



## ABSTRACT

This paper is a historical discourse on the development and the political framework of television broadcasting in Nigeria. It also explores the influence of politics in the emergence of the medium of television, and its imperative in Nigerian politics. It argues that the political gimmick, culture and counterculture characteristic of the Nigerian polity was germane to the establishment of television stations in Nigeria. I utilise the literary and descriptive methodological investigative approaches to investigate the imperative of television in the Nigerian political landscape. Among other findings, the study reveals that the birth of television in Nigeria is rooted in the Nigerian political situation of the First Republic, and that television is imperative in the growth and positive change and development of Nigeria. This research concludes that television and politics in Nigeria intersect. In Nigeria, this medium of communication is a force to reckon with. Hence, the study recommends that positive reforms and modifications should be made by the National Broadcasting Commission in the operation of television broadcasting. Furthermore, these reforms should be adhered to, so that the aim and objectives of the positive transformation in television broadcasting in Nigeria can be achieved.

## KEY WORDS

Television. Nigerian Politics. Imperative. Political cum Broadcasting.

# 1. Introduction

Of all the media of mass communication, television is one of the most highly utilised. In fact, in 2013, 79% of the world's households owned a television set. Besides the urban areas where television has taken a strong foothold, most families in rural areas can also claim ownership of the medium. Its capacity to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct culture cannot be overemphasised. As a medium of communication, it is functional in disseminating information, providing entertainment and education. In the light of this functionality, Newton Okoh in *A handbook of radio and television presentation*, submits that „*the content of the medium could also serve as a tool for stimulation.*“<sup>1</sup> Okoh's submission is an extension of the multi-functionality of the medium. The wide ownership and popularity of the small screen-television is not farfetched from the fact that its consumers are dispersed in the comfort of their homes, not only to be handed what the cinema supplied, but to be acquainted with the latest events in society. Furthermore, television has also affected and influenced the trends of world politics.

In postcolonial Africa, television played a major role in the political revolutions. Paradigms of such are the political uprising in Egypt, the Libyan war which led to the death of President Muammar Gaddafi and many others, surmised as the „*Arab Spring.*“ Furthermore, modern and postmodern Nigeria has also engaged in the utility of the medium in political engagement. This has created spaces for various dimensions in the electoral process. Against the backdrop of the above, this study engages in a historical discourse on the development and the political framework of television broadcasting in Nigeria. It also explores the influence of politics in the emergence of the medium of television, and its imperative in Nigerian politics.

It argues that the political gimmicks, culture and counterculture characteristic of the Nigerian polity was germane to the establishment of television stations in Nigeria.

## 2. A Retrospect of Television Broadcasting in Nigeria

*„In our age when all languages are confused as in the tower of Babel, when all aesthetical genres intermingle, death threatens the theatre as film and television encroach upon its domain...“*

*Jerzy Grotowski*

The first electronic medium of mass communication in Nigeria was the sound box-radio. The British colonial government wanted a concrete link between its colonies and mother Britain, hence the establishment of a radio station in 1932 in Lagos. It was a wired broadcasting service called the Radio Distribution Service. Most programmes broadcast at this time were products of the British Broadcasting Service (BBC). In other words, the move for the Nigerianisation of the content of radio was still out of place.<sup>2</sup> Radio broadcasting was controlled by the post and telegraph service department. Though the Second World War disrupted the development of broadcasting, it was revived after the war. At the end of the war, the British capitalised on the positive Communication impact made by radio broadcasting in the western world, and extended the tentacles of the RDS to Kano, Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode, Port Harcourt, Enugu and Zaria in 1944.<sup>3</sup>

The establishment of other RDS stations was extended to the above places. To realise a total growth of the medium, more had to be done as Akinwale makes us understand that Nigeria was the first to adhere to the Tyron-Byron report. The Tyron-Byron report was a pragmatic research exercise aimed at advancing the utility of radio in the country. With the execution of the final

