

# **MASS COMMUNICATION AND NATION BUILDING IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD**

**VOLUME ONE**



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## NEWS PERSONIFICATION: THE NEWS AS A METAPHOR OF LIFE

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### Abstract

*The chapter argues that no matter how rigorous and painstaking the process of news gathering is, the product will still be a mere embodiment or concretization of an abstraction, whose attributiveness reflects truthfulness, factualness, timelessness and prominence.*

### INTRODUCTION

One of the enduring criticisms of Western media news presentation is the fact that it is obsessed with a concern for the morbid or tragic. But Western journalists often respond to this charge by claiming that news is about these because they are most likely to excite our sensitivities and emotions rather than the seemingly banal cocktail and administrative reports. Yet this criticism of Western media news is relevant because if everything were reduced to a teary fare then the world would almost be a sardonic place to live in. We cannot totally discard this critical notion because news is about persons, events and places. News is the fiction of life made real in its symbolisms. Thus what may sometimes be dreamed of manifest itself before our very eyes. This adds the touch of fiction to the facts of life and this is played out as the drama of life whose truth is sometimes too frightening to be thought of as real.

In news presentations the key concerns and focus are persons, events, places and things. When it is not about persons, at least it must be about activities. These actualities are then presented sometimes as metaphorical explanations for the actors and actions. Because of the repetitiveness of events, places and characters, journalists have reduced news reports have ceased to be creative, new, original or refreshing; but what it means is simply that the starry-eyed young men and women who daily go hunting for the "displacement of the routine" also have to be gifted in their

young men and women who daily go hunting for the "displacement of the routine" also have to be gifted in their use of the symbolisms of representation. Thus reporting on these events, places, persons and things has become somewhat routinised, each presentation standing for or representing its kind anywhere in the world. But reporters and media which dominate the world's news gathering and news dissemination systems almost present the view of the world which could be reduced to stereotypes. News of the less developed cultures is almost always negative while that about the originating culture always seems more positive, and where it is negative, it is glamorised evil, and in the process news reports are reduced to some kind of pathetic fallacy. But since we cannot escape a fuller explanation of what constitutes news in the world today, it therefore becomes necessary to do so in order to understand the ideologies, social constraints and pressures, and other factors which determine the nature, character and directions of news flow. In the final analysis what news is or is not is largely a factor of a mix of culture, ideology and professional perception and prescription. Thus Wilson's (1990:12) news as:

*The intimations of things hitherto unknown, a confirmation of those uncertain or yet to become reality and the validation and sharing of proximate or remote experience through the use of traditional and western media systems, comes close to de-mystifying news perception from western intellectual perspectives thus broadening the scope of metaphorical abstractions.*

### THE NATURE OF NEWS

News originally referred to a number of near synonymous descriptions from novelties, tidings, word, rumour, message, bulletin, declaration, gospel, story, to despatches, announcement, advice and notification. Several definitions isolate the following characteristics of news: 'freshness', 'prominence' or 'salience', 'unusualness', 'timeliness' or 'recency', 'human interest', 'relevance' and 'proximity'. But as one view puts it,



*the criteria of what is news vary according to the needs of different countries and societies... the definition of news depends ultimately on cultural perception (Quoted in Wilson 1990:6).*

The characteristics of news as presented in the elements listed above reflect images of the world. The images of the world as presented to us by the world's news media are pictures of varying shades and hues. Most of the pictures reflect the disparities between the world's economic zones, distorted images, cultural alienation, linguistic differences, political differences, war and sinews of war. For a third world nation like Nigeria, the picture is more dehumanising. They represent snippets of hunger and poverty, national and human disasters, illiteracy, north-south hemispherical dichotomy, human rights violation, problems of political governance, social and economic inequalities as well as administrative inefficiency and mismanagement.

All these pictures are ever present in the media of the western world which dominate the international news gathering and news dissemination market. The picture of news in the minds of western reporters has remained static over the years from pre-colonial times till date. Africa of the dragon-infested seas has only changed to Africa of political violence, disease, hunger, drought, etc. But what is news or constitutes news has undergone changes as far as the picture vector is turned to the western society. News of the western world presents a glittering contrast to that of the Third world. The shift from positivism to negativism is not necessarily abrupt but can be placed within a continuum where approximate and neutral features may be found. Viewed from this perspective perhaps one may conclude that the range of movement within these polarities tend to follow a central right (for western society) and a left to centre (for Third world society) direction.

