

Unpopular Essays

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"IT never was easy to brew and operate a policy that balances the democratic demand for a free flow of information with the larger need of suppressing the information that might prove destructive of the whole and the obligation of not overwhelming the individual with so much information that he starts living in morbid fear of his environment."

"THE NBC (without the distraction of regional broadcasting systems) would have played the role occupied by the BBC in Britain. But unfortunately, that sanctimonious position of daily balancing what the audience wants with what it NEEDS, is being challenged by a move to take broadcasting, as it were, into business."

IT is a common feature of indulgent new nations that they operate the colonial structures that were left behind by the "departing" colonisers. At least they try to.

Nigeria answers this description of neo-colonies. But the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation has demonstrated that it is not always a traumatic experience to follow where the colonisers led.

The N.B.C. is, in my opinion, the best thing "they" did for Nigeria.

Because new nations are set on fragile conditions of unity, and because broadcasting is the deepest penetrating medium of mass communication which does not respect boundaries of literacy, the choice of a centrally controlled broadcasting system has become an imperative option for nation-building.

The NBC, as the logical successor to the Nigerian Broadcasting Service and the Empire Service, answers this need for nation building through broadcasting.

There have however, been distractions. There is for instance, a powerful move to take broadcasting into the private sector. And broadcasting has since been proliferated to ethnic ends.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo who started the proliferation by setting up a regional radio station at Ibadan in competition with the NBC, said he did so because he had been denied access to NBC facilities.

Using this logic, it has been argued that proliferation developed as a logical conse-

NBC: Too Good To Change

quence of the shortcomings of the NBC. In which case, rather than congratulate the Corporation for bearing the torch of unity through broadcasting, one should blame it for allowing (by its errors), regional systems to develop and pander to the tribal divisions of the country.

That observation is, of course, misleading. NBC is not in error. Regional broadcasting developed as a result of the regionalisation of politics and the ineffectiveness of the centre. It developed, not because of the NBC, but in spite of it.

And regional broadcasting has been quite an experience for Nigeria! Because of their deep penetration, tribal politicians have found the regional

Broadcasting Corporation was perhaps, the most effective vehicle used for educating Easterners away from the national purpose at the time of the crisis that preceded the civil war. So was it alleged that the first wave of pogrom in the north was occasioned by a Radio Cameroun broadcast, relayed by Radio Television Kaduna to the effect that northerners were being killed in the east.

In all this, the NBC maintained its composure, never struck a discordant note to the tune of unity.

As a fall out from this, the corporation has been generally criticised as being too close to the government to be of much use to the public.

Most of the instances cited to illustrate this

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broadcasting stations the most effective bases for their campaigns of hate. Campaigns that cut across class and recruit the worst in human tendencies.

The Eastern Nigeria

view are largely correct, but the verdict is too sweeping and exaggerated.

Exaggerated and unfair.

power to transmit.

It is not generally realised that the move to "capitalise" broadcasting is backed by individuals who have grown rather powerful in the country. It even includes Mr Christopher Kolade, the director general of NBC himself.

Speaking at a newspaper interview to mark the 20th birthday anniversary of the NBC, Mr Kolade is reported to have said that broadcasting "is an undertaking that runs through the life of the people. It is not only for relaxation or education or public enlightenment. It consists of variety. If it is public run, as the NBC, it concerns itself more

ed by private enterprise participation... Public broadcasting alone cannot give broadcasting the kind of variety that will make it thrive".

It is difficult to justify Mr Kolade's premise. If anything, the entertainment slice of NBC's programme content has been as large as to be almost scandalous. It has been variously put at two-thirds and four-fifths. Just as the balance has started becoming more responsible, the director-general is crying that the NBC concerns itself too much with "public enlightenment!"

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with public enlightenment. But this creates the difficulty of meeting the entertainment requirements of the people. Broadcasting in Nigeria will be enriched

The NBC is too good to change. If anything all those state broadcasting systems should close down. They stretch our manpower and facilities unnecessarily.

Similarly, although Broadcasting is, under the current legal system, still in state hands, certain private alternatives are inching closer and closer to this "market".

The American-backed ELWA studio at Igbaja and the Christian Radio Studio at Uyo are perching in waiting for the day when a president of the draft constitution's description will give them

