

## Condom use and the popular press in Nigeria\*



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### Abstract

The increased acceptability and use of condoms by men in southwestern Nigeria is reflected in joking references to condoms in the comic-style popular press. Yet these references display an ambivalence about condoms that is mirrored in survey data and in interviews regarding condom use by rural Ekiti Yoruba men. This ambivalence, which is often couched in terms of health, has implications for the acceptance of government-sponsored HIV/AIDS-related educational programs. Because of the irreverence of comic-style newspapers and the 'unofficial' nature of their authority which coincides with popular attitudes about health programs, they have a credibility that could be useful in educating adolescents about sexually-transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

### Introduction

Knowledge about condoms as contraception and as AIDS prevention is a prerequisite to their acceptance and subsequent use. This paper examines attitudes toward condoms and their portrayal in the popular press in the Yoruba-speaking area of southwestern Nigeria. Through these everyday exposures, as well as through informal discussion, not only is information about condoms relayed, but their use is made more culturally acceptable. References to condoms in the popular press contribute to the formation of a popular consciousness which, along with factors of availability and education, support increased condom use in southwestern Nigeria noted in recent studies (Nichols et al. 1986:104; Caldwell, Orubuloye and Caldwell 1992:224; Makinwa-Adebusoye 1992:69).

The use of condoms reported in urban areas corresponds with my own research in a rural Ekiti Yoruba village in the northeastern part of Ondo State where condoms have become a common contraceptive option for men of varied ages. However, while many men found condoms to be beneficial, others expressed reservations about their use, often in terms of health. Rather than perceptions of condoms being simply a reflection of education or its lack, these different perceptions reflect, at another level, ambiguous attitudes toward health policies generated 'from on high'. As Bledsoe (1990:198) has observed: 'People do not necessarily respond to policy directives in ways outsiders might predict. African peoples set their own agendas for change in culturally specific ways'. While results from the Ekiti village case-study and open references to condoms in the popular press certainly suggest that their use is considered modern and hence culturally acceptable, the feeling

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remains that local knowledge regarding health should not be completely abandoned. A distrust of condoms is also evident in the popular press. Indeed, one of the primary characteristics of the popular culture generally is its ability to express these ambiguous attitudes toward modern and traditional practice and thereby to project new ways of thinking (Barber 1987).

A final section of this paper examines the implications of this ambiguity for our understanding of the health transition in southwestern Nigeria. Lindenbaum's conception of this process, as something being constantly created and redefined, is particularly appropriate here:

Rather than holding to models of 'pre-transition' and 'post-transition' societies, we might better view the modern transformation (however we come to define it) as emerging from the constant creation of new expressions of cultural difference and states of health, along with the redefinition of old ones (Lindenbaum 1990:907).

A sensitivity to the varied and sometimes contradictory perceptions of health and their sociopolitical dimensions underscores the negotiability of the meaning of health. Focusing on the popular press gives a view of this transition that is rich with nuances.

### **The popular press in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, newspapers and magazines have proliferated in recent years, possibly because of the increased price and scarcity of books. They range from weekly magazines owned by large publishing firms with regular production staff to intermittently published newspapers which appear to have skeleton production staff or may even be 'one-man' operations. Of these productions, there are three basic categories: the celebrity type, the love-story type, and the comics-'soft porn' type. The more regular weekly magazines such as *Vintage People*, *Prime People*, and *Today's Choice* run stories on the lives of celebrities interspersed with fashion hints, horoscopes and sensational stories about unusual births. Most of the popular romance newspapers, including *Fantasy*, *Super Romance*, *Romance International*, and *Super Story*, consist of line-drawings or photographic stills with inserted balloons for dialogue. As their names suggest, these newspapers present stories that are miniature soap operas in print, often with moralistic themes. The third example of the Nigerian popular press is the comics-'soft porn' variety such as *Lolly*, *Ikebe Super* (literally, *Super Ass*), and *Fun Times*, which are basically extended cartoon comic strips. Each has three or four stock characters who get into various, often ridiculous, predicaments as a result of their lecherous behaviour. Along with the stories of their escapades there are short 'one-line' cartoon jokes interspersed throughout these papers as well as advice columns on questions of health and sex.

