

## Market valorization in broadcasting policy in Ghana: abandoning the quest for media democratization

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### **Colonial and postcolonial continuities in broadcasting policy**

Within the context of the dominant paradigm of communication and development (Schramm, 1964), the state considered radio and later television as the key media for national development after independence in many African countries. And there was a justification for optimism as to the potential role these media could play in the social transformation called modernization. Following the declaration of Ghana's independence in 1957, the most daunting task facing the young nation-state was one of crisis of identity, for the simple reason that the state had to contend with multiple ethnolinguistic groups, each without a technology of writing. The nature of radio and television broadcasting, and their ability to transcend the obstacle of non-literacy, came in handy in this onerous task of national integration. Radio, in particular, was to be the instrument for linking the rural and the urban, the elite and the masses, as well as serving as the meeting point for the various ethnolinguistic groups. But then the quest to use radio to build a community, like the quest to claim a mandate for development, was not an exclusively postcolonial phenomenon, but also a project that the colonial state had adopted earlier.

The humble beginnings of broadcasting in Ghana date back to the colonial era. It was in 1935 that the then Governor of the Gold Coast (as Ghana was then called), Sir Arnold Hodson established the first wired radio distribution system in Accra as an extension of what was, at that time, called the Empire Service from London. The Accra network, which was later named Station ZOY, started service on 31 July 1935, to mark the

silver jubilee of King George V of the British Empire (Ansah, 1985: 1). Right from its inception the 'magic' of sound broadcasting was envisaged as a tool for education by the colonial administration. In 1939, Governor Hodson wrote a letter to the Colonial Office in London asking for a transmitter to be installed in Accra to facilitate independent broadcasting to reach out to 'members of the community in addition to teachers and school children whom it is intended to reach' (Hodson, 1939). According to Ansah (1985: 3–5), programme content was not educational in the narrow technical sense. It included news about the significance of the British Empire and government policies as well as 'urgent propaganda'. True to its intention of using the radio for educational purposes, by March 1939 the colonial administration had provided facilities for school children in 17 towns to listen to the radio (*Gold Coast Legislative Council Debates*, 1939: 9).

The start of the Second World War in September 1939 triggered the expansion of radio for propaganda purposes. Initially, rediffusion broadcast was targeted at the population within the Gold Coast. In order to increase its outreach beyond the colony to use radio for the cause of the Allies against Nazi Germany, a small 1.3 kW transmitter was installed in Accra. A new 5 kW transmitter was installed the following year and this enabled broadcast signals to reach out to neighbouring German-controlled Togoland as well as French West African territories (Head, 1979: 45). Indeed, the war situation had a positive impact on the development of radio in the Gold Coast. British colonies were a very important source of soldiers and food supplies to assist in the prosecution of the war. Consequently, it was during the war that the use of local languages was given attention in broadcasting (Ansah, 1985: 6). The reception area of Station ZOY (as the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation was then called) expanded to even East and South Africa, as Governor Hodson had occasion to report to the Legislative Assembly in 1941:

Broadcasting has had a most notable year and our service is actually of the greatest imperial and even international importance. . . . Our transmissions are clearly received in our sister colonies of Nigeria and Sierra Leone, and a report of reception has even been made as far afield as Cape Town. In addition, we have had a report that our transmissions have been heard by our soldiers in East Africa though a weak signal. (*Gold Coast Legislative Council Debates*, 1941: 13)

Colony-wide radio broadcast experimentation started in 1952 as part of an out-of-school literacy project (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1992: 116). The technology for reaching out to the Gold Coast colony was a wired rediffusion system of broadcasting. The rediffusion system linked listeners through radio boxes that were rented out to subscribers. These boxes were connected by a wired system from regional and district relay stations. The subscriber could only listen to broadcasts from Gold Coast Radio and had

no option of tuning in to other stations. This privilege of a captive audience was probably the very reason why successive governments, even self-rule ones, chose to maintain it, despite the fact that it was a technological oddity that was too expensive to maintain. Head and Kugblenu quote the technical adviser to the colonial governor in 1943 as defending the rediffusion broadcast thus: 'One of the greatest advantages of rediffusion is that the listener can receive only what is provided him by the rediffusion authorities and thus obnoxious propaganda is not available to him' (1978: 123). The rediffusion authority here was the colonial state and later, after 1957, the postcolonial state. It was in the 1980s that this technology was phased out.

