Western radio memories and narrative construction on Africa

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Abstract

Three historical milestones allow a reflection on the narratives of transnational radio stations in Africa: the expansion of transnational channels in Africa, after the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War; the holding of the "Conference of non-aligned countries" in Bandung, 1955, which expressed the will of sovereignty of the countries of Africa and Asia; the "Media and development forum" held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, which expressed the desire to "decolonize information". These great events aroused a certain interest in the field of Radio Studies in Africa. The present reflection aims to analyze the narratives of Western radio stations in Africa, which it focuses on the historical review of the role of radio as a mean of expanding Western imperialism. From a different perspective, the reflection tries to capture the latest trends in ideological and discursive changes in international radio in Africa: internationalized participation, the promotion of democracy awareness, and the awakening of human rights. The emergence of the new narratives of Africans radio stations, mediated by web radios on the platforms of social networks on the internet and their potential, are other points of reflection. In an analysis of this historical information, the study opted for an interpretative approach to the documentation, conference statements, and literature produced on international radio in Africa, what comes close to the topological analysis developed by sociologist Max Weber on the ideal types, an interpretative and explanatory hermeneutic, in which texts, ideologies, culture and historical periods must be understood as symbols that must be elucidated within their systems of signification. This analysis model extracts typical elements from the bibliographic material and describes them in detail.

Keywords

radio; imperialism; social networks

Memórias e construção de narrativas das rádios ocidentais sobre África

Resumo

Três marcos históricos permitem uma reflexão sobre as narrativas das rádios transnacionais em África: a expansão de canais transnacionais em África, depois da II Guerra Mundial e o início da Guerra Fria; a realização da "Conferência dos países não alinhados" em Bandung, 1955, que expressava a vontade de soberania dos países da África e Ásia; o "Fórum de meios de comunicação social e desenvolvimento" (2008) realizado em Uagadugu, Burquina Faso, que manifestava a vontade de "descolonização da informação". Estes grandes acontecimentos despertaram um certo interesse no campo dos Estudos da Rádio na África. A presente reflexão tem como objetivo analisar as narrativas das rádios ocidentais em África, concentrando-se na revisão histórica do papel da rádio como meio de expansão do imperialismo ocidental. Numa outra perspetiva, a reflexão tenta capturar as últimas tendências de mudanças ideológicas e discursivas das rádios internacionais em África: a internacionalização comparticipada, a promoção de consciência de democracia e o despertar de direitos humanos. A emergência das novas narrativas das rádios

africanas, mediadas por web rádios nas plataformas das redes sociais da internet e as suas potencialidades, constituem outros pontos de reflexão. Numa análise desta informação histórica, o estudo optou por uma abordagem de natureza interpretativa da documentação, declarações de conferências e literatura produzida sobre as rádios internacionais em África, naquilo que se aproxima da análise tipológica desenvolvida pelo sociólogo Max Weber sobre os tipos ideais, ou seja, uma hermenêutica de cunho interpretativo e explicativo, na qual se deve compreender textos, ideologias, culturas e períodos históricos como símbolos que devem ser elucidados dentro de seus próprios sistemas de significação. Este modelo de análise extrai do material bibliográfico os elementos típicos e descreve-os com detalhe.

INTRODUCTION

Memory is a cognitive function built by an individual, organizations, or society to store and transmit information through written, oral and electronic expression. A journey through the memory of literature and documentation on transnational radio in Africa allowed the elaboration of this article. The objective is to understand the construction of narratives of international radio stations in Africa. On the one hand, for a better understanding of their ideologies in Africa, on the other hand, to understand the process of "decolonization of information" and the subsequent role assumed by African radio stations in independent societies, their political and cultural implications, their effective contribution to the development of democracy and citizenship and, finally, to understand the challenges of African radio in the digital age/era.

The problem of Western radio both in the period of Western colonization, characterized by ideological and cultural imperialism, and in the post-colonial era, characterized by changes in the narratives of information transmission, has little epistemological and historical depth in the annals of the history of radio in Africa. In this reflection, the central questions are: what kinds of narratives were produced by transnational radio stations about Africa during the periods of colonization and after independence? What are the prospects for the future of radio in Africa?

Three aspects answer the initial question of this reflection: the historical and theoretical plan that contributed to the construction of ideological narratives of Western radio in Africa; the perception of Africans about/through the narratives of Western radio stations, based on the reports and theoretical studies of African scholars and writers; finally, the opening of Africa to the world, thanks to the alternative means of communication based on the social networks of the internet and the possibility of building their own uninterrupted narratives.

