Chapter 7
Whose TV is it Anyway?
An Examination of the Shift towards Satellite Television in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The thesis of this chapter is that the rise in popularity of satellite television in Zimbabwe was not mainly driven by the capabilities of the new technology, but by dissatisfaction with Zimbabwe Television (ZTV). The chapter will begin with a discussion that problematises the idea of what constitutes new technology in the African and Zimbabwean contexts. The focus then moves to the content broadcast locally and how a segment of the Zimbabwean population have turned away from ZTV to have their media needs and gratifications met from satellite TV. There is an extended discussion of propaganda and quality of programming, which are hypothesized as the driving factors for satellite TV's rise in popularity. A discussion of the cultural influences that satellite TV programming has on the Zimbabwean viewing public is included, and the chapter will conclude with some thoughts on the future of satellite television in Zimbabwe if changes in local broadcast TV programming come about.

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, most people accept the idea that we are living in a globalized, interconnected world. One consequence of globalization is the divide that exists between developed and developing countries in information and communication technologies (ICTs). The divide surrounding access to and available types of ICTs has become pronounced. This book is premised on the idea of interrogating new ICTs. This chapter's relevance to this discussion is premised on the notion that "new technology"

is a relative term, with some technologies that are considered older in developed countries rightly being explored as new technologies in developing countries such as Zimbabwe.

The interconnection that ICTs allow provide a much easier and freer flowing media stream of informative, educational and entertaining programming than existed in the past. In Zimbabwe, however, there is one local television station (ZTV) that is the majority of the local population's only televised source of news and entertainment. A government appointed board controls the content of programming on ZTV. In a diverse, global world, what population would feel satisfied with access to one TV station with a limited and controlled program set?

When the technology of satellite TV was introduced into that media landscape, it allowed the Zimbabwean audience more choice in programming. As the major approved purveyor of satellite television in Zimbabwe, DStv, represented by Multichoice Zimbabwe, became the provider of choice for Zimbabweans who had the money to pay for the necessary equipment as well as the monthly charge in foreign currency. Having one main satellite provider of choice is a common experience on the African continent and depends largely on where you live. According to Wright (2008) "Most African countries obtain their satellite services from South Africa-based Multichoice's DSTV or France's Canale 5" (p. 44).

The major objective of this chapter is to provide the reader with an appreciation for the TV media landscape that exists in Zimbabwe and how satellite TV, which is a relatively new ICT for much of the population, has grown in popularity for a complex variety of reasons. A secondary objective it to make clear that Zimbabwe has experienced an extremely difficult decade and that it is within this *current context* that the issues explored need to be understood. Readers should realize that any exploration of the importance of satellite TV, local TV and cultural influence is extremely complex and cannot be divorced from historical context.

Finally, readers should grasp the notion that if the media space in Zimbabwe changes, then the impact on DStv's audience and Zimbabwean television's audience is unknown and will have to be explored in that new context.

BACKGROUND

It is important to remember that in Zimbabwe, as in many African countries, a large portion of the population get their information and entertainment from radio. This chapter however focuses on satellite TV, but readers should note that there is a larger radio than TV audience in Zimbabwe.

Having made that distinction clear, it is important now to consider the idea of what constitutes a "new ICT" in the Zimbabwean context. Why? The term *new ICT* is often used as if the definition is clear and universal. What needs to be recognized is that the term is neither clear nor universal and it is crucial to understand this in order to locate Zimbabweans on the spectrum of ICT exposure. It is this understanding that underpins this chapter's inclusion in a text on new ICTs.

While perhaps a little overstated, Polikanov and Abramova's (2003) point that "…high-brow analysts should not forget that many Africans have never seen a TV set…" (p. 50) is germane. *Africa Business'* Tom Nevin makes a similar point when he argues that the "continent strives under a paucity of ICT infrastructure with many people having never even made a telephone call" (p24). The idea that to some, a telephone would be a new technology, while to others a TV would be a new technology is often not one that is considered when new ICTs are discussed. Most discussions of new ICTs focus on the latest technological developments in that realm, which most often occur in developed countries with strong and widespread ICT infrastructures. While this is not wrong to do, it is also not an accurate global interrogation of the notion of what a new ICT is.

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