Between 1946 and 1953 station ZOY was administered by the Public Relations Department of the Colonial Government. On the recommendation of a commission set up in 1953, the station was renamed Gold Coast Broadcasting Service (GCBS) and made into a separate department of government. In 1958, on the recommendation of another commission, appointed this time by the first self-rule government to look into the development and growth of broadcasting, the GCBS was relocated to new premises with improved infrastructure and state-of-the-art broadcasting equipment. The GCBS was also renamed the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC). From its introduction until 1967, the GBC was totally government funded. Subsequently it had to supplement government support with some commercialized operations. The introduction of commercialized operations was gradual, with the state retaining the monopoly over broadcasting.

Colonial broadcasting policies and postcolonial ones up to 1982 when Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was initiated have common threads when it comes to the role of private sector participation. The question of the role of the private sector was already contentious at a time when the objective of broadcasting was the building of Empire. For instance, a Colonial Confidential Circular in 1948 was already making the case against privatization.

I regret that many Colonial Governments have found themselves compelled to deviate from it (state funding) owing to the difficulties which they have experienced in finding the necessary finance to develop broadcasting as a public service, and owing to the willingness of commercial companies to develop broadcasting or rediffusion services on seemingly attractive terms. I refer below to the problem of finance, but I would here reiterate the view that even though commercial broadcasting may be subject to strict government control and may be operated with restraint and understanding by its sponsors, its operations are necessarily governed by the desire to earn a profit from the community, and it must largely waste the educational and administrative opportunities which broadcasting offers. (Colonial Office Confidential Circular, 1948: 1)

Going through the archives of this period, one comes across a long chain of correspondence between London and the colonies in West Africa, suggesting that the pressure to privatize was quite strong. To resolve the problem, the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London constituted a two-member committee to investigate problems associated with broadcasting. The report, which was submitted in August 1949 by L.W. Turner of the BBC and F.A.W. Byron of the Crown Agents for the Colonies, recommended against the involvement of the private sector.

We consider that wired broadcasting should remain a Government service in West Africa. The governments are not desirous, in the interests of the community, of such services being operated by private companies, nor would we recommend it. Extension of wired broadcasting services beyond the profitable densely populated pockets of the towns into the thinly populated, and consequently less profitable suburban areas or into the smaller towns, is less likely with private ownership than with a government service. We consider that any balance of revenue over expenditure should be ploughed back into broadcasting, which would not be the case under private ownership. (Turner and Byron, 1949: 18)

The report also recommended that the state should go beyond the provision of broadcasting facilities to the provision of reception opportunities. It called for the provision of community listening facilities arguing that:

A large majority of these advanced people have incomes of not more than a shilling a day. Many who live in the bush are outside a currency area and where there is no money economy. Consequently there is little hope for this large section of the population buying cheap domestic receivers. But it is these people who can derive so much benefit from broadcasting and whom Governments are anxious to help. (Turner and Byron, 1949: 19)

The ideas and arguments supporting non-privatization and state-sponsored community listening were influenced largely by earlier experiments in India. The recommendations were largely accepted and circulars issued to the colonial governors in the Gold Coast (Ghana), Nigeria and Gambia for their implementation. What is significant here is the fact that the welfare of the people was raised as a matter for the Empire. Their integration into the older form of community (Empire) was the basis for the policy initiatives on broadcasting that privileged public broadcasting values over private broadcasting.

The international reach of the broadcasting infrastructure, developed by the colonialists for their imperialist expansion, was later to come in handy for the first self-rule government after Ghana's political independence. The government of Kwame Nkrumah used the developed broadcasting infrastructure to wage an anti-colonial campaign to assist in the political liberation of the African countries that remained under foreign domination. In 1961, the GBC network was expanded to include an External Service

department purposely targeted at other African countries still under British, French and Portuguese domination. Thus French, Hausa, Swahili, Arabic and Portuguese were used in addition to English (Ansah, 1985: 8).

The same question of avoiding the privatization of broadcasting that had dogged the colonial authorities was to be raised again by the first postcolonial state of Ghana. Thus when in 1965 President Nkrumah inaugurated Ghana Television, he would state that:

Ghana's Television will be used to supplement our educational programme and foster a lively interest in the world around us. It will not cater for cheap entertainment nor commercialism. Its paramount object will be education in the broadest and purest sense. (1965: 3)

In the same speech, Nkrumah talked of the role of television in the nation-state project as one providing for 'the education and edification, the enjoyment and entertainment of our people . . .' and said that ensuring that television broadcasts reached every citizen was the responsibility of government (Nkrumah, 1965: 3).

