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BROADCAST MEDIA AS AN EXTENSION OF TRADITIONAL CHANNELS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION: A CASE STUDY OF 'SO DAA BEE? ON BCOS TV, IBADAN.

A paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Nigerian Chapter of ACCE.

Department of Communication Arts, University of Uyo, Uyo.

June 19-21, 2003

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Abstract

Conflict resolution is a value-laden process in the traditional Yoruba society. Conflict, of course, is a universal phenomenon and an inevitable element in the relationship among living things, either human or otherwise. The resolution of the conflict, as well, is inevitable to achieve peace and, eventually, progress in any society. Conflict resolution in Yorubaland, for instance, is hinged on ethics, that is, resolution of conflict is seen as something good and in the overall interest of the society. Therefore, conflict resolution is taken as a communal effort either at the family, ward or town level. These traditional channels are best seen as 'courts of love' where disputants leave to be better friends.

The broadcast media extend the frontiers of traditional modes of conflict resolution with their various informal arbitration programmes. One of such is 'So daa bee' on BCOS TV, Ibadan. This programme, just like others of its kind, has proved effective in the resolution of various kinds of conflict among the people.

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Introduction

Conflict is a universal phenomenon and an inevitable element in the relationship among living things, either human or otherwise. Tichenor et al (1980:17) posit that conflict is a central component in community life and social change. In other words, in some way, (social) conflict serves as a lubricant for social machine. It is what indicates the interaction among living things. Without it, life seems to be stiff.

Just as conflict becomes a natural occurrence, the resolution of the conflict, as well, remains a *sine qua non* for the achievement of peace, and eventually, progress in any society. Before the advent of colonialism and the formal judicial system in Africa, various African peoples in their various communities have been interacting among themselves in conflict; and, in their own ways, have been resolving the conflict. While the Western (European) way of resolving conflict can be regarded as formal with all its

appurtenances, we would, in that sense, take the African traditional means of resolving conflict as the informal. These informal traditional ways of resolving conflict can come at the family level where the family head (*baálé*) takes the utmost responsibility for this; at the community level where the *baálè* takes charge; at the town level where the king (*oba*) is in control; or at the spiritual level where the spiritual leaders become the arbiters.

As a result of the growing complexity of the human society coupled with the adoption of the mass media system in modern African societies, resolution of conflict can no longer be limited to the family or communal life. In a way, the emergence of mass society has also brought about conflict resolution through the mass media. Although, they, yet, serve as a complement to the traditional and the formal judicial systems, they have also proved to be important as a channel for conflict resolution and as an agent of socialisation where members of the public can learn and gain experience from the cases being adjudged.

Significantly, the focus of this paper is the informal arbitration programmes on the broadcast media as an extension of the traditional modes of conflict resolution. The broadcast media arbitration programmes are seen as an extension of the traditional modes of conflict resolution because the philosophy and the structure remain the same. The two are informal and their conflict resolution is hinged on ethics. Albert et al (1995:8-9) note that settlement of dispute among Yoruba people, for instance, is achieved by appealing to 'omoluabi' of both parties. 'Omoluabi' means a person of good character and the instinct is believed to be in the conscience/mind of everybody. Albert et al (1959:9) write:

> Thus any appeal to omoluabi is an appeal to conscience (*eri okan*) intricately interwoven with the concept of the family (*ebi*) to which every person belongs, and of a higher being, *Olodumare* (God) to whom every person is accountable.

Specifically, this paper shall be considering the arbitration programme, 'So daa bee' on the television service of the Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State, Ibadan (the capital city of Oyo State, Nigeria) as an extension of the African traditional channels of conflict resolution. Similar programmes are 'Agborandun' on NTA, Ibadan and 'Agborandun' (the same title with that of NTA, Ibadan) on BCOS Radio 1.

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Formal and Informal Channels of Conflict Resolutions

The formal judicial system was brought into Africa, courtesy of colonialism. In this system, the police and the courts are responsible for conflict resolution by the application of the laws of the land. While the police are, sometimes, involved in taking offenders to legally constituted courts for trial, the courts, on the other hand, interpret and apply the law as found appropriate in resolving civil or criminal conflicts. The courts have the statutory powers to impose fines or mete out punishment to anybody found guilty in the course of the trial.

In the formal system, counsels are involved to hold brief for the parties involved in the trial. Statues are applied in arguing and judging cases in this process. Not only is the process formal, the modes of dressing of various 'law officers' (the police, the lawyers and the judges) are equally formal.

In contrast, the informality in the traditional judicial process is indicated by how the litigants present their cases, how the judge obtains their evidence and how the court itself functions. No counsels are involved, rather the judge plays the role of counsel by cross-examining disputants and witnesses (Albert, et al, 1995).

