

Television Broadcasting in Africa: Pioneering Milestones

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Abstract — The television remains one of the most important medium worldwide for disseminating information and providing entertainment. It has overtime become one of the greatest gifts of electronics engineering to mankind. Although the history of television broadcasting in other parts of the world is widely known (Europe: In the year 1936, North America: In the year 1939), not much is known about the African experience. The first terrestrial television broadcast signals in Africa occurred on Saturday October 31, 1959 and belonged to the Western Nigeria Television Service (WNTS). This was a critical milestone in Television history and today Africa boasts of over 600 television stations (excluding repeater stations). This paper examines events that led to Nigeria being the first country to introduce television broadcasting in Africa, reasons why other prominent African countries failed to achieve this feat and looks at factors that contributed to the birth of the largest terrestrial television network in Africa : The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) which presently boasts of 94 Television stations. We also examine pioneers in Colour Television broadcasting and Satellite Television broadcasting in Africa and conclude with an analysis of the effect Television has had on the emergence of Nollywood as the second largest movie industry in the world.

Index Terms — Africa, Broadcasting, Nigeria, Satellite, Television.

I. INTRODUCTION

Although it is difficult to state categorically who invented the television (John Logie Baird, Vladimir Kosma Zworykin and Philo Taylor Farnsworth all mentioned as inventors) what is without dispute is television's impact on our world. It has become one of the world's favourite medium of entertainment and one of electronics engineering's best gift to mankind. The Television has helped in information dissemination, research and entertainment to mention but a few.

In less than a century television sets have become a permanent fixture in most homes. Televisions studies and media analysis is an established research field in major nations of the world with studies on the impact of television, demographics and other associated research. The television media industry is also a large and profitable one with multibillion dollar profits from films, commercials, documentaries and other sponsorship avenues. Television broadcasting's origins in other parts of the world have been properly documented and are widely known, however not much is known about television's broadcasting's origins in Africa. A search through academic libraries and online electronic resources often yields little or no results. This

paper seeks to highlight the giant strides made by the African continent and gives the critical milestones of television broadcasting in Africa. The paper is arranged as follows: Section two looks at the first television station in Africa; considers the circumstances that led to its conception and the role of key parties in its formation. We also consider reasons why two prominent African countries: Egypt and South Africa did not launch television broadcasting earlier. Section three is information about analogue television systems in Africa and its distribution among African countries. In section four another critical milestone we look at is colour television broadcasting in Africa and countries that were pioneers in this area. We then delve in section five into the metamorphosis of the Nigeria Television Authority which has overtime become the largest terrestrial television network in Africa. In section six we consider pioneers in Satellite television broadcasting in Africa. And in section seven we consider Nollywood. Specifically we evaluate the effects Television has had on the growth of the Nollywood film industry. The paper is concluded in section eight.

II. HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Africa is the second most populous continent in the world after Asia and one of the most endowed in terms of natural resources. For a greater part of her history she was colonized by foreign nations. In the 1940's the clamour for self rule which had begun decades earlier had intensified among African nations. Going into the 1950's one of the results of the clamour was shared governance between African's and the foreign powers in most countries and total independence for a few countries. It was against this backdrop that television broadcasting came to Africa.

In the 1950's Nigeria had three regional governments: Western Region, Eastern Region and Northern Region and a federal government at the centre. The regions were led by Nigerians while the federal government was British led. Radio was the major broadcast organ of the day. Radio had been introduced in Nigeria in 1932 [1] by the British. It was then known as the Empire Service of the British Broadcasting Commission (BBC) and broadcasts were federal government (British) controlled. In 1956 a policy of the Western Region (Western Nigeria) was criticized on Radio by an official of the British federal government, the premier of the Western region Chief Obafemi Awolowo in return sought to use the same

medium to counter the criticism but was refused. This was where the seed for the eventual launching of the television service was sown. At series of conferences in London in 1957 and 1958 where the constitution of Nigeria was being drawn Chief Awolowo proposed that regional governments be allowed to control their broadcasting affairs. [1]

This proposal was enthusiastically supported by other Nigerian politicians and regional governments were constitutionally allowed to set up and maintain their own broadcasting outfits. This led to the launch of the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service (WNBS) and eventually to the first television station in Africa: Western Nigeria Television Service (WNTS) [1]-[3]. The other regions also set up their own broadcasting organs: Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Service (ENBS) and Broadcasting Company of Northern Nigeria (BCNN).

