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**GILBERT K. M. TIETAAH, MARGARET I. AMOAKOHENE AND
MARQUITA S. SMITH**
University of Ghana

Continuity in change: A history of radio for national development

ABSTRACT

In this article, we assert and demonstrate a particular and enduring adaptability of radio in tandem with observable temporal shifts in development communication theory and practice in Africa. Specifically, we use the historical research method to explore and explain the ideological discourses, polity contours and social forces that have overlain the role of radio as both an index and an instrument of development in Ghana. The evidence reveals that radio has transitioned through three key milestones in how the technology has been appropriated and applied to national development efforts: from transplantation, through transmission, to transaction. Each of these phases coincides, incidentally, with paradigm shifts in development communication theorizing: from modernization through diffusion to participation. They also coincide, broadly, with three distinctive epochs of ideological shifts in the historical accounting on radio for development in Ghana: from British imperial hegemony, through post-independence command-and-control, to contemporary liberal pluralism.

KEYWORDS

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INTRODUCTION

Optimism about the potential of radio for delivering development dividends has its roots in the 1950s western-inspired typology of a world of hierarchically differentiated groups of nations – characterized as first world, second world and third world (Melkote and Steeves 2015). According to this typology, the ‘development problems’ of Africa were due, in part, to cultural and information deficits among African societies. The main features of these societies were agrarian livelihoods, low literacy rates and low per capita incomes, along with superstition, passivity and a resistance to innovations (Waisbord 2001). Their communities were also dogged by a remarkable dearth of physical infrastructure, including poor road, transport and telecommunications networks; poor and inadequate health, sanitation and educational facilities and professionals; and weak and inadequate mass media institutions, technologies and practitioners.

This article threads a discursive needle through the changing phases of radio as both an instrument and an indicator of development in Ghana. What the resulting tapestry reveals is that radio has transitioned through three key milestones in how the technology has been appropriated and applied to national development efforts – from transplantation, through transmission, to transaction. Each of these phases coincides, incidentally, with paradigm shifts in development communication theorizing: from modernization through diffusion to participation. They also coincide, broadly, with three distinctive epochs of ideological shifts in the historical accounting on radio for development in Ghana: from British imperial hegemony, through post-independence command-and-control, to contemporary liberal pluralism. Together, they enable the article to move beyond what media anthropologist Debra Spitulnik refers to as a mere annotation of specific, static, facets of radio as lived experience (2000) towards an engagement with the social and political-economic dynamics that have defined and driven that genealogy. This perspective thus breaks ranks with previous scholarship on radio history in Ghana, which has generally addressed radio as part of a broad, temporal, chronicling of mass media in Ghana (Ansu-Kyeremeh and Karikari 1998) or when the focus has been on radio per se, a critique of its instrumentalist insinuation into the colonial and post-independence governance architecture (Ansah 1986; Head 1979). Rather, by laying out the cumulative trends and continuities in radio for development, and putting the evidence in conversation with current polity, the article injects a social-anthropological strain into the conventional narrative. It also demonstrates the coincidence of correspondence between historical shifts in paradigms and the remarkable adaptability of the technology to the prevailing practice of development communication. First, though, and before retracing the steps along the pathways of Ghana’s experience with radio as a development-support medium, we briefly discuss the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the article.

Theorizing development radio

Against the background of a continent bridled by infrastructural and psycho-social privations, the partiality for radio in early efforts at stimulating development in Africa is understandable. First, for these so-called primitive societies thought to be ‘largely dominated by orality’ (Pavarala 2003: 2166), the phonic attribute of radio made it the most appropriate mass communication medium for transplanting attitudes favourable to psycho-social change and economic

mobility. Second, as a transmissionist, receiver-oriented medium, radio had a particular resonance with the prevailing modernization-diffusion paradigm that essentially saw development as an acculturation process. Third, radio defied the socio-economic, geographic and linguistic barriers imposed on other mass media such as television and the newspaper and was, therefore, a more suitable medium for primary audience targeting. Finally, a veritable wealth of empirical evidence had been adduced by UN agencies and US-sponsored scholars to privilege radio as the most effective and efficient technology-based tool for producing and propagating communication-supported development programmes among developing communities (Melkote and Steeves 2015).

The contemporary repudiation of the transmissionist, top-down, communication model in favour of more interpersonal, more dialogic processes coincides with parallel advances in transistor and battery technologies that have also made radio increasingly more transactional, more participatory. At the same time, a fundamental tenet of the neo-liberal political ideology that African countries have been encouraged to embrace is the classical link between media pluralism and national development. This link can be explained syllogistically as follows: development presumes the participatory engagement with and mobilization of citizens. In turn, engagement and mobilization cannot be done without a free and pluralistic media regime. Ergo, fundamental to any effort at mobilizing and deploying national effort towards addressing development needs is the democratization (i.e., the availability, expansion and sharing) of information and communication facilities. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan underscored these overlapping connections among media, democracy and development when he remarked two decades ago that '[i]f information and knowledge are central to democracy, they are the conditions of development' (cf. Tietaah 2013:1).

