

BANISHING MIRACLES: POLITICS AND POLICIES OF RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING IN NIGERIA

Abstract

Nigeria is home to a vibrant media marketplace. Excluding more than a hundred titles of daily tabloids and weekly newspapers, there is a densely saturated broadcast industry consisting of radio, television (terrestrial, satellite, pay per view and cable channels) and video-film in Nigeria. Since the deregulation of the broadcast industry in 1992 with the issuing of broadcast licences to individuals and groups, the country has witnessed a burgeoning growth such that at the beginning of 2008, there were about 284 broadcasting stations in Nigeria. Since then, more licenses have been approved and issued, indicating a further expansion in the industry. Focusing on the practices and policies of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) vis-à-vis religious broadcasting in a multi-religious society, this paper investigates the politics, policies and processes of regulating deregulation within the industry which have raised some controversies in recent times, particularly with reference to what the NBC calls “unverified miracles”.

Key Words: Broadcasting, Television, Pentecostalism, Politics, Miracles, Deregulation.

Introduction

Since Nigeria received political Independence in 1960, all the Constitutions drafted and promulgated have guaranteed freedom of religious association, expression and practice.² What the Constitutions have not granted citizens, in a straightforward, uncomplicated manner, is freedom to own and operate a broadcast medium. In a multi-religious society such as Nigeria, the role of the state with respect to religious communication is critical. And as Rosalind Hackett (2006:167) argues, “the role of public

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2 I am infinitely grateful to Dr. Chuks Okoye of the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, and Chikas Danfulani of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Bayreuth/Jos, Peter Ochigbo, NTA Jos Programmes Manager, for their invaluable assistance in the course of researching this paper. Both were helpful in facilitating the interviews with the officials of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and in locating archival material. Earlier drafts of the paper were presented at two conferences: “New Media and Religious Transformation in Africa” (Abuja, Nigeria, 10-12 July 2008) and “Media, Religion and Culture”, Methodist University of Sao Paulo, Brazil (11 – 14 August 2008). I am grateful for comments from participants as well as from the editor of this journal and anonymous reviewer. The usual caveats hold.

religion in a nation-state in political transition [as Nigeria obviously is] ... provides an important insight into the mechanics of religious representation in the mediated public sphere". There is a long and complicated history of mutual suspicion among the Nigeria's different religious collectivities to warrant a cautious approach to the liberalisation of the media as well as the role of the state in the strategies of public representation of religion (Harnischfeger 2008; Toyin and Heaton 2008:238f). Bala Musa (2000:107) points out that "the volatile religious atmosphere in the country, the abuse of religious speech in the past, the excessive politicization of religion, and the constant use of the mass media to heighten religious tensions" in Nigeria have necessitated the institutionalisation of a policy of "prior restraint" on evangelising communities in relation to religious broadcasting. This paper argues that, these factors notwithstanding, the role of the state as a principal player in the media market plays a not insignificant role in the equivocations evident in the state policies and politics of deregulation and regulation of the media marketplace, particularly in respect to religious broadcasting.

The liberal character of the Nigerian broadcast market is the unique achievement of the last two decades. It was during this period that the broadcast arena increasingly took on a competitive texture quite different from what it had been since 1932 when the first broadcast medium was established. In that year, the British Broadcasting Corporation established an experimental monitoring station in Lagos; in 1935 a Radio Distribution Service was commissioned in Lagos, followed by another one in Ibadan in 1934 and Kano in 1944. It was only in 1951 that the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) was founded as an agency of colonial government (Akintunde 1995). This was the backbone of broadcasting infrastructure in Nigeria which expanded under a two-tier government — federal and state — control and monopoly. This paper examines the political economy of television broadcasting in Nigeria — leaving alone for now the related issue of radio transmission — and its interface with the public representation of religion.

The first television broadcast station in Nigeria, Western Nigerian Television (WNTV), was established in 1959 by the Western Nigerian Regional government. It was three years before the federal government-owned and -controlled Nigerian Television Service (NTS) was established in Lagos in 1962, and another five years before the integration of the NBS with the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) to form NBC-TV in 1967. The Nigerian Television Authority Act No. 24 of 1977 created the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), which is the largest television network in Nigeria. All through this period, television broadcast rights were vested and controlled by the federal and state governments (from 1979). It was only in 1992 that the enabling laws were put in place for the liberalisation of the broadcast industry. Partial commercialisation had started a few years earlier. The first private broadcast license was issued on 10 June 1993 for the first time in the history of Nigeria. At the beginning of 2008, there were 97 federal government-owned television stations; 32 state-government owned television stations, 18 private television broadcasting stations, 4 Direct to Home Television stations; 35 cable stations using Multichannel Multipoint Distribution Service (MMDS or wireless Cable) channels; and, 4 Direct Satellite Stations (DBS) in Nigeria.³

3 There are six federal government-owned radio stations known as Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), in addition to 37 Frequency Modulated (FM) stations and an external radio station, the Voice of Nigeria (VON). There are also 40 state

In Search of a Market for Loyalties

In contemporary societies, the broadcast media are perhaps the strongest instruments for the production and distribution of allegiances. In order to provide a more critical and nuanced perspective on the ambiguities of legal provisions that both deregulate and regulate broadcasting in Nigeria, it is helpful to evoke a theoretical framework first articulated by the American media scholar, Monroe E. Price (1994; 2002; 2007). Monroe Price (1994:667) postulates what he aptly describes as a “market for loyalties – in which large-scale competitors for power, in a shuffle for allegiances, often use regulation of communications to organize a cartel of imagery and identity among themselves”. Price argues that states generally compete in a market for loyalties for the hearts and minds of its citizens. States have vested interest in political and social control and demand, sometimes through anticompetitive measures such as the regulation of broadcast media, that their citizens “buy in” to their messages in order to maintain power and control (Price 2002: 32). Governments play dual role of operating mechanism for the functioning of the cartel and cartel player. The quest for political stability or social order is usually deployed as the manifest reason for the control of the media marketplace. Although this market for loyalties has existed “everywhere and at all times”, it is dynamic with changes in the nature and scope of participation, extent of boundaries and “the nature of the regulatory bodies capable of establishing and enforcing the rules for participation and exclusion” (Price 1994:667).