<sup>1</sup> OKOH, N.: *A handbook of radio and television presentation*. Warri : Jolo Publishers, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> MACKAY, I.: *Broadcasting in nigeria*. Ibadan : University press, 1964, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> AKINWALE, A.: *The Nigerian broadcaster: a professional or a civil servant* in AKINFELEYE, R. (ed.): *Issues on Broadcasting in Nigeria*. Lagos : Spectrum books, 1990, p. 26.

research made by two BBC workers, Tom Chalmers and Murray, the Nigerian Broadcasting Service was established in 1951, but started transmission the following year after numerous difficulties. Chalmers became the first Director-General of the Nigerian Broadcasting Service. Radio broadcasting went through many revolutionary changes as numerous investigations were carried out by BBC personnel such as Mr. Chalmers, where radio stations should be located and how it can be proliferated. The Radio Distribution Service was modified into the Nigerian Broadcasting Service in 1952. Due to the upsurge in the number of political parties and political consciousness, the NBS was labelled a tool, used by the colonial government. Daniel Omatsola in *Television film production in Nigeria: A critical source book*, notes that „the NBS was criticised for its monopoly by the colonial government.“<sup>4</sup>

The Macpherson constitution of 1951, paved the way for the emergence of regional broadcasting stations which included radio stations located in Eastern, Northern and Western Nigeria. According to Elo Ibagere, it is now that the political life, social life and social development of the Regions (of Nigeria) will mean that regional broadcasting will play an even more important part than was originally anticipated.<sup>5</sup> The critique of the monopoly of radio stations in Nigeria, and its politicisation, watered the ground for the evolution of the television medium in Nigeria. It was not until 1953, when the political terrain was in a rigorous tempo that the major event which led to the call for a revolutionary change in the broadcast world in Nigeria, occurred. The call for independence spurred these issues. Citing Elo Ibagere, Moses Oghenevizie in *Reality television and African aesthetics: a study of big brother Africa*, reveals that in 1953, Chief Anthony Enahoro, an Honourable Member of the Action Group from the Western Region, moved a motion calling on the House of Representatives to accept the attainment of self-governance in 1956.<sup>6</sup> The representatives of the North in the house rejected this decision and Chief Obafemi Awolowo led Action Group (AG) to walk out of the house. The British Governor General that same evening, along with the Nigerian Broadcasting Service, severely criticised the action carried out by some people in respect to governance. Though he did not mention names, the message was already decoded. He was referring to the action of the Action Group. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the Action Group went to the Nigerian Broadcasting Service to demand equal opportunity to go on air and refute the position of the Governor, but was denied. It became obvious that that the federal government was exercising a stronghold on the operations of the Nigerian Broadcasting Service.<sup>7</sup>

When Obafemi Awolowo requested time to reply to the claim of the Governor General, he was refused air time and the die was cast. This event led to increased campaigning for converting the Nigerian Broadcasting Service. This crusade for change, made the colonial government give the issue consideration. Although the above event, along with the need for a wider coverage, led to the establishment of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation which was to be modelled on the British Broadcasting Corporation in Mother Britain and would serve to nigerianise its content, the Western Nigerian Government did not stop in its quest to set up its own radio broadcasting station. It went ahead in 1959 to establish the first television station in Nigeria. It was not only the first in Nigeria, but it was the first in Africa. This was the birth of the Western Nigerian Broadcasting Service (WNBS) and Western Nigerian Television (WNTV) which was the brainchild of a collaboration with an overseas company. Citing Obaro Ikime, Oghenevizie states further that: The Western Region, which was most articulate in their resentment against

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<sup>4</sup> OMATSOLA, D.: *Television film production in Nigeria: a critical source book*. Warri : Abotu Research Publishers, 1997, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> IBAGERE, E.: *Social Development, Television and Politics in Nigeria*. Ibadan : Kraft Books, 2009, p. 101.