In addition, the particular potential of radio for democracy and development in Africa was given expression by the African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), which noted in the preamble of its October 2002 Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression that 'oral traditions, which are rooted in African cultures, lend themselves particularly well to radio broadcasting'. It also explains the shift in policy paradigms from the stranglehold of state monopoly towards a regime of broadcast pluralism in Africa. The gains of pluralism are protean, in that they propagate and fertilize the other normative indicators of development: democratic inclusion and equity, market economic competition, freedom of expression and participation, and social and cultural advancement.

This remarkable adaptability of radio to the prevailing theory and practice of development communication would explain the facile faith in its potential by both the colonial and post-colonial governments in Ghana and much of Africa. This is a perspective that we explore in this article in the light of the inherent differences in ideological and policy orientations that inspired successive governments in their appreciation and application of the power of radio.

Historicizing radio development

This article contributes an African and particular experience to the field of media history that, as James Curran (2002: 3) notes, has been 'the neglected grandparent of media studies'. Bailey (2009: xxi) echoes this observation, attributing the tendency of media scholars to focus attention on 'the ideological

effects of mediated representations' to the presumed greater utility of addressing current conditions, not past problems. As Bailey argues, however, 'the historical materiality of one's object of analysis' offers useful insights for the present and the prospective (2009: xxi).

In this article, we employ 'the anthropological narrative' (Curran 2002: 26) to explore and explain the part that radio has played in constructing and conducting the development goals of the national state of Ghana. In other words, while we are interested in discovering and documenting the historical account of radio for development in Ghana, we are particularly concerned about the ideological discourse, polity contours and social forces that overlaid the arch of the narrative. Specifically, we searched multiple sources of primary and secondary information such as library archives, legislative instruments, parliamentary records, newspaper publications and references from the literature. The search was guided principally by reference to specific time points or periods and by mentions of specific keywords or their derivatives. We also relied, in a more limited way, on key informant interviews, chain-referrals and even serendipity. Thus, for instance, starting with a publicly available time point or period in the history of broadcasting in Ghana, we looked for the Parliamentary documents pertaining to the relevant dates and debates. Then, using the keywords or derivatives – such as radio, broadcasting, media, communication and telecommunication, development, education, information, national interest and public interest – we identified and read the transcripts of the debates and decisions of the sitting. We also took note of references to previous or planned sittings, and searched the relevant dates and documents in a recursive, back-and-forth, process. For the key informant interviews, we also interviewed two individuals: Kwame Karikari, communication professor and former director-general of the state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), and Edmund Yirenkyi Fianko, Manager (Engineering) of the National Communications Authority (NCA). Their responses were used chiefly to clarify or fill factual gaps in the more recent history, or to guide a further search for sources of archival information. The data thus assembled were discussed in the light of the prevailing media ecology, political ideology and social anthropology.

THE COLONIAL LEGACY OF DEVELOPMENT RADIO (1935–57)

Radio broadcasting was introduced into Ghana in 1935 through the instrumentality of Sir Arnold Hodson, then governor of the Gold Coast (as Ghana was called at the time). The occasion was to mark the silver jubilee of the coronation of George V, when the imperial voice of the British monarch was intoned via the Empire Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and relayed to 'the children of the Empire' (Gold Coast Colony 1936: 4, Legislative Council Debates) on the Accra Redifussion Station then transmitting from a small bungalow on 9th Road near the Ridge police station in Accra. The landmark significance of this technological feat is conveyed in the following account by Governor Hodson when he addressed members of the Gold Coast Legislative Council in February the following year:

The transmission and reproduction of [King George V's] address must have appeared to some to border on the miraculous. Since then that miracle has become an everyday occurrence, and the occupants of

over 750 houses in Accra are now able to enjoy the wireless broadcast programmes sent out by the Empire [...].
(Gold Coast Colony 1939: 4, Legislative Council Debates)

Thus, Station ZOY, as the Accra Rediffusion Station was later named, was intended, in the first place, to enable the colonial authorities and European settlers to maintain political and cultural ties with the British metropolis. Within a year of going on air, the station had attracted some 400 subscribers. Ten years later, by 1945, the subscriber base had increased tenfold to 4000 (cf. Ansah 1986).

Second, radio was intended to support the empire-building (com)mission by transplanting occidental ideologies and 'urgent propaganda' (Hodson 1939: n.pag.) among citizens of the Gold Coast. Hodson actually ascribed prophylactic efficacies to radio, suggesting that by exposing citizen-subjects to doses of *radio-therapy* they would, thereby, be inoculated against the contagion of nationalist rhetoric that was beginning to spread among the growing band of educated local elite. In a letter to the Colonial Office in London on 8 January 1938, Hodson explained that extending ZOY services to 'the educated portion of the population' in Accra and coterminous regions was 'a valuable and cheap antidote' to the 'mischievous pabulum' and reactionary proclivities otherwise engaged in by the political and educated elite. The letter reiterated the strength of his conviction:

I am convinced, not only because it gives the educated community food for thought but also because through the medium of the broadcast programmes Government is able to control to a large extent the type of mental stimulus which that community receives.