Third world  $\xrightarrow{-}$  N  $\xrightarrow{+}$  Western world

In the case of western society, the news image gradually moves from the neutral to the positive occasionally moving slightly left of centre; while news about the Third World

moves from a concentration of negativism to benign neutrality and may move slightly right of centre especially in entertainment and sports reports. In our general conceptualization of news as well as the images or little pictures we have in our heads of the persons, events, places and things, we are forced into adopting personal attitudes to them and personifying them in more ways than one. Thus news persons are usually persons that are known and unknown and usually persons we have never met and may never meet.

Cherry (1978:8) encapsulates this vision of news persons when he says:

The ever-mounting volume of news that presses upon us requires us at least to adopt some personal attitudes towards millions of different people.

He avers further:

We cannot know them individually as persons, but read about them only as *names and activities*. We can see them only as *classes and types*; as *institutions*, as *abstract* and speak of Biafrans, Chinese, Arabs, Americans, teenagers, black race, students as though such population varied little among themselves, as persons.

It is clear from the various news presentations by the media that such presentations are generalizations which tend to view persons as classes and abstracts. Yet as Cherry (1978:9) further points out:

*... there is a growing danger that they can be discussed as though they were persons, rather than personifications (as they really are) and the sins of one member, or small section, of any such groups can become read as being the sins of the whole group.*

So what is in the nature of news is simply a factor of the process of its production which processing hinges on a number of internal and external forces which influences its selection and presentation.



John Bittner (1991:251-258) has isolated ten key factors which work together to influence the selection, treatment and presentation of news in the mass media. These factors are: economic, regulations, deadlines, personal and professional ethics, competition among media houses, news values, news hole, attention factors, peer group pressure and reaction to feedback.

Economic factors relate to the profit-loss structure of the media which mostly operate as part of free enterprise. The economic reality demands that the media must make profit or go out of business. This does not apply to non-commercial, or semi-commercial government-run media of the Third World and other countries like FRCN (Nigeria), BBC (UK), VOA (US). Yet economics is not the sole determinant of news content.

Regulatory bodies and legislations by federal, state and local governments tend to control the operations of the media as well as ensure freedom of expression and of the press through constitutional provisions like Section 36 of the 1979 Nigerian constitution. Recent legal pronouncements by the court on matters relating to defamation which have been largely against media practitioners appear to be in complete violation of press freedom and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and have appeared as major constraints to the free exercise of the freedom of expression laws.

In 1993, the promulgation of draconian decrees by the Nigerian military had a telling effect on news selection. Decrees 43 and 48 of 1993 were all aimed ostensibly at ensuring that only pro-government media had a free reign. Considering the fact that these decrees were the handiwork of a former magazine publisher, they had tended to encourage the security agents who appeared to have his tacit support. There is almost a situation where the type of news that is recorded and transmitted must be found by government agents to be acceptable otherwise the circulation of such news is immediately halted through seizures of either whole editions at printing presses or part thereof in selected states. The situation appears to be worse than what Decree 4 of 1984 attempted to do in Nigeria. Decree 4 known as Public

Officer's (Protection Against False Accusation) had decreed that:

*Any person who publishes in any form, whether written or otherwise any message, rumour, report or statement, being a message, rumour, statement or report which is false in any material particular or which bring or is calculated to bring the Federal Military Government or the government of a state or a public officer to ridicule or disrepute, shall be guilty of an offence under this decree.*

The most intimidating thing about this decree was that it did not matter whether the story was true or not if there was a spelling error perhaps of the name of a public officer that could, in fact, constitute an offence against the law.

But while the new Decrees 43 and 48 literally decreed newspapers out of existence, the other at least provided for a twelve-month proscription order and a fine of N10,000.

Another factor which influences news selection and presentation is the ever-present bugbear, deadlines. They force news reporters to work under extreme pressure on a daily basis. Like fast foods, 'quality' can sometimes be compromised, and in news reports this quality hinges on accuracy.