Up until 1994, when private radio broadcasting was allowed in the country, the postcolonial state had always justified the monopoly of the airwaves in nationalist terms. The instruments of broadcasting were seen as part of the resources available for the realization of the nation-building project, and the reasons for the choice of broadcasting among the existing media were the same as those set out in the communication and social mobilization model of Karl Deutsch (1966). It should be added that justifying state monopoly on the basis of multilingualism and democratizing access was not wholly accurate, since controlling the airwaves has always been part of the basis of the legitimacy of the state. However, the linguistic flexibility of the technology was the source of attraction. Thus post-independent national communication policy in Ghana was to be synonymous with language and broadcasting policy as the state had to find a balance among its 44 language groups (Ansah, 1986). The MacBride Commission puts the number of languages in Ghana at 56 (UNESCO, 1980: 49).

Ghana's quest for symbols to mediate national consciousness among the various constituencies was solved with the creation of national institutions, including for radio broadcasting (Ansah, 1985). By its mere existence, GBC became a symbol that the people could identify with. In addition, the state used the medium to mobilize the people for the task of development (1985: 21). The integrative function of broadcasting in Ghana is underscored by the fact that the institution served as a tool for giving legitimacy to the state by facilitating familiarity with national institutions and policy objectives. Thus the objectives of the postcolonial state were not very different from those of the colonial state, which also saw radio as an

instrument to create a unity of thought, though in the latter case, for good of the Empire rather than the nation.

For instance, J.K. Asare, whose job it was to coordinate policy at the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in the first postcolonial government, would state the basis of policy thus:

Broadcasting has a very real and important role to play in the reconstruction of nations that have in recent times gained their independence. These countries have to bridge the gap between them and the so-called developed countries in a matter of years rather than centuries or even decades. There is no time to be lost. The standard of living of the people has got to be raised through the adoption of better farming methods as well as the establishment of suitable industries. The advantages of adopting better farming and fishing methods should be planted firmly in the minds of the people and they should be persuaded to adopt the more scientific methods where these are found to be superior to traditional ones. (Asare, 1964: 1)

If radio was considered such an instrument for national integration, Paul Ansah points out that from 1957 to 1985, at least, the medium was an instrument for inter-elite communication, with the majority of the people whom it targeted being mere passive observers. Radio was 'considered the exclusive preserve of the political elite who use[d] it to communicate with one another and to issue instructions to the lesser mortals in the community' (Ansah, 1985: 22).

This paternalistic posture of the elite has been eroded by the liberalization of the airwaves in Ghana, and the subsequent onset of private broadcasting. But if the early postcolonial era of broadcasting was characterized by elite-to-elite communication, the current media scene in Ghana suggests that it is now an intra-urban affair, with marginal participation from non-city dwellers. As will be shown in Tables 1 and 2, the national distribution of radio and television (as at June 2002) remains highly skewed.

Another important difference between early broadcasting and the current environment is that national integration was mistaken for 'synchronization and homogenization of thought'. Opposition views were easily branded as subversive and often attracted severe penalties. In pursuit of a homogenized nation, broadcasting was virtually an instrument of state monopoly. For instance, the instrument of incorporation, Legislative Instrument (LI) 472 (1965), which defined the administration of the GBC, gave the president the power to appoint and dismiss the governing board of the media organization. The president had the exclusive power to determine the length of time in office of the board and its chairman, while the legal instrument also empowered the Minister of Information to 'give directions generally to the Corporation and the Corporation shall be bound to comply with such directions'. The grounds on which the president could dismiss

the governing body of the GBC were formulated as follows: 'if he is satisfied that it is in the national interest to do so' (LI 472, 1965: 5).