(Hodson 1938)

While such hallowed belief in the power of radio may appear outlandish in the contemporary media ecology, it reflects the dominant stimulus-response view of media effects – which was prevalent within early twentieth-century behaviourist thinking. Plus, the novelty of the radio technology would seem to have evoked its own awe among early audiences.

Hodson also saw in radio the opportunity for both in-school and out-of-school education. Thus, a year after the request to extend transmission to privileged segments of the indigenous population was assented to, Hodson sent yet another dispatch to the Colonial Office on 11 January 1939, requesting financial support to produce local independent educational broadcasts for 'members of the community in addition to teachers and school children'. He explained that as an educational tool, radio would make it 'possible to keep in direct touch with a widely scattered and influential body of teachers and with the adolescent school boy and girl'. Once again, this request was granted, so that on 14 March 1939, Hodson was able to report to the Assembly that 'many thousands of school-children in 17 of the more important towns' had been enabled to listen to the school broadcasts (Gold Coast Colony 1939: 8, Legislative Council Debates).

A fourth value and motivation for the use of radio in the Gold Coast was its potential for the cultural and political indoctrination of the population. Hodson's letter of 11 January 1939 actually conveyed the insidious expectation that by becoming an established feature of the school curricula, the broadcasts would help exercise a hegemonic hold on teachers and children at their

most impressionable age. Thus, the school broadcasts were administered as a palliative intended, in the words of Ansah, 'to inculcate in the citizens of the Gold Coast certain aspects of British culture and ideas and thereby inoculate them against undesirable ideas which might come from outside' (1986: 5). It has to be pointed out that the paternalism implicit in this application of radio was consistent with the sincere but mistaken belief that westernization was synonymous with development, and that by divesting the local people of their traditional habits, they would more eagerly embrace the blessings of (western-defined) modernity. Station ZOY thus became instrumental in projecting and promoting the British imperial idyll.

The outbreak of the Second World War on 1 September 1939 prompted the further extension of transmitter strength and commitment of the services of Station ZOY towards the war efforts of the Allied forces (which included African countries within the colonies and dominions of the British Empire) against the Axis powers (which included the French colonies in West Africa and the German allies in North Africa). Consequently, in 1940, the ministry of information in London financed the installation of a dedicated five-kilowatt transmitter to enable transmission into neighbouring colonies, of pro-Allied propaganda themes, and to counter the pro-Vichy propaganda broadcasts from Dakar, Senegal. Specifically, an expatriate French refugee was recruited from the Ivory Coast (now Cote d'Ivoire) to broadcast a nightly half-hour of counter-propaganda in French (Head 1979: 45).

Between 1941 and 1943, the diversity of languages used on the station was expanded to include broadcasts in French, English, Hausa, Moshi, Ewe, Fanti, Twi and Ga. The inclusion of broadcasts in the local languages was intended to prosecute the local propaganda agenda. In an account published in a UNESCO manual on the use of radio for education, John Wilson, information officer of the Gold Coast at the time, made the following remarkably blunt claim:

The families left at home were almost entirely illiterate. Their minds were filled with vague fears concerning their relatives fighting in areas only vaguely known, if at all. [...]. Ever present was the possibility that a people by nature superstitious and, by religion, accustomed to the propitiation of the unknown and terrible, might begin to regard Hitlerite Germany as a force not to be resisted but placated.

(Wilson 1950: 44)

The outreach of the station was also extended as far afield as South Africa and parts of East Africa. In his 1941 legislative council report, Governor Hodson gave the following account on the state of broadcast development in the colony:

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 Colony 1941: 13, Legislative Council Debates)

To more effectively execute its propaganda responsibilities, Station ZOY was administered by the Gold Coast Information Department. The war agenda

also curtailed domestic productions. Addressing the Legislative Council on 23 February 1943, Sir Alan C. M. Burns, who succeeded Hodson as governor in 1941, explained that although the daily duration of re-diffusion had been extended, the services from ZOY needed to be more dedicated to prosecuting the propaganda campaign. Consequently, some programmes, notably 'entertainment programmes by local artistes', were suspended 'to give way to propaganda' (Gold Coast Colony 1943: 12, Legislative Council Debates). The value of this service to the war effort must also be understood in the light of the fact that British colonies became a ready source of conscriptions and food supplies.

After the war, and upon the recommendation of a commission set up to review the broadcasting needs of anglophone West Africa, the station was reorganized into a separate department of government. It was renamed Gold Coast Broadcasting Service (GCBS) in 1953 and a policy of indigenization was initiated to increase the number of local staff. The content of broadcasts was also increasingly interspersed with capsules of news and music in the local languages.

