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It is clearly admitted that the mandate of the public service broadcasting is to provide information, education and entertainment and promote principles of democratic values, equality, liberty and dignity of individuals. Furthermore, the public service broadcasting should give the public 'what we think they need and what they want, but few actually know what they want and even very few know what they need' (Weddell 1974). This statement appears to fit into the Algerian broadcasting scene. Thus, information and communication policies in Algeria are regulated by decrees and information bills. The last 1990 information law brought more press freedom and opinions than previously allowed. Though, scholars consider it as transitory code, whereas media professionals perceived it as another penal code, identical to previous authoritarian codes that had prevailed during the ruling one party system. Although, 1990s bill paved the way to media printing pluralism, electronic media is still state owned. 14 years later, the situation has not dramatically changed and the state monopoly is fully and completely exercised.

RTA Reshuffled

Prior to 1986 reshuffling policy, the electronic media was operated by the Algerian Radio and Television (Radio Télévision Algérienne); inherited in 28 October 1962 from the ORTF (French Radio and TV) during the colonisation period. The ART was restricted to form four public enterprises; the national radio enterprise (ENRS) the National TV enterprise (ENTV), the National Audio-Visual Production Enterprise (ENPA) and the National Broadcasting enterprise (ENTD) for carrying and transmitting radio and TV programmes (Audi Visual Council Report 1990).

National Public Radio Channels

The radio owned and run by the public broadcasting enterprise headquartered in Algiers with 3,000 employees in which 951 work in local radio stations. Organised into national, local, regional and thematic structures, three national radio channels operate; Channel one broadcast in Arabic, Channel Two broadcast in Tamazight (Chawi, Mozabit, Targui, Chenoua and kabyle languages) and Channel Three broadcast in French. Thematic ones are Koran radio which broadcast religious programmes and holly Koran verses, Culture radio promotes arts, literature and poetry. In addition, the continuing Training University (Open University) operates an educational radio station. Algerian Radio has also external services and broadcast in English and Spanish through Bahja Radio.

Local and Regional Radio Network

Local radio network is a new reality in the audio visual space. Presently, 28 local radio stations broadcast daily between 4 to 12 hours programmes on local, cultural, social and political issues. First local radio stations created in 1991 were Bechar Radio, Mitidja, Ouargla and Laghouat. From 1992 to 2004, 22 radio stations were created in the main cities; Tamanrest, Tlemcen, Setif, Batna, Oran, Tebessa, Constantine, Adrar, Annaba, Illizi, Tiaret, Tindouf, Naama, Biskra, Ghardaia, Mascara, Msila, Skikda, Mostaganem, Chleff, Sid Bel Abbes, El Bayadh and only Souk Ahras Radio is not launched. Available on frequency modulation (57,14%) and amplitude modulation (42,86%), local radios programmes are broadcast live (52%) and recorded ones (48%) in classical Arabic (62,06%), dialect Arabic (17,65%) and Tamazight (20,29%)

(Djoudi, ISIC 2004).

National Television Enterprise

Much of the foregoing information about the radio applies to Algerian television. Presently, there is one national channel called ENTV and two depending satellite channels; Canal Algérie and Third Channel with different programmes content. ENTV has four regional stations; Constantine, Oran, Ouargla and Bechar. It broadcasts daily programmes on news, current affairs, sports, films, series, documentaries. National programmes sources which consist of news,

current affairs (reportages, debates), sports, music and documentaries represent 3098h 30mns of the total broadcasting hours. Private producers contribute with 253h. Foreign programming made of soaps, films and documentaries, represent 140 h and brought from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Gulf states, France, Italy England, United States and Canada. (ENTV Dept of Statistics and Analysis 1993).

Launch of Canal Algérie and Third Channel

In 1994, Canal Algérie was launched and broadcast 80% of programs in French to Algerians immigrants and Beur generation (second generation of Algerians born in France). It has a leading role in popularity with several Arab and African television channels according to a survey carried out by Kara Consulting agency for Eutelsat. Third channel created in 2001 covers Arab world with programmes on local news, culture, arts and traditions.

Digital Technology Shift

The shift from analogue to digital technology has been a slow but gradual process. In 2000, Algerian Radio had adopted a gradual process of digitization. Already, 6 local radio stations are fully and completely digitized. In 2003, new equipments were introduced; such as digital switcher, Studer On-Air 2000 digital consoles, Digimedia workstation and D424 magneto-optical disc recorder. Algerian television has also ignited a new promising and ambitious digital technology programme. Equipments (studios, outside broadcast van), editing, transmission and distribution tools; microwaves, digital satellite news gatherings (DSNG) are purchased. Computing facilities are introduced to newsrooms and archives. However, if technologically, it can be fairly assessed that public service broadcasting is well prepared, trained and equipped, one of the main difficulties that it faces, are human resources management, human resistance and that may delay the digitization process.