Such an authoritarian conception of 'national interest' and broadcasting was considered acceptable in the early days of the nation-state, despite the fact that it was fundamentally flawed. It was acceptable and tolerable because the conception of the nation was mistakenly presumed to be one of promoting a synchronization and homogenization of thought. President Nkrumah's thinking was along these lines when he directed in 1965 that all the three radio networks across the country be 'converted into a single network, and all our national transmitters will carry the same programmes' (Nkrumah, 1965: 5). Broadcasting policy in the early years of Ghana was always articulated around the idea of national unity, understood as a lack of diversity of thought. Just two years after the birth of Ghana, the then Minister of Education and Information, Mr Kofi Baako, briefing parliament about the recent acquisition of new transmitters, would defend government policy against regional programming in the following terms:

I wish to stress that these new transmitters will relay the national programmes and there is no intention whatever of initiating regional programmes. . . . The radio is a great unifying agency in our country. Through it people all over Ghana can appreciate that we are all the same nation with the same ideas and aspirations. . . . Ghana is a unity and in this small country there is no room for regional and tribal groups, each emphasizing their own differences from the rest of the country at the expense of national unity. (quoted in Ansah, 1985: 33)

This thinking about media and nation has been drastically revised in current policy practice, with the national Constitution categorically insulating the state media from state control and guaranteeing freedom and diversity of thought, as well as viewing Ghana as a mosaic rather than one big village, like the national pioneers thought when they articulated their idea of Ghanaian nation-ness. But this change comes at a price. Not only is the state supposed to desist from interfering in the administration of the state media, it has also given up the responsibility of helping to increase access for vulnerable groups, who are by no means a minority within the body politic. This change in the relation of the state to the media has not been brought about of its own volition. This new policy approach coincides with a redefinition of the state as a supervisor of market operations in an economy where the project of transition from subject to citizen is incomplete.

In a way, the Ghanaian experience is similar to that of early Canada, not just because of the two countries' common heritage of British imperialism, but also in the mode of bringing their imagined communities into being. Marc Raboy points out that Canadian nationalism was dominated by 'urban, English-speaking central Canadians. French Canadians, rural Canadians, those in outlying regions, labor, women and farmers were at best marginal to its concerns, except insofar as their support was needed'

(1990: 18). Against this backdrop, the Anglo elite sought to use radio as a unifying force through a public service system, with Quebec nationalist opposition arguing that broadcasting should be a localized enterprise. Apart from using radio for the requirements of nation-building in Canada, broadcasting was also articulated as an instrument for education. At the same time that the colonial administration was deploying radio in the Gold Coast to create unity of thought and promote mass education, key figures in policy debates in Canada were pressing for the use of radio for public education against the demands of the private sector to allow unfettered commercial operations (Raboy, 1990: 39). For instance, Graham Spry would argue:

Broadcasting, primarily, is an instrument of education in its widest significance, ranging from play to learning, from recreation to cultivation of public opinion, and it concerns and influences not any single element in the community, but the community as a whole. (quoted in Raboy, 1990: 36–7)

Spry was making this statement in 1931. A year later, Prime Minister Bennet would re-state the place of radio in Canada as an instrument in nation-building and as an instrument for education. For a country that was working out its identity as not British and not the United States, radio came in handy as the technology that was to teach and bind the community.

The debate in Canada, and the struggle to maintain the state's role in broadcasting in the form of public service, is still going on, even though, one can argue that the nation-building project there has been largely completed, compared to the state of affairs in Ghana. But the debate in Ghana as to the direction of broadcasting is almost over, while the nation-building project is by no means accomplished. This irony is worth noting as we reflect on the consequences of SAP policies in developing countries such as Ghana.

In view of the above historical record of colonial involvement in the application of communication technology for the development of the colonies, where do we situate the common assumption in the literature of development communication that tends to link the application of communication to development only in the postcolonial era? The colonial state was not building a nation-state in the postcolonial sense as such, but it articulated its policy in the same frame that the postcolonial state was to adopt. If we abandon the rhetorical garb of nationalism that the postcolonial state wears, are we going to unearth a development communication theory of colonial and postcolonial continuities?

Another observation that can be drawn out of this discussion so far, and which I will subsequently develop in the rest of this article, is that the dream of building a nation through the instrumentality of communication technologies will have an unpredictable trajectory within the contemporary conjuncture of market-led policy practice. Countries such as Canada, the



USA and other postcolonial communities that fashioned nation-states out of diverse groups with a strong commitment to a comprehensive communication policy, successfully achieved the feat at a conjuncture when the global environment was not so predatory and opposed to their humbly stated goals of civic access and participation. The incomplete nation-building project in Ghana, and across most of Africa for that matter, now faces an uncompromising challenge from the new regime of market valorization brought about by the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). The African experience, then, can be characterized as an amazing fast-track development that has been through all the 'stages of life', but within a rather brief time-span, so that it can be said of the nation-state that it reached old age without going through adult life.