Of the three types of popular press described here, the last is the most satirical and subversive. For example, in a recent story in *Lolly*, the notorious character Nackson disguises himself as Professor Jakujah, a famous Jamaican faith healer. During a revival meeting, his 'double-blind and cripple[d]' side-kick thrusts away his crutches and dark glasses, suddenly able to walk and see, while the gullible crowd shouts 'Hallelujah!'.<sup>1</sup>

The social and political import of these comic-newspapers should not be dismissed. In 1991 in Katsina in northern Nigeria, it was reported that 100 people died, 300 were wounded, and the offices of

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<sup>1</sup> The fake preacher who robs his congregation is a common theme of Yoruba popular theatre as well (Barber 1986:25), demonstrating the way in which the same idea may be taken up in different popular cultural media. In this particular story, Nackson also makes reference to the satirical song, 'Funwontan' ('Give Them Everything'), by Alhaji Pastor Oluwa Olugbenga Adeboye. This song with the chorus, 'Say Hallelujah three-and-a-half times, three times, etc.' parodies fundamentalist Christian prayer; the song is extremely popular in Nigeria today.

the publishers of *Fun Times* at Katsina were burnt, after it published a story considered to be disrespectful of the Prophet Mohammed (*Newswatch* 1991).

The importance of these comics – which are essentially soft-porn newspapers – lies in their twin qualities of subversiveness and inane escapism. While they rely on sensational headlines similar to those of the celebrity and romantic popular press, they offer something slightly different, in which:

Authority is simultaneously upheld and subverted and judgment is suspended. In this way, if in no other, a place is held open in the mind – a place which does not yield completely to the values that maintain the existing order of things (Barber 1987:68).

These comic-newspapers are a source of new ways of thinking and subsequently, acting.

### **Condoms in the popular press**

The discussion of the popular press in the remainder of this paper focuses on the comic-‘soft porn’ newspapers *Lolly*, *Ikebe Super*, and *Fun Times*. These comic-newspapers, convey a glimmer of contemporary popular consciousness on a range of current issues, including condom use and AIDS. While I was unable to do a systematic survey of their entire output, I bought issues between July 1991 and April 1992.<sup>2</sup> In the ten issues collected over the period, condoms were mentioned eight times (in five cartoons and in three text sections); AIDS was referred to in two cartoons and in six text references. Generally, references to condoms in the comics under consideration appear in three contexts: as jokes about contraceptives, ‘shocking’ obscenity, and satirical commentary on politicians (and implicitly, government programs). They may also be part of stories depicting the ‘war between the sexes’ in which, as in other forms of popular culture such as travelling theatre, the male perspective predominates (Hoch-Smith 1978; Barber 1986). It is through their combined familiarity, humour, and impertinence that these comic-newspapers make the use of condoms seem familiar and fashionable to a broad group of Nigerian men.

Condoms are referred to both directly and indirectly. In the ‘vulcanizer’ cartoon (Figure 1), the word condom is explicitly mentioned while the joke relies on the knowledge that condoms are also referred to as rubbers. There are also jokes that rely on puns based on trade names. In the rape court-case cartoon (Figure 2), one must know that Durex is a

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<sup>2</sup> I do not know how many comics were published during this period. Issues tend to come out rather irregularly even though they advertise that they are published monthly. With the exception of *Fun Times* which dates its issues, most of the cartoon-style popular press is identified by issue number only.

**Figure 1**

Note: Condoms are often referred to as rubbers, hence the joke about 'vulganizer' (vulcanizer; tyre repairman) patching the condom 'before the show'. It is unclear whether the pregnant woman is his fiancée, wife or 'outside girlfriend'.

