists anywhere”

The desire by third world countries for a balance news flow may continue to be elusive as states at international sphere are out to pursue their political ideology, economic interest, technological benefits at the expense of weaker states that depend on them.

Akakwandu (2014:125) identified five nature of imbalance in global news flow:

- ✓ There is news flow imbalance between the developed and the underdeveloped states
- ✓ There is imbalance between state actors having different political ideologies and operating different media system.
- ✓ There is imbalance between regions entangled in one crises or war situation including Israel and Palestine.
- ✓ There is also a news flow imbalance between the underdeveloped countries themselves. This is as a result of different linguistic, political and economic realities and their individual loyalty to their former colonial masters.
- ✓ Within states there is also news flow imbalance since most media organizations are concentrated at the centre and as such focuses on government activities at the expense of community news stories. Nwuosu and Nweke (1990:359) in recognizing the substances of national interest in global communication gave three reasons for vertical news flow in international communication.
- ✓ The media in industrialized countries are too powerful
- ✓ Their services are not truly international, news is selected to suit western attitude or interest
- ✓ They lack the virtues of accuracy and objectivity.

Apart from news flow imbalance and under reportage of third world countries, Aggarwala (1990:337) noted that international communication from the western nations’ end, do not address the information needs of the third world countries. He said “ when third world leaders criticize the western press for biased and distorted reporting, they are not generally speaking questioning the factual accuracy of western news agencies or their correspondents, what they feel chagrined about is the lack of a third world perspective.” Africa lacks the media platform to tell her own story by herself to the world the way it should be told.

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The agenda setting theory, the centre peripheries theory and the framing theories are applied in this study to help place the role of the mass media in international communication and how this has contributed to undermine Africa's values and consequent loss of her identity.

#### **3.1 The Agenda Setting Theory**

The major tenet of agenda setting theory is that the mass media is powerful enough to set agenda for public debate. The theory was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw on a ground breaking study of the role of the media in the 1968 presidential campaign in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The theory implies that the degree of attention, focus and interest mass media audience give to issues of public concern is determined by the degree of attention focus and interest the mass media gives to such issues. In this way, the mass media paints pictures in our minds thereby to an extent determine what we think about. This means that international communication, with particular mention of global news agencies like Reuters (Britain ), Associate Press (USA), United Press International (USA), Agency France Presse (France ) among others and other transactional media organizations as CNN, BBC and Ajazeral determine the issues that the world discuss. This further implies that the emphasis placed on issues by global media organizations whether justified or not determines global discourse and to a large extent shape public opinion on global issues. This situation, leaves third world global media audience at the mercy of these transactional news agencies and media organizations, making them passive as they (third world global media audience) depend on them (international media organizations and news agencies) for news at global sphere. Consistence exposure of third world defenseless, choice less and passive audience is likely to influence their political, economic and social realities in terms of language, fashion, art, music and life style .

#### **3.2 Framing Theory.**

Framing theory was first developed by Goffman in 1960s and 1970s as a micro level theory focusing on how individuals learn to routinely make sense out of their social world. According to Baran and Davis (2012:396) presently the framing theory has been linked to how the mass media takes reports of events from a particular angle to influence audience's interpretation of news report. This also implies positioning a news story from a particular angle. The overall aim in the framing theory is to influence how the audience at the receiving end makes sense out of the issues raised by the media or how the audience interprets the media messages. Relating this to this study, the global media conglomerates and news agencies in pursuit of national interest frame issues in favour of their host nations. Africa's story is mostly told in bad light. Given the media technology and finance, Africa could frame and tell her story better.

#### **3.3 Centre Periphery Theory**

The tenet of this theory is that most political structures the world over concentrate government institutions, political power, social economic institutions and organizations as well as the mass media at the centre (nation or state headquarters) while the component states (suburbs/peripheries) depend on the centre. This arrangement makes the centre more attractive, politically active, economically and socially vibrant. As such the centre becomes a news hub which the peripheries (suburbs) depend upon for news. Activities at the centre naturally and regularly, make news headlines against the suburbs that are under reported. The postulation of this theory mirrors the global sphere where the developed nations can be referred to the centre where the global news agencies and transaction media organizations are concentrated. The developing nations could be regarded as the suburbs/peripheries that constitute the passive global media audience. As such the centre which is made up of the develop nations qualify as global news hubs.