In the rest of this article, I want to shift the discussion to contemporary policy practice in order to demonstrate how the SAP in Ghana has inaugurated a new regime of market valorization in communication policy discourse. The discussion above allows us to put the Ghanaian experience of media democratization into historical perspective. It is ironic that what the colonial state resisted in the name of promoting the welfare of the colonial subjects, the contemporary postcolonial state succumbs to without considering the welfare of its citizens. The seduction of market arguments is not new to the state, be it colonial or postcolonial. The colonial and early postcolonial states, as I have already pointed out, successfully resisted the arguments and based policy principles on democratizing media access. It is the contemporary postcolonial state, through the SAP, that has abandoned this humanist quest for increasing access.

### **The new communication policy regime**

In the postcolonial development history of Ghana, one of the most important policy initiatives was the setting up of the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) in April 1990. It was set up to coordinate the new national planning effort and to advise the president on development planning policies and strategies. Ultimately, it was to prepare a comprehensive national development plan that would map out the country's strategic direction for the next 25 years, starting from 1996. The national development plan was initially called the National Development Policy Framework and later renamed *Ghana-Vision 2020*. According to this vision, the main development goal was to transform Ghana from the poor, underdeveloped, low-income country that it is now, into a vibrant and prosperous middle-income country within a generation.

To give the commission stability, the NDPC was enshrined in the 1992 Constitution as Article 86 and given legal basis by parliament under the NDPC Act of 1999. The idea of supporting national planning through the

Constitution and an act of parliament, in an era where market thinking dominated development policy, is quite a curious development. As it is generally understood in the development literature, *national development planning* is a deliberate effort to identify the most appropriate means and measures for achieving specific development objectives. It is the conscious effort, often led by the state, to influence, direct and, sometimes, control changes in the principal economic variables that determines economic development (Martinussen, 1999). The argument in favour of deliberate state intervention in the economy of developing countries dates back to the 1950s. Generally the argument has been that market mechanisms are simply not capable of handling certain distributive tasks in the economy, such as in the area of public goods like electricity, gas and water supply (as well as telephony, until recently).

After a district- and region-wide consultation, the NDPC produced its 292-page national plan, *Ghana-Vision 2020: The First Step, 1996 to 2000*. This first five-year plan was approved by parliament in November 1995 after the president made the presentation. The parliamentary floor debates were combined with parliamentary consultations with stakeholders in the economy. *Ghana-Vision 2020* is not the first development plan in post-colonial Ghanaian history, but it does have certain unique features. In the first place, its attempt to collate views and inputs nationwide was unprecedented. According to the *Ghana-Vision 2020* document, the national development plan was formulated following the coordination of sector plans from 20 ministries, government departments and agencies. Ghana is divided into 110 administrative districts. Each of these districts is linked to central government through 10 Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs). In the formulation of *Ghana-Vision 2020*, each of the 10 RCCs submitted harmonized reports of local government development plans from districts within their jurisdiction to the NDPC. These regionally coordinated plans were further harmonized and coordinated with the sector plans of the sector ministries. The NDPC set up six Cross-Sectoral Planning Groups (CSPGs) to handle the various issues raised from the local government level up to the sector ministerial level. These six CSPGs were: (1) macro-economics and financing, (2) production and private sector development, (3) human development, (4) infrastructure and spatial development, (5) rural and urban development, and (6) enabling environment. The members of the CSPGs were public-sector policy-makers, private consultants, academics, science and technology researchers, business executives, officers from District Assemblies and RCCs and representatives of farmers, fishermen and unionized workers (*Ghana-Vision 2020*).

The second unique feature of the development plan was that it was the first in the history of Ghana to receive comprehensive input from beyond the confines of government planning machinery. The plan was circulated among the donor community and 'benefited from critical comments from

distinguished Ghanaians and professionals working in Ghana and overseas' (*Ghana-Vision 2020*, 1997: viii). In all some 174 experts drawn from the government institutions, universities and think-tanks, politicians and consultants contributed to this plan.