Source: Suji (1991:3)

**Figure 2**

Note: Durex is the brand name of a popular British condom, commonly called 'Duress'. The raped woman refers to Durex in her answer to ensure that readers get the joke. The Yoruba phrase at the end of the sentence is loosely translated as 'No good one whose children are cursed'.

Source: Arowolo (1992:4)

**Figure 3**

Note: *Suya* (spelled out in condoms) is a type of spicy, spit-cooked beef. In the story a woman is referred to as 'my *suya*'.

Source: Yusuff (1992a:3)

**Figure 4**

Note: The poster soliciting votes with free condoms on the bottom right is juxtaposed with equally ridiculous posters advertising a lunch for a vote and miracles such as the walking lame, all suggesting exploitation of the politically gullible.

Source: Yusuff (1992b:5)

widely known brand of condom and that condoms are often referred to by this name. Furthermore, in everyday parlance, this brand is pronounced 'Duess'.

References to condoms play a more peripheral role in other stories. For example, condoms may be used to form letters for the title story, 'Suya' (Figure 3) or may be part of the background, as in the political poster soliciting votes with free condoms (Figure 4). This poster, of interest as it suggests an awareness of the ways in which condom distribution may be politically exploited, is juxtaposed in the same frame with equally ridiculous posters, one offering 'a free lunch' for a vote, another advertising the miraculous healing powers of the phony Jamaican professor described above.

The humorous, satiric, and obscene references to condoms suggest how these publications may be useful in understanding changes in popular consciousness. Yet they also show 'how difficult [it is] to get any evidence about it' (Barber 1987:4). What, if any, underlying attitudes to condom use do these cartoons reveal? Part of their humour derives from the naive responses given by the vulcanizer and the raped woman respectively who, unlike the clever reader, think condoms can be repaired or that duress is the same as a Durex condom. This complicity between satirist-cartoonist and reader cannot be assumed to reflect a change in consciousness about the acceptability of condoms. Nonetheless, the difficult question should be considered: how can we explain the change in attitudes that now allows for open discussion, to say nothing of published joking, about condoms? Can it be assumed that this change is simply a matter of availability and a 'trickle-down' effect in which the great Nigerian masses follow the footsteps of a trend-setting educated elite? The references to condoms in the popular press suggest that something more complex is going on.

The inexpensive, urban-based comic-newspapers discussed here, all of which are published in Lagos, are read by a wide range of Nigerians, both urban and rural, students and working people, and not necessarily by the well-educated elite. Their stories project a sense of being up-to-date and urbane. One must possess a certain cultural knowledge in order to understand the oblique references to condom use, names, and promotional strategies, even if one is not part of the trendy Lagos 'yuppie' set or high-ranking government circles. The broad-based popularity of these comic-newspapers suggests that innovative behaviour might become more acceptable through association with the sort of 'unofficial' modernity represented by the popular press and the popular culture generally, as distinct from the government-sponsored programs advocated by an educated elite. Indeed, an increasingly large proportion of the populace disillusioned by the present economic downturn<sup>3</sup> may be suspicious of official government-sponsored programs and more convinced by the portrayal of the same ideas in the unofficial popular press.

### **Condom use and knowledge in an Ekiti village**

The Ekiti village where this study took place is in a rural area about 40 kilometres northwest of Ado-Ekiti. At present it has a permanent population of about 3,500 inhabitants and is situated along a paved federal highway, allowing for frequent travelling to nearby towns and markets. Villagers also have access, if intermittently, to electricity and pipe-borne water. There are three primary schools, one

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<sup>3</sup> This disillusionment may be expressed in terms of health. For example, in southeastern Nigeria, a type of skin infection which has increased in recent years is called Babangida after Nigeria's President because people associate it with rising soap prices attributed to his economic policies (Alubo 1990:1078).

secondary school, a post office, a police station, a maternity clinic and dispensary, and a new hospital, jointly constructed with a neighbouring town. In addition to three chemist shops and the dispensary where condoms are irregularly available, condoms are readily available in chemist shops in nearby towns.