While acknowledging that it is easier to describe a conventional market for goods than the market for loyalties, Price insists both types of markets share certain features in common. Both kinds of markets have “sellers”, “buyers” and forms of “payment” for goods and services exchanged. The sellers in the market for loyalties “are all those for whom myths and dreams and history can somehow be converted into power and wealth – classically states, government, interests groups, businesses and others” (Price 1994: 669). Religion, according to Price (2007:87), “has always been a major aspect of markets for loyalties”. Religious organisations, like governments and other social actors, are formidable producers of allegiance, all in competition for public loyalties. The “buyers”, on the other hand, “are the citizens, subjects, nationals, consumers — recipients of the packages of information, propaganda, advertisements, drama, and news propounded by the media”. Consumers pay by exchanging one set of identities with a different set, becoming obedient to certain laws and carrying out specific duties such as paying taxes, patriotic support for a national cause (such as to fight in a war), including paying “with his or her own sense of identity” (Price 1994:670). The cost for loyalties could sometimes be very high, meaning that the competition for them may become very strident as well. As shall be adumbrated shortly, the equivocation evident in the media laws and the ways religious communication is regulated in Nigeria strongly point to the fact that the state is a primary actor in the market for loyalties, constantly in competition with religious organisations as producers and sellers of allegiance. Confronted by the inexorable power of religion, the state is frequently unwilling to allow equal participation of religious organisations in the market for the production

government-owned radio stations and 17 privately owned radio stations. For a comprehensive listing of all these broadcast stations, see <http://www.nbc.gov.ng/broadcast.php> (accessed 28.05.2008).

allegiance and competition over loyalties. Media legislations in Nigeria have always been made by the powerful who use state infrastructure to contest for and reinforce their grip on social and political power. Hence a variety of regulatory instruments is put in place even when a specific media environment is presented as deregulated or self-regulatory.

Legal Frameworks of Broadcasting in Nigeria

Over the years, the legal framework for private participation and management of television broadcasting in Nigeria is foregrounded by certain principal instruments, namely, the Constitutional provisions, particularly of 1951 and 1979; the Wireless Telegraphy Act of 1961; the Nigerian Television Act of 1976; and the National Broadcasting Commission Act 38 of 1992 as amended by the National Broadcasting Commission (Amendment) Decree No. 55 of 1999. In varying degrees, these legal structures increasingly decreased the amount of control and monopoly of the broadcast industry by the federal government.

The McPherson Constitution of 1951 vested more powers on the regional governments to own and operate broadcast stations, a situation that was markedly different from what was the case previously. This Constitution granted autonomy to regional governments by putting broadcasting on the concurrent legislative list or within the administrative jurisdiction of both the federal and regional governments. This constitutional provision, therefore, provided the added impetus for the expansion of state-owned broadcasting media from the late 1950s to present. Part of the reason why the McPherson's constitution recognised the importance of regional governments and granted them a measure of autonomy, according to Michael Chukwuma (1985: 283; 285) was because it "was the result of about two years [of] discussive [*sic*] exercise" between different regional governments, pressure groups, political associations and the colonial authority, "from the village level to the national level". While the 1951 McPherson constitution granted more powers to regional governments to own and operate broadcast media, it was the 1979 Constitution which expanded this provision by explicitly stating that private individuals and groups could participate in the ownership and management of broadcast media. In Section 36(2) of the Constitution, the provision was made that "every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions". In principle this seems to be a recognition of parts of the rights of citizens, although in a strange twist, the very next subsection of the Constitution circumscribed the said provision by stating: "no person other than government of the federation or of a state or any other person or body authorized by the President, shall own, establish or operate a television or wireless broadcasting station for any purpose whatsoever". The operative 1999 Constitution enshrines similarly worded provisions in Section 39 of Chapter IV on "Fundamental Rights":

Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference. (2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) of this section, every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions: Provided that no person, other than the Government of

the Federation or of a State or any other person or body authorised by the President on the fulfilment of conditions laid down by an Act of the National Assembly, shall own, establish or operate a television or wireless broadcasting station for, any purpose whatsoever.

The Wireless Telegraphy Act of 1961 made it legally mandatory that government should license all broadcast stations. The first Wireless Telegraphy Ordinance was enacted by the colonial government in 1935 which underwent a series of modifications that finally resulted in the Wireless Telegraphy Act No. 31 of 1961 although it never came into force until 1 July 1966. It was this Act which prohibited the establishment of wireless telegraphy unless under a licence issued by the Minister responsible for communications. Besides being invested with the power to grant broadcast licence to regional or state governments (Section 31(1)), the Act in Section 8(1) also empowered the Minister to use his discretion to grant licence to citizens of Nigeria to conduct experiments in wireless telegraphy for scientific and research purposes.⁴ Under this Act, the broadcast media were firmly controlled and monopolised by the federal and state governments, with resultant lack of quality programming and competition in the industry (Mohammed 1994). The power of the Minister responsible for communication to grant license for broadcasting was never exercised:

As a result of the fact that the radio station was always the first target for coup-makers and has always been an important tool for the coup maker to announce a change of government, successive governments have nursed the fear that relinquishing control of broadcasting by allowing private concerns to own and operate broadcast stations would worsen their state of insecurity.⁵

Political self-interest, rather than the common interest of Nigerians, had informed the laws undergirding public broadcasting, the same factor that is evident in the political use of religion in Nigeria. Governments that were not responsible to, and for, the Nigerian citizens dreaded the power of the broadcast media in the hands of critics and opponents, and these included individuals and groups such as religious organisations. The electronic media are the most potent instruments of influencing thought in modern society; its control is therefore critical for the survival of governments, particularly those that are less democratic or popular such as Nigeria's military dictatorships which were responsible for drafting almost all the media laws since 1960.

A major policy shift of the government was the promulgation of the National Broadcasting Commission Decree no. 38 of 1992 which raised the constitutional provisions a step higher. It was signed into law on 20 August 1992 by Ibrahim B. Babangida, the military president of Nigeria and amended by decree No. 55 of 1999 promulgated by another military ruler of Nigeria, General Abdulsalami Abubakar on 26 May 1999, just three days before he vacated office. These two pieces of legislation, which effectively abrogated the Wireless Telegraphy Act, were occasioned by a number of factors. Of these, three pertinent factors deserve mention: the first is the liberalisation of the economy starting from the mid-1980s; this is followed by increasing agitation for democratisation, and finally, the anxiety against unregulated access to direct foreign

4 Laws of Nigeria, revised ed., Cap 233, 1948.

5 Media Rights Agenda and ARTICLE 19, Broadcasting in Nigeria: Unlocking the Airwaves, February 2001, p. 2.

broadcast by a sizeable but also increasing number of Nigerians.

Decree No. 38 established the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and outlined its responsibility, which, among other things, include receiving, processing and considering applications for the ownership of broadcast stations (radio, television, cable, direct satellite, etc.), regulating and controlling the broadcast industry. In addition, the NBC has the responsibility to maintain the principle of equity and fairness in the broadcasting industry; receiving, considering and investigating complaints from members of the public (private and corporate) regarding broadcast contents and the conduct of broadcasting stations; setting standards about the contents and materials for broadcast as well as establishing a national broadcasting code. Furthermore, the NBC is to intervene and arbitrate in conflicts in the broadcast industry, ensure qualitative manpower development, monitor broadcasting for harmful emission, interference and illegal broadcast and set and apply sanctions, including revocation of licenses of defaulting stations. A particularly intriguing responsibility of the NBC spelled out in the enabling law is to ensure that a licensed station shall be used to promote national interest, unity and cohesion and that it shall not be used to offend the religious sensibilities or promote ethnicity, sectionalism, hatred and disaffection among the peoples of Nigeria (NBC Decree 38, Section 9(1e)).