Personal and professional ethics constitutes another factor which help gatekeepers to determine what should be reported and in what manner or some distinct professional criteria or some foggy personal standards or ethics which may coincide, by and large, with professional considerations. But this one grey area which has often caused disaffection between news reporters and proprietors. In a recent case in Nigeria, three journalists including an editor left the *African Concord* magazine over disagreement with management on editorial matters. The journalists claimed they were performing their professional duties and that their proprietor had no right to undermine them.

Competition between and among media is considered healthy for the development of a free press and it guarantees the reporting of more than one opinion. Competition keeps the competitors on their toes and ensures some level of



responsibility and seriousness on the part of the news media. They therefore cannot take their audience for granted. This factor is very important too.

Competition in itself is considered a healthy way of ensuring that standards are maintained but sometimes this can lead to unprofessionalism and sharp practices among some practitioners who are anxious to keep their medium ahead of competition. In recent times, the nearly suffocating Nigerian newsmagazine market has received a lot of jolting interference from Government agents masquerading under indeterminate and nebulous laws. Several editions of magazines like *Tell*, *The News*, and *Tempo* had been impounded by security agents who claimed they were acting in the interest of the state and journalism. Even some magazines have engaged one another in excoriating attacks which tend to heighten the sharp differences among practitioners and exposing their internal rivalries in their mutual efforts to win over the highly selective reader. Fair competition has not been helped by unequal access to resources. Yet competition is a strong factor in news selection, for between the private and government-owned media there is a gulf in their selection of news on economic and political issues, which selection also determines their readership patronage.

Furthermore, the importance people attach to the event or the potential impact the event is expected to have on its intended audience constitutes an important consideration in news selection and presentation. Thus whether an event is selected by the gatekeeper or not can largely depend on the relative potential of the event and its perceived esteem in the eyes of the public. This factor is preferred to as the news value, and it is a factor determined by all the people affected by a media event.

Related to news value is the news hole (space) factor. The news hole is, strictly speaking, the number of columns of space in a newspaper available for editorial matter after the advertisements have been scheduled (Jacobson, 1969:223), but in general terms, a news hole refers to 'the total amount of space or time in which to present messages in order of

decreasing values'. (Bittner 1991:259). As Bittner (1991:254) further notes:

*The size of the news hole is also determined by the number and news value of events that attract the gatekeeper's attention. Thus a number of other influences come into play in giving the news hole its quality and character.*

Attention factors also play important roles in news selection and presentation. These are visual and aural stimuli that enhance a story. Because of the competing elements which make news selection a somewhat difficult task, visual or aural support to stories though may not always be necessary in the cases of compelling stories, can sometimes be the reason for using a particular story, thus giving it an added advantage.

In addition, peer group pressure constitutes another potent factor in news selection and presentation. It brings about those decisions that are influenced by one's professional colleagues. Although peer group pressure can sometimes have the salutary effect of ensuring that the reporter's personal prejudice is moderated by the interest shown in the story by colleagues, yet it can sometimes create a feeling of misuse of *esprit de corps* by journalists and a protection of the group members.

Finally, feedback, that self-regulatory mechanism within the system helps to determine news selection and presentation based on audience reaction to previous presentations. Such feedback could take any form: from a personal visit to a telephone call or letter. The journalist's reaction to this feedback may lead to his moderating his earlier position or changing the direction of his report in the case of a series presentation. Such feedback cannot usually be defined as the individual view of a member of the audience since it can sometimes represent the view of a silent majority or that of a fringe group. The gatekeepers have the responsibility of determining or judging the quality of the response which an audience member makes. Through experience he may sometimes find it easy to distinguish between the two.



## METAPHORS OF NEWS

Local and international news presentations are determined by a number of professional factors namely: economic, legal, time schedules, ethical issues, competition, news values, news hole, attention factors, peer group pressure and feedback, each factor being in turn moderated by environmental factors.