<sup>6</sup> OGHENEVIZIE, M.: *Reality television and African aesthetics: a study of big brother Africa*. [An unpublished Masters Thesis]. Department of Theatre Arts, Delta State University, Abraka : Delta State University, Abraka, 2012, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> IBAGERE, E.: *Social Development, Television and Politics in Nigeria*. Ibadan : Kraft Books, 2009, p. 101.

the NBC, became the first region to establish its independent broadcasting station, but rather than radio, it opted for television. Thus the first television station to be established in Nigeria and the African continent was owned by the Western Region. It was called Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) with its slogan, „*First in Africa*.“<sup>8</sup>

The WNBS station which started its operation in October 31<sup>st</sup> 1959 ended the monopoly of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. More broadcasting stations emerged in the other regions much later. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the then Premier of the Western region, who established the station, said that broadcast media will serve as teacher and entertainer and as a stimulus to us all to transform Nigeria into a modern and prosperous nation. The Northern Nigerian regional government did not bother to establish a broadcasting station unlike the Eastern Nigerian regional government that established its own the following year. Thus, Eastern Nigerian Television (ENTV) as it was called, adopted the slogan, „*second to none*.“ It is pertinent to note that Western Nigerian Television had previously coined the slogan, „*First in Africa*“, hence, Eastern Nigerian Television claimed they were second to none. The Northern regional government established its own in March 1962 with the name Radio Kaduna Television (RKTV). The Nigerian Television Service followed a year after, but initially its service was confined only to Lagos. The threat from WNTV and later, the other regional television stations perhaps energised the quest of the federal government to establish a television station. Herein lies the political dimension of broadcasting in Nigeria.

Television broadcasting stations became counter-tools. They became tools with which the Action Group criticised and countered policies made by the central, colonial government. The broadcasting stations continued with their service till there emerged another phase in the development of broadcasting in Nigeria. This phase was also influenced by the change in the political terrain of Nigeria: The military regime which culminated in the creation of twelve states by General Yakubu Gowon. The military government and subsequent military governments coveted the regional television stations for their own use. Thus, these television stations became federal government controlled.

The proliferation of the Nigerian polity in 1967 facilitated an increase in television broadcasting stations. Precursory to this time, when the Mid-Western region was created, a radio and a television station was established. Mid-West Television, Benin, was created in 1978, with a radio station as well. Benue-Plateau State had its own in 1974. The station established by the then Benue-Plateau state government had begun transmitting in colour. It is therefore a fact that BPTV, Jos was the first television station in Nigeria to transmit in colour. Rivers and Kano also followed suit. There is the presupposition that the multiplicity of the Nigerian society also led to that of television broadcasting stations because every state craved for one so as to serve as a mouth piece as well as to succinctly and easily disseminate their policies to the populace. By this time, there had been an influx in the number of televisions, especially in urban areas in Nigeria where the upper and middle classes lived in. One factor that also led to the popularity of the medium was the introduction of drama programmes such as Wole Soyinka's *My Father's Burden* which was the first drama series on Nigerian television, as Segun Olusola in *The Advent of Television Drama* argues that: A remarkable feature of the 1960 affair, one which differentiates it from the 1980 incident which I referred to above in my introduction was that the play, *My Father's Burden*, a very incisive criticism of the emerging Nigerian bourgeoisie bribing and corrupting its way through was televised... Wole Soyinka never wrote for television again.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> OGHENEVIZIE, M.: *Reality television and African aesthetics: a study of big brother Africa*. [An unpublished Masters Thesis]. Department of Theatre Arts, Delta State University, Abraka : Delta State University, Abraka, 2012, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> OLUSOLA, S.: The advent of television drama. In OGUNBIYI, Y. (ed.): *Drama and theatre in Nigeria: A critical source book*. Lagos : Nigeria Magazine. 1981, p. 372.

