

## The Scramble and Partition for Content: The Place of Africa in a Globalised Programmes Market

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### Introduction

Like in the pre-colonial days, there is a new struggle and partition for Africa. This time the struggle is not limited to physical territories or the natural resources, it is in fact, the struggle for the heart and soul of the African through its mediated content.

Every year, around the world, programme makers and producers converge for the business of selling content. The global programmes market run into billions of dollars. Well established programmes markets have emerged after the patterns of the globalization of the world market space. With media content highly monetized and commoditized. Outcomes are regional marketing hubs for programme content market and distribution. In America, there is **NAAB**, in Holland there is **IBC Amsterdam**, in Singapore is **BROADCAST ASIA**, **MIPTV CANNES** for France, **SITHENGI** in South Africa and perhaps **AFRICAST** in Nigeria. These are globally recognized content markets whose monetary value is too large to appropriate.

Content, according to Esiri (2002) is the soul of the broadcast industry. Content is so crucial because it fuses the multi-dimensionality of entertainment culture and politics and of course profit. The television and video format or medium especially presents itself as a good vehicle for the portrayal of programme content. Thus programme content is a big income earner. Because the broadcast industry, is content driven. The American film and TV Industry according to Milano (2010) is comprised of 3.5 million professionals including advertisers, lawyers, actors, directors, make-up artistes and the rest. **Comcast**, for instance is the US's largest cable company with revenues of 36 billion dollars in 2009. It runs 10 specialty channels. NBC is the general electric owned entertainment group that includes universal studios, Its revenues are grossed at about 15.4 billion dollars. The group includes TV network and TV studio, eight specially run channels.

Aside its potential of money making, the television, has emerged as a crucial area of study in popular culture. It is indeed the subject of intellectual and academic discourse. This is so because of the level of impact that it can bring to bear on the behavioral patterns of people and societies. Television, Video and film have become over the years not only veritable tools for entertainment, information, and education; they have more essentially become a tool of nationalism. All over the world the modern communicator is in the forefront of cultural promotion or preservation. That is why the programmes market, is not just a market of products, it is market place of ideology . philosophy ,politics and diplomacy.

## The Programmes Market

At a typical programmes market what you find are content producers big production houses like MAGNUM, MGM etc who come in with big libraries of productions that they may have created over the years for purpose of marketing. Others are in it for purpose of selling channels. Some content providers offer or invest as much as 1.7 billion pounds per year according to MIPTV NEWS (2010) Yet others are in it to offer free channels free to air, without immediate financial benefits but for political and religious objectives. The Russian media for instance is offering at Cannes 2010 free News channels; this is obviously to challenge the monopoly of informational flow by CNN. Therefore the programmes market is one of varied priorities. Whilst some are in it for profit, certainly others are there for the political. That is why content producers and marketers are constantly at loggerheads with the regulators.

The programmes markets themselves are run with a mixture of the serious and the banal. Usually there is the key note, which deals with topical issues and trends in broadcasting but with academic perspectives. For example MITV(2010) Keynote was on "changes in the way audiences consume information in the digital age". The paper addresses the challenges of digitization, which has become front burner in contemporary media discuss. Stars like Idris Elba of BBC came to introduce his show (*luther*) and projected it to attract the international market and indeed future market.

On the business side, according to Sahab (2010) despite the dearth of studios, MIPTV Cannes, has become huge event for people creating and monetizing content. And it is international. He states that MIPTV can expect a strong showing from smaller companies and **Indies**. Claudia Sahab had stated that 2010 will be busier than the former. She notes that the Spanish company Televisa saw huge growth in its ready made series sector in the preceding years due to their exposure at the programmes market. She noted that countries like Hungary are buying ready made telenovels. Other Countries buying include those of Africa, like Nigeria. Sahab said she expects this trend to continue beyond 2010 as this will bolster the novatele business in Spain. She also added that switch off from analogue currently taking place across Europe is proving to be a good thing for product sellers. Of course the growth of DTT is going to provide numerous challenges and opportunities for content providers. She believes that the new production strategy is to monetize content on various platforms. He states that, the idea is trying to reach the audience where they are. To basically fish where the fishes are and that seems about telling the story across multiple platforms.