A. Western Nigeria Television Service (WNTS)

Western Nigeria only had the means to fund television broadcasting at this time but lacked the technical/ engineering expertise required for this kind of venture. Television broadcasting was still at its conception stage in most nations of the world and was still young in advanced nations. For instance in 1956 television broadcasting had just begun in Australia, Austria, Sweden and Spain [1]. Western Nigeria turned to a British company and entered into a partnership with Overseas Re-diffusion Limited [1]. Overseas Re-diffusion Limited based in Britain not only provided the technical/engineering expertise for the new television station, they also manned the news and programmes department. Overseas Re-diffusion Limited was a subsidiary of Associated Re-diffusion a company jointly owned by British Electric Traction Limited and Re-diffusion Limited. Overseas Re-diffusion was successful in introducing Television service in Hong-Kong on May 29, 1957 and it was to them that Western Nigeria entered into a partnership with.

Television Broadcasting commenced Saturday October 31, 1959 in Ibadan capital city of Western Nigeria. The initial coverage area was around 4800-6000 km [1]. Transmission was limited and was about four hours each day (6:00pm - 10:00pm). Most homes were without television receiver sets as television sets were not manufactured/assembled locally and hence had to be imported. This made them very expensive and thus the government had to establish viewing centres in strategic cities/towns in the then western region. People had to congregate around the television receiver sets. The programmes shown on WNTS cut across the gamut of conventional broadcasting conventions of the times. Programmes included sports, theatre performances/dramas, news, women programmes etc. There was also a strong emphasis on educational programmes especially the sciences as this was in line with the philosophy of the Western Region government who were keen on educating a large portion of the populace. A major engineering challenge was the problem of repairing and servicing equipments. There were no spares

available in Africa and no servicing personnel available. To repair/maintain equipments they had to be sent to Britain and this was usually expensive as the transportation cost was added to the maintenance/service cost. Reference [1] recounts an incident concerning an Ampex quad videotape recorder which the station bought complete with kit and spares (it had been used before and was not brand new). It however refused to work and was left unrepaired till a young Nigerian engineering graduate newly employed by WNTS attempted to repair it and eventually succeeded. Engineering staff at WNTS Ibadan often had to devise innovative engineering solutions since they were obviously handicapped by lack of funds and availability of service personnel.

WNTS in Nigeria was thus the pioneer television company in Nigeria and indeed Africa. Fig. 1 shows a Nigerian newspaper's report of the launch of WNTS.



Figure 1. The Daily Times of Monday 2, November 1959 reporting the launch of WNTS the previous Saturday with a picture of the unveiling of the WNTS plaque by top government officials. Clearly seen in the picture is Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Western Region Premier) and Sir James Robertson (Governor General) [1]

Table I lists some selected African countries and the year they commenced television broadcasting. In the case of Botswana although a private television company was in existence before, we give the date when the government owned television station began transmission.

In the next subsection we consider the case of two prominent African countries and the reasons why they did not achieve the distinction of being the first to commence television broadcasting in Africa. We will specifically

consider Egypt and South Africa and their respective experiences with television broadcasting.

B. Egypt

Egypt had plans to commence television broadcasting in the early 1950's. Having gained independence earlier than most African countries (The Egyptian Republic was declared on June 18, 1953) it was only logical that they consider delving into television broadcasting. Television broadcasting was paramount in the mind of President Gamel Abdul Nasser and concrete plans were made to start broadcasting on a large scale. However other political events delayed the takeoff of their plans. Just like when the second world war (a political event) disrupted the growth of the television industry in Europe, the British–French–Israeli invasion of the Suez canal (lasted from October 29 1956 - March 1957) delayed the birth of broadcasting in Egypt [4].By the time the dispute was over and Egypt were about to re-start her television project, Western Nigeria Television Service (WNTS) was already born. Egypt entered into an agreement with Radio Corporation of America (RCA) in 1959 not only for the setting up of a television network but also for the ability to locally produce television receiver sets [1],[4]. This was actually good foresight on the part of the Egyptian authorities unlike Western Nigeria where many of the locals did not have access to television sets. Egypt began Television broadcasting at exactly 7pm on Thursday July 21, 1960. Egypt also recorded some firsts in television broadcasting in Africa. They launched three television stations simultaneously unlike other African countries that typically launched one station first; also Egypt did not rely on foreign workers to help them in launching operations. Their staffs (engineering and other divisions) were all locals [4]. Finally Egypt was one of the first African nations to canvass local manufacture/assemble of television receiver sets.