POST-INDEPENDENCE POLICY CONTINUITIES IN RADIO USE (1957–92)

In many ways, the first post-independence government of Kwame Nkrumah (and to varying degrees, successive governments since 1966) perpetuated the policy and practice of its colonial antecedent in its appreciation and application of radio for development. Following the attainment of political independence in 1957, the young nation state was faced with the onerous challenge of de-territorializing the multiple chiefdoms and of melding their multiple ethnic eccentricities into a common republican consciousness. To this end, just as the colonial authorities used radio to foster allegiance to the metropolis, the Nkrumah government assigned to radio the role of forging and fostering a sense of unity and participation in the development project of the country. Moving a motion in parliament for the adoption of the programme of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on 29 August 1960, sector minister, Kwaku Boateng, expressed the expectation that radio would contribute to the realization of this nation-building aspiration:

The old ties of community, kinship and tribe must be transcended by a patriotism in which the farmer and the worker understand the state, and all must feel a sense of belonging to it, united under our Republican constitution with one Parliament and one President [...].

(Ghana 1960: n.pag., Parliamentary Debates, col. 927)

Second, as with Hodson's use of radio to carry out his empire-building mandate, Nkrumah perpetuated and justified his government's monopolistic hold on radio by intoning the 'nation-building' rhetoric. 'It was decided' as Ansah explained, 'that radio should operate as a centralised system in order to serve as a tool for unification' (1993: 94). Underlining this policy of pursuing a transmissionist state control of radio, like the nationalist ideological orientation that inspired the declaration of a one-party state in 1964 (and the later declaration of a 'non-party' union government in 1977), was the rhetoric of exigency. It was argued that the agenda for 'accelerated national development' could ill-afford the presumably divisive and diversionary views of the political opposition or other sectarian interests.

In fact, in a similar address to parliament a year earlier, on 16 July 1959, about the recent commissioning of a new transmitter to improve reception in the northern sector of the country, Kofi Baako, then Minister of Education and Information, provided the following explanation for the Nkrumah government's reticence about pluralizing broadcast programming:

The radio is a great unifying agency in our country. Through it people all over Ghana can appreciate that we are all of 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 emphasising their own difference from the rest of the country, at the expense of national unity. [...] If the country is to progress, these differences must cease to count [...].

(Ghana 1959a: Parliamentary Debates, col. 630)

The differences alluded to by the Minister were in reference to the enduring challenge of the Nkrumah government, of knitting the diverse ethno-linguistic groups into a unitary nation state, against federalist factions within the main opposition National Liberation Movement (NLM) – dominated as it was by members of the majority Akan ethnic group in the country. Importantly, while the policy orientation of the Nkrumah government was to exercise a centrifugal control over radio broadcasting there was, nonetheless, an inherent recognition that the goals of development would be better served if radio access was treated as a public interest aspiration, and not limited to only bottom-line considerations. Considerable effort and expense were, therefore, committed to expanding and diversifying the reach and range of programmes and people covered.

In July 1959, there were reported to be 70,000 radio sets in the country in addition to 40,000 relay boxes (Ghana 1959a: Parliamentary Debates). A year later, in August 1960 the information minister reported that a total of 37 relay stations had been sited within the most economically viable segments of the country. The number of subscribers to the re-diffusion boxes had also increased by an extra,000 (Ghana 1960: Parliamentary Debates). Moving the motion for parliament to approve the budget and programme of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on 29 August 1960, Kwaku Boateng underscored the capacity of radio to mobilize the collective commitment and contribution of citizens towards prosecuting the government's vision for national development:

If our people are kept informed of the work of government, of the tasks before the nation, and can be made to realise the part each of them can play in building up the economy and culture of our nation, there is no limit to our future.

(Ghana 1960: Parliamentary Debates, col. 925)

A special department was established in 1962 to produce and present programmes exclusively for rural audiences. The programmes, broadcast in five Ghanaian languages (Akan, Ga, Ewe, Dagbani and Nzema), were aimed at providing agricultural and public health education to rural targets (Karikari 2000).

Over the years, increasingly more relay hubs were devolved from the national capital and by 1970 the number of relay stations had peaked to 52, to

which a number of rural subscribers were linked by re-diffusion boxes (Ansu-Kyeremeh and Karikari 1998: 4). Third, the Nkrumah government continued, and actually reinforced, the colonial authority's policy of using radio as an adjunct of adult education and classroom instruction. In this case, however, the role of radio was to unleash the creative spirit of the Ghanaian and inspire a nationalist consciousness that is akin to Freire's (1973, [1970] 2005) liberation pedagogy of *education for conscientisation*. This contrasts sharply with the colonial approach of *education for domestication* (Freire 1973, [1970] 2005) that was thought to perpetuate a dependency syndrome and inferiority complex in the colonized subjects. To this end, the government took steps to indigenize the face of radio in terms of staff, programmes and institutional image. In 1958, the GCBS was renamed the Ghana Radio and Television Corporation (GRTC) and then renamed again on 2 July 1965 as the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) (Ghana 1965: LI 472).