The village headmaster, *Masquerade*, *Song of a Goat*, *Winds against my Soul*, *For Better For Worse*, *Case File*, as well as *Hotel De Jordan* followed. „Other dramas that came up later were Peter Igho’s *Cockcrow at dawn*, Lola Fani-Kayode’s *Mirror in the Sun*, Zeb Ejiro’s *Ripples*, Ken Saro-Wiwa’s *Basi and Company*...“<sup>10</sup>, among others. The popularity of these dramas culminated in the purchase of television sets which determined social status and prestige especially in rural areas at that time. The second republic saw an upsurge in the propagation of more television stations since the ruling political parties used the available ones for their personal interests, for propaganda and for dissemination of policies. These stations became engrossed in political issues, that they soon lost focus on the purpose of their formation and establishment as Elo Ibagere avers that: As it was a prophecy of doom, after the NPN won the 1979 election, pressures were mounted on the NBC by the party to the detriment of other parties. Consequently, the programmes of the other parties were blacked out of NBC’s daily broadcast. Even, radio station in states controlled by opposition parties, began to broadcast in favour of the NPN controlled federal government, and to the detriment of the opposition parties controlling those states.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, the Second Republic saw the emergence of Alhaji Shehu Shagari taking the mantle of leadership in his defeat of political stalwarts such as Mallam Aminu Kano, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. At this time, the ruling party, which was the NPN, completely politicised the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. It could be remembered that the military governments had taken charge of all broadcasting stations and therefore by the time Alhaji Shehu Shagari became President, the television and radio broadcasting sector was already under the control of the federal government. Without doubt, the aim of the NPN in monopolising the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation was to boost their chances in winning subsequent elections. This was the birth of propaganda broadcasting in Nigeria. The broadcasting personnel, who refused to succumb to this despotic act, were either demoted, or sacked to act as a deterrent to others.

Based on the fact that Lagos state was been controlled by the UPN, a major opposition party, it was decided to set up a state owned television station. The federal government refused to allow the station to operate. This case was contested in court. The Lagos state government lost at the lower court, but won at the Appeal Court so they were given the permission to operate. Hence, Lagos Television emerged.

Like the old Western Nigerian regional government that broke the jinx of the monopoly of the British colonial government thereby establishing the first television station, a state situated in west-Lagos had again established a state owned television station. The audacious action of the Lagos state government spurred other states into action. The stations set up by the opposition parties were organised to challenge the unfriendly policies of the federal government. In fact the Owerri based Nigerian Statesman quoted Governor Sam Mbakwe of Imo state as saying that the Imo Broadcast Station was established to inform citizens of the state of the activities of the government and to counter the many mischievous propaganda of the federal government against the state by the federal government owned broadcast stations.<sup>12</sup>

With the proliferation of more broadcasting stations, the state owned television stations began to preach their policies as well. The political parties in charge of the states therefore coveted the newly established television stations for their own use. With this, television became a pencil in the hands of the government. In 1977 the Nigerian Broadcasting Service became the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA).

<sup>10</sup> AYAKOROMA, B.: Trends in the Development of Contemporary Nigerian Video Film Industry. In ONI, D., AHMED, Y. (eds.): *Trends in the Theory and Practice of Theatre in Nigeria*. Ibadan : JFR Publishers, 2008, p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> IBAGERE, E.: *Social Development, Television and Politics in Nigeria*. Ibadan : Kraft Books, 2009, p.106.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107.



### 3. Towards the Deregulation of Television and its Imperative in Nigerian Politics

For several years, the government did not consent to giving the go ahead for the ownership of broadcasting stations by private individuals. There are many reasons for this. It could be recalled that the first media of mass communication to encroach on Nigerian society was the print media. This was when Rev. Henry Townsend began the publication of a newspaper called „*Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Egba ati Yoruba which started publication in 1859.*“<sup>13</sup> Subsequent newspapers such as *The Lagos Weekly Record*, which was a militant newspaper, made it very popular. Payne Jackson succeeded in laying a solid foundation for the Nigerian press. He also set the pace for Nigerian nationalists who eventually used the press as a strong instrument to fight colonialism. The *Weekly Record* became an organ of reference for budding journalists.<sup>14</sup>