## Africa in the Global Programmes Market

So, what is the place of Africa at the global programmes market. Unfortunately African participation is abysmally low at these international markets. At MIPTV 2010 only HITV NIGERIA came to Cannes. Sadly it only came to buy, not to sell. According to Zubair (2010) "we came here to buy content for our rapidly expanding Pay TV". Asked if he was selling any content, he said his company was planning to do so but admitted that the quality of content from Nigeria was low and non competitive.



What this establishes is a global disequilibrium, Africa goes to the international markets only to buy, but sells next to nothing. But what does Africa buy? Africa buys content that is Western and Euro-centered. For instance, one of Mnet's programme sources for the very popular and well patronized 50 channel DSTV Africa, is ITV studios global entertainment of the US. ITV also sells programmes to BBC Africa, NBC hallmark, National Geographic among others. According to Edmunds (2010) it is clear that Sub-Saharan Africa is full of promises as far as its predisposition for acquisition of programmes is concerned. Africa offers a huge market potential to Europe. She states that a case in point is MTV network Africa which exceeded its 2010 audience forecast by 20 percent, just as MTV BASE racked more than 90 million viewers by the end of 2009.

Therefore, Africa is a huge market for foreign content. With digitization, African scholars, producers and policy framers must look forward to the challenges that it portends. This paper postulates that there is great disequilibrium in the marketing, acquisition and distribution in the world and the earlier Africa braces up to this new scramble the better.

### The Issues

Charles Okigbo (2000:3) states that Globalization does not simply refer to the objectiveness of increasing interconnectedness, it also refers to cultural and subjective matters, namely, the scope and depth of consciousness of the world as a single entity. Hamelink (2002:33) also cited in Okigbo (2005) says globalization refers to the worldwide expansion of media production and distribution companies that trade on the emerging global media markets. He adds that this expansion is evidently facilitated not only by technological developments, but also largely through the pressures on countries to open their domestic markets to foreign supplies and the concomitant neo-liberal claim that cultural products should not be exempted from trade rules. The delivery of cultural content has therefore become a crucial issue. Cultural content has assumed several relevancies, from ordinary entertainment essence to the political, economic, diplomatic and sociological. Cultures have become commoditized or commercialized leading to huge imports and exports of cultural products like film and video..

The consequence of the commoditization of culture is in an increase in the exportation of foreign cultures into other countries, especially through film and video.. Cultural products, specially broadcast content and film now enter or penetrate more homes and with greater ease. This has the tendency to influence people's perception and create for them new meanings and priorities. Nations will therefore need to take a more than a passive interest in the development of their film industry, as one of the veritable ways to insulate their cherished indigenous cultures, from other ravaging foreign contents. Underpinning the competitive rationale in international culture communication and the role of the motion picture, Justus Esiri (2002:1) points out that,

*The motion picture has become a tool for maintaining both local and international competitive advantage. Motion pictures drive passions and emotions, as well as influence with tremendous power, the psyche of a people. The tool has been used by the western powers to several strategic ends in the past few decades.*

He adds that most countries will guard their broadcast airwaves more than they would their land borders. Noting that motion picture capture the essence of a people, their market values, practices, places and culture, both locally and internationally. Where a concerted national effort is made to harness the potential of the broadcast industry, the reward goes beyond cultural expression. The motion picture have served as an informal medium for testing foreign policy. The national security of a nation can be threatened by the unrestricted and indiscriminate influx of foreign motion pictures, just as it can by an invading army. Motion picture producers are therefore charged with the daily responsibility of molding and reinforcing the appreciation of our national heritage, culture norms and traditions, in the minds of our people.

However, with economic and technological inequalities increasing globally and with a fast developing and advancing Europe, the gap between the so-called developed nations and the developing in the area of cultural exchange seem to be expanding rather than decreasing. Capturing this scenario, Loui Iguisi (2002:1) writes,

*The battle in a multi cultural world maybe to a large extent fought in the media, media people are human, they have their own cultural values. With regards to other cultures their position is ambiguous. They are in a position to direct peoples attention –to create an image of reality, which to many people becomes reality itself. All except the most sophisticated citizens carry the believes about cultures reflected in their favorite television shows, radio programmes and newspaper.*

Therefore the need for cultural identity has increased among many nations. Obafemi believes that various literary coinages and philosophy were all angled towards this new form of imperialism and that for the African to liberate himself he would have to use the weapon of his culture. He states that, “Culture as an arm of superstructure has a crucial role to play in the cultivation of the African humanity in all its dimension, –economic and political in particular. Taste and values, fashioned on pre existing imperial hegemonistic canons must evolve”.