### **Development without mass media**

Despite this impressive collection of expertise and stakeholders in national development, nowhere does the development plan mention the role of mass media in national development. No provision is made for the extension of mass media facilities to rural areas that still do not have such taken-for-granted facilities as radio and television. Given the central place of mass media in discussions about development from the 1960s on, one would expect that *Ghana-Vision 2020* would make provision for its use. Let us remember that it was the Gold Coast colonial administration that first articulated the need to use the mass media, and radio broadcasting in particular, to reach out to the people and convey health, agricultural and political messages to improve their lives. In the postcolonial period, the very conditions that warranted the use of the media to extend the reach of the state have still not been resolved. The framers of *Ghana-Vision 2020* acknowledge the prevalence of widespread poverty, illiteracy and lack of basic information that could change the lives of people, especially the rural folk. Indeed, this is the very reason they gave as a foundation for the whole exercise in development planning. Thus, throughout the document, reference is regularly made to this fact.

For instance, basing its calculations on the research done by the Ghana Statistical Service and published as *Ghana Living Standards Survey*, the *Ghana-Vision 2020* plan reports that as recently as 1992, about 31 percent of the total Ghanaian population had expenditures below the poverty line, qualifying them as poor or very poor. The World Bank classification of poverty defines the 'upper poverty line' as people earning US \$1 or less a day, and the 'extreme poverty line' as those earning 75 cents or less (World Bank, 2000a: 8). About 50 percent of women in the country lack formal education and, of the other 50 percent who have experienced it, only 3 percent make it beyond secondary (high) school. Adult literacy among women is 42 percent. Men are better off, with a literacy rate of 64 percent. With 81 percent of women not practising any form of contraception, the fertility rate among women aged 15 to 49 is 5.5 children per woman (*Ghana-Vision 2020*, 1997: 79; World Bank, 2000a: 13). Malnutrition is prevalent with about 50 percent of women of childbearing age suffering from iron-deficiency anaemia. And, according to *Ghana-Vision 2020*, 'lack of knowledge regarding the food and nutritional needs of the household members' (1997: 85) is one of the causes.

While we may contest the way poverty is problematized with the above statistical categories, in the interim, it offers a window into the context in which national development policy is being formulated. With such literacy levels, for instance, why would a national development plan depart from the previous policy paradigm of deliberate proactive state participation in the business of mass media, at least for rural mass communication? For the rural sectors of most of Africa, not excluding Ghana, it is not a question of private versus public/state media, but between public/state media or no media at all (UNESCO, 1980).

Tables 1 and 2 give an overview of the state of the electronic media in Ghana. In compiling them, I combined National Communication Authority sources (NCA, 2001), which had not been updated since April 2000, with other official and unofficial interviews. The population percentages are worked out from the 2000 population census report issued by Ghana Statistical Services. Ghana has 10 administrative regions. Greater Accra, which includes the national capital Accra, has a small rural and a large urban population. The Ashanti region is the second most urbanized region, with Kumasi as its capital. Northern, Upper East and Upper West are the northernmost regions of the country, with predominantly large rural settlements, and have been described by the World Bank as the poorest part of the country.

**TABLE 1**  
**The distribution of FM radio stations in Ghana as at June 2002**

Region	% of national population*	Number of FM stations		
		FM licences issued	On air	Not on air
Greater Accra	15.8	17	14	3
Ashanti	17.3	12	9	3
Western	10.0	3	3	0
Central	8.6	6	6	0
Eastern	11.5	5	2	3
Brong Ahafo	9.9	8	8	0
Upper West	3.1	2	2	0
Upper East	5.0	1	1	0
Volta	8.8	3	3	0
Northern	10.1	2	2	0
Total	100	59	50	9

\* Population figures are from 2000. The national population is 18,412,247.

**TABLE 2**  
**The distribution of TV stations in the country as at June 2002**

Region	% of national population*	Number of TV stations		
		TV licences issued	Operational	Non-operational
Greater Accra	15.8	10	6	4
Ashanti	17.3	5	4	1
Western	10.0	2	2	0
Total	43.1	17	12	5

\* The national population is 18,412,247. Only three urban regions have TV stations. The remaining seven, being predominantly rural, do not have any so they are not listed.

The state-owned broadcasting corporation, GBC, owns at least one FM station in each of the 10 regions and uses these stations to network with its two shortwave radio broadcasting stations in Accra, which have more than 90 percent coverage of the entire country. Apart from Accra, where GBC has two FM stations, Ebono FM and Uniiq FM, the other region that has a disproportionate number of GBC FM stations is Central Region. The region has three GBC FM stations with two university campus FM stations, making it the region with the highest number of non-private stations in the country.

