

Development of radio in africa



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Topic: The development of radio in African countries, including South Africa

In this academic assignment I will be describing the historical background and development of radio in Africa as well as in South Africa. I will also provide information about the present situation of radio today in Africa and South Africa.

Radio was first broadcasted in South Africa in 1924. There has been three different phases that have occurred since the development of radio in Africa and South Africa. The first phase is the historical beginning of radio on the African continent. These were the first stages of development which would lead radio to become a mass media in the future. Radio was started in Africa when the European, British, Belgium, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian settlers arrived on the African continent and started to take control of the different countries. This was known as the Colonial period. These settlers started radio broadcasting to fulfil their own personal needs and interests. Only at a much later stage did the colonisers introduce radio services for the local and indigenous people of Africa. (http://www.transculturalwriting.com/radiophonics/contents/usr/downloads/radiophonics/A_Brief_History.pdf; accessed on 27 February 2014)

The second phase in radio broadcasting now started with the development of the radio in South Africa and Africa after the colonial period. “ The domestic broadcasting systems of all European powers were at this time state (not government necessarily) monopolies such as the British independent public service model of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) or the French

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government radio stations. The Portuguese permitted some private broadcasting by colonial settlers in their colonies, but the main picture was one of national state monopolies” (http://www.transculturalwriting.com/radiophonics/contents/usr/downloads/radiophonics/A_Brief_History.pdf; accessed on 27 February 2014).

Some of the first broadcasts on the African continent took place in South Africa. In Johannesburg (the Association of Scientific and Technical Services), Durban (Durban Corporation) and Cape Town (the Cape Peninsula Publicity Association), the radio stations were given licences to broadcast. These three radio stations started their broadcasting in 1924 but very soon after their establishment they all found themselves in debt. This is when the government decided that a commercial option would not provide the service that they required and wanted. In 1927 a man named I. W. Schlesinger, an insurance entrepreneur that purchased the three failing radio stations, decided to connect the three stations together into one network and called it the African Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). But in 1929 the ABC fall into a shortfall situation owing to several implications such as poor landline connections, high costs of programme production and because of the difficulty enforcing the licence payments. The ABC eventually reversed its financial position and within a couple years they were able to carry out capital improvements, this was all because of the schemes that that had implemented. The main audience at this stage were elite English speaking people. Most of the radio’s shows were broadcasted in English, which showed the development of the inequality of the languages used in broadcasting. Afrikaans was domination in the rural areas. In 1931, the ABC then changed

its policies as they introduced a 30minute segment done in Afrikaans, and then in 1936 they had changed the 30minute segment to a 90minute one. There was no broadcasting done in any African language. John Reith, Director General of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), was invited to South Africa in 1934 where he recommended a new form of broadcasting for the country. (Teer-Tomaselli & de Villiers 2014: 153 – 154)

In 1936 The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was established. Very soon after the establishment of the SABC, they began to move away from the structure and way of broadcasting that was done by the BBC. There were issues with the unequal use of different languages. In June 1938 the first broadcast quality carrier link was set up between Grahamstown and Johannesburg. In 1939 a short wave receiving station was established near Panorama outside Pretoria. The main issue with the radio broadcasting was that there was dominantly English being spoken and only in 1939 did the radio start to bring in Afrikaans. The radio never catered for the black native people as there was no mention of African languages during broadcasting. In 1948 the National Party came into power in South Africa and they and the Afrikaner Broederbond acquired more domination in broadcasting. In 1950 the SABC introduced their first commercial radio station known as Springbok Radio. Springbok Radio's programming was aimed at the white English speaking people. Only after 1943 did they start broadcasting their programmes in Afrikaans as well. It was only in the 1960's that they started broadcasting in African languages to cater for the black native people who listened to the radio. This was when Radio Bantu was developed during the Apartheid era, this allowed the black people to keep up to date with the

political issues in South Africa. The radio stations now started to use VHF (Very High Frequency) and FM signals and networks. There was now an establishment of many African languages used in the broadcasting of programmes and music on the radio. From 1980 till 1984 there was the introduction of independent commercial radio stations such as Capital Radio, Radio 702 and Radio5. At the beginning of 1996 there were 22 radio stations in South Africa, out of those 22 stations 11 of them were broadcasted in the official African languages. Some new radio stations that were introduced were SAfm, KFM and Radio Lotus. This was the development of radio broadcasting in South Africa. (Teer-Tomaselli & de Villiers 2014: 160 – 162)

Radio development in the rest of Africa happened as follows: “ in 1927 in Kenya, in 1932 in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), in 1933 in Mozambique, and in 1935 in the French Congo. The earliest radio in British West Africa was not broadcast by wireless transmission but via wired services-subscribers had loudspeakers installed in their homes to receive the service. This was how broadcasting began in Sierra Leone in 1934, Gold Coast (now Ghana) in 1935, and Nigeria in 1936. Unlike the wireless services in Britain’s other colonies, these were created with native African listeners in mind. Then in 1936 the British colonial administration decided to develop radio broadcasting throughout its African colonies as a public service for native people. In Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), World War II provided an incentive with major consequences for the development of radio in that territory. A small radio station was established principally with the objective of carrying news (in African languages) of the war’s progress to the Families of Soldiers fighting with the British forces in Africa and Asia. Radio also

developed rapidly in other parts of Africa due to the war” (http://www.transculturalwriting.com/radiophonics/contents/usr/downloads/radiophonics/A_Brief_History.pdf;

accessed on 27 February 2014).). These radio stations after the war were now focused on educating, informing and entertaining the African listeners. These radio stations had very little independence as the government had strict control over them, only from the 1960’s and onwards did they start gaining their independence. These radio services relied on shortwave connections to be able to reach distant places.

The situation of radio today is still very important. Most people in Africa and South Africa have access to a radio where they can be constantly updated, informed and entertained 24/7. Radio has played as a major nation building feature in Africa. Direct broadcasting by satellite was started in the early 21st century. Radio is still a dominant mass medium throughout the African continent. Every country in Africa has at least one radio station. Radio’s now days are more technologically advanced and have much better network signals that allow for longer distance connectivity to that radio station. We can now even listen to the radio on our phones which allows for mobile and portable connectivity. More and more people now have access to radios as they are inexpensive. People in the rural areas now have access to radios which allows them to be kept informed by the news every day. Radios are an important feature in people’s everyday lives. Everyday new inventions and creative innovations are being formed in order to keep continuously developing the radio into an advanced electronic mass medium.

To conclude, radio was first developed to satisfy the needs, wants and desires of the settlers that colonised the African continent. It went through a stage of racial discrimination where no African language was used, as well as minimal usage of the Afrikaans language, in the broadcasting of the radio channel. Later when languages became equal and more channels were developed in order to accompany for all races, cultures and languages. Eventually radio had been developed throughout the African continent and most people had easy access to it. Now the radio is used to inform, educate and entertain its viewers. Radio is now one of the most important forms of mass media because every person has access or owns a radio. Radio will forever live on and will never stop developing.

References

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