With reference to Ollennu (1969: 110-22), Albert et al (1995) posit that judgments passed in this kind of court are binding only if they are acceptable to the parties in dispute. They further note that the probability that verdict passed in the traditional court will be respected by the disputants depends much on the direct and indirect sanctions which the judge can invoke against those who seek his arbitration. Such sanctions are classified into three: moral, ritual and legal.

With a study of the Tswana people of Botswana, Comaroff and Roberts (1981:109), cited in Albert et al (1995), identify four hierarchical options for conflict resolution in the typical traditional African society.

(i) Disputants try to resolve the conflict themselves;.

(ii) Disputants seek the assistance of senior kinsmen to resolve the conflict;

(iii) Disputants take the matter to the headman of the neighbourhood (in which the defendant lives).

(iv) Disputants take the matter to the local chief.

Traditional Channels of Conflict Resolution in Yorubaland

In consonance with what Comaroff and Roberts (1981) describe of the conflict resolution mechanism among the Tswana people of Botswana, the Yoruba of Nigeria also have different levels of conflict resolution which also correspond to the different levels of kinship. Conflicts are resolved at the level of the nuclear family (*idile*), headed by a *baálé*; at the level of the extended family (*ebi*), headed by a mogaji; at the level of the village or ward, headed by a *baálẹ̀* and at the level of a town, headed by a king. In

resolving conflicts, these heads are assisted by other elders and influential people in the community. They all sit together at a forum to hear cases and offer judgments.

Cases brought before a *baálé* include conflicts among co-wives, brothers and sisters; truancy and street fights involving his children and his foster children (Albert, et al, 1995:13). *Mogaji* and *baálẹ̀* have responsibility for such cases as land disputes in the family and disputes over inheritance. Cases brought before the king usually border on land matters and appointment of 'mogajis' and 'baálès'.

In each case, the jurists listen to each of the disputants as they present their cases one after the other. The jurists also do thorough investigation of the case by taking evidence from various witnesses. With the application of native wisdom and lore, the jurists adjudicate the matter.

The utmost aim of the traditional judicial system in Yorubaland is the restoration of peace by, amicably, resolving conflicts. As a result, fines or damages are not usually awarded by the mediators in civil cases. Sometimes, however, mediators award simple fines as a deterrent to the re-occurrence of particular anti-social behaviour. This may be in form of kolanuts or local gin, both of which have ritual purpose. For instance, some of the kolanuts brought as fines can be broken and passed round for everyone to eat as an indirect way of celebrating the resolution of the conflict. (Albert et al, 1995:26).

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Broadcast Media

Broadcasting is the transmission of radio and television signals over air from fixed terrestrial transmitters and with limited range (McQuail, 2000:491). The limited range has, however, been broadened with the advent of cable and satellite systems which

surfaced in the 1970s. Simply put, broadcasting is the action or activity of sending out sound and/or images by means of radio or television. McQuail (2000) notes that radio and television have, respectively, a seventy-plus-and a forty-plus-year history as mass media, and both grew out of pre-existing technologies-telephone, telegraph, moving and still photography, and sound recording.

In specific terms, television, for instance, means telephony with vision. The seed of television was actually planted in 1888 with the invention of the photo-electric cells, a device which converted light into electric current (Boyd, 1994). One of the basic principles behind television goes thus: if light can be turned into electricity, then electricity can be turned back into light.

John Loggie Baird, a Scottish engineer, developed a way of scanning a picture, line by line, so each line could be sent by wire to a television receiver. This process was reversed at the other end and the picture reformed line by line into an image of the original (Boyd, 1994:286).

Boyd (1994:288), further, notes that television pictures are transmitted by piggy-back. According to him, "TV and radio programmes ride on the back of high frequency signals called carrier waves which are transmitted at up to millions of times a second". The carrier wave is electronically altered to match TV signal. This way, TV programmes are super-imposed upon the carrier wave. The modified carrier wave puts the TV signals through the air to a receiver where the process is reversed and the signal is converted back into the original picture and sound.

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A Brief History of Television in Nigeria

The first television signal to be sent out whole of Nigeria and Africa took off in Ibadan in the South-Western part of Nigeria on October 31,1959. The then Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) was established by an Act of the (former) Western Region's House of Parliament, primarily, to enhance formal and informal education. The former Eastern Region followed suit on October 1, 1960 when it started the Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (ENBC). The same overseas company, Overseas Re-diffusion, built both the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service (radio and television) and ENBC (radio and television).