Other radical newspapers such as the *West African Pilot* were established by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and they also served in the struggle against Colonial rule. Some radical editors at that time were Ernest Ikoli and Peter Pan, among others. Upon the attainment of independence, the print media was duly used to check the excesses of the government but it was too late for the government to curb what they called a menace. Thus, the government could not risk liberalising the broadcasting sector. Putting television broadcasting in private hands would cause more threat than the print media had done because the government was aware that as a potent force for mass mobilisation and stimulation, it would be tragic to let private individuals join the broadcasting train. However, in 1992, the military government of Ibrahim Babangida finally deregulated the broadcasting sector, through the creation of the National Broadcasting Commission Decree. A new era for private broadcasting had begun. Ibagere articulates that the actual deregulation of television broadcasting commenced in 1992 via the promulgation of Decree 38 on August 24, 1992. This decree established the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). It was the Babangida administration that succumbed to the demand for the deregulation of broadcasting.<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, the door became open for individual investors to become television station owners. For a television station to be established, it had to be registered with the National Broadcasting Commission, the body responsible for regulating broadcasting stations and their content. The new privately owned television stations included African Independent Television (AIT) Lagos, owned by a Marine Engineer, Chief Raymond Dokpesi, Galaxy Television, Channels Television, and a host of others. This was what Bisi Adanri in *Fundamentals, ethics and effects of television* referred to as the democratisation of the electronic media.<sup>16</sup> The new private broadcasting stations, being competitors in the mass media market, made the government owned stations buckle up as the competition in the media space became stiff due to the proliferation of television stations.

The Nigerian political space had been greatly influenced by television. There have been cases where the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation shut down state and privately owned television stations on the grounds that they acted contrary to the rules and regulations guiding the nation's broadcasting code. In fact, in a larger framework, television had played a vital role in world politics. In the United States of America for example, it served as a medium for debate among presidential candidates. With the television medium, the young John F. Kennedy was able to defeat his opponent, Richard Nixon, in series of debates. He eventually won the general elections. One would not categorically forget the role it played in the 2016 American election.

<sup>13</sup> ADANRI, B.: *Fundamentals, ethics and effects of television*. Akure : Linda bee publishers, 2005, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> IBAGERE, E.: *Social Development, Television and Politics in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2009, p. 110.

<sup>16</sup> ADANRI, B.: *Fundamentals, ethics and effects of television*. Akure: Linda bee publishers, 2005, p. 18.

The two contestants, namely, Donald Trump of the Republican party, and Hillary Clinton of the Democratic party, made their manifestoes well known through the Cable News Network (CNN), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and other television broadcast stations, in a series of debates. However, the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Cable News Network were critical of Donald Trump, but sympathetic towards Hillary Clinton. Hence, these two global television stations were politicised in the process.

The influence of television on voters cannot be overemphasised since a number of media effects studies have shown that apolitical individuals are susceptible to attitudinal or behavioural change as a result of television-media exposure. This is what is called the „*media propaganda model*“ which portrays television as a medium for propaganda. Like its film counterpart, television influences the thought patterns of a people, facilitates cultural integration and promotes change in the traditions of a people. Television therefore, promotes ideologies. Isaw in *Revolutionary Democracy Vs. Liberal Democracy: A belated reply to Yosyas Kifleyesus's*, states that civilly done, debates of various kinds benefit a country such as ours by creating well-informed citizenry. Well informed citizenry in turn facilitates a knowledge-based vote to adjudicate a democratic contest between acutely differing political parties.<sup>17</sup>

In Nigeria, the place of television in politicking is sacrosanct. For instance, the origin of the medium cannot be separated from politics. Unlike the radio broadcasting medium which was introduced into Nigerian by the Colonial masters, television broadcasting started as a conception of Nigerian nationalists and a product of regional politics. After having the right to reply to the federal government on the castigation made by Sir John Macpherson on him and the Action Group, turned down by the Nigerian Broadcasting Service, Chief Obafemi Awolowo decided to establish the Western Nigerian Broadcasting Service (WNBS) in 1959. The above named station was the first regionally owned broadcasting station in Nigeria. Chief Awolowo did not stop there, perhaps, in an attempt to send the message of his superiority to the federal government, he decided to establish Western Nigerian Television in Ibadan, on 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1959. This was the first television station in Africa. In so far, the Action Group, which is the dominant party in the Western region, saw it as a viable tool to preach its party manifestoes, its agenda and democracy.

