

# Gateway to Africa: The History of Television Service in Late Colonial Nigeria

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## Abstract

The constitutional changes that took place in Nigeria in the decade before independence granted significant authority to the colonial state's three regions. The 1954 constitution gave both the federal and regional governments the authority to legislate on broadcasting issues. In 1959, Western Region leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, established the Western Nigeria Television Service (WNTV), a service considered the 'Gateway to Africa'. This article historicizes the processes and politics of the founding of this station, revealing metropolitan efforts to control the television service's direction in order for it to remain aligned with British cultural and imperial interests. It also shows the BBC's attempts to stall the successful launch of a service that it considered a competitor. The study argues that the broadcasting service's creation was an act of dissent against British colonial rule and its cultural imperialism and sheds light on how the Western Region's political elites embraced emerging public communication technologies to undermine colonialism.

## INTRODUCTION

The period after World War II in Africa coincided with the rise of nationalist movements as Africans demanded constitutional changes that gave them more electoral franchises and representation in governance. In Nigeria, between 1946 and 1960, the colonial administration enacted three constitutions: the Richards Constitution of 1946, the Macpherson Constitution of 1950, and the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954. These constitutions and the changes resulting thereafter laid the framework for the political organization and structure of Nigeria in the late colonial and early postcolonial period. In 1939, Governor Bernard Bourdillon divided the protectorate into three provinces: North, East, and West. When Sir Arthur Richards became governor in 1946, he introduced a new constitution that was aimed at fostering unity between the different provinces of the country, most especially the isolationist North. Unfortunately, the constitution's introduction of regional councils in the North, East, and West led to a regionalization that set the foundation for subsequent ethno-political rivalries and strife, and the sub-nationalist competition that was a serious challenge to forming a nation-state during decolonization and in the period

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after independence. By the late 1950s, Nigeria's different regions enjoyed significant sovereignty. The Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 made this autonomy possible; it introduced many significant changes, chief among them regional autonomy and a federal system of government. Thus, the regions shared power with the neutral federal government, enabling them to pass bills on different policy issues ranging from taxation to the provision of healthcare. These constitutional changes are essential to understanding the politics of the creation of the Western Nigerian Television Service (WNTV) in 1959, a service that was considered the 'Gateway to Africa'.

This article historicizes the process and politics of WNTV's founding, arguing that the creation of WNTV was an act of dissent against British colonization and its educational influence in the region. During the period leading up to WNTV's creation, the Western Region's political elites, specifically the Premier, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, wanted to steer the region's development. Television was a major part of this development plan. Awolowo sought to devote 50 percent of the new television service's programming to education. This study also shows that Western Nigerian leaders wanted to use this service to celebrate and promote local culture, thereby dismantling notions of European cultural superiorities that were preponderant in the colonial school system. Furthermore, the leaders intended to use WNTV to advance the political interests of Nigeria's Western Region, to extend mass media power beyond the nation-state to other parts of the African continent. Despite the colonial authorities' efforts to thwart the television service's creation and to control its direction, Awolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro,<sup>1</sup> and their African and British collaborators resisted, remained resolute, and advanced a service that spurred competition from other Nigerian regions as well as neighbouring Ghana that was already politically independent of Britain.

WNTV's importance to the history of African mass media development cannot be understated. As the first African television service, it served as a model for local services across the African continent. Thus, this study – which sits at the intersection connecting the politics of decolonization, regionalism, and nationalism – is a contribution to the scholarship on late colonialism and its legacies. It sheds light on how African leaders employed emerging public communication technologies and used the limited authority that the European white supremacist powers granted them to improve the conditions of their people and to undermine colonialism. As such, this article is also policy-relevant to contemporary African leaders as they contend with the vestiges of the colonial project, the continued colonial deterritorialization of their nations, and the rising neocolonial *Machtpolitik* that has emasculated their nations.

## BROADCAST MEDIA IN NIGERIA

In 1935, Wired Radio Service (also known as ReDiffusion) was introduced in Nigeria. During World War II, colonial authorities in Nigeria used the radio broadcast service to inform Nigerians about the war, especially those African units fighting on behalf of Great Britain, and also to transmit propaganda with the goal of enlisting support from the colonies' various peoples. Radio also served as an essential tool for establishing connections between the metropole and colony. The early radio service was a system of broadcasting in which the programmes were sent through landlines to listening boxes. In Nigeria, the Post and Telegraph Department was responsible for distributing this service.<sup>2</sup> By 1946, this service was made publicly available to those who could afford to rent the listening boxes in Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Kano, and Zaria and it offered about 18.5 hours of programming a day. In 1948, there were about 8,000 subscribers in Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> The primary content broadcasted was British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) programming and this was supplemented with local news items and some African music.<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Chief Anthony Enahoro was the Minister of Home and Midwest Affairs.