Production and Co-production Schemes

In 2003, Algerian television invested 35 billions Algerian Dinars (4,5 millions \$ (1)) to purchase and co-produce with local private production companies whose contribution increased from 1% in

2000 to 4% in 2003. Contribution ranges from series of documentaries, sitcoms, reportages, comedy and quiz. In comedy theatres for instance, it can reach 100%. Conceiving, producing and airing national programmes have increased from 26% in 2000, to 69% in 2002 and 74% in 2003. Genres programmes are dispatched as follows. 2069h (46.10%) dedicated to entertainment, 1435h (31.97%) of educative programmes and 984h (21.92%) for news and current affairs. In 2004, 35 private sitcoms projects are launched. However, independent producers association (with 40 members) faces financial difficulties related to production, post productions high fees and social charges (Reports on PSB Workshop December 2002). 1\$= 79.5 A.D

Financial Support Patterns

The state contributes to public service broadcasting finances with respect to codes of obligations. Para-fiscal fees are collected through the electricity bill. Advertising are other financial resources. Because of its status as industrial and commercial public enterprise, Algerian broadcasting is allowed and encouraged to make advertising, sponsorship and other funding activities. However, ENTV' budget as an example, illustrates an overview the financial patterns. In 1992, state contributed with 59,2 billions A.D (83%), para-fiscal fees were 12,5 billions A.D, revenues from publicity and sponsors were 3,24 billions A.D. In 1997, state contribution increased to 79,57 billions A.D, 17 billions A.D came from publicity revenues and other fees 42, 62 billions A.D. Personnel charges estimated at 88,62 billions A.D (64% of the total budget) and management charges 24,63 billions A.D (17,5%). However, the human resources have sharply increased. Since 1993, their number increased by 2,5 times which represent 31,5% (3000 employees in December 2003). The purchase of foreign programmes cost 15,04 billions A.D (10,5%), 5,87 billions A.D (4%) represent the national production and co-production cost, 4,13 billions A.D (3%) are allocated to insurance fees and social charges and 1,45 billions A.D (1%) devoted to purchase national production. Financing public service broadcasting has been always a headache for managers. Compared with El Jazeera, ENTV' budget represent 5,7% of it and 3% of French public television.

Many Challenges

Algerian public service broadcasting faces social, political and cultural pressures. Its monopolistic status has not enabled the emergence of efficient audio visual space. Subjects to criticisms from political parties, civil society for lack of objectivity and independence. Also, present organisational structures, programmes contents quality, news and current affairs editorial independence illustrate poor marks if an independent assessment of PSB' credibility and impartiality is to be carried out.

Failures and Setbacks

One of its main failures is the lack of competition. This situation has created a sentiment of outrage and dissatisfaction from politicians and members of the civil society. Social and political reality is depicted in such way that the focus is put on personalities and officials rather than on events and issues. Further, news are treated in an official and formal manner that discourage independent and innovative approaches and irrespective of journalistic practices (Zaghlami, 2004).

Another setbacks are alarming tendencies to quit the country. It is a brain drain phenomenon. Technical staff and journalists have been moving to several Arabic satellite radio and television channels; El Jazeera, El Arabyia, Abu Dhabi ANN, MBC, Kuwait TV, El Alam (Iran) and EDTV (United Arab Emirates). Ultimately, Algerian public service becomes a training centre to provide foreign channels with media professionals. Also because of quality programmes and poor content, a zapping culture is taking place. Foreign channels from France (TF1, France2, France3, M6, TF6 etc...) Middle East (Egyptian Satellite, Syrian TV) and Gulf States (El Jazeera, Abu Dhabi, Dubai TV) are popular in Algeria.

The Image Culture Tyranny

'Adding insult to injury' the culture of image is noticeable and has a negative perception (Curran 2000). Algeria is one of the examples where the image culture overshadows the culture of books and printings. The society has a tendency to favour oral and speech culture. Image has also its fascinating and attractive dimension on hearts and minds. Facing the camera, ordinary people hesitate, impressed and thrilled. Appearance on television has direct impact on future of personal and professional life. Electronic

media enables to gain legitimacy for ambitious persons involved in politics, business and culture (Djezairi 1992).

Thomas' syndrome

Appearances on television can be sources of social ascension and political promotion. Very often, political parties activities, social tensions and strikes occur only if they are covered and political leaders intervene only in front of camera. This reality is well perceived through excessive exposures of politicians and other official authorities on TV. It is Thomas' syndrome where the image is used as political legitimacy tools and proofs. What is reported and portrayed by television is legitimate and what is not reported and ignored is obviously illegitimate.

Alternatives

The monopolistic situation of audio-visual in Algeria has forced many Algerian managers to invest in France. Berber Television (BRTV) broadcast from France, wide range of cultural, social and political programmes aimed at Berber community in Europe and Maghreeb states. Beur Television is the second Algerian 'ethnic television station' based in France. With Mediterranean strong ties, programmes content deals with social, cultural and politics. Algérie Lumières is the newly born television channel that is planned to broadcast from Belgium, Algerian cultural programmes..

Words of Optimism

The culture of public service broadcasting in Algeria has the last miles to reach the maturation age. It is also poised and committed to improving its governance. Democratic access, human resources training, regulation of fairness (in terms of neutrality, accountability, responsiveness), programmes schedule, content, imports, language, and advertising are some issues that the public service should keep high on its agenda for the next few years if it wants to remain credible and popular. Lastly, some words of optimism and comfort came from president of Algeria Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who affirmed during ASBU meeting in Algiers in December 2004, that a new organisation is planned to strengthen media pluralism and preserve freedom of expression. Yet Algerian television will launch in the fall of 2005, Tamazight channel and two other TV channels for sports and youngsters. lzaghlami@yahoo.fr

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