This, is what has been described expedient challenges to western literary domination, which treats indigenous aesthetic traditions and formats of the post-colonial world as inferior, subclass, subsidiary of the established western literary canon. It is apparent from the analysis above that for us to realize the notions of equality or equity in the consideration of cultural or artistic content in the global equilibrium, the Africans and African artist especially will have to evolve their own notions and evolve a deliberate strategy to conquer this disparity in the content market. Supporting this position further, Olu Obafemi (2003:31) states that,

*The main plank of such evolving aesthetic cannon derives from the location of theory on the artistic heritage and legacy of pre-colonial indigenous forms, including ill full utilization of proverbs, incantations, riddles and aphoristic languages, incorporation, and recreation of ancestral and cultural myths. Also concern with issues of political and economic import to society. Certainly this appropriation of indigenous aesthetic poses a strong challenge to the stronghold of Euro-centric format and hierarchy and lead so crystallization of an afro centric criterion.*



Also advocating a new orientation for African art Chinweizu (1980:240) recommends that “our culture has to destroy all encrustations of colonial mentality, and on the other hand, map out new foundations for African modernity. This cultural task demands a deliberate and calculated process of syncretism”. He believes further that for African art to de-colonize the new synthesis must be within the parameters of African tradition rather than outside it. He makes the point for African flavour which is a matter of contemporary realities and life tones as well as of the cultural inheritance from the past. Africa needs its own programme bank. Africa needs to evolve a home grown production company that can originate authentic African programmes for the international market, African block busters..A situation where Africa buys from the west to sustain its rapidly expanding broadcast industry 400 and 13000 channels as is the case in Nigeria without an equal investment in our own content can only mean capital flight from Africa to the west. The West will seem to continue to gain more. It should be acknowledged that though a few contents have sold from Nigeria like **Jennifer** (2009) **FIGURINE** (2010) and **Mainframe production**, placed side by side the volume of business is heavily against Africa. Sadly rather than form marketing groups as has been done by the Francophone world to negotiate and drive down prices, what you have today is a disjointed monopolistic tendency where one product is sold to **HITV**, **MULTIMESH**, **AIT**, and **NTA**, separately with premium dividends culminating in favor of the western content provider. Collaboration is the key thing in the programmes market, African production houses and even buying houses will need to collaborate

### **The Indian Example**

India has the benefits of successful international outfits such as **Sony Entertainment Television** and **Zee productions**, which is, Indian owned and broadcast in Asia, Europe and the US. With a potential 1 billion audience the Indian market is one great potential. According to Tilak (2010) From 2009-2010, the Indian TV industry is projected to grow, at an annual compounded rate of 14.5 percent. She projects that increases in DTH subscriber base and entry of new players in increase the space will lead to exponential leaps in the Indian market. She postulates the crucial question –with such an exciting growth story as Indian TV experiencing, wouldn’t the international TV industry expect to see India’s major network buyers rushing out to gobble up contents at events like MIPTV. She states that the answer is no. According to her India has a thriving television production business and these production houses churn out content that is topical culturally relevant and in a language that is still understood by the masses. While production houses may be in the business of mass production they indeed have a grip of their target audience.

So in India, productions from the West struggle for shelf spaces and only rarely do productions break through the cluster. Tilak adds that Hollywood cinema are so culturally alien to Indian culture that acceptance is limited to titles that are high on action or graphic content and larger than life like: **Rambo**, and **Godzilla**. For her for international producers to break into the Indian market they must consider the language issue. She states that there is a plethora of Hindi language general entertainment channels to choose from and viewers don’t really feel the need to watch dubbed content. .

## Challenges

Can Africa establish an equilibrium with the other markets of Asia, Europe and America? Can we like India develop our own industry to the level of export? It is not as if this challenge is itself new but we are increasingly facing a new face of neo-capitalism through the programmes market. As noted earlier the imbalances in cultural export in an assumed global village and the obvious tendency of the big to swallow the developing has led to a new consciousness of an imperative for the developing cultures of Africa to promote their own culture, preserve it and export it.