C. South Africa

South Africa also could have been the first African country to start broadcasting but for the reluctance of the then apartheid government to do so. The apartheid government gave the excuse of heavy financial obligations. Moreover the government expressed reservations about the benefits of Television broadcasting and its effect on society. They therefore felt that it was an investment they could not go into as they lacked the pre-requisite manpower as South Africa was facing shortage of manpower. The South African government also claimed that they would wait till TV technology (specifically colour TV) broadcasting was fully developed in order to avoid a situation where they began with black and white systems and had to switch to colour TV systems. The government therefore promoted radio as an alternative to the television. Then South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) chairman Pier Meyer while promoting the superiority of radio said [5]:

TABLE I
BEGINNING OF TELEVISION BROADCASTING IN SELECT
AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Country	Year
Nigeria	1959
Egypt	1960
Congo, Morocco	1962
Gabon, Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda	1963
Ethiopia	1964
Ghana	1965
Mauritius, Tunisia, Zaire	1966
Zambia, Madagascar, Niger	1967
Equatorial Guinea, Libya	1968
Togo	1973
Central African Republic, Tanzania, Mozambique	1974
Angola	1975
South Africa	1976
Guinea	1977
Benin, Lesotho, Swaziland	1978
Mali, Mauritania, Somalia	1979
Namibia	1981
Burundi, Cape Verde, Chad	1984
Cameroon	1985
Sao Tome & Principe	1991
Rwanda	1992
Gambia, Guinea-Bissau	1995
Malawi	1999
Botswana	2000

Reproduced from the book: Nigerian Television Fifty years of Television in Africa by Oluyinka Esan with permission of the publishers AMV Publishing, P.O. Box 661 Princeton, NJ 08542 USA.

“In our time the radio has become the most intimate friend of the moving and busy man. Unlike the film and written word, it does not bind one to a specific place. One can put a small radio in one's pocket and listen while busy with something else”.

It can be said that South Africa did not have television solely because the government was not too keen on the idea for political reasons. They were arguably the most technologically developed country in Africa at that time. The apartheid government felt it would weaken their grip on power. The decision on introducing television broadcasting became a big issue especially as other smaller, less wealthy African nations had introduced television already. On December 15, 1969 the government bowed to pressure and instituted the Meyer Commission [6]. Its terms of reference were to *“make recommendations about the desirability and nature of television service for South Africa”*. On April 27, 1971 the South African Government announced that television broadcasting was set to begin in South Africa. Test transmission started on May 5, 1975 and exactly eight months

later precisely on January 5, 1976 The South African Broadcasting Corporation Television SABC-TV commenced broadcasts [6]. South Africa has then gone ahead to create one of the most successful broadcasting markets in Africa.

III. ANALOGUE TELEVISION SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

Analogue television system as the name implies are television systems where the television picture together with associated sounds are encoded using analogue encoding techniques and then transmitted on frequency carriers (either Very High Frequency (VHF) or Ultra High Frequency (UHF)). The main analogue coding techniques are National Television System Committee (NTSC), Phase Alternate Line (PAL) and Sequential Colour with Memory (SECAM). NTSC originating from North America was used in North America, parts of Asia, Central America and parts of South America. At the moment NTSC is not in use in any African country. It was initially in use but most African countries have migrated to PAL. PAL and SECAM are the analogue coding techniques used in Africa. PAL developed in Germany has many variations and is used by almost all African nations excluding the French speaking nations. Majority of Africa's French speaking nations uses SECAM. SECAM originating from France is the pioneer European colour television standard. Variations of PAL used in Africa include: PAL B, PAL B/G, PAL B/H and PAL I. Variations of SECAM used in Africa are SECAM B, SECAM B/G, SECAM K and SECAM K1. Fig. 2 is a pie chart showing the distribution of the various variants of PAL and SECAM in use in Africa.

At the moment plans are underway in Africa to transit to Digital television broadcasting. The pioneers in this area are South Africa and Kenya. In South Africa there are simulcasts of both analogue and digital television. This commenced in November 2008 and is scheduled to be completed Tuesday, November 1 2011. Kenya has also has simulcasts of both analogue and digital television. Digital broadcasting begun on Wednesday December 9 2009 and is scheduled to be completed in June 2012.

IV. COLOUR TELEVISION BROADCASTING IN AFRICA

The Island of Zanzibar (now part of the nation of Tanzania) was the first African nation to introduce Colour Television. It named her television station Television Zanzibar (TVZ). The idea for TVZ was initially conceived in August 1971 and came to fruition on March 9 1973 when trial transmissions started [7]. The government entered into an agreement with PYE TVT a London based Electronics Company. PYE TVT was bought by Royal Philips Electronics Inc. in 1976. The station was equipped with a 5 kW UHF transmitter [7]. Full broadcasting began on January 12, 1974 and usually lasted for an hour as the station did not possess recording equipments [7]. In other words the station practised live recording.