News, as we have stated in this article, is a presentation of pieces of reality which could be seen as pathetic fallacy. Each presentation, imagery or picture can be projected as either microcosms or macrocosms of the event. Thus a news report like the one captured in *The Punch* headline: **'Wild Beasts Sack Farmers... in Sokoto State'** (24/08/92) could become a metaphor for development concerns the world over. The picture that comes to our mind is that of ravaging elephants, rhinos, etc. devastating farmlands in Sokoto, in the Amazon Basin, the Ganges valley, and other wilds the world over. This report brings images of the food problem, hunger, famine and drought-related problems. Concerns for displaced persons, poor harvests and the general helplessness of populations raise other development issues: food aid, financial aid, low technology and a general concern for the human family as a world family.

Another headline story in *The Punch* proclaims: **'Aids Claims Two Lives in Nigeria'**. Again death through aids is not just the problem of two families in Nigeria but the story raises health concerns. The story is a pathetic fallacy which captures in the two deaths the general concern worldwide for the health scourge called aids.

For some self-righteous reader, it could be a case of punishment or justifiable end for persons who could not control their sexual appetite. For many others the general spectre which could follow suit juggles the memory: Two gone, what about those they were in contact with? What are the chances of the rest of us? In fact for many still it is the affliction of fear by the knowledge that the killer-disease has come so close to our door steps.

The headline: **'SDP Sejects Aspirants Request... for Political Jobs'** strikes the political cord in us. Afterall we all are political animals. The report is a personification of the

vagaries of all political animals. After angling for the big fish and failing we sometimes settle for the smaller fish. It also reflects the intrigues, blackmail, the long-drawn behind-the-scene haggling and negotiations that take place before we see a smiling president in spite of the burden of his concessions weighing heavily on him.

When a newspaper reports of **'Police in N25,000 Bribe Scandal'**, it is clearly a metaphor for the growing denigration and devaluation of our law enforcement agencies. It is the irony of life that those who are meant to keep the law have become law-breakers. The policeman (bribe-taker) becomes for us not the man but the race, the people called policemen, but really this is a personification of crime although many cases could lead to a generalization for the group as being typical, the norm rather than the exception. We would reflect on the sum of N25,000 as being stupendous. Yet the actual import of the story is ascribing human characteristics to the crime of bribe-taking by a policeman for that matter. This is not just a crime committed in a Third World country but that which is afflicting mankind generally, the corruption within the police force as well as other security agencies.

The Nigerian nation has been afflicted by wild cat strike actions since 1992. Beginning from the landmark strike action by members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), a body which represents all teachers in universities, the country has witnessed strikes by bank workers, petroleum industry workers, tanker drivers, teachers in primary and secondary schools, civil servants, non-academic staff of universities, teaching hospitals, research institutes, colleges of education and polytechnics, and public transport drivers. In the case of the ASUU strike which lasted for seven weeks, that is about half of a semester, the Federal Government replied with a proscription order and refused to negotiate. So when government leaders decided to negotiate, a newspaper responded with the headline: **'Proscribed ASUU Chiefs, Government talk'**.

Proscription captures the image of government intolerance and high-handedness. **'Proscribed ASUU Chiefs'** thus becomes a metaphor for the oppressed workers everywhere. An industrial strike is a legitimate tool used by



labour unions to fight for fair remunerations and conditions of service. Perhaps the idea of proscription recalls the denial of the right to existence but talking brings back that hope. ASUU therefore represents industrial struggles for equity not just as persons representing university teachers.

In a similar vein the story captioned: **'Naira Loses 20K to the Dollar'** does not represent the Nigerian currency per se. The naira is a figure of speech representing the turbulent world of unstable or sliding currencies. Perhaps better seen as a metaphor for the international monetary crisis, the naira represents the weak currencies while the dollar represents the strong. The naira could also stand for financial indiscipline, the image of poor economic policies while the dollar could represent the power of the international monetary cartels: IMF, the World Bank, Paris Club, London Club, the Group of 7 as well as economic imperialism and financial terrorism on the part of the strong. It also brings to mind the tricky businesses of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), Wall Street, Dow Jones and Nikkei Averages.