## Nigeria Broadcast Law

The Nigeria broadcasting code (1999:6) in its general principles, SECTION 0.3.1 states in the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph that shall essentially match the best in the profession anywhere in the world, yet be distinctly Nigeria. Whereas the Cultural objectives of broadcasting in Nigeria provide that broadcasting shall provide through programming, a service essential to the maintenance and enhancement of national identity and cultural sovereignty. Also to seek, identify, preserve and promote Nigeria's diverse cultures.

The Economic Objectives states that broadcasting shall promote the nation's economic goal. Nothing in the code advocates a competitive thrust for the industry in the international market. Section 11.10.7 states that the principles of reciprocity in programme exchange shall be adhered to in this matter. The code however does not state how this rule is to be executed or implemented.

## Collaboration As A Strategy

The African Franco phone countries are seventy countries with 200 million people. To position themselves in the global programme market, they have collaborated to set up the **Organisation International de la Francophonie**. According to Coffie (2010) more than 1500 productions reach international eyes from their organization each year. To him, coming to MIPTV and other programme markets is essential to their dream of creating value for their works. He states that some national delegates such as Senegal and Benin are attending the programmes market to get an opportunity to meet the world with their products. Nigeria and other African countries will need to deliberately and consciously come together forge partnership that produce programme banks from where content can be monetized with potential of marketing to the rest of the world. According to Paul Zilk (2010) Japan more than any other territory in Asia has been successful in churning out international co-productions. He states that Japan has traditionally been making co-production with partners like France TV, ZDF, but are now expanding their horizon. They are also looking for a group of international producers who share their values but have different skills to contribute.

Still on collaboration, Russia and China recently signed a co-production deal worth 3million pounds on a drama titled, **The Ultimate Secrets of Warrior**, the series which was filmed location in Russia, China and France, is the first international drama co-production between the countries.



Also, Singapore's Media Development Authority has long been involved in constructing treaties and encouraging deals that bring Asian content to the international market place. The key focus according to Christopher Chia, CEO of MDA, has been to forge partnerships aimed at international co-creation. Among MDA'S co-development deal is with West Screen, the development agency for the film, TV and digital media industries in the South West of England. According to Chia, the multi-platform, content across continents initiative aims to encourage Singapore and UK producers to develop concepts with multi-platform potential and cross-media elements. One of such partnerships of note, is an agreement between Singapore's MYchina Channel and Shanghai Media group's distribution arm, **Wings Media** to co-produce two infotainment series. One of them, **foreigners** in China, looks at how expats in China adapt to the local culture.

Talking about Co-production, Clement Calvet (2010) says when something works, why change it? One example of a co-production that has really worked is **The Pillars of the Earth** a movie based on Ken Follet's novel about the building of a 12<sup>th</sup> century English cathedral. The partners for the **pillars of Earth** were drawn from across Europe, and North and South America and includes Austria's public broadcaster ORF, German free TV Group, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Canada's the movie NETWORK and movie central, Spain's Sogecable, Hungary's TV2 and Latin America's Leda Films. Sony pictures world wide XQUISITION GROUP, UNIVWERSUM FILM HOME ENTERTAINMENT, Germany's DZ bank, Canada's FIDIC, the National bank of Canada are also in on the project.

## **Conclusion**

Though a number of South African companies are heading for Cannes and other programme markets in the world, much of Africa is doing nothing to balance the programmes trade relationship between Africa and the rest of the world. Perhaps of note is the singular effort of James Makawa who has played a pivotal role in bringing programming from sub-sahara Africa to the US. In 2005, he co-launched THE AFRICA CHANNEL. whose investors include the Congolese basket baller Mutombo. The Africa channel has been a prolific buyer of programming from Sub Sahara but his effort is like that of a drop of water in desert.

HITV in Nigeria is also attempting to build studios. According to Zuibair 'we want to use the Tinapa studio to develop local music, TV advertising and content production' One can only hope that this dream materializes. Already, the entire TINAPA project is shrouded and delayed by bureaucratic bottlenecks. Therefore, it is imperative that African producers take the content challenge seriously. We must understand the market, We must know the language needs. Content and service providers must focus on understanding the economics of the business. Producers must find the right partners and recruit the right partners. If we don't we are into another age of cultural imperialism, another predator face of globalization.

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