In the light of these awesome powers of broadcast media to form and influence thought, conduct and actions, it is appropriate and legitimate to prohibit licensed broadcast stations from fomenting and disseminating hate speech and national disunity. However, it is hardly the responsibility of commercial broadcasters to promote "national unity", whatever this is. The law setting up the NBC, and its amendment, deployed the concepts of "national interest", "public interest" and "interest of the public" six times (NBC Decree No. 38 Section 2(n); 4.4; 9(1e); 25(8d); NBC (Amendment Decree No. 55 Section 10(2B); 10(8A)). Nowhere in the text were these concepts defined or given content as legitimate objectives to be safeguarded, protected, or promoted by private broadcasters. Particularly in Nigeria, what amounts to "national interest" often represents the interest of the politician(s) or a certain segment of the political class or elite who evoke the notion rather than the "common good", the good of the largest segment of the citizenry. Ordinarily, national interest may be conceptualised as any action, circumstances, policies, or decisions that are generally considered to benefit the nation-state as a whole. However, in Nigeria, as historical experience amply shows, the "state" is not often synonymous with the public or the citizens of the nation such that the interest of the abstraction called the "state" becomes co-terminus with what benefits the general public.

The liberalisation of the broadcast industry happened in spite of state reluctance. According to Chuka Onwuchili (2007:126-128), the Babangida regime that pioneered this state loosening of the broadcast industry was visibly under "pressure" and "coercion" from several quarters such as the country's international lenders and the threat of new information technologies. The contest for public mind figured and still plays important role in the way the laws were crafted and are being administered.

The Broadcast Regulator and Religious Broadcasting

The "myth" of national/public interest plays itself out once more in another provi-

sion of the NBC law. In Section 10a, the NBC is prohibited from granting broadcast license to a religious organisation. The law proffers no reason or justification for the blanket ban. This ban is apparently illegitimate, considering the constitutional provision guaranteeing freedom of expression as well as the provision in the NBC law that applicants for broadcast license “give an undertaking that the licensed station shall not be used to offend the religious sensibilities or promote ethnicity, sectionalism, hatred and disaffection among the peoples of Nigeria”. There are ample safeguards in the NBC law which allows the Commission to wield enormous powers, including the revocation of licenses of erring stations, to protect the society from religious hate speech to warrant the blanket ban on granting broadcast license to religious organisations. In many other countries (such as Cameroon⁶, Kenya (Parsitau 2006),⁷ Tanzania, the Vatican and the United States), religious organisations own and operate broadcast media. In the United States of America, for example, religious broadcasting has evolved to become an industry in its own right, with its own “code of conduct” first written in 1944 (Courtright 1996:226). Bala Musa (2000:107) suggests that “The decision not to license these [religious] stations may be due to the volatile religious atmosphere in the country, the abuse of religious speech in the past, the excessive politicization of religion, and the constant use of the mass media to heighten tensions”. One important aim of the liberalisation of the broadcast market is plurality and diversity; yet, the prohibition of ownership of broadcast media by religious organisations starkly sabotages this objective. Some socially relevant groups are systematically excluded by the NBC laws which were undemocratically drafted and enacted.

Considering that the contents of the NBC decree are contradictory or at best deliberately ambiguous in some parts, the confusion in respect of religious broadcasting clearly illustrates the difficulties state officials have in dealing with religious issues or deregulating the media market, the fear of losing their grip on the market for allegiance. Allowing religious organisations to own and operate broadcast media would in practice “alter the mix of voices” in the society, and consequently affect the composition of its market for loyalties; it would destabilise public opinion by asserting “soft power” for new religious opinion makers (Price 2003:51-52).

While Section 10 of the NBC Decree 38 states clearly that “The Commission shall not grant a licence to a religious organisation; or a political party”, Section 2(1)(c) states unequivocally that the responsibility of the Commission is “recommending applications through the Minister [of Information] to the President, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces for the grant of radio and television licenses”. As stipulated in both the 1979 (Section 32(6)) and 1999 constitutions (Section 39(2)), the final authority for the issuance or denial of a broadcast license rests squarely with the president of the country, and *not* with the NBC as has been generally assumed, which only exercises an

6 There are about five radio stations owned and operated by religious organisations. I thank Barrister Dave Ebong for confirming this information for me.

7 In Kenya alone, there are more than 16 broadcast stations owned and operated by religious organisations, both Christian and Muslim, see “Kenya: International religious Freedom report 2007”, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90103.htm> (28.03.2008). I thank Esha Faki Mwinyihaji of Maseno University, Kisumu, Kenya, for additional information. In Tanzania, there are about 24 privately-owned and operated radio and television stations; about 18 of these owned by religious organisations; the Catholic Church alone operates 10 of these while four belong to the Protestant/Evangelical communities. I thank Dr. Bernardin Mfunbusa of St. Augustine, Tanzania, for the information.

advisory function in the process. This is consistent with the idea of the state competing with other power blocs or dominant groups for the allegiance of the citizens by maintaining a near-monopoly in the market for loyalties.

Broadcasting Code and Religion

One of the responsibilities of the NBC as set out in the legal instrument establishing it is “establishing and disseminating a national broadcasting code and setting standards with regard to the contents and quality of material for broadcast” (Decree 38, Section 2(1h)). The *Nigeria Broadcasting Code* (hereafter “the Code”) was first published by the NBC in 1993; a second edition was released in 1996, with a third edition out in 2003. It is now in its fourth edition (2006, all citations from this edition). According to the current Director-General of the NBC, M. A. Atoyebi, the current document was a product of broadcasting professionals from all over the country, mass media scholars “as well as other interested members of the public [who] freely and democratically debated every provision in it”. The purpose of the Code, Atoyebi insists, is to assist broadcasters to make sound decisions, build credibility and serve the Nigerian “society in an ethically responsible and constructive manner”.⁸ The Code serves both prescriptive and restrictive functions towards the achievement of the social, cultural, political, economic, technological and professional objectives of broadcasting. The NBC further listed 15 objectives of broadcast regulation, including the broadcasting of services which respect community standards (whatever these are!), fairness, protection of the rights and interests of consumers and sustainable competition in the broadcast industry and “self-regulation ... within the framework of professional standards” (*Nigeria Broadcasting Code*, Section 0.3.3 g, k, n, o). In these objectives, the Code conforms to similar industry codes designed to reflect “role expectations”, socialise newcomers in the industry, and increase public confidence (Courtright 1996).