Furthermore, Bill Clinton represents American politics and the American president, it is not about the person of the president but a whole lot about the power, glamour, integrity, wealth, resilience, politics, constitution and the intrinsic American character. In some instances there are images of international terrorism as evidenced in the barefaced bombing of Libya, invasion of Panama, Guyana and the near genocide committed against the Iraqi people, the double-talk and manoeuvrings at the United Nations, the double standards in approaches to international issues, the destabilization of weaker nations and political assassinations by the CIA and other internal security agencies like MOSSAD. All these constitute some of the images that people have in their heads about the American president whoever he is. For some, still the picture may be that of a powerful democracy, benevolent nation, secular state with strong christian traditions, rich, sometimes overbearing and overreaching itself. In the final analysis we have a very complex image which is represented by the picture of a boyish, democratic member who happens to be the president of America in 1997.

Bosnia Herzegovina. What a musical name. Ironically, the realities in this former province of the Republic of Yugoslavia are not near a loss of lives, hunger and starvation, disruptions of regular human activities, extreme hatred and bitterness, destruction of facilities and national edifices, ~~and~~ constitute a great cause of international concern for peace lovers and lovers of humanity but financial havens for arms dealers.

Somalia presents a more complex scenario because of its mixture of man-made and natural disasters. For her it is a potpourri of famine, drought, ethnic and socio-political differences as well as civil war. All the same, the situation speaks volumes of the dangers or ill-effects of ideological warfare and the readiness of ideological godfathers to arm either side or all sides of the conflict without the slightest interest for the welfare of the people. Today, the US efforts at paying for its past 'sins' by attempting to disarm its former allies in order to be able to provide succour for some who are caught in the cross fire of inter-ethnic rivalry have come to a head. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, ideology has been replaced by ethnicity and religious differences as in the Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Liberia and recently Togo and the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire). Media reports on these trouble spots are statements about the human condition not just news about the countries mentioned. Thus Somalia stands for anywhere of its kind anywhere in the world.

Finally, OPEC, the oil-producers' cartel comprising Third World producer countries spells oil politics. News about OPEC is obviously news about the troubled oil market whose vagaries have negative or positive effects on the economies of cartel members as well as the poor nations of the world and the leading consumer-nations. OPEC news reminds us of the uncertainties of production, supplies and consumption of and the spectre of disruption of production and supplies. The image of industries and refineries shutting down world-wide and the attendant hardships are all part of the picture we get when OPEC is in the news. For some, there is also the image of an emasculated organisation with Arab Sheikhs scurrying from consultations with American and British allies to



sessions with their bemused partners. For such people, OPEC has become a toothless bulldog and an Arab-dominated talk-shop where participants are anxious to reach agreements that they do not intend to keep.

Still for some, the image of the 1973-75 Arab withdrawal of supplies to the west which led to a skyrocketing of prices is still vivid.

### New Directions for News

John Hartley (1982:38-62) has outlined the main pre-occupations of western news media to cover six broad topic areas: politics, the economy, foreign affairs, domestic news, occasional stories and sports. But the Annan committee on the future of Broadcasting (1977:275) in suggesting additional topics to cover what it considered 'neglected areas' stated that it should include more good news. This is an admission of the seeming obsession of western media with the bizarre and what African scholars refer to as 'disaster reporting'. Hartley also raises an interesting question which is fundamental to the understanding of the economics and politics of news with regard to its social significance: Are the events that get so much coverage there because they already 'affect our lives', or do they affect our lives largely because they are constantly reported in the news? This is a question that gets close to addressing the myth of mass media effects and equally calls to mind the status conferral role of the media. Looking at the present tendency of public media towards commercialization which translates into quantification and commodification of media content, the spectre of extended discrimination by African mass media against local events looms large. For while scholars criticise western media for not mentioning Third World positive or neutral news events in their fair but concentrating on bad news, Nigerian media extend the discrimination to a laughable end when they in turn re-echo international news agency reports but ignore reports concerning the lives and activities of persons in their environments except in situations where the actors are prepared to buy the air time or space.

Thus news is presented either as announcements, advertisement or publicity exercises. Denied access to

international news media, the local personalities are sometimes also denied attention in the local media. Thus news becomes what has been paid for by a rich buyer - a commodity stripped of the quality of 'newness and unexpected things'. And as Hartley (1982:39) further avers: 'little is said about the lives of ordinary people - only about the decisions made in politics, the economy, etc. which are taken to, affect those lives (usually in the wallet)'.