The then Nigerian Television Service of the Federal Government, built by the American network-owned company of NBC – International, went on the air in April 1962. Similarly, the Northern Region government's Radio-Television, Kaduna (RTV-Kaduna) was on the air in 1962. It was built by Pye Ltd. and Granada TV Ltd. (Uche, 1989).

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Because of the problems of allocation of frequency and lack of cultural sensitivity in programming, the then Federal Military Government took over the control of all television stations in the country. On April 1, 1977, the government formally promulgated a decree establishing a corporation to be known as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). Thus, television broadcasting in Nigeria came under the control of the NTA. This, however, changed during the nation's second Republic (1979-1983) when some states, based on the provisions of the 1979 constitution that made radio and television broadcasting a concurrent subject between the federal and state governments,

established their own stations that were independent of the NTA structure, control and management (Uche, 1989:65-66).

Between that time and now, virtually all the existing 36 states of the federation have their own TV stations. The medium has been further proliferated with the entrance of the private TV stations brought about by the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission Decree No. 38 of 1992.

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Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS)

What is, today, known as the Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS) was initially two separate media entities, namely the Radio O-Y-O and the Television Service of Oyo State (TSOS). Radio O-Y-O was established in 1976 while TSOS came to being in 1982. The two were merged in 1984 under a corporate entity now known as BCOS. BCOS now comprises BCOS TV, Radio 1 (AM), and Radio 2 (FM).

Some of the objectives of BCOS are:

(i) Providing television and radio broadcasting services as public services for dissemination of information, education and entertainment;

(ii) Securing wide coverage and long reach for the programmes broadcast by radio and television services which are strictly in compliance with the general standard of ethics and good tastes; and

(iii) Maintaining balance in political, industrial and religious matters.

BCOS Radio 1 operates on Medium Wave Band. It is a network of transmitting stations located in Ibadan on 756 KHz, Gambari (near Ogbomoso) on 792 KHz and Oje-Owode (near Saki) on 675 KHz. The Channel reaches other States like Ekiti, Kogi,

Kwara, Ondo, Osun and a substantial part of Lagos. It is also received in the neighbouring countries of Burkina-Faso and Republic of Benin.

The BCOS Radio 2 is the first Frequency Modulation (F. M) station to be operated by a State Radio Organisation in Nigeria. It came into existence on Saturday, 1st July, 1978. The station operates on a 2 x 30 KW transmitters installed at Mapo Hill, Ibadan and transmitting on frequency 98.5 MHz. The Channel is received in the whole of South West, Abuja, Kaduna, Minna and Lokoja.

The BCOS TV, just like BCOS Radio 1, is housed in Ile-Akede, Orita Basorun, Ibadan. It transmits to the whole of South West. It is operated on channel 28 UHF. Programmes transmitted on the BCOS channels can be categorised majorly into three Public Enlightenment, Entertainment, and News and Current Affairs. The two Radio Channels operate for 19 hours each day, opening 5.00 in the morning and closing at 12 in the night. The BCOS TV operates weekdays transmission from Monday to Friday in two stages: Morning Transmission ((9.00am to 2.00pm) and Afternoon Transmission (4.00pm to 12midnight). The weekend transmission (Saturday and Sunday) is for 17 hours each day, opening at 7.00am and closing 12.00 midnight. (See *BCOS Millennium Brochure*).

So daa bee?

'So daa bee?', a public complaints programme of the BCOS TV, was started in the year 1983. The philosophy behind it is the mediation of civil conflicts for the creation and maintenance of harmony and understanding among individuals and groups in the society. The belief in the philosophy underpinning the traditional mediatory system in the Yoruba society makes the programme attractive to the common folks who

may be averse to the complexity of the formal judicial system. The *BCOS Millennium Brochure* (p. 17) describes 'So daa bee?' thus:

> It is an ombudsman programme which makes use of the African method of settling disputes by setting up a panel of elders to mediate between the aggrieved parties.

Not all cases brought to the BCOS TV station are put on air for the programme. Depending on their nature, some cases are settled off the air by the 'So daa bee?' panelists. When a case appears knotty and is set for airing, an underlying motive for this is to be able to inform and educate the public about the issues involved in the case. Thus, at the end of cases like this, the viewers may hear the programme presenter asking the panelists:

> *Eyin Ojogbon, kini arigbamu ti e lero wipe awon ara ilu le ri ninu oro to de'le gege bi awokose ikilo tabi arikogbon?*
>
> You wise men (the panelists), what is the solid point which you think the members of the public can hold onto from these your deliberations on this case as to educating them on how to behave, warning or informing them.
>
> (Albert et al, 1995:74)

Significantly, the programme aims at tickling the conscience of the public as to being fair and doing what is good. The meaning of the programme title, 'So daa bee?' is 'Is it fair?'. Thus, at the end of each episode of the programme, the presenter, with a philosophical tone, would address the viewers:

> Do you consider that whatever you do is seen by one who is ubiquitous, that is God Almighty. Nothing is hidden to Him. He sees everything done in the closet or in the public. And do you know that whatever wrong you do against anybody is a discomfort to that person. Put yourself in that position so that you will be able to ask yourself before you do anything: 'Is it fair to do it?'