As a regulatory instrument, the Code set out very specific guidelines in respect of religious programming. The whole of Section 4.4 is devoted to the complex issue of religion broadcast, which begins with a preamble that recognises the centrality of religious beliefs and practices in the lives of Nigerians, the capacity of religion to evoke “strong passions and emotions” since it carries “varying sensibilities and sensitivities”, the multi-religious character of the society. One of the central prescriptions of the Code is that “religious broadcast shall not exceed 10% of the total weekly airtime of any station” (Section 4.4.1.i). This regulation is designed to prevent broadcast stations from being dominated by religious programmes. If the 10% weekly religious airtime is considered to be the most significant postulate of the Code, the second in importance is equal access and public service: “Equal opportunities and equitable airtime, not less than 90 minutes of a station’s weekly airtime, shall be made available to all religious groups in the community as a civil responsibility without charge” (Section 4.4.1a). The NBC seems to recognise the community-building function of religion such that it stipulates that broadcast stations offer “community service” in terms of free airtime dedicated to religious news and activities. How a particular station responds to these two injunctions, or interprets them, is not the responsibility of the NBC but

8 Nigeria Broadcasting Code, 4th ed., (Abuja: the NBC, 2006), p. 5.

the station manager.⁹

There are other provisions of the Code which deal with the manner and content of broadcasting religion in the media. "Religious programmes shall be presented respectfully and accurately" (Section 4.4.b); broadcasters are to avoid casual use of names, words or symbols regarded as sacred by believers; when members of a particular religious community exercise control over the content of a programme, the programme should be presented by "a responsible representative of the given religion"; religious programmes should not attack or ridicule any other religious group or community.¹⁰ Religious broadcasts are to be restricted to creedal exposition, and this needs to be done in a manner that does not mislead the public. Furthermore, the broadcast of rites and rituals involving cruelty and obscenity are prohibited, "except in programmes designed specifically to teach the beliefs of a religion" (Section 4.4.h). It is not clear what the Code is intended to safeguard here: ritual slaughter of animals in African indigenous religions and in Islam or rituals such as circumcisions. What the provisions of the Code have dealt with seems to be doctrinal criticisms, bias and misrepresentation of religions by non-adherents of those religions. It is still possible, however, for members of a particular religion to deliberately misrepresent their own faith in ways that may be considered exploitative. It is how to handle this issue that led the NBC to postulate what became known as the "verifiable miracle hullabaloo". By far the most controversial single item in the Code dealing with the broadcast of religion relates to "miracles".

Banishing Miracles from the Airwaves

A programme promoting religion in any form, shall present its claim, especially those relating to miracles, in such a manner that is provable and believable [...]. An advertisement promoting religion in any form shall present its claims, especially those relating to miracles, in such a manner that is verifiable, provable and believable (*NBC Broadcasting Code*, Sections 4.4.1g & 7.5.1a)

The above prescriptive items in the Code have always been part of all previous editions of the NBC Code and were not just inserted in the latest edition. To safeguard the public against deception has consistently been a goal of the NBC Code. Similarly, in *The Nigerian Code of Advertising Practice* (3rd ed, 2005) published by the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON), there are two significant postulates dealing with the public representation of religion. Section 4.16 titled "Advertising of Religious and Related Products and Service" contains explicit prohibitions such as: "no religious

9 In order to avoid the controversies surrounding religious programming in the 1990s, a private television station in Ibadan and Lagos, Galaxy TV, decided to boycott sponsored religious programmes altogether. To achieve the 90 minutes' weekly free airtime quota, the same station devotes airtime to what it considers as newsworthy religious events.

10 Pentecostal pastors frequently ridicule elements of African indigenous religions in their "evangelistic broadcasts". In 1996 a pentecostal bishop in Owerri displayed human skulls during his television programme to demonstrate his powers in breaking "ancestral curses" which he alleged to be responsible for the lack of progress and prosperity in the lives of many Born Agains. He was neither prosecuted for the illegal possession of human remains/disrespect for the dead nor was the television station that broadcast the programme sanctioned for airing such abuse of elements of indigenous religious practices such as the veneration of ancestors (see Ukah 2008:284). It took mass outrage and violent demonstrations during the "Otokoto Uprising" in Owerri in mid-1996 for the incident to be officially registered and questioned.

advertisement shall be seen to try to exploit the weaknesses, handicaps, shortcomings or state of desperation of members of the public" (4.16.1). This is a verbatim reproduction of NBC Code (Section 7.5.1c) indicating a unified position between the two regulatory agencies on the public representation of religion. Not being satisfied with this general statement, the APCON Code specifies further:

Advertisements/promotions of any religious product or service shall: i) avoid exaggeration in its claims pertaining to miracles on the adherents of the religion through the use of spurious testimonials likely to deceive the audience; ii) avoid promise of financial prosperity; iii) Not cast aspersion on any other sect or religion; iv) not coerce, cajole or otherwise compel anyone to become an adherent of a particular sect or belief, (APCON Code Section 4.16.2.i-iv).

Obviously, these regulations were observed in the breach by both the broadcast media and the religious organisations, particularly the Pentecostal churches that sprung up like wild fire all over urban southern Nigeria. The new churches were in stiff competition among themselves for membership and therefore attractive packaging became increasingly very important in their self-representation. "Instant Miracles", as a poster advertising miracles in Lagos in 2005 captioned it, soon became a specific feature of Pentecostalism that differentiates it from other religions. Miracles transformed into Pentecostalism's "unique selling proposition" (USP), the most important product offered religious consumers, something special and convincing to attract attention and precipitate the possible switching of allegiance from one church to another. Miracles as UPS also provide legitimation for the activities of church owner-founders in the religious media marketplace; it is the proof of their divine call to mission, the reason for engaging the media.

The intriguing issue, however, is not so much the role of miracles in religious broadcasting or communication but why the regulations governing religious broadcasting were left dormant and not enforced until April 2004. As shall be shown shortly, the contest for loyalty in Nigeria's religious media market prompted some groups to instigate the resurrection of a dormant law in order to exercise control. The acrid debates raised by the NBC's attempt to enforce these regulations expose the politics of policy implementation and enforcement with regard to public representation of religion in the media.