Certainly, in order to avert the present direction of news a new path has to be charted to accommodate both the positive and negative as well as neutral content. But generally the focus of news should be based on the following broad information needs: The Economy, Politics, National issues, Occasional stories, International Affairs, Local Government Affairs, Justice and Entertainment (Sports).

The economy presents a welter of issues from business to agriculture. Nigerian media audience like audiences all over the world are concerned about and need information on companies, structural adjustment, budget, statistics on the economy (trade figures), inflation, import and export duties, prices of goods, banking and finance, agriculture and food production. All over the world economic issues dominate discussions and are the focus of media attention and the business of government. It has become the nemesis of many a government, such that economic management and policies are now the strongest bases for determining the success or otherwise of government or party and thus predominate in politicians' media campaigns for re-election.

Politics is essentially one of the areas in which the masses of the people require information. The concern of the media in politics may be seen as stretching from local, state to national and international politics.

The people need to know most of all what is happening in their immediate environment which the present media fare in Nigeria seems to deny them. Rather the Nigerian audience is inundated with information about places most people would not bother to look up in maps because they would not even know from which corner to begin. Thus there is news on



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Kazakhstan, Somalia, Papua New Guinea, Haiti and in what has now been characterised as Afghanistanism.

Political news in recent times has become the source of dramatic rise in sales figures as well as cover prices as obtained when the military government of Ibrahim Babangida unilaterally annulled the presidential polls held on June 12, 1993 in Nigeria. Many newspapers and magazines became instant successes through the political stories they carried daily. Such stories became the sources of conflict between the government and some media on the one hand, and a source of estrangement between the people and government-controlled media on the other. The babel of voices which in the true western media tradition leads to a re-alignment of forces and a clarification of issues created an atmosphere of seeming confusion and fear fueled by government propaganda.

What are the political issues that the media concern themselves with? Most media speak of Government business, (Aso Rock, Military Administrators and Abuja), policies, political personalities, disputes, elections, political parties and the affairs of state in state and local government councils. These are handled from partisan, geo-political, and sometimes objective perspectives.

The next focus of news content in Nigeria is what is loosely referred to as national issues. National news reports focus on these issues. It may be hard or soft news (human interest or humorous reports). It may be about issues with a large threshold or events involving personalities of national importance or events of national importance or significance. Sometimes the concept of national news is interpreted by media gatekeepers to mean news of events involving personalities of the dominant ethnic groups or sub-nations. This misconception often leads to an internal imbalance in news coverage and presentation thus creating internal calls for what in a larger or global context is called a new world information and communication order.

However, the reality points to the fact that what is considered national has not been very clearly defined within the contexts of Nigeria's contending political and ethnic situation. The definition, for now, has been left in the hands

of a few strategically and politically advantaged actors who have arrogated to themselves the right to define our world for as in their own image.

Within the ambit of news directions fall occasional stories. Occasional stories are those stories which do not form part of the menu in our news cafeteria. They may be about celebrities, novelties and events like festivals of an annual nature. By their nature they are irregular or sporadic yet may constitute a 'displacement of the routine'. Audiences everywhere are always enthused by such news reports and that is why they are always expected and when they are presented they are always received with relish.

From very ancient beginnings news had always been dominated by international affairs. The concept of 'tidings' was closely associated with news of events in distant places. Earlier in our discussion of the political aspect of news direction, we had addressed the seeming concern of Nigerian media with foreign reporting. Because of the inter-relationship between nations in trade and politics news about what happens in some key areas of such relationship is strongly desired. Thus the audience is interested in news about relationship between governments, the United Nations, wars, coups, earthquakes, hijacks, and other disasters and threatening events. When the United States, Britain and France imposed limited sanctions against Nigeria in the aftermath of the unjustified cancellation of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections the news brought about a lot of anxiety in Nigeria and in Africa considering the important role of Nigeria in African and international politics. Such presentation is not the same thing as the excessive concern with foreign affairs while a number of national issues are ignored.