Research for this study, conducted from June 1991 to April 1992, began with a household census and open-ended interviews of 70 women aged 15–39 and 66 men aged 20–44, selected on the basis of age, on attitudes toward family planning and government population policies, use of birth-control methods, and associated health concerns. These interviews were conducted primarily in Yoruba by research assistants (a woman and a man) whom I alternately accompanied. The recorded interviews were then translated into English. These interviews were used to devise questions for a DHS-like survey of 302 men, aged 20–54, and 300 women aged 15–49, randomly selected by residence. The survey interviews, which included questions on knowledge of birth-control methods, contraceptive use, and family-size preferences, were conducted by two men and two women research assistants and myself in January–April 1992.

Unlike women, who primarily obtained knowledge about family-planning methods from maternity clinics and hospitals, men in the Ekiti village study learned about family planning through their exposure to outside sources. In the survey of 302 village men, 43.4 per cent reported getting information about family-planning methods from the public media (newspaper, radio, television).<sup>4</sup> The popular comic-newspapers discussed above were readily available to village residents who had the option of buying issues of *Lolly*, for example, when travelling to the nearby towns of Ilupeju and Ikole, both of which have well-attended, periodic markets, where I sometimes bought my own copies.

Since I did not collect these newspapers with the explicit intention of relating them to my survey work on contraceptive acceptability and use, I have no detailed information about readership. I certainly saw young people, mainly men, reading them in taxis and was also asked to lend my recently purchased copies to both young women and men in the village.<sup>5</sup> My impression of the popularity of these comic-newspapers is reinforced by focus-group discussions led by Barker and Rich (1992:202) who found that in the city of Zaria in northern Nigeria,

School-age youth who were attending school said that they got information about sexuality from popular magazines, such as *Ikebe Super*, *Lolly*, and *Fantasy*, as well as from 'love novels'.

Village men interviewed in the survey were well-informed about condoms: 94.7 per cent had heard of condoms and slightly over half (51.3%) said they had used condoms at least once in their lives (Table 1). Their awareness of condoms also was reflected in current widespread condom use by both married and unmarried men. Of the 175 married men surveyed, 38 per cent said they were currently using condoms, which represents 18 per cent of married men without girlfriends and 48 per cent of married

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<sup>4</sup> A recent survey conducted by the AIDS Prevention Council found that over 85 per cent of young Nigerians obtained information about AIDS through the media (*Sunday Guardian*, 29 March 1992:B4). Makinwa-Adebusoye (1992:68) notes that the mass media were the second most common source of information on contraception and reproductive health for women and men, aged 20–24, in three Nigerian cities.

<sup>5</sup> As in many towns and villages in the Ekiti area of Ondo State, most of the permanent residents of Itapa-Ekiti younger than 40 had at least some primary education and basic literacy. Ninety-two per cent of men and 70 per cent of women aged 20–24 have had some secondary education, mostly at the local secondary school where classes are conducted in English, the language used in the popular publications discussed.

men with girlfriends (Table 2). Married men therefore appear more likely to use condoms with girlfriends than wives. However, the actual frequency of condom use in these cases is not known.