Religious believers, particularly in Nigeria, generally maintain that there is an intrinsic connection between the mundane activities of individuals and the intervention of the deity. According to a foremost Nigerian Pentecostal pastor who is renowned for his "mediatised miracle evangelism", and founder/owner of Believers' LoveWorld Inc. (alias Christ Embassy), Chris Oyakhilome, "A miracle is an inexplicable intervention by a supernatural power in the natural affairs of man. A miracle is something beyond the normal course of events. Usually, a miracle is a positive event."¹¹ The belief that the supernatural can inexplicably intervene in the affairs of human beings is the foundation of the belief in miracles. This belief sits differently among the different faith communities of Nigeria. For many Christians, particularly the "New Pentecostals", at the heart of being "Born Again" is not just the possibility, but the reality, of the miraculous in the believers' everyday life. Again, Chris Oyakhilome articulates the opinion of a majority

11 Chris Oyakhilome, published interview, "His Eyes on the World", National Standard (Abuja), December 2004, p. 25

of the new Pentecostal class when he insists that: "I have a message that certainly heals people. You cannot hear that message and remain sick, poor or dejected. It would bring you hope and life. ... [O]f a necessity, there will be healing and miracles" [following the hearing of the message].¹² Femi Emmanuel, founder/owner of Livingspring Chapel International (Lagos and Ibadan) is unequivocal: "Miracle is the crux of the gospel. Gospel minus miracles becomes ridiculous. Christianity is the religion of signs and wonders".¹³ According to another prominent Pentecostal leader, Enoch Adebayo of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, every illness is the outworking of the mischief of the devil, and so requires a religious solution as no true Christian can simultaneously accommodate the Holy Spirit and sickness in his/her person (Adebayo 1994: 10-11; see Ukah 2008:196-9).

The Pentecostal conceptualisation of illness to embrace the "physical, psychological, socio-economic, or political" (Kalu 2008:265) makes the miraculous a common daily occurrence. Miracles are "your credentials" for preaching the gospel: "If you preach Jesus Christ and he sent you, he will back up your claims [with miracles]. Now if he doesn't back up your claims, you have to find out whether or not you are called".¹⁴ There is a telling paradox here: the same miracles that legitimate a preacher before his followers also delegitimize him using the broadcast media. In some other religious traditions, such as Islam and African indigenous religions, miracles and the miraculous are subdued themes which are not emphasized or publicised as is the case with Nigeria's New Pentecostalism. The nub of the issue with the leaders of the Pentecostals, however, is that the competition for adherents, social visibility, and prestige is a strong factor in pastors using the media in displaying their "credentials" and credibility.

The so-called "miracle broadcast", therefore, emerged in a two-fold relationship in which pastors recognised the power of images and the technology of broadcasting media in creating leverage in the competition for loyalties and the cash-strapped media organisations, particularly the government-owned and -controlled stations, which craved for the patronage of religious entrepreneurs in recruiting revenues from sponsored religious programmes and religious advertising. The broadcast media, particularly television stations, paid significant instrumental role in the emergence of what G. A. Akinola calls "commercialised religious empires" that boast of billions of dollars in untaxed revenue¹⁵ through a variety of practices such as "the harvesting of donations" from the public, the collection of tithes from members and the marketing of media products, namely, books, magazines, videos and audio tapes (also Hackett 1998:258). Oluyinka Esan (2009:157) graphically captures the state of affairs within the government-owned television stations when she writes: "Commercialised [television] stations featured productions with a questionable mix of claims and values by traditional and spiritual healers, with little effort made to verify those claims. Religion (Christian and Islamic evangelists) became a brand [...] and personal celebrations of the privileged tended to dominate the screen." Esan concludes that state general man-

12 Chris Oyakhilome, p. 25

13 Cited in Festus Eriye, "Televangelists told to Verify Miracles or Pull the Plug", *The Sunday Times* (Lagos), 16.05.2004.

14 Chris Oyakhilome, p. 25.

15 G. A. Akinola, "The Trials of General Obasanjo", *The Guardian* (Lagos), 21.05.2008, [http://www.guardiannewngr.com/editorial_opinion/article03/indexn2_html? \(access21.05.2008\).](http://www.guardiannewngr.com/editorial_opinion/article03/indexn2_html? (access21.05.2008).)

agers where “most unapologetic for this trend even when [they] found some of the programmes distasteful”.

As an industry, religious advertising, for example, is the second highest income earner for media organisations in Nigeria; it is second only to alcohol and tobacco advertising combined (Ukah 2004: 83; 2002); religious adverts and sponsored programmes provide more than 40% of the revenue of both government and privately owned and operated media houses (Ihejirika 2006a: 163). For example, in 2002, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) claimed it was investing “over eight million naira [ca. \$571,428.57] each quarter of broadcasting session” to finance its programmes on 28 television and radio channels in Nigeria. One of the television channels engaged by the church is a satellite station (Ukah 2003:156). An hour of sponsored programme on such satellite broadcast station costs as much as the equivalent of \$10,000.¹⁶ Some churches, such as Christ Embassy, the RCCG and T. B. Joshua’s Synagogue of All Nations Church, sponsor well over 20 hours of programmes each week. This is only a tiny fraction of the revenues broadcast organisations derive from sponsored religious programmes.

Miracle broadcast, therefore, was generally recognised as mutually beneficial to the broadcast industry and to a class of church owner/founders who specialises in the production of miracles. The section of society whose interest seems not to have been adequately covered or protected happens to be the consumers of religious broadcast. Since the early 1980s when the Pentecostal phenomenon emerged and started spreading like “wild fire”, there had been accusations and allegations that there are “some fake Pentecostal pastors who utilise magical powers and cultic mediums to manipulate and cajole their credulous adherents” (Magbadelo 2004:15). Continuing, Magbadelo (2004: 15-16) asserts that “Pentecostal churches in the country have continued to feast on the psychology of the masses who genuinely are desirous of relief from their sordid existential realities; ... [some pastors] pursue their pre-occupation as a commercial venture, and utilise any means to accumulate profits”. *The Guardian* (Lagos) newspaper editorial of 21 April 2004 states with forthright poignancy:

The rise of the so-called Pentecostal churches in Nigeria has led to the proliferation of all sorts of churches preaching prosperity to millions of unemployed¹⁷ Nigerians who having failed at every effort to secure employment now seek the sanctuary of a chanting and titillating church. A number of these churches claim the power of miracle healing. With many Nigerians too poor to afford drugs, these churches have replaced both doctor and chemist [pharmacy].¹⁸ Many of their healings are done on television

16 Sam Olukoya, “Nigerians Divided by TV Miracle Ban”, BBC News, <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3784659.stm> (accessed 18.02.08). On NTA Jos, 13 episodes of 30-minutes slot of religious programme cost ₦150,000; a 60-seconds religious adverts cost ₦12,000; 45-seconds ad cost ₦9,000 while a 30-second ad cost ₦2,500.00 (all these exclude production costs); Interview with Peter Ochigbo, Programmes Manager, NTA Jos (13.05.2008).