The evolution of Radio Studies can be analyzed in two approaches: either by an epistemological approach, searching from which fields of research these studies have emerged, how they were integrated in Studies of Mass Communication or by a historical

approach, presenting the evolution of radio, social and cultural environment that was established. It is in the second position that the present study chose to privilege and redo the route described by previous studies.

The diversity of bibliography and themes on radio in Africa required an effort to group different sources of information, followed by an interpretive analysis of the information. Finally, the discussion of results was an exercise that tried to establish a dialectical confrontation between the authors and showed the relationship between the concepts exposed and the central question of the study.

The analysis of the results of the study allowed to conclude that the expansion of transnational radio stations in Africa and the respective narratives were driven by three historical and ideological interests: first, by the maintenance of cultural values and the Western civilization during and after the colonial period; second, for ideological wars during the Cold War period, the time of the massification of Western radio stations in the African continent due to the antagonistic depolarization between the capitalist and communist blocs; and the third interest, after the Cold War, was in the development of cooperation and production of new narratives focused on African regions in conflict.

Background

This reflection finds its inspiration on Asante's (2013) publications on "The Western media and the falsification of Africa: complications of value and evaluation", from the Latin American current of thought on cultural imperialism, and on Biney's (1997) studieson "Western media and Africa: issues of information and images" on the *Journal of International Affairs*, publications that deconstructed western media ideologies in Africa.

Western media, over many years, have built the image of Africa as a place of chaos, tribal conflict, ethnic wars, corruption, disease, and genocide. In fact, they are social constructions carried out by the power of the media in an immense and culturally diverse continent. However, there have been few efforts by them to present the positive aspects of the African continent, such as, for example, African entrepreneurship, inventions, the development of the field of education, cultural wealth, and other social dynamics.

Radio was one of the media of imperialist domination in Africa. For Power (2000), for example, during the period of Mozambican colonization, he represented his work as a colonization radio that emphasized the links between his activities and the maintenance of European culture and civilization in the colonies. In Mozambique, he sought to solidify his contribution to Western culture and civilization in the light of colonial political objectives.

In the last days of Portuguese colonialism, broadcasters began late to try to assimilate non-white issues in the perceived order of colonial modernization. Radio programming was differentiated in important ways according to ethnicity and gender (Power, 2000).

Throughout the African continent, the radio presented an important step in the conquest of other territories, thanks to its facilities for propagation through the air and through radio waves, especially during the troubled period of World War II.

After the World War II, international conferences were held on the technical aspects of regulation, specifically the allocation of transmission frequency. The first conference was held in Moscow in September 1946. The second was in Atlantic City, USA, both of which gave rise to the International Committee for the Registration of Frequency (Jeanneney, 1996, p. 267).

At the "World Administrative Radio Conference" held in Geneva, 1979, under the auspices of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Americans tried, unsuccessfully, to oppose to the redistribution of the radio broadcast frequency, practically monopolized by them and other industrialized countries, in detriment of developing countries, which indicated an attempt to monopolize frequencies and impose technical and ideological superiority in what characterizes them in mass communication theories (Joanguete, 2010).

During the Cold War, capitalist and socialist countries competed for the power of information control. It was increasingly clear that this was an ideological war. On the one hand, the USA propagated the ideology of mass culture in its favor, through its music and the film industry. On the other hand, the history of relations between the various countries of Eastern Europe and the countries of the African continent, which adopted socialist models during the wars for national liberation, as well as in the post-independence period, were not concerned with ideologies, but rather with ensuring financial and military aid from communist countries in the East to overthrow the colonial domination of the West (Cascais & Blanchard, 2017; Groppo, 2008).

Groppo (2008, pp. 131-132) states that:

> the link that was established between the communist parties and the USSR was not simply one of political dependency, but also one of material dependence. Many of these parties received, more or less consistently, financing and various types of aid from the Soviet State, on a more or less consistent basis, on which their ability to carry out constant political activity depended in part.

On the African continent, the cooperative relationship between the communist countries of the East and those that followed the communist regime included the opening of space for the radio broadcasting of the USSR. The scenario remained even after the independence of African countries, as many Western powers tried to introduce the logic of monopoly of the radio signal transmission and its internationalization (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1997). In this context, some academies and research centers in communication began to be concerned with propagandistic ideas and the dispute for cultural and ideological domination.