**Table 1**  
**Men's knowledge and use of condoms by age (percentages)**

Age	Heard of condoms	Ever used condoms	N
20-24	96.4	42.7	110
25-29	92.4	50.0	66
30-34	96.8	64.5	31
35-39	100.0	55.0	20
40-44	93.9	63.3	33
45-49	94.4	66.7	18
50-54	87.5	45.8	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>94.7</b>	<b>51.3</b>	<b>302</b>

**Table 2**  
**Current condom use reported by men in an Ekiti village, January-April 1992**

Marital status	% using	N
Unmarried (N=127)	25.2	32
Married or engaged (N=175)	37.7	66
-without girlfriends (N=60)	18.3	11
-with girlfriends (N=115) of whom:	47.8	55
use with wives/girlfriends only	9.6	11
use with girlfriends only	26.1	30
use with both	12.2	14
<b>Total (N=302)</b>	<b>32.5</b>	<b>98</b>

Condoms were distributed free by local primary-health program workers in 1986 and gained popularity for several reasons. First, they are easily available either through free distributions or from the local dispensary and chemist shops. Secondly, the benefits of condom use have been well publicized at the local maternity clinic and in the public media. Finally, many married men prefer to use them with their wives shortly after childbirth both to prevent early pregnancy and because their wives are breastfeeding.<sup>6</sup> Since the traditional two-to-three year period of abstinence from sexual intercourse with one's wife following childbirth has diminished in practice to twelve months on average (compare with Caldwell, Orubuloye and Caldwell 1992:227), married couples use condoms in order to resume sexual relations while maintaining the appearance of the traditional two-year spacing. One man who used condoms in this way explained:

Q: How long will you continue using Durex with your wife?

<sup>6</sup> The continuing preference for two-to-three year spacing between children is reinforced by the belief, still maintained by some Itapa women and men, that semen can affect the mother's milk, causing the nursing infant to sicken and sometimes die. Condoms, unlike other contraceptives, prevent the transmission of semen.



A: Three months after delivery I will begin, then [until] nine months, at least once a month.

Q: When do you stop using it?

A: If my child is up to a year, I will stop using it.

Q: So you will be using Direct [joking].

Other married men still abstain from sexual relations with their wives for a year or more:

Q: Will you be using contraceptives immediately your wife delivers to prevent pregnancy?

A: It can't be possible because if I have sex with my wife during this period, it will affect her and in turn the child and the child may die. So I prefer going to a prostitute for sex and after I will be using condom.

Married men in these situations have little interest in having children with 'outside women' (girlfriends or prostitutes) and use condoms to prevent pregnancy. However, of the 115 married men who report having current girlfriends, 44 (38%) report using condoms at least some of the time with these women (Table 2).

Several men, when asked what, if any, contraceptive they used when having sexual intercourse with their wives after childbirth said that they had used condoms with no ill effects:

Q: Have you been using pregnancy control after your wife delivered?

A: To me personally I don't have interest in any wife outside my matrimonial home. With the introduction of various pregnancy controls like condom, Duress, with the use of these I can still have sex with my wife. In my own case, I usually make love to my wife with the use of condom.

Q: Has your wife had any problems resulting from the use of contraceptives?

A: No health problem at all.

[26 years, secondary school, driver, married, 2 children]

Q: Do you use contraceptives to control pregnancy immediately your wife delivered?

A: That particular time, what I normally do is that when my wife delivers and rests for about 40 days, at this time she will have recovered her normal self, I will go and buy Duress. I use Duress since I don't cherish flirting about with outside women.

Q: Has your wife complained of any ill-health as a result of the use of Duress?

A: No ill health has developed.

[41 years, primary school, radio technician-farmer, married, 2 children]

Others were less convinced about the safety of condoms. Some women were afraid that condoms would affect menstruation:

Q. What are the health effects of using condoms?

A. If one uses them more than necessary, menstruation may be prolonged and there may be much blood at times. This means that if one discharges during sexual intercourse and the the male semen doesn't mix with the woman's semen [vaginal secretions during intercourse], then during menstruation, there will be a rush of blood. When a condom is

used, it may not allow the woman to discharge [secrete fluid] for a long period or even at all, and this may cause back pain for the woman.

[32 years, teacher, married, 3 children]

Both women and men were concerned about condom breakage, as the following comments reveal:

If condoms rupture, they can make pregnancy possible and if part of the condom accidentally cuts and remains inside the woman, it can block and stop an intended pregnancy, leading a woman to go for a D & C.