The scale and comprehensiveness of these changes were resented by sections of the right-leaning political opposition, as reflected in the following concern expressed by A. W. Osei, member of parliament for Ahafo: 'Radio Ghana is becoming unpopular in this country and people loathe to listen to the news. This is due to the replacement of the 7:00 am and 8:00pm BBC news with what they call "African News"'. Nevertheless, by June 1959, Radio Ghana was transmitting about 100 hours of locally produced school-broadcasts, and only two hours of educational programmes relayed from the BBC. There were also programmes designed for the 'education and edification' (Nkrumah 1965: 3) of adult citizens who had not had the opportunity of formal schooling. Kwaku Boateng, who succeeded Kofi Baako as Minister of Information, explained his ministry's greater emphasis on the educational value of radio, indicating that the government did not 'want people to turn on their sets merely to be saved from boredom'.

Fourth, the superstructure built during the Second World War years and bequeathed by the colonial authorities at independence also provided the foundation and ferment for President Nkrumah's use of radio to advance his foreign policy agenda. Like the colonial use of radio for war propaganda, Nkrumah used radio to promote his socialist ideology and vision for a united Africa. His address at the formal commissioning of the Ghana External Broadcasting Service on 27 October 1961 explained in uncompromising terms Nkrumah's ideological bent and foreign policy vision for the station, which bears quoting extensively:

For too long we have been subjected to vile and vicious propaganda designed to cast doubts on the ability of the African to manage his own affairs. Even when we became independent, the whole apparatus of colonialism was turned on us in an effort to disunite and separate us. [...] the voice which will go out [from the station] will be truly African – African in content, outlook and imagination. [...] We are neither anti-West nor anti-East. We have our own way of life, a socialist way based on a sound cultural foundation and an African background. Those who wish to understand our actions must first begin to study and appreciate this background. They should not judge us from ignorance and they should not expect us to become mere copy-types of their past or present, however good these may be to themselves. In this External Broadcasting System we now have a voice which will boom and resound across the shores and over the mountains and valleys, carrying with it a message

1. Under the current, fourth republican constitutional dispensation, although centralized state control has been replaced by a pluralistic broadcast system, the national (or public) interest obligation of the media is similarly entertained or exacted (cf. article 12 (2), 41 (a) (c) (d), and 164 of the 1992 Constitution; and sections 2 (b) (c) (e), 13 (1) (2), 17 (1), 27 (1) (3 (b)) (4) of the National Communications Authority Act, 1996 [Act 524]).

of hope and encouragement to our compatriots in our beloved continent [...] the service which we are formally inaugurating today will be a powerful force, sustaining the assault that we have launched against the ramparts of colonialism and imperialism in all their forms and manifestations.

(Nkrumah 1961: 2–3)

It is remarkable that Nkrumah's ideas echo the dependency school of thought that had begun to question the motives of the modernizationist prescription for development of the third world – described as hegemonic and deleterious to efforts at self-determination, self-initiative and self-sufficiency.

With a combined transmitter capacity of 950 kilowatts, the signals of the *External Service* could be clearly heard in many parts of Africa and Europe. It broadcast programmes in five international languages – English, French, Hausa, Swahili and Arabic – with plans 'in the not too distant future' to expand the service to cover fifteen languages. Information Minister Kwaku Boateng justified the high capital and recurrent expenses required for building and operating this comprehensive radio network by citing a number of tangible and intangible multiplier benefits of the programmes, including the claim that '[e]very citizen of Ghana now knows the tune and indeed the words of our National Anthem, through hearing them on the Radio' (Ghana 1960: n. pag., Parliamentary Debates, col. 935). The real value of such an apparently mundane service can only be fully appreciated in perspective. The spectre of secessionist agitations in certain parts of the country prior to the declaration of independence on 6 March 1957 was yet to be fully exorcised. Besides, as noted earlier, the young nation state needed to divest its citizens of their primordial ethno-linguistic identities and to arouse among them a communal outburst of national aspiration and productive impulse.

These concerns were actually codified in the Instrument of Incorporation of the GBC (LI 472) of 1965. The objects of the Corporation included the obligation 'to prepare in the fields of culture, education, information and leisure, programmes in consonance with the national progress and aspirations'. The statutes of the instrument were laden with clauses of closure and control. They conferred on the Minister of Information 'powers of direction' to overturn the decisions of the board of directors (Ghana 1965: LI 472, section ix), and even more far-reaching powers of 'control and management' on the President in the 'national interest' (Ghana 1965: n. pag., LI 472, section ix).¹

At the receiving end, the postcolonial government seemed, again, to have been inspired by the policy orientation of the colonial authorities. Nkrumah rolled out a programme to provide battery-receiving sets on hire-purchase terms to individuals who could not make a one-off payment and for the most deprived, rural-bound, segments of the population, sets were provided for communal listening in schools, village halls and information centres. A State Electronic Products Corporation was established to produce more relay boxes and transistor sets. In addition, the Ghana Sanyo Corporation, which assembled the *Akasanoma* brand, was commissioned under a joint Ghana–Japan agreement to assemble small, portable, radio-receiving devices available to the public 'at reasonably affordable prices' (Ansu-Kyeremeh and Karikari 1998: 4). Kofi Baako provided an essentialist, national development, justification for the decision:

When we can bring an even larger number of our population within range of our programmes we shall feel that one of the objects of our

development plan has been achieved [...]. In our democratic society our Government are not a remote body of administrators. We want the people to participate in everything we do [...].
(Ghana 1959a: Parliamentary Debates, cols. 633, 634)

Successive postcolonial governments after Nkrumah maintained and justified the status quo of centralized control of broadcasting for development by invoking the rhetoric of state legitimacy. They argued that the frequency spectrum was part of the exhaustible natural resources of the state – and had to be held in trust and judiciously utilized in the national public interest. Of course, there was also the implicit motive of regime self-preservation. Ansah observed about African leaders of the time that they saw themselves as ‘the modern philosopher-kings’ whose version of the truth the media were obliged to endorse and espouse ‘at the risk of being labelled reactionaries, counter-revolutionaries, imperialist lackeys or ordinary nation-wreckers’ (1986: 24).

In 1985, the year of GBC’s golden anniversary, three 50-kilowatt short-wave transmitters were installed, enabling a reliable 24-hour-a-day domestic service and renewing broadcasts of the external service that had been suspended due to the financial austerities that dogged the country and station in the early 1980s. With advancements in spectrum management technology the re-diffusion system became not only anachronistic but also increasingly prohibitive to maintain. Consequently, starting with the Upper Region Agriculture (URA) FM station in Bolgatanga (1986) the re-diffusion stations were converted to FM relay stations in Accra (in 1986 as GAR), Apam (in 1987 as Apam Radio) and Dormaa Ahenkro (in 1991 as Dormaa FM). These services were almost exclusively development-oriented, in that they were set up with donor (World Bank, UNESCO) funding to promote self-help, adult literacy or agricultural extension initiatives.² Thus, when in 1985 for the golden jubilee anniversary of the state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), Ansah (1986) proposed a development imperative for broadcasting in Ghana, he was only echoing a mandate that has underpinned policy enunciations since radio was introduced into the country 50 years earlier.

2. Kwame Karikari, personal communication, 15 February 2016. Professor Kwame Karikari is a communication scholar and media development consultant in Africa. He was the director general of the state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) between 1982 and 1984.

RADIO UNDER THE (1992 CONSTITUTIONAL) REGIME OF BROADCAST PLURALISM

The historical account shows that from 1935 through the intervening decades of intermittent one-party and no-party rule until the return to multi-party constitutional governance in 1992, radio was exclusively state-owned and government controlled. Such a system of monopoly and control did not augur well for the spirit of democratic pluralism and free expression that the 1992 Constitution sought to foster. Despite this, the framers of the Constitution were persuaded that a media environment conducive to national development aspirations (as encapsulated in the Directive Principles of State Policy; notably, Article 36) was one in which ‘objective information is disseminated, different and opposed views are presented and shared, enlightened public opinion is formed and political consensus mobilised and achieved’ (Ghana 1991: 85).

Since the induction of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, the political-economic climate in the country has been auspicious for radio broadcasting both as an enabler of the development of multi-party electoral politics and as a growth pole in its own right. This is largely attributable to the constitutional stipulations of Article 162 (3), which, together with the NCA legislation

(Act 524:45 (1)), legally abrogated the restrictive Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) Law on media ownership and control (PNDCL 211) of 1989, repealed the Telecommunications (Frequency Regulation and Control) Decree of 1977 (SMCD 71) and engendered an outburst of private interest and participation in the media industry.

On 30 December 1996, the Parliament of Ghana enacted the National Communications Authority (NCA) Act (Act 524), formally institutionalizing the body responsible for the management of the spectrum resources of Ghana, including the allocation of broadcast frequencies. Going through the corpus of transcripts of the debates and submissions that preceded the passage of the Act, it seems clear that the legislators were motivated by national public interest values and principles. Contributing to the debates in parliament on Monday, 12 December 1994, Kojo Yankah, then deputy minister of information, explained that, 'even in the cradle of democracy' the U.S. Communications Act of 1934 'makes broadcasters public trustees'. This means that the broadcast frequency was treated as a corporate national resource, and consequently the grant or renewal of licences was linked 'with a broadcaster's ability to serve [...] the public interest, convenience and necessity' (Ghana 1994c: n.pag., Parliamentary Debates, col. 1381). The minister also cited the Canadian Radio, Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), whose *raison d'être* was the recognition that 'choice is meaningless unless it includes programming which reinforces the cultural heritage of all Canadians' (Ghana 1994c: n.pag., Parliamentary Debates, col. 1382).