News reports are also required to focus on local government affairs. The events could include local administration, local courts, traditional institutions and overlords, ordinary folks who are engaged in significant activities and those generally referred to as the grassroots or rural people. Those folks are generally exciting people. And as Hartley (1982) notes usually little is said about the lives of these people. The situation is made worse in our now highly commercialised news presentations where news is purchased



as a commodity in the market place, and where the pictures on your screen are but those of 'commercial' personalities who have been able to pay for the air time. Thus the value of news is determined by the amount the 'commercial person' is ready to pay. And as Wilson (1993:9) laments:

*Ironically, news which is supposed to be a free commodity has had a value placed on it by media managers and public relations agents.*

Thus as he further avers:

*The rural people, the poor and the lower middle class who form the bulk of television viewers do not have the opportunity of watching the activities of their community on a station they have often been told belongs to them.*

Abuse of judicial procedures even by judicial officers and law enforcement agents is a matter which the average citizen needs to know. The media occasionally give prominence to stories regarding such abuses but it does not see adequate attention has been given to this aspect. For instance, many Nigerians are very ignorant about what constitutes their rights under the law. There is very little of human rights and constitution education which should prepare the average citizen for a life in highly dangerous society as ours. The police as part of the enforcers of the law join in misinforming the public about their rights within the Nigerian constitution. For example, it is a common practice at police stations for adult female citizens to be denied the right to bail people brought before the law on grounds that they are women, yet our constitution says everyone is equal under the law and there is no clause in the constitution which denies women this right.

Extrajudicial measures like execution by policemen of suspected criminals without due process including the use of the largely unconstitutional tribunals and open-air dismissal orders given by military leaders to public officers without recourse to the principles of fair hearing and the conditions of service under which the persons were employed are despicable and are often given a lot of prominence by the media which themselves are supposed to expose such unjustified actions. The victims of these illegal actions and

abuse of the law are members of the society who themselves are inveighed into believing that this is both legally and morally correct.

The media should redirect its energies to efforts at straightening or righting the wrongs of our leaders who in most cases are themselves products of a bastardised culture and would stop at nothing at foisting their self-righteous positions on the society. Our deep worry is over the seeming connivance of the media with the commission of injustice against innocent citizens. There is certainly need for greater awareness and attention to judicial matters and the functioning of the judiciary. The media must assist the judiciary to achieve independence from the executive so that there can be greater accountability and trust in both the judiciary and the executive.

Finally, entertainment has been given a lot of quantitative treatment by the media but what we need now is qualitative attention. By qualitative attention, we mean there should be a more organized arrangement by which programming takes care of all sports and other forms of entertainment and the aesthetic elements of time are taken into account. At present entertainment programmes are handled haphazardly, and they need focus. Thus because the audience members are made up of people of various interests, it is desirable to programme radio and television entertainment, be it music, drama, sports or cultural display to reflect the tempo of the game is to abuse the medium and the patient audience. Our time value orientation has to change and the real import of entertainment programmes must be brought home to the audience. The purgative and cathartic effects of entertainment must be paramount in the minds of the media practitioners and they cannot therefore afford to make their presentation dense and worrisome.

In newspaper and magazine writing, the sports writer can bring some sunshine to the faces of the readers. The language has to be simple, and the style arresting and breezy or quick-paced to reflect the action or tempo of the game being described. While details are necessary woolly descriptions are to be avoided and this will give the true character to the presentation. Apt pictures should be chosen



as representative of the event being described. Variety in pictures and in style of description is also essential.

## CONCLUSION

The process of news gathering, organization and dissemination is rather long and complex one. Very few persons ever give a thought to its complexities when they are receiving media messages. Even a few number still never realise that what they read is a mere embodiment or concretization of an abstraction. In its attributiveness news assumes a certain universal quality which reflects truthfulness, factualness, timeliness, prominence and salience among others. It is a deviation from these that often gives news presentations a bad name and equally reveals the mask surrounding certain aspects of news presentations. Thus we can see the persons behind the personifications, the events, places and things. In the end, what we find after a dizzying trip through news pages or budgeted routinised attention to broadcast news, is a metaphorical view of life.

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