17 According to a recent report published by an International Industrial conglomerate, there are well over 21,613,411 unemployed but employable Nigerians, see “21 Million Nigerians Unemployed – Report”, Nigerian Tribune (Lagos), 26 May 2008, <http://www.tritbune.com.ng/26052008/news/news7.html> (accessed 26.05.08).

18 A recent evaluation of the Nigerian health sector states that “Conditions have become so poor in Nigerian hospitals that those with resources, including the politicians responsible for improving these services, often travel out of Nigeria to meet their own health needs. ... The poor state of health services in Nigeria has contributed to Nigeria’s low life expectancy of forty-five to forty-six years and high child mortality rates of nearly 200 per 1,000 live births. Malaria remains prevalent, and outbreaks of

with testimonies that are often unverifiable. [...] [However], there are Nigerians who have come to grief by their association with some of the more unscrupulous elements of these miracle-peddling groups.

As a consequence of these concerns which were part of the public debate about the presence, function and *modus operandi* of new Pentecostal churches, it was generally thought, the NBC, through its then Director-General, Dr. Silas Babajiyi Yisa, stated on 30 March 2004, that all broadcast stations in the country “which indulge in transmitting [...] programmes that profess indiscriminate miracles as events of daily fingertip occurrence [should] put a stop to this by the 30th of April 2004”.¹⁹ Yisa made explicit references to the two sections 4.4.1 and 7.5.1a of the NBC Code dealing with the broadcast of miracles. It was obvious therefore that NBC’s action was not a *ban* as such but an *enforcement* of existing provisions of the Code, which hitherto had been observed only in their breach. Clarifications followed the furore which NBC’s pronouncement immediately generated; the prohibition was not on “miracle broadcast” *per se*, but such broadcast should follow certain procedures which had been in place since 1993. They should be “provable”, “verifiable” and “believable”. The NBC did not proffer any definition or description of what qualifies as a “miracle” nor did it offer any procedural steps for the verification of a purported miracle so that it becomes “believable”. Similarly, the agency did not specify to whom or which group in the society a purported miracle should be proved, verified or become believable. Evidently, to Pentecostal Christians, miracles as broadcast on television are believable, the barrage of “supporting testimonies” that usually accompany them serve as “scientific proof” of authenticity. The popularity of miracles means that they are generally believable by the target audience. While there were no punishments spelt out for churches who major on miracle broadcast, television or radio stations which fail to abide by NBC Code in this respect risk being fined, and their equipment could, in addition, be confiscated or their broadcasting licenses be withdrawn. The irony is: the NBC which does not issue broadcast license now has the power to withdraw licence from erring broadcast stations. The chairman of APCON, May Nzeribe, provided further details when he stated in an interview:

There’s no ban on miracle advertising on TV or any other broadcast media.... If you have to do any promotion at all because of the inherent danger involved in leading people on a slope, because of our attachment to hope in life which is the major product of evangelism, what we said is the testimonial of the miracle to be advertised must be well documented so that it can be verified. Testimony should contain full contact addresses and names of the beneficiary of this miracle ... the names and addresses given must be authentic.²⁰

A three-fold step was required of religious leaders who seek to broadcast miracles of any type: they should provide a valid/authentic medical report on a patient’s condi-

cholera, meningococcal meningitis, and yellow fever are not uncommon ... HIV prevalence rate is on the rise ... (Falola and Heaton 2008:238).

19 See “NBC’s Order on Miracles”, *The Punch* (Lagos), Tuesday 18 May 2004, p. 17; Geoffrey Ekenna, “Miracles or Magic?” *NewsWatch* (Lagos), 19 April 2004, pp. 12-14.

20 “Nobody has Banned Miracles on TV ... All we’re Asking for is Confirmation” – May Nzeribe, Chairman, APCON”, *The Sun* (Lagos), 8 November 2004.

tion before an alleged healing took place; they should also submit a video evidence of the healing process itself; and finally, they need to provide another medical report confirming that the earlier diagnosed condition no longer exists.

Though difficult, these conditions are not impossible to satisfy. The clarifications provided by APCON rather than the NBC indicates that miracle broadcast, contrary to the views of its sponsors which see it as part of “evangelism”, is officially categorised as commercialised performance or advertisement on television.

However, an important question that illustrates that the regulation of religious broadcast is an important instrument of anti-competition in the contest for loyalties is: why did it take the NBC twelve years to enforce a provision of its Code of Broadcasting? Religious broadcast is not new in Nigeria; it was there even before the liberalisation of the broadcast media in the 1990s (Lyon and Lyon 1991). As Alozie (2003; 2005; also Ukah 2005) demonstrates, the veracity of media advertising in Nigeria is generally unscrutinised. Product manufacturers and service providers use the media to make unsubstantiated claims about their products and services; yet they are hardly called upon to account for their actions or are they charged to court for attempting to mislead the public. What, then, is special, or different, about miracle broadcasts?

By May 2004, it became obvious that the NBC’s belated attempt at enforcing elements in its Code of Broadcasting was instigated by officials of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), an umbrella organisation of many Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Livinus Okpara, a top official of the NBC, confirmed in early May 2004 that the enforcement of the Code on unverifiable miracles on television and radio was announced after extensive consultations and agreement with the PFN. The National Secretary of the PFN, Bishop Joseph Ojo, founder/owner of Calvary Kingdom Church, Lagos, commented that it was not miracle that was prohibited; the NBC was rightly “regulating the broadcast of miracles on television which I support because many of the people [broadcasting miracles] on TV are not preaching [the] gospel ... they are advertising themselves and bringing reproach to the name of the Lord.”²¹ Significantly, he likened miracle broadcasts to the menace of fake drugs in Nigeria, which, before the aggressive crackdown of National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), was alleged to have claimed many innocent lives and at the same time made many businesspersons prosperous (Erhun *et al.* 2001; Alubo 2001; Cockburn *et al.* 2005). Joseph Ojo’s statement, which reflects the official position of the PFN, is a strong one indeed that lumps money laundry, advance fee fraud, miracle broadcast and sundry corrupt practices together (Shehu 2005; cf. Laniel 2001). The assertion effectively links miracle broadcast to corrupt practices which warrants state intervention and control in order to protect citizens from unscrupulous activities of greedy preachers.