[Woman, 35 years, trader, married, 6 children]

I don't use it because what people say about Duress does not encourage me to use it. People say it can melt and I don't want anything to melt inside the vagina of my wife.

[Man, 22 years, secondary school, mechanic-farmer, married, no children]

The simplest and less dangerous system I use is the withdrawal system. Nothing will be dropped. I don't use Duress because people say it is dangerous because it can cut inside the vagina and can be harmful to the woman.

[Man, 38 years, degree, teacher-farmer, married, 4 children]

These attitudes have more than local currency. In a recent newspaper article, a reporter in Lagos observed after interviewing prostitutes that 'Everywhere there was an increase [in price] if use of condoms was involved. Their excuse being that the device may dismember due to friction leaving a shred' (Archibong 1992).

Other, more serious, health concerns associated with condom use were raised by one village man:

A: What we are discussing and why I mentioned Durex is that I've not been using it but [it's] what I've learned. You know I'm a student of health education and this is part of the health aspect of this thing. Now when I mentioned Durex, I can't help observing side effects.

Q: What are the side effects of Durex?

A: These Durex may at times be contaminated for instance, at times it may be exposed at the tail, when you use a carrying-disease condom, it may be the type of disease like AIDS, it will transfer the disease to the woman. And at times when you have an exposed Durex, on releasing you may release to the woman and as such she [takes in the semen] and becomes pregnant. And these Durex at times are very dangerous. Something made of rubber, it may cut [break] inside the womb. The [fact] is so grave it means a sudden operation to remove it and on knowing it, it may lead to the death of the woman.

[Man, 31 years, secondary school, teacher-farmer, married, 3 children]

These three men's fears were based on hearsay rather than actual experience as none had actually used condoms. Yet there is some basis for their concerns.<sup>7</sup> For example, the occurrence of recent scandals about counterfeit drugs suggests that sub-standard or outdated condoms are possibly being

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<sup>7</sup> For other analyses of health concerns associated with condom use in Africa, albeit in different cultural settings, see Forster and Furley 1989:152 (Uganda); Taylor 1990:1027 (Rwanda); Irwin et al. 1991:923 (Zaire).

sold.<sup>8</sup> Also condoms may tear for some men due to improper storage or inadequate size (Orubuloye, Caldwell and Caldwell 1992:12) As one man explained:

I have heard of Durex but I don't use it because if I use it, it will tear. I can't say precisely whether it is because I have a bigger penis but when I've attempted to insert my penis, each time it tears so I have denounced using it.

[41 years, secondary school, teacher-farmer, married, 5 children]

Further, men's fears of contaminated condoms may be taken more seriously, given the knowledge that they are sometimes used more than once:

A: Anyway, I have something like that, that is I used to buy Duress. That is what I do.

Q: You'll be using it for how long?

A: You mean that...if I use one and wash it, I take another and use it, next time I use it, that is it; two times.

[35 years, secondary school, tailor-farmer, married, 4 children]

The idea of contaminated and disease-carrying condoms is also expressed in the popular press. In one story in *Fun Times*, for example, a woman uses a condom with her boyfriend, keeping it along with the semen it contains, to use in making love medicine. However, these more sinister associations with condoms are unusual. Only one man described condoms as possibly contaminated with AIDS. Indeed, condom use in this Ekiti village is not associated with AIDS but rather with contraception. This attitude may change if AIDS cases are diagnosed among villagers and as AIDS and safe sex are more widely discussed and publicized in the popular press and elsewhere.

#### **Condoms and AIDS in the popular press**

The importance of condoms in preventing AIDS is being mentioned in editorial columns, medical advice columns, and in feature articles in the popular press. For example, in a recent issue of *Lolly*, the editor included a general letter to readers about a schoolmate who had contracted AIDS and died. His advice is informal yet to the point:

I know like me here, you enjoy sex. If you want to continue enjoying it, there is a few facts you need to remember. There is a growing number of AIDS carriers now in Nigeria. The damn thing is fatal with no cure ... so be more careful now!