The process of becoming a nation-state under postcolonial circumstances is a project of extending civil society and facilitating the transformation of subjects into citizens (Mamdani, 1996). It is a project in democratizing the material conditions for participation in the new form of (imagined) community, which serves as the platform for attempting an entry into modernity. The communicative infrastructure has always been considered the site for this extension, providing a new environment for the nationalist imagination (Anderson, 1983; Carey, 1981; Martin-Barbero, 1993). Whether in the early North American experience, the later Asian experience or the recent African attempts, the postcolonial experience has been that an active state constructs the national community through media extension, if it chooses to do it peacefully. Why then do recent policy initiatives in Ghana suggest a different scenario?

To put this neglect of the mass media dimension into perspective, it is relevant to note that the particular conjuncture around which the idea of forming the NDPC came up, and the subsequent formulation of a 25-year national development framework, coincided with a period of ferment in national discourse about media freedom, liberalization and privatization in Ghana. State involvement and control of mass media in Ghana is often treated with apprehension, and justifiably so. From the colonial state to its

postcolonial versions, at least up to the coming into force of the Fourth Republican Constitution in 1992, the mobilization of the media for development purposes was combined with various forms of abuse of civil liberties. Indeed, this abuse of development communication by dictatorial regimes in developing countries has earned state intervention negative connotations, making any such intervention in the production or distribution of content highly suspect.

It is against this background of distrust of the state that the 1992 Constitution was crafted. A whole chapter was devoted to 'Freedom and Independence of the Media'. Under this chapter, elaborate provisions were made first to insulate the right to publish and publication from state control. This was achieved by entrenched provisions proscribing the state from licensing speech and publication. Entrenched provisions in the Constitution require approval in a national referendum of 75 percent votes before they can be amended. Thus, the freedom of the media (that is freedom from) is generally secured. The second set of provisions under this chapter of the Constitution intended to insulate the state-owned media from the ruling government. This was achieved through the setting up of the National Media Commission (NMC). The 15-member NMC is so constituted as to make it quite difficult for any government to have undue influence over its decisions. Ten of the members are nominated by civil society organizations, including media professional associations. The parliament nominates three while the president nominates the remaining two. The 15 members choose their own chairman. The NMC has the power to appoint Chief Executive Officers of State-owned media and their board of governing directors. The board of governing directors in turn appoints editors in consultation with the Public Services Commission (*Constitution of the Republic of Ghana*, 1992: ch. 12).

A careful study of the constitutional provisions on the media reveals that the framers of the Constitution were influenced by the principles of 'negative freedoms' more than by 'positive freedoms', that is, freedom from, as opposed to freedom to. The idea of positive freedom is not wholly alien to the framers of the Constitution, however. They were obviously influenced by the principles of positive freedom in writing Chapter 6, 'The Directive Principles of State Policy', in which Article 36 explicitly enjoins the state to be proactive in the development of the private sector and free market economy (*Constitution of the Republic of Ghana*, 1992: ch. 6).

When I put this issue before John Mahama, Ghana's Minister of Communications from 1996 to 2000 and Member of Parliament, in an interview, he claimed the state's role was circumscribed by the constitutional limitations. While the Constitution does not prescribe state involvement in the democratization of media access across the country, it does not proscribe it from embarking on such a mission. One cannot therefore say that the non-problematization of media access in the *Ghana-Vision 2020*

was due to the elaborate constitutional provisions on the relation between the state and media. In my interactions with some staff of the NDPC, the mass media question was dismissed as not the responsibility of the state. The allusion was to the fact that there are constitutional provisions on how the state should handle the media. Furthermore, reference was made to the fact that the ideas contained in the *Ghana-Vision 2020* document as the development needs of the country were a synthesis of the explicitly stated needs of the districts, communicated through the RCCs to the sector ministries and ultimately to the NDPC.

There are only two mass media organizations currently operating in the country that are state owned and have public service objectives. The first is the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, which operates Ghana Television, GBC Radio One and Radio Two, and a network of FM stations across the country. The second is the Ghana News Agency (GNA), which operates as a news-gathering establishment with print and broadcast media as its clientele. As part of the ongoing SAP, the World Bank has consistently pressurized the government to divest itself of these two organizations. The push to commercialize the operations of GBC and GNA has been considered a first step towards state divestiture from the business of mass media. At a World Bank-sponsored seminar on 'The Re-invention of Government' on 19 March 1999 at Akosombo in the Eastern Region of Ghana, the then Minister of Communication, Mr John Mahama, was categorical in stating his government's commitment to the privatization of these two media organizations. According to the minister, the government would do better if it no longer had to fund the operations of these media organizations.