The above scenario provided the impetus for the establishment of regionally owned television stations, in Nigeria. In the same vein, the quest for political relevance also led to the influx of more state owned television stations as championed by Lagos state in the second republic. Thus, underneath the entertainment, information, education and communication functionalities of the medium, one major function of the medium in the framework of its formation by various governments, was-political statements and ideologies. The medium had also determined the political atmosphere of Nigerian society for some time now, especially during elections. For example, the 2015 elections would attest to the above statement. The populace expected the two major contestants, invariably the presidential candidates of the People Democratic Party (PDP), President Goodluck Jonathan and the All Progressives Congress (APC), General Muhammadu Buhari to indulge in a presidential debate on one of the major television stations, such as the Nigerian Television Authority, the African Independent Television and/or Channels Television, but the APC candidate refused.

By all indications Muhammadu Buhari refused to participate in it for two reasons, the first was that the debate would be organised and tilted to favouring his opponent and that his opponent was a better out spoken person. He knew the power of television in influencing the opinion of the populace. In another state such as Delta state, the People's Democratic Party gubernatorial candidate had a debate with the candidates of the Labour Party and the All

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<sup>17</sup> ISAW, A.: *Revolutionary Democracy vs. Liberal Democracy: A belated reply to Yosyas Kifleyesus's*. [online]. [2020-0-25]. Available at: <[www.aigaforum.com/articles/Refuting\\_liberalism.htm](http://www.aigaforum.com/articles/Refuting_liberalism.htm)>.

Progressives Congress. The purpose of such debates was to speak directly to their supporters and the masses in general, captivate them, and also, to project their manifestoes. In course of the discussions, phone calls are received. This is a process where viewers of the debate are allowed to ask questions, about issues being discussed, to facilitate clarification, with the view to finding solutions to societal and political problems. These questions focused on developmental issues. Text messages are also sent in by viewers. These text messages are question based or statement based. Statement based messages, focus on issues which the populace want the party candidates and eventual winners to tackle, which questions based messages make the party candidate engage in series of oral answers to the problems and challenges typical in the country.

This systemic politicking creates room for the populace to properly decide which political candidates to vote for. In this process, socialisation is also effected. Of all the media of communication and entertainment, television probably has the greatest potential for socialisation, integration and networking. Precursory to the 2015 general elections, a suit was levelled against African Independent Television (AIT), one of the leading television stations in Nigeria by Asiwaju Bola Tinubu for an attempted libel of him and some of his top party (APC) members. Perhaps, he saw the capability of the television to negatively affect his political career therefore it became imperative for him to take legal action. Television also projects politics of hate as Ibagere states that: It is impossible to find the face of any opposition leader on television screens. Even some stations reject adverts from opposition party leaders. The case of the Alliance for Democracy (AD) in Delta State is pertinent here. A candidate was adopted by the party to contest on its platform for the gubernatorial seat in the elections in 2003. Despite paying the broadcast fee of thirty five thousand naira, the news was not carried by the state owned Delta Broadcasting Service (DBS). This compelled the party to threaten dragging the station before the NBC for the commission's regulation.<sup>18</sup>

With the digitisation of the television medium, there has been a paradigm shift in the trend of politics in Nigeria. Other transnational, transcultural and transcontinental media of communication, such as social networking sites (which include Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Injoo, Linkdin, Badoo, Eskimi), have changed the direction and enhanced political culture in television. The proliferation of private television stations in Nigeria, such as *TVC*, *Galaxy Television*, *Silverbird Television* among others continue to have an influence on the thought pattern(s) of the electorate towards the electoral candidates of their choice.

## 4. Conclusion

Television and politics are two inseparable entities. In Nigeria, the medium is a force to reckoned with. Although television and its operation in Nigeria is still being politicised, it is imperative in the growth and positive change and development in the Nigerian political terrain. This study concludes that television and politics are two inseparable entities and in Nigeria, the medium is a force to reckoned with. To this end, this research recommends that positive reforms and modifications should be made by the National Broadcasting Commission in the operations of television broadcasting. Furthermore, these reforms should be adhered to, so that the aim and objectives of the positive transformation in television broadcasting in Nigeria can be achieved.

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18 IBAGERE, E.: *Social Development, Television and Politics in Nigeria*. Ibadan : Kraft Books, 2009, p. 142.



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