<sup>2</sup> Luke Uka Uche, *Mass Media, People, and Politics in Nigeria* (South Asia Books, 1990), 37.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Alan Waterman, *Juju: A Social History and Ethnography of an African Popular Music* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 92.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Armour, 'The BBC and the development of broadcasting in British colonial Africa 1946–1956', *African Affairs* 83 (332) (1984), 360.

context for the expansion of the service was Arthur Creech Jones's 1948 dispatch to colonial governors reminding them that broadcasting was an 'instrument of advanced government, and thus they need to improve communication between governments and governed and to enlighten and educate the masses as well as to entertain them.'<sup>5</sup> To help with expanding broadcast communication, the Colonial Office (CO) sought the assistance of the BBC and its staff were given the mandate to carry out a survey on the state of broadcasting in Africa and to help with creating, training, advising, and improving service.<sup>6</sup> To foster collaboration between the BBC and the CO and its work in broadcasting across the world, the CO formally requested in 1946 that the BBC should second a staff member to the CO to be responsible for broadcasting. Oliver J. Whitley was selected for this position and he worked in collaboration with John Grenfell Williams, the Head of the BBC's Colonial Service. Charles Armour argues that with these developments, 'the drive, ideas and current philosophy of the BBC could be injected into the Colonial Office system at the center and propagated through official lines of communication such as confidential circulars, dispatches and letters to Governors, Chief Secretaries'.<sup>7</sup> Keeping to its mandate, the BBC assisted Nigeria in the establishment of the Nigerian Broadcasting Service in 1951. About 10 percent of the staff were on loan from the BBC to help in training and supporting the new broadcasting service. The BBC-backed Nigerian Broadcasting service produced radio programming that was heard around the country.

## THE REGIONAL POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

In historicizing the process leading to the emergence of WNTV, it is important to examine the highly partisan regional political landscape. At the time of Sir John Stuart Macpherson's arrival as the Governor General of Nigeria, there were three regional governments in existence. In 1950, Macpherson introduced a new constitution that effectively created four governments, three regional governments and one central government. The three regional governments all shared responsibilities in the central government and the central government also had some control over what happened in the regional governments. For example, the central government could veto legislation passed by the regional governments; yet, before 1952, the regional governments did not have the power to amend legislation emanating from the central government that was within 'regional competence'.<sup>8</sup> This led to continuous conflicts between the regional governments and the central government, most especially the Western Region Government (WRG) and the central government.<sup>9</sup> One early conflict was the WRG's proposal that the regional Council of Ministers should have authority over government officials and that the governors should only be able to exercise authority over civil servants or government officials after consultation with the Council of Ministers.<sup>10</sup> The conflicts between the regions and the central government increased and by 1953 there were constitutional crises in the Eastern Region and riots in the Northern city of Kano.<sup>11</sup> Holding Nigeria together as one country became tenuous as the Northerners threatened to secede and other regions started clamouring for self-rule.<sup>12</sup>

The political crisis rocking the colony necessitated a new constitutional conference to resolve the issues Macpherson's 1950 constitution created. Constitutional conferences were held in August of 1953 in London and January of 1954 in Lagos. The decisions of these conferences constituted the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954, named after the Secretary of

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Ofori-Amoah, *Africa's Geography: Dynamics of Place, Cultures, and Economies* (Wiley, 2019), 345.

<sup>7</sup> Armour, 'The BBC and the Development of Broadcasting in British Colonial Africa', 361.

<sup>8</sup> Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 118.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Lynn, 'The Nigerian self-government crisis of 1953 and the Colonial Office', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34 (2) (2006), 250–1.

<sup>11</sup> Olufemi Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics, 1890s–1990s* (University of Rochester Press, 2006), 70.

<sup>12</sup> Lynn, 'The Nigerian self-government crisis of 1953 and the Colonial Office', 253.