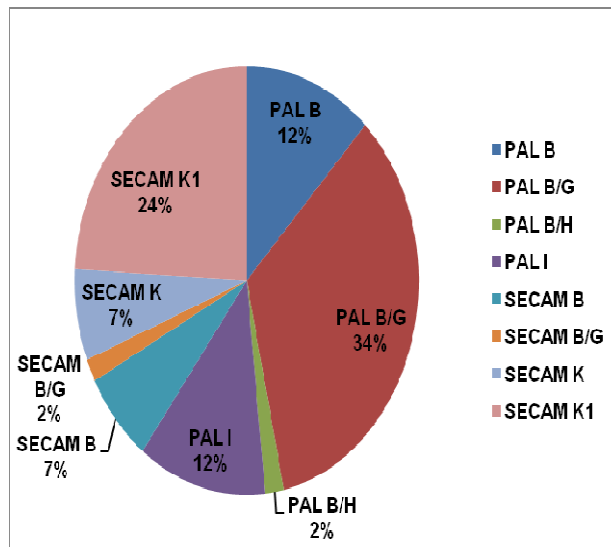


Figure 2. Pie Chart showing the distribution of the various analogue encoding schemes in Africa.

Later in the year the government decided that it needed to expand its facilities and invest in staff training. To this end 12 engineers were sent to Plymouth Polytechnic in Britain and other production staffs were sent on courses all over the world [7]. Government also invested in recording equipments and subsequently transmission time increased from an hour to two. Nigeria was the second African country to begin colour television broadcasting. The then Benue Plateau State (now split into two states: Benue and Plateau states) started colour broadcasting in 1975 one year after TVZ. The name of their station was Benue-Plateau Television (BP-TV) and they commenced transmission using the Phase Alternate Line (PAL) analogue encoding system on October 1 1975 [8]. South Africa joined the league of colour television broadcasters when she commenced broadcasting on January 5 1976 as she immediately started broadcasting in colour.

V. THE NIGERIAN TELEVISION AUTHORITY(NTA)

After the launch of WNTS by the regional government of Western Nigeria, the regional government of Eastern Nigeria made the decision to launch television operations too. They decided to partner with the same partners WNTS partnered with: Overseas Re-diffusion Limited and this gave rise to Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation Television (ENBC-TV) [1]. Broadcasting commenced on October 1 1960 (Third in Africa after WNTV and Egypt).ENBC-TV had two stations; one in Enugu and the other in Aba with both stations transmitting simultaneously [1]. Both stations had no videos recorder so live programming was the order of the day. It was a herculean task as staff had to shuttle between both stations but the operational difficulty eased as time progressed. The Northern region of Nigeria at this time was the only regional government without a Television station and the politicians

made attempt to remedy this. The government of Northern Nigeria went into a partnership with Granada television Limited (now known as ITV PLC) and Radio Television Kaduna (RTK) was launched on March 15 1962 [1]. Similar to the experiences of other regions the government had to establish communal viewing centres as many homes did not have television receiver sets. The federal government of Nigeria also decided to launch television operations. The federal government teamed up with NBC International and in April 1962 the Nigerian Television Service (NTS) was born [1]. Nigeria therefore had a total of four television stations (WNTV, ENBC-TV, RTK and NTS). Nigeria became a republic on October 1 1963 and experienced a three year civil war (July 6 1967 – January 15 1970). By the mid 1970's two new stations were created (Mid Western TV-1973 and Benue Plateau BP-TV- 1975). As more states were created in the new republic the states all rushed to establish their own television stations. As many as 10 stations had already concluded plans to establish television stations. Nigeria was then under the military rule and the military government decided that there was need for a central television body in order to foster national unity amongst the various regional units in the country [1].

To this end the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) was set up in May 1977 but was retroactively activated from April 1976. The idea was to have a central television identity for the Nigerian people. NTA swallowed the older TV stations (WNTV, ENBC-TV, RTK, Mid Western TV and BP-TV) and acquired the facilities of the 10 states that had concluded plans of commencing television broadcasting [1]. It also upgraded the television stations from black and white to colour television broadcasting. NTA also set up television stations in states without any and has made it one of its cardinal duties to do so. More states were created in Nigeria in 1987, 1991 and 1996. NTA is still true to its ideals and often has more than one television station in a state. NTA presently boasts of 94 television stations in Nigeria [9] making it the largest single terrestrial television network in Africa [1], [9]. Coverage of the country is complete as cheaper television receivers sets are now commonplace. As the number of Nigerians abroad has increased NTA has also expanded its reach to still serve them. NTA is available online at AFRICAST [10]. AFRICAST is an online Television network that has agreements with a number of African television broadcasters to broadcast their content online [10]. NTA is also available on Bright Entertainment Network (BEN) a television station in Britain.