The objects of the NCA were expressed in discursive frames that suggest public interest motivations. First, Section 2 of the NCA Act includes, for instance, mandates to provide broadcast services throughout Ghana; ensure that such services are responsive to community needs; and generally protect the interests of audiences. Section 4 of the Act also assigns to the responsible minister 'such directions of a general character as appear to him to be required in the public interest [...]'. Third, Section 27 (3)(b) requires the NCA, 'in assigning or allocating frequencies', to ensure equity in 'the distribution of communications stations as between urban, rural, commercial or other categorisation'.

But legislative enunciations per se do not guarantee delivery. It took another two years of gestation – fertilized by civil society advocacy and public agitation – before the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government began to issue frequencies for private proprietors to operate radio and television stations. For instance, in March 1993, the School of Communication Studies at the University of Ghana organized a national advocacy conference on the pluralization of broadcasting in Ghana. On that platform, P. A. V. Ansah, then director of the school, singled out radio for particular treatment, referring to it as a 'development tool whose resources must be harnessed for the benefit of the nation, especially for the majority illiterates living in the rural areas' (1994: 24). While striking a similar note, Karikari, however, posed a caveat about the counterproductive possibility that a condition of unbridled privatization might produce 'a bastardization of pluralism' (1994: 9). The government seemed to concur with Karikari's (1994) concern for a regulated system in which privatization might yield the intended national development dividend. At least, that was the government's alibi for tarrying on the constitutional obligation to allow for private participation in the broadcast sector.

Within a year of the 1992 Constitution, dozens of radio and television frequency applications had been lodged with the Frequency Regulation and

Control Board (FRCB). According to Ampaw (2004), one of these applications was made by the Independent Media Corporation of Ghana (IMCG) on 11 May 1994. Incidentally the sponsor and chief executive of IMCG was a member of the main opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) in the December 1992 elections. It took four months for the frequency board to respond to the IMCG, with the excuse that the processing of all applications had been suspended pending the setting up of a National Communications Authority. On 9 November 1994, the IMCG defied the frequency board and began test transmission, under the call-name Radio Eye, on the VHF 96.2 MHz band. Two weeks later, on 4 December, armed police personnel raided the station and seized its equipment. In a statement to the nation's parliament two days later, then Minister of Information, Kofi Totobi Quakyi, described the decision to go on air 'without any authorisation' as an 'act of brigandage and lawlessness' (Ghana 1994b: n.pag., Parliamentary Debates, col. 1210). He alleged, furthermore, that 'the real intention of the brains behind that pirate radio station was either to court cheap political martyrdom or try a psychological offensive on the public or both' (Ghana 1994b: n.pag., Parliamentary Debates, col. 1211). But the government's nervousness about the political price of the prospective loss of monopoly control of broadcasting is also betrayed by the Minister's earlier remark that 'the advent of private broadcasting is like opening a Pandora's box' (Ghana 1994a: n.pag., Parliamentary Debates, col. 1204).

On 20 July 1995, the FRCB finally yielded to the rising tide of public pressure and announced the grant of authorizations to 27 applicants to begin operating private FM radio stations in Ghana. Thus began the scramble by private proprietors for broadcast frequency licenses. In the meantime, to gain a head start in the competition for audience shares by private commercial stations, GBC fast-tracked long-standing intentions of converting its regional re-diffusion outlets into full-service FM stations. Between 1994 and 1996 the corporation established seven more regional FM stations in Kumasi (as Garden City Radio), Sunyani (as BAR), Ho (as Volta Star), Cape Coast (as Radio Central), Sekondi (as Twin City Radio) and Tamale (as Radio Savanna). A final regional station was opened in the Upper West Region in 2001 (as Radio Upper West).

In practice, however, these regional stations do not operate as autonomous entities. Broadcasting House in Accra, headquarters of the national broadcaster, continues to provide policy direction and exercise general administrative oversight. Besides, the regional stations must link up (via pre-set tuners) to the national studios in Accra for the major news bulletins of the day in English. Otherwise, the regional directors and their staff are able to develop their own programmes and formats in accordance with local conditions and needs. They are also expected to support their operating costs with internally generated revenue from sponsorships and airtime sales. In a message to the Corporation to mark its 60th anniversary in 1995, however, then Minister for Information Kofi Totobi Quakyi urged GBC not to be seduced by the commercial pressures to 'turn the corporation into a cultural ghetto'. Rather, he challenged it to prioritize national development goals, to 'endeavour to forge a more participatory and collaborative relationship which would truly serve the public by expressing their political and cultural diversity while pursuing the national development agenda' (Ghana Broadcasting Corporation 1995: 10). As the state progressively weans itself off the subvention of public institutions, and in the face of feisty competition for audience shares, however, it does seem doubtful that these regional stations can sustain their distinctive, non-commercial identity.

3. Personal communication with Edmund Yirenkyi Fianko, Manager (Engineering), NCA. Updated by reference to NCA website on 21 March at: <http://www.nca.org.gh/industry-data-2/authorisations-2/fm-authorisation-2/>.