But an academic, Dr Cletus Doduonoo of the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, contested the position of the minister and his government, pointing out that the government's arguments for divesting itself of the two media organizations are shallow. His argument was that the rush to privatize institutions without looking into their history and purpose for the nation-state was ill advised.

Are we saying money should overrule social services? And how will a citizen of Bawku (a remote town in the north-east corner of Ghana) hear anything about his town if GNA is to focus on the search for money? . . . We are rushing into something we do not know yet. (Ghanaweb News, 1999)

Doduonoo's opinion represents the sentiments of the nationalists who have always tried to remind the postcolonial state of its reason for being. Iliasu Adam, a GNA journalist in the northern Ghanaian town of Tamale, told me in an interview that, for the 13 years he has been reporting news from northern Ghana, the priority has always been fostering national cohesion of what is otherwise a cocktail of cultural groups. His view was that when the

operations of GNA and GBC are commercialized, some cultural communities are likely to be forgotten by the rest of the country because they will hardly ever attract any profit-oriented news organization.

The denial of state responsibility for the democratization of media facilities in Ghana is part of a comprehensive attempt to redefine the role of the developmental state in the postcolony. At least, this is a subject that has been specifically discussed at the board level of the World Bank (World Bank, 2000b). A 30 March 2000 meeting of the board on Ghana specifically framed its strategy around three themes, one of which was changing the role of the Ghanaian state. This implies both the state withdrawing from activities that the private sector can do better, as well as achieving sharp improvement in public service delivery (World Bank, 2000b: 2). What is interesting is that the Bank articulates the rolling back of the state within a Ghana government plan to reduce poverty:

The overriding goal of the Government of Ghana's development Strategy for Poverty Reduction and the support of the Bank group is to eliminate hard-core poverty. Within that broad goal, the proposed business strategy of the Bank Group would help the government to i) raise the growth rate of the economy; ii) redefine the role of the State; and iii) implement their strategy more effectively on the ground. (World Bank, 2000b: 7)

In the particular case of Ghana, the Bank pointed out that the state's involvement in the business of media and utilities is an indication of the 'overextended' nature of public service. The Bank defines the media and utilities as non-public goods and therefore makes future financial flows conditional on the state giving up control of these sectors (World Bank, 2000a: 12). It argues that Ghana scores low on several World Bank indicators because of what it terms excessive state involvement in the economy. To reverse this trend, the Bank recommends, 'commercializing Government operations'. Who should fill the void? The private sector and non-governmental organizations, the Bank recommends.

The labelling of media and utilities as non-public goods is a troubling re-articulation of the place of media in the nationalist project. It smacks of the worst forms of economic fundamentalism. Even in most of the developed world, where commodification of the economy is widespread and advanced, utilities such as water and some (very limited) aspects of the media are still considered public goods, and are still strongly regulated by the state.

My discussion with Iliasu Adam in June 2002 at Tamale reminded me of Tony Barnett's argument that the nation-state is an uneasy balance of multiple ethnic and class identities – and that the level of unease and the issues that may serve to produce legitimization crisis, will depend on the specific history of the state. In Africa, as in the Middle East, Asia and Latin America, legitimacy is ultimately derived from the politics of



development (Barnett, 1997: 33). With a regime of extensive commodification of all aspects of the economy, including media access, with a population of 30 percent earning less than a dollar a day, will the postcolonial state face a crisis of legitimation? This is not a question that can easily be answered, but it is a likely scenario.

The scenario is more likely now that the World Bank and its allied international partners have successfully pressurized the Ghanaian state into abandoning the project of extending media access to all citizens. We can rightly conclude that the structurally adjusted postcolonial state has succumbed to the lure of the market logic. We have to recall that this was a seduction that even the colonial state, conventionally demonized in much of Africanist literature, had the humanist and communitarian convictions to resist. In view of this development, the question that arises is: how far is the postcolonial state influenced by the humanist requirements of community, as opposed to the logic of a Darwinian theatre of private profit?

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