Furthermore, the leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was in support of the enforcement. According to the then CAN president and the then Prelate of Methodist Church of Nigeria, Sunday Mbang, Pentecostal leaders have abandoned the message of salvation and now dwell more on miracles because of money and cheap publicity. He asks rhetorically: “What has miracle got to do with making Christians good people?”²² The Catholic hierarchy also indicated its solidarity with

21 Sam Eyoboka, “Bishop Ojo Backs NBC’s Ban on Broadcast of Miracles on TV”, Vanguard (Lagos), Monday, April 19, 2004.

22 “Mixed Reactions over Nigeria’s Televised Miracles Ban”, The Vanguard (Lagos), 14 April 2004.

the NBC. According to the Director of Social Communication of the Lagos Catholic Archdiocese, Gabriel Osu, the enforcement of the NBC Code would take care of the “bastardised” state of religious broadcasting in the country: bastardised because the production and dissemination of “miracles” have taken over the airwaves.²³

From the above expressions of support for the enforcement of Sections 4.4.1 and 7.5.1a of the NBC Code, it is obvious that the attempt was a targeted enforcement directed at a specific segment of the Pentecostal community which has become notorious for the “miraculisation” of the broadcast media. Even when no names were named by the NBC, the arrowheads of the miracle group are generally known to be Chris Oyakhilome of Believers’ Loveworld and Temitope Joshua of Synagogue of All Nations. Both are *not* members of the PFN, and for a long time both have been excoriated on several occasions by prominent pastors such as Chris Okotie, Matthew Ashimolowo, Mike Okonkwo and the leadership of the PFN as epitomising thinly veiled occultic healing practices (Hackett 2001:195; Gaiya 2002:24-25; Ihejirika 2006b).²⁴ Not insignificantly, these are the two topmost spenders on miracle broadcast in Nigeria as at 2004 and have been embroiled in controversies well-documented in the media since late in 2002. Chris Oyakhilome in particular, who claims to have over a million followers in Nigeria, has had a running battle with the CAN and the PFN before the enforcement came in 2004.²⁵ He started his television ministry in 1996, and was

the biggest patron of Nigerian television stations. His *Atmosphere for Miracles* (ATM) ran seven days a week on about 20 TV stations. Even with the NBC ban, Oyakhilome still retains his slots, replacing the ATM with *Teaching Programme* and *LoveWorld*. The ATM continues to run, twice a week, on Ghana’s Metro TV and throughout the week on LoveWorld Christian Network, a satellite channel owned by Oyakhilome. It also runs on TBN in South Africa.²⁶

At the moment, Oyakhilome runs a huge, worldwide television ministry and organisation that explores every media outlet (print, audiovisuals, Internet, satellite) to disseminate his message and products. The enforcement compelled him to relocate the headquarters of his broadcasting empire to South Africa, instead of Lagos his original base, where the media laws and policies accommodate his type of miracle broadcast.²⁷ T. B. Joshua has also established his own satellite and Internet television, Emmanuel

23 The Vanguard (Lagos), 14 April 2004.

24 Because of their dramatic healing style, peculiar teachings and practices as well as the relationship between Oyakhilome and Joshua, both churches are constantly involved in controversies. In 2003 and 2004, two members of Christ Embassy stole huge sums of money (\$400,000) from their employers and gave large portions (\$100,000) to the church as “seed offering” (for details see Ukah 2007:627). Recently, the Campus Fellowships of Believers’ LoveWorld were accused of being the nest of campus prostitution and campus gangsterism. According to the Chaplain of the University of Ibadan Chapel of Resurrection, Venerable J.A.F Olusola, the fellowship is a “haven” for student commercial sex workers and cultists who recruit young female students into prostitution rings, see Segun Olugbile and Abimbola Adelokun, “Campus Prostitution: Varsities Turn Spiritual to Vice”, *The Punch* (Lagos), 10.06.2008, <http://www.punchontheweb.com/Artid.aspx?theartic=Art200806104543835> (accessed 23.06.2008).

25 National Standard (Abuja), vol. 1, no. 7, January 2005: 18-24

26 Bamidele Johnson, “Super-Rich ‘Godfellas’”, *TheNews* (Lagos), vol. 26, no.23 (19 June 2006), p.23.

27 See the extensive interview published in two parts in National Standard (Abuja), vol. 1, no. 6, December 2004: 22-30; National Standard (Abuja), vol. 1, no. 7, January 2005: 18-24.

television, which is also hosted from South Africa principally targeting Europe, sub-Saharan Africa and North America. Chris Oyakhilome and T. B. Joshua are unarguably two of the richest Pentecostal pastors in Nigeria who blur any distinction between the bible and economics, drama and prayer in the process drawing scathing criticisms (or jealousy and envy as some of their admirers claim) from people within and outside the Pentecostal community.²⁸

The enforcement, therefore, rather than being a case of “prior restraint”, is in reality, an attempt by a religious cartel (the PFN, supported by CAN) to regulate the media space through the NBC. Part of the reasons that emboldened the PFN to seek to squeeze certain religious actors out of the media marketplace was the public image of the former president, Olusegun Obasanjo, as a “Born Again” Christian, who actively courted and received the endorsement of the PFN during his political campaign for the office of the president of Nigeria in 1999 (Obadare 2006). The public display of Pentecostal piety by the former president, in addition to the granting of 20 billion naira worth of import waivers to the Redeemed Christian Church of God, inspired the PFN to seek to deploy state machinery and power in muffling the voices and presence of other competitors. For the PFN, sanitising the Pentecostal media market is a holy zeal that may attract presidential reward in form of financial or material support, in addition to guaranteeing a market niche.²⁹ The Obasanjo regime functioned, through the NBC, as “the mechanism that allows the cartel to operate and is often part of the cartel itself” (Price 2002:32). In this case, the deregulation of the media has occasioned further regulation of specific segments of the media space in an attempt to control media market niches.

Conclusions

“In any society characterised by religious pluralism, choice of what or what not to broadcast is clearly difficult” (Lyons and Lyons 1991:103). According to Yusuf Danesi, a top executive of Nigeria’s advertising watchdog, the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON), “churches threaten to take over Nigeria’s airwaves”.³⁰ The proscrip-

28 “In God’s Name Plc”, This Day (Lagos), 30 June 2007. T.B. Joshua is renowned for attracting high-ranking politicians from Africa to his church. He hosted a sitting president, Frederick Chiluba of Zambia, in 2001 (see Phiri 2003) and Prof. John Evans Atta Mills, presidential candidate of Ghana’s National Democratic Congress in 2007 as well as the internationally renowned Indian evangelist, Paul Dhanakran. Prof. Mills, a Methodist, had also visited Chris Oyakhilome in the course of seeking a cure for his ill health and political troubles in Ghana. See “Mills storms Lagos Church”, <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=139870> (accessed 24.06.2008).

29 See Ikenna Emewu, “Holy Scam: Obasanjo’s Church in ₦20b Import Waiver Deals”, Saturday Sun (Lagos), 3 November 2007, <http://sunnewsonline/webpages/features/newsonthehour/2007/nov/03> (accessed 03.11.07). According to this report based on disclosures from the Senator Udoh Udoma-led Senate Committee probing tax waivers and incentives during the regimes of Obasanjo (1999-2007), the importation amounted to ₦100 billion which ordinarily should have attracted import tariff worth about ₦20 billion into government coffers because the goods brought into the country by the church included 300 cars worth \$6,923,000.00; 100 jeeps (SUV), worth \$8,000,000.00; video equipment, worth \$12,000,000.00, etc. These are essentially luxury goods that cannot be classified as “religious” brought into the country in outrageous quantities at a very high cost made possible through the manipulation of state power.