In an article by Barrot (2010) in *La Revue des Médias* entitled "Les radios internationales en Afrique", the author states that no other region on the planet is as open to international information and as dependent on foreign broadcasters as the Sub-Saharan Africa. There are several international radio stations operating in Africa, such as those of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service, Voice of America (VOA) and, recently, radio Chine Internationale.

The French school of communication, known for its culturalist theories, questioned the way in which the internationalization of Western media proceeded and interfered directly in the culture of other peoples with the ideological apparatus of the State, such as radio and television or imperialist cultural industries (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1997).

The British historian Trevor-Roper (1969) wrote in his book *The past and the present: History and Sociology*, that there was no story/history to tell in Africa, unless the history of Europeans. The same speech by the historian was reproduced implicitly in media policies when the race for new African audiences began.

We must understand that all the reports presented about radio in Africa are configured as an ideological mechanism for the control of African masses, which throughout history have gained other meanings, both in technical and ideological aspects.

Post-independence national radio stations

Within colonial society, in which radio prevailed as a means of mass communication, it is necessary to view culture as a medium full of ideology. After the independence of African countries, starting in the 1960s, radio stations were a mass media of the state monopoly and followed the guidelines of governments and could not transmit content that would trigger other political changes within their own populations. The information was very controlled (Agbobli, 2016; Perret, 2010).

Myers (2008) and Ilboudo (2014) report that after independence, most national radio broadcasters were established. They started broadcasting in the language of the ex-colonizer and sometimes in one or two national languages to affirm the role of new independent states and, in this context, radio has become an attribute of the independence of these countries and the radio services controlled by independent states has won the largest audiences in most of Sub-Saharan Africa.

It must be said that the first manifestation of African autonomy in the telecommunications and audiovisual sector was the creation, in 1962, of the Union des Radiodiffusions and Televisions Nationales d'Afrique (URTNA), composed of the national radio and television organizations of African states. Later, URTNA was transformed on October 30, 2006 into the African Broadcasting Union (AUB), with the aim of contributing to enrich the quality of life for Africans and reveal the true image of Africa.

As it can be seen, URTNA is the first African organization that seeks to rescue the image of Africa, through the production and distribution of content produced by Africans. However, URTINA was far from debating media regulation and political aspects

of communication. The main concerns were focused on nation building through the media. In this, the governments took control of the radios for the construction of the nation, facilitated the task of the governments in the education of the people and raised the national conscience. The media were a catalyst for government policy; unification of the nation and popularization of government leaders (Asante, 2013).

Despite the nationalization of the radios of the colonial regime, Sub-Saharan Africa was, since the beginning of independence and the Cold War, the focus of short wave transmissions in several languages by transnational broadcasters, specifically from the former colonial powers and the main communist countries. For example, in 1958 and 1959, Radio Moscow and Radio Beijing launched their broadcasts in French, English, and Portuguese to the African continent (Mattelart, 2015).

The "Conference of Non-Aligned Countries" held in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 was the first political milestone that expressed the will for sovereignty in the countries of Africa, and Asia. It was the first movement in favor of the African renaissance, including Asia, in the field of economics, politics and the media sector. Thanks to this organization of Non-Aligned Countries against colonialism, public communication policies opened the space for neoliberal globalization, which resulted in an imbalance in communicative processes (Amin, 2015)

In the same sequence, in 1970, the debate on the New World Order of Information and Communication (NOMIC) was launched. NOMIC was an international project for the reorganization of global information flows, through various government actions Furthermore, it was an initiative of the movement of Non-Aligned Countries with the support of Unesco, whose objective was "decolonization in the field of Information" (Silva, 2009, p. 11).

The decolonization of information was firstly debated in the late 1960s, in which, according to Bourges (1978), the world information network was in the hands of rich countries, while developing countries played secondary roles. The proof of this is that the major news agencies, European and American, produced and distributed the raw material for news published around the world. Hence the need to implement, on a worldwide scale, a policy that would reduce the hegemony of the great powers.

Another important milestone in the history of media in Africa was the holding of the 1976 "General Conference" in Nairobi, organized by Unesco, which constituted an international commission for the study of the worldwide flow of communication. The commission was chaired by the journalist, lawyer and former Irish Foreign minister, Seán MacBride, and was composed of 16 international personalities in the field of culture and communication. This commission worked until 1980, when it drew up and released a report entitled *One world and many voices*, which was also known as the *MacBride report*, in which it reported the communicational imbalances in the world and the predominance of unique narratives by Western media (Silva, 2009).