The Panel

The 'So daa bee?' panel comprises retired senior citizens who obviously have several years of life and public service experiences behind them, and thus, can be credited with some reasonable level of wisdom. They seem to have all the credentials necessary for adjudication, at least, in the informal setting of the programme. They include a retired Chief Inspector of Education, a retired school principal, a retired head of personnel in a state ministry and a barrister who is no longer in active practice. Some of such panelists are equally Justices of Peace (JP).

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The Programme Procedure

Hearing of cases is conducted at two levels. One, off the air, and the other, on the air. For cases that will be aired, recording is done on Thursday while the programme normally comes on the air on Sunday between 2:30 pm and 3:30pm.

On a Thursday, anybody who has a complaint to make and the respondents who have been invited based on earlier complaints received by the panel come to the office of the BCOS TV.

Fresh complaints are first attended to. Albert et al (1995:71) report that when a complainant arrives, he tells the producer and other officials of the station working on the programme about his problem. After asking him a few questions as to his claims for confirmation, he is given an invitation letter to give to the person against whom he has complained. The invitation states briefly what the case is about and requires the respondent to come to the TV Station on the next recording day.

After this, the officials would attend to the previous complainants who have come with their respondents. Albert et al (1995) also provide substantial insights:

> The two parties (if both are present) then move to the area where the screening panel is seated. Both sides state their case and by a process of questioning, appeal, persuasion, warning and exhortation richly laced with Yoruba proverbs and Quranic or Biblical injunctions, the mediators try to settle the matter.
>
> Albert et al (1995:71)

This may result into the case taking any of the following shapes:

1. The matter may be settled with both parties undertaking to do whatever is required of them and to report to the panel on their progress.
2. If the matter is not settled, the panel may set it down for recording on air.
3. The matter may require the production of documents/witnesses or the taking of an action before the panel would be able to hear the matter completely.
4. If the respondent does not turn up, the producer gives the complainant another letter addressed to the respondent in the same terms as the first letter. If the respondent does not answer the second letter, the producer gives a third letter to the complainant. If the third letter does not produce any reaction, the complainant is put on the air. He does not state his case but he appears and the panelists appeal to the respondent to come and state his case concerning the complainant shown. In most cases, the respondent comes after this. And, in instances where the respondents refuse to come, the panelists, adhering strictly to the principles of fair hearing, would just regard such matters closed.
6. When the panelists have finished with matters which may be settled or partly heard off air, they move to the studio and begin hearing matters set to go on air.

7. Where it is necessary to have flexibility in the mode of operation, another mode may be adopted. Thus it is not uncommon to have cases which are brought straight onto the air for reason of urgency, or which are discussed in private with only the disputants and the panelists present. (Albert et al, 1995:71-73).

Notwithstanding the nature of the case or the mode of handling, the ultimate aim of 'So daa bee?' as a 'court of love' is to smoothen relationship and engender understanding. This objective is predicated on the philosophy of the Yoruba which is expressed in this (wise) saying:

Ko si awaye ma ja,
Bee si ni, ko si a ja ma re.

No one is immune to conflict,
And no one involved in any conflict is immune to reconciliation.

Albert et al (1995) discloses that there are some areas of conflict which 'So daa bee?' does not dabble into. Such include:

1. Human rights cases (where the respondent is the government) are not treated because the producers have decided that such cases are better treated through the formal legal system which has all the coercive tools at its disposal.
2. The panel does not hear cases which involve traditional rulers. Because of the traditional respect for the traditional rulers, it is regarded as out-of-place treating matters involving them on television. However, such matters are addressed through discussions with people close to the traditional ruler who might try to get him to do something about the complaint.

Conclusion

Because of lack of official recognition and statutory powers for 'So daa bee?', it lacks the power of subpoena and to enforce its judgement. Nonetheless, this informal arbitration panel has been effective and successful in resolving conflicts and engendering harmony. This is known by the number of cases treated and the feedback after the judgments.

The initiative has largely been successful because of its resort to native wisdom and exhibition of fairness and openness. Without doubt, the viewing public has gained a lot of wisdom and experience from the programme.

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