Always use a condom for protection unless you're 100 per cent sure about your partner. And bear in mind that everytime you have sex with a different person, you increase your chances of becoming infected so next time you meet someone you fancy, think. Please stay alive for *Lolly's* sake. Till next month, AIDS no go catch us o! (Ademoronti 1992).

The personal tone of this entreaty differs from more formal government efforts, with posters of a skull-and-crossbones with the caption 'AIDS Kills', with news coverage of internationally-sponsored

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<sup>8</sup> In early 1992 there were several news-stories about the sale of expired or adulterated drugs by Nigerian chemists (for example, Agbambu 1992).

AIDS workshops, and with educational campaigns such as the Ministry of Health program held recently for students at the University of Ibadan.<sup>9</sup>

The difficulty of informing people about condom use in preventing AIDS is exacerbated by the difficulty of persuading them to change their behaviour. A recent study of male and female students at the University of Ife suggests that even with the knowledge that condoms can prevent AIDS transmission, many students prefer not to use them (Odebiyi 1992:59). While 70 per cent of the 120 interviewed felt that condom use prevented AIDS, only 31 per cent were in favour of condom use (Odebiyi 1992:61).

Odebiyi's main prescription for changing behaviour is a variant of the 'just say no' solution:

Religious, educational and other social institutions must be involved in the campaign to uphold the virtues of individual discipline, self control and decent living at all times ... The government, too, must re-launch a much more rigorous and comprehensive publicity campaign ... (Odebiyi 1992:62).

While this approach may work with some, something less institutional and official as well as more intimate and private might be more convincing. Odebiyi (1992) suggests the possibility of bringing in people with AIDS to speak with students (compare Makinwa-Adebusoye 1992:70). On a wider scale, increased coverage in the popular press, similar to what is currently being done in commentaries and cartoon stories about condom use and AIDS could be useful here.<sup>10</sup> One example, published in a daily newspaper, *The Mail*, is the cartoon-column 'Talking Rawbitch' (Durojaiye 1992) which has carried AIDS-related information and is sponsored by the African Centre for Science and Development Information in Lagos. Further, Dr. Tiley-Gyado, co-ordinator for the National AIDS program announced that the Federal Ministry of Health would soon start to show films on AIDS (Jimoh 1991:18).

## Discussion

Barber's (1987) thoughtful examination of popular arts in Africa, concludes with a discussion of the Nigerian television series *Ile-iwosan, Hospital*. Her analysis illustrates the particular way that popular culture in southwestern Nigeria reflects more general attitudes toward health, which relate, in turn, to attitudes about condom use expressed by Ekiti village men and the comic-newspapers previously discussed.

The purpose of this television series was to educate the public about the benefits of modern medicine and to encourage attendance at hospitals and clinics; however, a more ambiguous message regarding medicine was conveyed. The general theme of naive villagers becoming enlightened and

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<sup>9</sup> At this program held in April 1992, medical officials came to the University of Ibadan to give a presentation to men and women students, entitled, 'AIDS – Impacts and Implications on Nigerian Youth'. A rumour circulated that women students were going to be tested for the HIV virus and as a result, only eight women attended (Efunnuga 1992:1).

<sup>10</sup> One possible solution might be to offer small grants to publishers of popular comic-newspapers to start a series focusing on problems associated with sexually-transmitted diseases, specifically aimed at a student audience. In Australia, for example, the comic magazine, *Streetwise*, covers health issues and is aimed at teenagers 'for whom conventional sources of information are not succeeding' (Borthwick 1988:105). Published by the Department of Education, Employment and Training and the Department of Primary Industries and Energy, the magazine is funded by small grants and is produced by the joint efforts of a small staff and young people, the magazine's target audience.

cured by modern medicine was contradicted by the portrayal of the hospital staff as arrogant bullies and of villagers as more understanding and sometimes correct in their diagnoses. As Barber (1987:66) explains:

What emerged was an attitude to medicine and to authority that was split by an irresolvable internal contradiction, around which every episode pivoted. This profound ambiguity ... is so pervasive that one could see it as a basic feature of contemporary Yoruba popular thought.