Internally, in the African continent, international conferences to discuss MacBride's report on the balanced information flow and the impact of Western radio and television

in Africa was an agenda item at the "Media and development forum" held in Ouaga-dougou, Burkina Faso, from 11 to 13 September 2008, organized by the European Commission, African Union Commission, International Organization of the Francophonie, British Community and the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, which constituted the first international debates on the new dynamics of media in Africa.

Particularly in the former Portuguese colonies, the concern to establish a radio that connected the colonies and the metropolis went back to the years of 1935. However, the idea only materialized 60 years later, with the creation of RDP Africa in April 1996, by Order No. 25 356/2006, Diário da República, 2nd Series, No. 238, December 13, 2006, in a context of a different political regime, based on the ideological basis of the diffusion of the Portuguese language and culture and "bringing a wide range of African information to Portugal" (Jordão, 2009, p. 19).

Against Western stereotypes about Africa, the "Media and development forum" was held in Burkina Faso in September 2008, which allowed the debate on the subject to be brought to light. For Jean-Luc Maertens, director of Euronews who chaired the workshop on the stereotypes of Africa in Europe and those of Europe in Africa, he concluded that many of these problems are due, in large part, to the Western media about which certain measures should be put in place to mitigate impacts, such as strong pressure on certain media that convey and support them (Goutier, 2008).

In summary, it can be noted in this historical framework that the colonial administrations used radio as a political tool to preserve colonial rule and impose Western culture. In contrast, post-independence African leaders used radio to promote nation-building, above all, they turned radio into a means of mobilization for the solidification of the nation-state.

However, in the 1990s, the situation changed almost drastically as democratic regimes in Africa advanced and, consequently, the media gained freedom of the press and expression. Research by the African Media Development Initiative (AMDI) in 17 Sub-Saharan countries, found that local commercial radio grew by an average of 360% between 2000 and 2006 and community radio grew by an average of 1,386% over the same period (Myers, 2008).

Ideologies in the narratives of Western radio stations

The first radio broadcasts in Sub-Saharan Africa were made in the early 1920s. Kenya had its own radio station in 1927, followed by Mozambique in 1933, and Senegal in 1939. But these were only broadcasting programmes made for expatriates[1].

The development of satellite communications has made it possible for traditional shortwave international broadcasts, promoted mainly by Western state and public stations, to also be relayed by radio stations in Africa in shortwaves and medium waves, because the majority of the African population lived in rural areas and very dispersed.

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[1] Retrieved from https://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/1624_story_of_africa/page17.shtml

For long distances short wave emitters were used, while for cities, medium wave emitters were used.

After the World War II, the Federal Republic of Germany was present in Africa through the radio Deutsche Welle (DW); Great Britain with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC); the Netherlands through Radio Nederland; France with Radio France International (RFI); the United States with Voice of America (VOA). All of them were among the radio stations that reached larger audiences in the world and in Africa (Jeanneney, 1996).

Comparatively, the French political action of international communication in Africa was facilitated by its closer relations with the former colonies since the establishment of Radio Paris Mondial. RFI now has 107 FM transmitters in the African continent, all located in Sub-Saharan Africa, including 82 in Francophone Africa, where its market share reaches 25% (Barrot, 2010). Meanwhile, the BBC's international communication policy was focused on an audience in India, later on it moved to a worldwide audience, including Africa where it counts with 70 FM transmitters, broadcasting in English to 36 countries (Barrot, 2010; Jeanneney, 1996). For this reason, the BBC is considered to be the most viewed TV station with around 120 million listeners worldwide. This figure does not include countries like China, where audience surveys were not done for political reasons (Sousa, 1993).

The practice of retransmitting international radio and television in Africa is based on commercial space sales agreements, a scenario that created a logic of penetration in the African continent. The same policy was practiced by the USSR during the Cold War in the 1960s. For example, VOA was founded on August 04, 1963 to provide news services for Africa. However, the underlying ideology in VOA is to combat undemocratic regimes, promoting human rights and freedom in Africa by offering more open and uncensored news services to more than 25 million listeners.

As Landau (2012) puts it, the mutations in Western radio narratives about Africa take on a new, more Africanist approach from the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the French-speaking countries unleashed a series of rights claims with the RFI, that held the monopoly of the francophone market.

The changes of Rádio e Televisão Portuguesa (RTP) took place in African countries that speak Portuguese through technical cooperation agreements for the field of social communication in three fields: (a) technical assistance; (b) professional training; (c) exchange and the circulation of journalists and the circulation of information (Carvalho, 1994; Jordão, 2009).