VI. SATELLITE TELEVISION BROADCASTING IN AFRICA

Satellite television is the second most common form of television broadcasting in Africa after terrestrial television broadcasting. Unlike cable television that requires the deployment of cables across long distances, satellite television basically requires a satellite dish and a receiver at the customer end.

The first commercial satellite television broadcaster in Africa is Multichoice. South African Multichoice launched Digital Satellite Television –DStv on October 6 1995 [11]. DStv is the biggest satellite service in Sub-Saharan Africa and broadcasts on both the Ku band and C band [11]. It has a wide variety of both audio and video channels on its service and users can also self select their languages [11]. Canal Horizons is the satellite television provider favoured by the French speaking countries in Africa. Canal Horizon is French owned. Another prominent satellite television provider in Africa is Egypt owned Nilesat. It launched operations on April 28 1998 and shortly thereafter added another satellite [12]. Nilesat not only broadcasts in Africa, but in the Mediterranean, Turkey and Iran [12].

VII. TELEVISION'S EFFECT ON NOLLYWOOD

Nollywood is the metonym for Nigeria's cinema industry. It is borrowed from the metonym Hollywood (for America's cinema industry) and Bollywood (India's cinema industry). According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) [13] Nollywood has overtaken Hollywood as the world's second largest film producer second only to Bollywood. It is also the most popular film industry in Africa and the most widely distributed. UIS posits that two things are responsible for Nollywood's explosive growth: Reliance on videos instead of film and multilingualism [13]. English is the most popular language for movies in Nollywood (44%) followed by indigenous Nigerian languages which are often subtitled in English (Yoruba: 31%, Hausa: 24% and Igbo: 1%).

Nollywood's history is long and can be traced back to the advent of Cinema in Nigeria. In Reference [14] we are told that the British introduced Cinema Film Units (CFU) which were simply mobile vans that by and large showed films extolling the British empire. Indigenous theatre groups were a response to the CFU's. At the beginning of Television broadcasting in Nigeria most of the television stations did not possess recording equipment and were thus constrained to live transmissions. Their entertainment programmes usually consisted of dramas and they often had to depend on the theatre groups for performances. The theatre groups had to adapt to television performance. In Reference [1] the author informs us that WNTS had to lean heavily on Yoruba travelling theatre troupes for performances in the local Yoruba language. WNTS had to also recruit amateur actors for their English dramas. In Nigeria two television related events led to the evolution of Nollywood: The need to include indigenous content in television programming and the massive expansion of NTA. The theatre groups increased their sophistry in response to this needs. In no time most of these performances started being recorded on analogue video. Along the way, the penetration of "Cassette technology" [15] in Nigeria aided the growth of Nollywood. With a Betacam camcorder, producers could record performances and save on Betacam video

cassettes or Video Home System (VHS) cassettes. These videos began to be marketed and soon gained popular acceptance. Since they were saved on VHS cassettes and were usually watched in homes they began to be popularly called “home videos”. Nollywood was born. Private television stations in Nigeria like Africa Independent Television (AIT) and Minaj Broadcast International (MBI) began showing Nollywood movies on terrestrial TV. In December 2003 Multichoice created a channel on its satellite television service (DStv) called African Magic dedicated to show African movies most of which are Nollywood movies. Nollywood movies are typically patronized by Africans (both at home and in the Diaspora)

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed stellar moments in the history of broadcasting in Africa. We examined countries that are pioneers in Africa in the television broadcasting industry. Nigeria was the first to introduce television in Africa in the year 1959. Zanzibar in modern day Tanzania was the first to introduce colour television broadcasting in the year 1974 and South Africa blazed the trail in the area of Satellite Television broadcasting in the year 1995 with the birth of DStv. We also gave a timeline of television’s advent in some African countries. This paper examined reasons why Egypt and South Africa (Two prominent African states) did not begin television broadcasting earlier. We also give the distribution of analogue television systems in Africa. Finally we traced the origins of the Nigeria Television Authority (Africa’s largest terrestrial network) and concluded with an analysis of the effect Television has had on the emergence and growth of Nollywood. We observed that the governments of most African nations used television as a means to assert their nations individuality and to provide a forum for national education and enlightenment. Television was also used as a means of fostering national unity.

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