State for the Colonies, Oliver Lyttleton. One of the major changes this constitution introduced was the structure of broadcasting in Nigeria. This structure shaped the development of regional broadcasting and then later state-owned broadcasting stations. Going into the constitutional assemblies, the Nigerian press and the Western Regional Government agitated for a broadcasting service independent of the federal government and organized along the lines of the BBC. Many Nigerians saw the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) as a government propaganda outfit.<sup>13</sup> This was confirmed in 1953 when Governor John Macpherson went on the radio broadcast service of the NBS and accused Awolowo of being unfaithful because of his persistent critique of Macpherson's constitution. When Awolowo demanded time from the NBS to rebut the accusations levelled against him, he was denied.<sup>14</sup> This incident exposed the NBS's lack of democratization and many Nigerians were afraid that the NBS was fast becoming the mouthpiece of the federal government. There was pressure, most especially from the Western Region, that broadcasting should be a prerogative of the regions and not the central government. This pressure gave rise to an important constitutional change that gave both the federal government and the regional governments the authority to make laws on broadcasting.<sup>15</sup>

Following the enactment of the constitution, the colonial administration took steps to transition the NBS to the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), making it a public corporation independent of government. Nevertheless, the regional governments were still not satisfied with the NBC's programming and began taking steps to establish their own broadcasting stations. Relying on the authority that the 1954 constitution granted, the WRG was the first to establish its broadcasting station. In what was a bold move of regional power, the WRG took control of the NBC's assets in the Western Region and established the Western Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (WNBC) in 1959.

## HISTORICIZING THE CREATION OF WNTV

The creation of WNBC in 1959 was Awolowo's first step toward actualizing his dream of creating the first television station in Africa, south of the Sahara. Plans to establish a television service in the Western Region were hashed out in 1958 and kept secret from the colonial authorities, including the colonial Governor of the Western Region. On December 30, 1958, *The Manchester Guardian Weekly* reported that the Western Government of Nigeria would be starting a television service in the new year.<sup>16</sup> The CO was surprised when they saw the news in the British media without receiving an official communication from the colonial governor of the region or the Governor-General of Nigeria. This was embarrassing to the colonial administration in Nigeria because it made them look like incompetent or absent-minded colonizers. It behoved the Governor of the region, J. D. Rankine, to offer some explanations to the CO as to why he had not duly informed the CO of developments in his region. In early January, the governor wrote to the CO giving an account of why he had not informed the office earlier of the plans for a television service. He told the CO that he found out about the plans during discussions with the Premier, Chief Awolowo, on December 18, 1958.<sup>17</sup> In a response from the CO to the Governor, the Secretary of State, Alan Lennox-Boyd, made clear that he was not privy to the development in Nigeria and had to find out from news reports. Nevertheless, he offered his assistance toward the project's success as many valuable lessons would be learned in the process of establishing television in tropical Africa.<sup>18</sup>

The Secretary of State's positive response changed the Governor's attitude toward the project. Governor Rankine believed that ReDiffusion official and Awolowo advisor, Patrick Dolan, inspired the idea of the television service. The Governor considered Dolan to be 'adept in the art of flattery and uses it to great advantage in convincing Awolowo that "he can

<sup>13</sup> Linus Nnabuike Malu, *Media Law and Policy in Nigeria* (Malthouse Press, 2016), 24.

<sup>14</sup> Uche, *Mass Media, People, and Politics in Nigeria*, 40.

<sup>15</sup> Malu, *Media Law and Policy in Nigeria*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> *The Manchester Guardian Weekly*, December 30, 1958.

<sup>17</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, J. D. Rankine to Christopher Eastwood, January 11, 1959.

<sup>18</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, S of S to Officer Administering the Government of Western Region, February 4, 1959.

build him up into a greater African personality than Nkrumah".<sup>19</sup> To the colonial authorities in Nigeria, the television service was primarily going to be a propaganda tool for Awolowo as it would be used for partisan advantage in the forthcoming elections. They also believed that Awolowo and his allies would fill the board with partisans from his political party, the Action Group (AG), who would use the television service to embezzle money.<sup>20</sup> The colonial authorities believed that this venture was a wasteful project that would only cater to a few elites when many people lacked basic essential amenities.<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that this service was an act of resistance to the colonizers, and thus, it was in the interest of the local colonial administration to impugn the founders' motives.