They call the shots, set global agenda on issues, shape opinions and impairs on the political, economic, social and cultural realities of the passive nations that do not have the technological knowhow and finance to turn the table around.

#### **4. INVASION OF AFRICAN AND AFRICAN VALUES**

Africa prides in her culture as a peculiar identify. Africa's identity also reflects in her abundant human and natural resources. Before her invasion, Africa had an established political, economic and social system. Economic interest according to historical records is the basic motivation that brought Europeans to Africa. Akakwandu (2014:52) traced the first contact of Europeans with African to efforts by European merchants who sought to have direct access to Asia merchants (India and China) for spices. In their attempts, a new sea route to Asia across Africa coast was discovered. This led to several voyages of explorations that brought Europeans to Africa. This discovery marked the beginning of international relations via communication between Europe and Africa in 1300s. The Portuguese were later to discover Senegal River in late 1440s, which resulted in their sales of Africans to wealthy Europeans as slaves to work in sugarcane plantations in Europe. The exported slaves were exchanged for European goods like guns, textiles knives and other things. As such some of the chiefs increased their slave capturing mainly through war for exchange of goods which they associated with status symbols.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European powers including Britain, France and Portugal scrambled to colonize some African Territories. Akankwandu (2014: 116) pointed out that Europe scramble for African territories was basically for economic interest in raw materials for European industries and market for finished products. According to him, some other interest groups came to African to put to end what they considered as inhuman culture including the killing of twins. This background makes it clear that African had man power and raw materials as an identity. From the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14th century till date, the exploitation of African has remained unabated. The importation of manufactured goods from Europe and the exportation of raw material to Europe is still the order of the day by most African countries. The mass exodus of manpower to Europe for greener pasture has been on the increase. Consequently and significantly, African values have equally been traded in exchanged for foreign cultures that have left Africa and Africans with a borrowed culture. Prominent is the loss of African languages to European languages as a result of constant global communication between and among state and non-state actors. Most Africans, particularly the younger generations speaks mostly English or French and consider mother-tongue second language. Our music today is mostly European and our life style is basically European.

#### **5. INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION AND CULTURAL IMPERIALISM**

Baran (2002:499), defined cultural imperialism as "the invasions of an indigenous people's culture through mass media by outside powerful countries." Culture has been the pride of Africa. It consist of the language, fashion, life style, music and arts. Baran (2002:499) sees culture as the world made meaningful, socially constructed and maintained through communication. Similarly, Hall (1976:14) sees culture as the medium evolved by human beings to survive. To him, nothing is free from culture, "it is the keystone in civilization's arch and is the medium through which all of life's event must flow." Taylor (1991:91) believes that cultures is a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and towards life. Through families and other social group, every individual is socialized into some values accepted within his society. Culture is transmitted through language. This account for the reason why language is seen as part of culture. Akakwandu (2014:221) noted the impact of foreign media on our culture:

“With heavy viewership of foreign Media products via the big transnational news agencies and eastern Media conglomerates, their portrayal and advertised cultures mainstream into our cultural psyche and begin to necessitate some changes in our existing culture. After all psychologists have succeed in relating cultural change to communication hence symbolic interaction which posits that “ culture symbols are learned through interaction”

Since culture can be impaired through communication, exposure to foreign media programmes relayed in foreign languages is most likely to influence decision to accept implied cultural values framed into global mass media messages and programmes. Ekeayanwu (2008: 8) sees cultural imperialism as “manifest in gradual erosion of local cultures due to the fast adoption of foreign culture and consequently media cultural imperialism. As it stand English language is becoming a global language and the American culture a global culture.”

## 6. CONCLUSION

The world has become a global village via international communication made possible by technology. It is gradually heading towards possibly having one language and one culture. This is the result of international relationship engineered by internationals communication with the global media conglomerates and transactional news agencies putting the developed countries at advantage and their culture impairing on the culture of the developing countries that stand at the disadvantaged end with no technical knowhow and finance to reverse the order.

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