Circling back to the regime of broadcast pluralism engendered by the liberalization of the airwaves: prior to 1992, radio in Ghana consisted only of the state-owned GBC's three national shortwave radio networks (Radio I and Radio II, and the External Radio Service) and the four FM stations (in Accra, Bolgatanga, Apam and Dormaa). With the subsequent passage of the enabling legislation (Act 524 of the NCA) in 1996, Ghana has, in nominal terms, been relatively well-served by radio. According to the industry statistics of the NCA (last updated December 2016) there were a total of 481 authorized FM radio stations in the country. This total is made up of 31 national public radio stations, five foreign public radio stations, 79 community radio stations, 21 campus radio stations and 345 commercial radio stations.³ The spatial spread across the ten administrative regions is as follows: Ashanti, 63; Brong Ahafo, 67; Central, 35; Eastern, 42; Greater Accra, 53; Northern, 48; Upper East, 18; Upper West, 22; Volta, 52; and Western, 81.

CONCLUSION

A close reading of media history shows that the Ghanaian experience with and use of radio provides a striking metaphor of the transfer of British colonial values and norms into the native sociocultural and institutional anthropology. According to the media historian Paddy Scannell (1989), in the early years of the BBC, the radio medium was consciously assigned the 'national interest' obligation of contributing to the political and cultural life of the Empire. Robins and Aksoy (2005: 41) support this account when they explain that broadcasting was an important symbol of state legitimacy through which citizens came to imagine themselves as members of the national public.

Distilling the key elements of the Ghanaian media history from 1935, a number of imperatives stand out that suggest that radio was perceived and applied as what French Marxist theorist Louis Althusser would refer to as 'an ideological state apparatus' (1970: 143). The features of this attitude and application of radio are as follows: first is the exclusive colonial administrative control, in the interest of empire-building – and of what Freire would refer to as 'the pedagogy of the oppressed' ([1970] 2005: 48). Second is the postcolonial state monopoly, in the interest of nation-building – and of what Ampaw would refer to as 'the imperatives of *raison d'état*' (2004: 24). Third is the current constitutional regime of broadcast pluralism, in the interest of the practice of participatory, multiparty, democratic governance – and of what the NCA would refer to in its tagline as 'communications for development'. In sum, the ideology underpinning the use of radio for development has mutated in tandem with the three distinctive epochs of Ghana's political history since colonialism. Specifically, both the colonial authorities and the post-independence governments identified a potential in radio as a tool for development – as expressed in both their policy enunciations and operational procedures. The attributes of this development transitioned from centralized, one-way transmission to pluralist system relying on audience participation, intended to engender not compliance or consent as in earlier eras but consensus for development.

In addition to its application as a channel for propagating development, colonial and postcolonial leaders also employed radio as an indicator of development, as suggested in their frequent enthusiastic references to numbers of re-diffusion and receiving sets to illustrate the extent of progress made in their modernization of society. An underlying assumption of the neo-liberal

ideology under the current dispensation is that the profit motive is expected to galvanize private capital for the promotion of democracy and development. The forces of demand and supply are relied upon to meet these aspirations. From a liberal pluralist perspective, the prevailing policy and the sheer spatial spread of radio in the country seem to bear out this expectation. They suggest, in any case, that under the current free-market paradigm of development, a deregulated broadcasting regime can enable distribution of the democratic dividend in a way that 'contribute[s] to the overall development of the country' (Constitution, Article 36 (2) (c)).

In conclusion, it is clear that through all the changing phases of Ghana's experience with radio, the basic doctrinaire belief in the potential of radio as both a catalyst and an index of national development has remained unchanged. What has changed are the different ideological orientations that have defined policy on how to best exploit and express this potential.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Gilbert K. M. Tietaah (Ph.D.) is senior lecturer in the Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana. He has researched extensively into broadcasting (especially radio), examining its regulatory and public interest dimensions. His scholarly interests straddle the interstices of communication, democracy and development. He has authored and edited several scholarly articles and applied research reports in the fields of communication for policy and social change, health communication, political communication and media policy – as particularly pertains to free expression rights.

Contacts: Department of Communication Studies, P.O. Box LG53, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana.

E-mail: gkmtietaah@ug.edu.gh; tietaah@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4878-5068>

Margaret I. Amoakohene (Ph.D., Leicester) is senior lecturer of communication studies, University of Ghana. She teaches public relations and qualitative research methods. Her research interests are in the areas of the intersection of communication with various fields including politics, governance, gender and the workplace. A former diplomat, she is a member of the Council of State of Ghana, and also a member of the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana.

E-mail: mamoakohene@ug.edu.gh; mamoakohene@hotmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7767-4850>

Dr Marquita S. Smith is a Fulbright Scholar at the Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana. She is associate professor at John Brown University, USA, where she serves as the Communication Department chair and coordinator of Diversity Relations. Her research interests focus on media development, public health communications and topics on diversity and inclusion.

E-mail: msmith@ug.edu.gh; quitaed@aol.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2391-9517>

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