For Awolowo and the Western leaders, the television service was to fulfil the educational aspirations of people in the region, aspirations that the colonial system with its limited educational services frustrated. The project was also to promote cultural programming that showed the beauty of Yoruba culture and instilled in the people pride in their culture and Yoruba nationalism. Thus, the television service was going to devote 50 percent of its programming to educational activities and 50 percent to commercial activities.<sup>22</sup> In a speech defending the project, Awolowo argued that the service would advance both the pace and standard of education in the region. Awolowo wanted to bring to people's homes developments in Nigeria and overseas. He declared that 'television will serve as teacher and entertainer, and as a stimulus to us all to transform Nigeria into a modern and prosperous nation.'<sup>23</sup> The political elites of the region welcomed the television project with enthusiasm because of its potential to advance the Western Region both educationally and politically.

Despite the reservations of the local colonial administrators, there was nothing they could do to stop the project because it had already received the approval of the regional Executive Council. Rankine acknowledged that the only recourse colonial authorities had at the time was to keep an eye on the project's implementation and to ensure the board was independent.<sup>24</sup> In London, the concerns or interests were different from those the local administration expressed. Two key interests emerged: how British companies would benefit from this new venture and how the colonizer would influence the direction and programming of this service. For example, K. C. Wright of the British Board of Trade wrote to the Trade Commissioner, W. J. Cheesman, indicating the interests of British businesses in the profits that would accrue from the television project and the need to protect their own interests. The Board of Trade informed them that from an export point of view there was nothing to be worried about if 'one of our operating companies take up their share of the business.'<sup>25</sup> Some of the British companies that were considered possible partners in the television project were Carrickford Productions, A.T.V. and ReDiffusion Limited.

Colonial administrators were concerned that the service could be turned into an anti-British propaganda machine given the rocky and tense relationship between the AG Party and the colonial authorities. When the CO heard that the WRG was approaching the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), a United States government institution, for an American television expert, CO officials attempted to hinder these efforts. Although the regional governments were granted significant authority, they could not receive foreign government assistance without London's approval. Thus, the CO delayed the ICA application. The CO's Robert Powers suggested that he could kill the application outright as there were more urgent priorities for which Nigeria needed ICA assistance.<sup>26</sup> Colonial authorities were concerned with ICA involvement because they felt that Nigerian people would orient away from British sensibilities and towards American sensibilities. They felt that the presence of Americans in television matters meant a loss of control over programming messages. The CO's J. K. Thompson said he did not like the idea of 'handing

<sup>19</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, J. D. Rankine to Christopher Eastwood, January 11, 1959.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Umeh, 'The advent and growth of television broadcasting in Nigeria: its political and educational overtones', *Africa Media Review* 2 (3) (1989), 57.

<sup>24</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, J. D. Rankine to Christopher Eastwood, January 11, 1959.

<sup>25</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, W. J. Cheeseman to K. C. Wright, January 27, 1959.

<sup>26</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, T. B. Williamson to A. E. Emmanuel, February 18, 1959.

over to the Americans the educational element in so powerful an influence as television in Western Nigeria.<sup>27</sup>

The challenge the colonial authorities faced was finding a British television education adviser. While the CO delayed the ICA application, considerable efforts were made to find someone suitable to steer the television service's affairs. The key to this lay in the BBC's interest in working with WRG as they had previously worked with NBC, having sent several of their staff to the nascent radio broadcasting station. When WRG conceived creating the television station, its leaders hoped that the BBC would provide them the technical assistance needed to bring the project to fruition. In December of 1958, after Awolowo informed the colonial authorities of the plans to begin the service, Patrick Dolan wrote to the CO seeking the BBC's assistance in vetting the contract that WRG signed with Marconi's of London for supplying equipment. Dolan wanted the CO to ask Mr F. C. McLean, the Deputy Chief Engineer at the BBC, to determine if the proposal was 'reasonable and proper'.<sup>28</sup> E. A. Emmanuel of the CO declined the request because Dolan was not following the CO's procedure. He informed him that the CO's protocol was that overseas governments should present their plans for the service to the Secretary of State who would use his offices to get them the assistance they needed.<sup>29</sup> Following the Secretary of State's letter of February of 1959 to the Governor of the Western Region pledging his support for the project, the CO was disposed to seeking the assistance of the BBC for the WRG television project.