30 Yusuf Danesi (2005) “The Poverty of Religious Advertising”, <http://www.free-articles-zone.com/article/The%20Poverty%20Of%20Religious%20Advertising> (accessed 23.01.06).

tion of miracle broadcast represents one clear case of persistent government attempts to protect citizens from perceived “bad” religion,³¹ but instigated by a religious cartel rather than the state working for public interest. Jeremy Stolow (2005:121) rightly observes that there is “a long history of anticlerical political philosophy [which attempts] to delegitimize religiously encoded practices by presenting them as tricks of mystification, as cynical deployments of technologies of imposture designed to generate secret profits, or to exploit the credulities of the innocent.” Implicit in the prohibition of the ownership of broadcast media by religious groups is the perception and belief that religious speech is imbued with such a tremendous, or rather transcendental, power as to be a form of violence. This perception informs the doctrine of “prior restraint” which seeks to justify the prohibition. As we have seen, however, this prohibition enables government to exclude significant competitors in the market for loyalties of citizens. The government’s policy on religious broadcasting remains largely negative, focusing on the power of religious speech to define and motivate large-scale social action with negative, rather than positive, outcomes. While there is general agreement by Nigerians that religion is an important element in their social, economic and political behaviours, this has not warranted a shift or reconsideration of government’s attitude towards religious communication.

The laws liberalising the ownership of broadcast stations in Nigeria brought about a certain degree of fragmentation of state power and monopoly over the loyalty of allegiance of the public. The state being a principal player in the market for allegiance, still retains, or craves to retain, a firm grip on the structures of media competition. This it does through media laws that exclude socially significant groups, the activities of the NBC (a government-dependent agency that wields considerable powers over public and private broadcasting), and selective implementation of media regulations, particularly those pertaining to equal access of all religious groups to broadcast media, public service broadcasting that reflects uniform coverage of all religious groups. The NBC is not neutral in its policies and practices in respect of religious broadcasting. The policies and politics within these two state organs are as a consequence of religious partisanship of federal and state governments contrary to the expressed constitutional guarantees. Media policies are demonstrably instruments of political manipulation. The doctrine of “prior restraint”, while pointing to certain incontrovertible historical antecedents about the political manipulation of religion in Nigeria, fails to adequately factor in the inconsistencies, contradictions, ambiguities and equivocations evident in media legislations, policies and practices. Significantly, it fails to examine how these policies are politicised at the implementation stage. An alternative, or rather complementary, model of examining the “broadcast scape”, as this essay argues, is to factor in the role of the state as umpire and player, regulator and participant, in the market for loyalties. It also illustrates the influence of powerful cartels, such as the PFN, in manipulating state laws and its implementations to enforce exclusion and the cultivation of market niche.

Unlike in South Africa where the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South

31 There are other forms of state interventions, using “hard power” as when Plateau state government used anti-riot police men to “chase away worshippers at Plateau Chapel of Grace”, Jos, on 25 May 2008, see Jude Owuamanam, “Police Chase away Worshippers at Plateau Chapel of Grace”, *The Punch* (Lagos), 26 May 2008 (<http://www.punchng.com/Article-print.aspx?theatric=Art200805264535559> (accessed 26.05.2008))

Africa is an independent body (Rivers 2006), the NBC is not an independent industry regulator; the laws undergirding its activities are deliberately framed to favour those in power and their cohorts. However, the laws alone do not determine or guarantee how the media environment functions; cultural yearnings and aspirations often create the driving impetus for the establishment of a specific media culture. The role religious media play within faith communities and within the larger communities is an important element that needs to be reflected in the framing of media laws and culture in Nigeria. Broadcast media laws as they exist in Nigeria do not take cognisance of this point. The doctrine of “prior restraint” as a guiding principle in the exclusion of religious organisations in media ownership fails to account for ethno-religiously motivated crises in Nigeria even in the presence of these restraints (see Akinwomi, Fwatshak and Okpeh 2007). As argued above, in the framing and implementation of media laws and policies in Nigeria, competition within a market for loyalties is, in the words of Monroe Price (1995:60) “a closer approximation of reality”.

Perhaps allowing religious organisations to own and operate broadcast media within the parameters of laid-down rules and regulation, stringently monitored and implemented by an independent industry agency designed after the South African model, could provide better-informed religious communities and stem incessant religious violence usually attributed to the miseducation and manipulation of believers. Above all, there is a need for a revision of media laws in Nigeria which would take into cognisance the needs of religious communities, advances in technology and modes of content delivery which would facilitate a convergence of regulation of broadcast media and telecommunications in the country. Religious organisations are increasingly using mobile communication facilities to distribute religious information, market their programmes and solicit for funds. This practice escapes NBC’s regulation of religious broadcasting. A new convergence of regulations will see how this slippery terrain of religious text messaging is monitored and controlled, and in the spirit of the doctrine of “verifiable miracles”, protect religious consumers from aggressive religious entrepreneurs. There are obvious signs of obsolescence in Nigerian media laws that call for a radical rethinking in line with the wishes of the Nigerian peoples in the 21st century.

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Асонзе Уках

ИЗАГНАНА ЧУДА: ПОЛИТИКА И ПОЛИТИКЕ РЕЛИГИЈСКЕ РАДИОДИФУЗИЈЕ У НИГЕРИЈИ

Резиме

Нигерија је земља веома живог тржишта медија. Поред више од сто наслова дневних таблоида и недељних новина, ту је и свеprisутна радиодифузна индустрија која се састоји од радија, телевизије (земаљских, сателитских, пеј-первју и кабловских канала) и филма. Од дерегулације радиодифузне индустрије 1992. године, са издавањем лиценци за емитовање појединцима и групама, земља је сведок пораста њиховог настајања, тако да је почетком 2008. у Нигерији било 284 радиодифузне станице. Од тада је одобрено и издато још лиценци, што указује на даљу експанзију у овој индустрији. Фокусирајући се на праксу и политику Националне радиодифузне комисије (НБЦ), *визави* религијске радиодифузије у мултирелигијском друштву, овај рад истражује политике и процесе уређивања дерегулација у оквиру индустрије у којој су се у последње време јавили извесни спорови, посебно са освртом на оно што НБЦ назива „непровереним чудима“.

Кључне речи: радиодифузија, телевизија, пентакосталци, политика, чуда, дерегулација.

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