This ambiguity (between medical authorities who are enlightened but intolerant and villagers who are backward but wise) is also partly reflected in the representation of condoms in the popular press and by the Ekiti village men's attitudes about condom use. Condom use as promoted by the government is accepted as the modern 'new system', as one village man noted:

You know according to the new system now, I mean relating to the issue of children, there has been a government campaign in relation to that. You can use, according to the policy of the Ministry of Health, Duress, contraceptives and so forth.  
[36 years, degree, education officer, married, no children].

Yet at the same time, some men did not care to use them, preferring known methods, such as having outside girlfriends:

A: Since my child was born, the only time I met with my wife, she didn't become pregnant and since then, I've been keeping a girlfriend. I have never used contraceptives – I don't like using contraceptives personally.

Q: Some people say that they use Durex or condom. How do you view this contraceptive?

A: They are saying that but I have never used it before. And they're advertising that it is good, but I am not interested in condoms.

[23 years, degree, applicant-farmer, married, 1 child].<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the popular press takes great delight in elaborating on its readers' sophisticated knowledge of condom use. However, these cartoons hint at the impractical, political, and sometimes sinister aspects of condoms as well. The 'vulcanizer' may think that condoms can be repaired but both he and the reader believe that they may tear. Readers may laugh at the rape victim's misinterpretation of the word, duress, but they also know that, ridiculous as it is to think that a rapist would use a condom,<sup>12</sup> there are times when condom use is not practical.

An awareness of this contradictory popular attitude toward medicine is important in understanding changes in the perception of AIDS in Nigeria. It suggests that different sociopolitical interests not only affect the extent to which information is accepted but also whether AIDS is considered a health problem. For example, in an article entitled 'Much Ado About Aids,' Malik-Yamah (1992) argues that there are more pressing health problems in Nigeria.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it is not simply a matter of relaying

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<sup>11</sup> While rejecting contraceptive use, this man said that he supports the government's population policy of four children per woman. But he wants to limit his family to four children by spacing and abstinence.

<sup>12</sup> In a recent rape case in Texas, USA, the rapist was asked to use a condom by his victim as protection against HIV-AIDS. Although he was later indicted, a State grand jury initially refused to bring charges presumably because the request for condom use implied consent (*The New York Times* 1992)

<sup>13</sup> See Bledsoe (1990) for other discussions of AIDS in the editorial columns of African newspapers.

information about AIDS and affecting attitudes and behaviour, but also a question of who is conveying the information and in what form it is communicated. There must be multiple sources for disseminating this information, in the 'unofficial' popular press as well as in government-sponsored 'official' programs, if its message is to gain credibility among a broad group of Nigerians.

In both the responses of village men and in cartoons in the popular press, the knowledge and use of condoms are considered to be enlightened and modern behaviour; while suspicions persist that while 'they're advertising that it is good', it may not always be. It is partly because of their ability to capture these contradictory attitudes that the comics-'soft porn' newspapers are so popular in Nigeria. Their 'unofficial', often offensive character, may lead us to ignore them. Yet as Caldwell (1977:103) has observed, lurid as the newspapers and magazines which focus on sexual liaisons may be, 'taking a single important example, the impact of the widely read *Lagos Weekend* must be very considerable on both individual reader and the society'. The comic-'soft porn' newspapers, as well as the ever popular *Lagos Weekend*, represent a valuable means that should not be overlooked, both for gauging shifts in the popular attitudes toward condoms and for advocating their use in AIDS prevention.

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