The CO wrote to the BBC on February 20, 1959 requesting that Patrick Dolan submit a technical review of the WRG project and asking the BBC to send staff to assist with programming. While the BBC was willing to provide a technical review of the proposal, officials were reluctant to provide programming help. The BBC claimed it only worked directly with governments and not agents because agents' interests sometimes conflicted with broadcasting operations or might even be in competition with the BBC.<sup>30</sup> The envisioned television service in the Western Region, being organized as a partly commercial service with private business investments, was bound to compete with the BBC, a public corporation. The BBC had other interests that the establishment of a Western Nigerian television service threatened. The NBC had discussions about establishing a national television service, and the BBC pledged its support for this project. The BBC officials' conviction was that the WRG service would overlap with that of the NBC. The Western Region transmitters were within 15 miles of Lagos, the base of the future federal television service and the BBC claimed that as a matter of principle when there was a clash between the national government and a regional government, their preference was to work with the former and not the later.<sup>31</sup> The conclusion the BBC made was that they saw a problem seconding staff to a commercially financed service that might compete with a federal public service.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the BBC was willing to make its staff available for the initial stages of a federal television service.<sup>33</sup>

The CO informed the BBC that there were no immediate plans to begin a federal service but despite the efforts expended to convince BBC officials to provide staff to WRG's television service, the CO did not succeed.<sup>34</sup> By April 1959, some at the CO had become resigned to the fact that the BBC might not provide any help with an education adviser. For example, H. D. Winther concluded after his meeting with Sir Beresford Clark of the BBC that 'I do not myself think we shall get much out of the BBC on this occasion, apart from technical advice.'<sup>35</sup> The BBC's reluctance to help was because of its interest in a federal

<sup>27</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, Minute by J. K. Thompson, March 3, 1959.

<sup>28</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, Patrick Dolan to A. E. Emmanuel, December 31, 1958.

<sup>29</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, A. E. Emmanuel to Patrick Dolan, January 2, 1959.

<sup>30</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, Beresford Clark to Charles Y. Carstairs, February 25, 1959.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/315, Minute by H. D. Winther, October 29, 1959.

<sup>34</sup> Several officials of the Colonial Office met with Beresford Clark of the BBC, among them C. Y. Carstairs, H. D. Winther and O. H. Morris.

<sup>35</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, minute by H. D. Winther, April 8, 1959.

service, where it would exercise more control because of the long-established relationship with the NBC.

On June 6, 1959, Patrick Dolan and Associates informed Winther that the producer of the BBC's programme 'Tonight' fit the criteria of whom they wanted for television in the Western Region. They desired that the CO approach the BBC immediately to obtain his services.<sup>36</sup> There were concerns in the CO that the BBC would not respond favourably to the request to release Martin Leighton because he was one of the few men trained in television operations and the BBC had been receiving requests from the federal governments of Nigeria, Ghana, and Singapore for help with setting up public television service and they were unable to meet these demands.<sup>37</sup> Martin Leighton himself was interested in WRG's television project and willing to resign from the BBC if he could be released from his contract, which stipulated three-months advance notice.<sup>38</sup> However, WRG needed Leighton immediately and could not afford to wait the three months.<sup>39</sup> When Winther spoke with Tangye Lean, the Deputy Director of External Services at the BBC, he was informed that Leighton's contract required a one-month advance notice, not three, and that if Leighton intended to join WRG's service immediately, he should have handed in the notice a month earlier. Lean told Winther that 'it was unfair to press the BBC to release a key man engaged in one of the more popular BBC regular programmes, who could not be replaced at a moment's notice, in under a month.'<sup>40</sup> Given the importance that the BBC attached to resignations, Winther advised Leighton to resign according to the terms of his contract if he wished to join the WRG service.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the CO's request to release Leighton troubled BBC officials and they requested a high-level meeting between them and the CO to discuss what they termed 'irregularities' concerning the request of Leighton's services.<sup>42</sup> Although the CO advised Leighton to resign according to his contract's terms, he walked out on the BBC and claimed that the CO told him not to do anything as they were working with the BBC on his behalf.<sup>43</sup> The CO believed that Leighton did not give advance notice because he wanted to maintain his connections with the BBC as long as possible to use them to negotiate his contract with Patrick Dolan and Associates.<sup>44</sup> The BBC was concerned that potential competitors would 'noble' its staff and strongly urged the CO to make sure that future requests going to the BBC follow proper procedures, arguing that the CO should not request specific staff for secondment; instead, they should send the job description, and the BBC would use their procedure on the secondment of staff to make the assignments. However, the BBC believed that Leighton's resignation did not result in any harm because they were glad to be rid of him.<sup>45</sup> Other than their frustration with the manner in which Leighton left, they provided no other reason why they were happy that he left.

Despite the obstacles that the local colonial administration, the CO, and the BBC placed on the path of the WRG, officials of the Western Region were tenacious. They pushed ahead, making the required deals and passing relevant legislation to make the television service a reality. On September 21, 1959, the Western Nigeria House of Assembly passed the Broadcasting Law that favoured the establishment of television and broadcasting services in the Western Region on behalf of the government. Presiding over the vote was the Minister of Home and Midwestern Affairs, Chief Anthony Enahoro. In his floor speech, Enahoro stated that although the primary function for television and broadcasting services was to develop the educational services of the region, 'commercial advertising would be welcomed and would run impartially' and that 'one thousand television sets had been purchased by Government for installation in schools and hospitals.'<sup>46</sup> The leader of the

<sup>36</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, minute by H. D. Winther, June 5, 1959.

<sup>37</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, C. Y. Carstairs to O. H. Morris, June 15, 1959.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, H. D. Winter to O. H. Morris, June 29, 1959.

<sup>39</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, minute by H. D. Winther, July 9, 1959.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/314, H. D. Winther to O. H. Morris, August 17, 1959.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>46</sup> TNA, CO: 1027/315, Telegram from the WRG to S of S, September 22, 1959.

opposition members of the regional parliament, Dennis Osadebay, together with another opposition member, Victor Amadasun, argued that a regional television service would not foster Nigerian unity and that it would leave out other regions.<sup>47</sup> Enahoro responded that opposition members should ‘dispel fears of services becoming political propaganda weapon’ because the Bill ‘excluded political advertisement from programme.’<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the television service went live on October 31, 1959 with great fanfare and interest from the local Nigerian media, African media, and international media. On November 4, 1959, an official press release from the WRG was issued announcing the beginning of the television service. The headlines of the press release were ‘Western Nigerian Premier Opens First African Television Network’ and ‘WNTV Goes on the Air.’<sup>49</sup> The celebratory tone of the press release is unmistakable. It began:

Cameramen and technicians clad in white dinner jackets spun dials and pushed buttons as WNTV, Africa’s first television network, took to the airwaves in Western Nigeria on 31st October. The Western Region Premier, Obafemi Awolowo, whose Action Group Government was the guiding force behind the creation of the TV network, described the new medium as one which can “help transform Nigeria into a more modern and prosperous nation.”<sup>50</sup>

## CONCLUSION

From the beginning of the twentieth century, British authorities viewed mass media as a means of solidifying control over its colonies, particularly on the African continent. As this article shows, media was a means by which British authorities sought to create legions of loyal ‘Negropeans’ who would both worship and obey the Crown’s authority. However, enterprising indigenous Nigerian leaders subverted these efforts, ultimately using the colonizer’s sociopolitical tools against them.

Examining the period leading up to WNTV’s first broadcast reveals the WRG’s clever manipulation of the power it received from a series of constitutions’ incoherent regional command structures and astute reterritorialization of colonial media systems to create its political machine. As television grew in popularity around the world and became a staple in Western homes by the late 1950s, Western Region leaders saw the creation of a television service in the nation as a step toward modernity, a way to bolster its partisan control in Nigeria, and a method of showcasing its modernization agenda across the African continent.

As the scramble to create WNTV reveals, ethnopolitical rivalries and strife, sub-nationalist competition, and the British authorities’ efforts to maintain power over its fledgling empire shaped and created some of the legacies of British colonialism in Nigeria. The colonizer’s attempts to meld together disparate sub-nationalities with different religions, political cultures, languages, and cultural practices were fraught with problems that almost led to Nigeria’s disintegration in the mid-1950s as the three regions threatened to break away and form independent countries. This crisis led to the 1954 constitution that granted more power to the different regions, including the authority to legislate on issues relating to broadcasting. The Western Region took advantage of these constitutional provisions to establish WNTV. This action spurred a response from the other regions and other British former colonies such as Ghana as they also took aggressive steps to launch their television services. The WRG’s power moves were nothing short of remarkable when British colonial authorities sought to stop WNTV’s establishment. When it became clear that they would not be able to thwart the project outright, authorities endeavoured to delay television in Nigeria drastically. Yet, the WRG was able to ‘win’ the battle for television because a series of the CO’s mishaps played into the WRG leader Premier Awolowo’s hands.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> TNA CO 1027/315, WNTV Press Release, November 4, 1959.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*