As a result of this cooperation, between 1987 and 1989, agreements were established between the Portuguese Radio Broadcasting (RDP) and the National Radios of the Portuguese speaking African countries (PALOP) as well as between the Portuguese News Agency (Anop), later Lusa – and the news agencies of the former Portuguese colonies.

To integrate African narratives in its programs, RDP África structured its editorial team and correspondents, comprising 36 members, among journalists and directors of Portuguese nationality and Portuguese-speaking African countries, whose work has the purpose of bilateral function, Africa/Portugal and bringing a wide range of African information to Portugal (Jordão, 2009, p. 19).

At the same time, the BBC is disputing the same audience with RTP on Portuguese-language services. The BBC's Portuguese service reaches half of the audience of all international radio stations to relay to the PALOP, thanks to 80 short wave broadcasting stations located in Ascension Island, Mauritius, Seychelles, Lesotho, South Africa, and Madagascar. In this way, broadcasts from the United Kingdom arrived in Africa, including the least democratic countries with strict laws that prevented the presence of foreign media.

In the 1990s, the BBC changed its traditional shortwave to FM broadcasting strategy in two ways: through its own 24-hour relay on a dedicated frequency or through relay arrangements with local radio stations. This is where its role in providing an alternative source of news is evident, since most of the media in African countries were under state control (Sousa, 1993, p. 10).

Whether through retransmitters mounted in geostrategic locations or via local radio, international broadcasters have grown their radio coverage for Africa and, at the same time, have influenced changes to improve internal policies and strengthen citizens' rights. In this effort, the hypothesis that they played a central role in imposing their cultures and governmental models through technological hegemony cannot be ruled out (Archangelo, 2006).

International broadcasting has become a means of broadcasting programs on human freedoms and rights among African listeners and has subsequently become the influential power of culture and the idea of openness to commercial globalization. Broadcasting policy was often more usefully a slow cultural impregnation of mentalities (Archangelo, 2006; Jeanneney, 1996, p. 264).

At BBC Africa and the RFI there have been significant changes in ideologies and in the way of telling stories. The two broadcasters started by breaking down language barriers. For example, the BBC was able, until 2009, to broadcast in 33 local languages, while Radio France Internationale took a long time to address the transmission of information in African languages, only starting its programs in Hausa in 2007 and those in Swahili in 2010. This new policy has already allowed the French broadcaster to take the lead in Niger, where the BBC has been the most listened to international radio in 20 years. As far as it is concerned, Deutsche Welle took on changes in Africa through the Amharic language, in addition to Hausa and Swahili and VOA started broadcasting in 10 African languages (Barrot, 2010).

Based on the evidence above, it is clear that since the independence of African countries, in the 1960s, Western radio in Africa developed the two-way theory: influencing the improvement of government systems and awareness of human rights and

freedoms, on the one hand, and imposing cultural models and opening spaces for commercial globalization, consequently, the construction of narratives of Africa from a Western point of view, on the other. This was the perception of journalist Hirsch (2012) in her text "The West's lazy reporting of Africa".

According to Asekun-Olarinmoye, Esiri, Ogungbamigbe, and Rahmat (2014) there were two main consequences of the biased coverage of Western media in Africa. First, the narrative model created a very negative picture and pessimistic perception of developing countries by the citizens of industrialized societies, particularly those who have never been to the African continent. These people tend to see the African continent as a country without borders or identities. The second consequence of this pessimistic view of Africa is the negative effect on foreign direct investment, as Africa's biased or negative coverage affects the flow of foreign direct investment.

The paradox of cultural imperialism on Western radio stations, despite being designed for political purposes, still maintains a lot of imposition in its programming and information. In other words, it has control over the way in which important facts spread throughout the world. In addition, they have other subjective interests to defend, such as helping their governments to fulfill political goals, cultural promotion and their values in African countries.

In recent years, there has been an improvement in the international radio narratives about Africa. Approaches closer to consensus try to occupy spaces in the international media, which try to highlight the diversity of programs on the African continent, for example: programs on cultural diversity, market, religions, art, government systems, music, literature, etc.

The approach to the positive aspects of Africa is well known on Radio France Internacionale (RFI) which privileges information and journalistic sources from Africa. At RFI, 60% of the programming is geared towards African issues with the aim of promoting proximity of the radio to the local, international and African diaspora audience (Archangelo, 2006). The advances in the production of narratives about Africa, the RFI's communication policy leaves doubts as to whether it really favors the promotion of the other angle of Africa. It is understood in all the programs produced and transmitted to Africa that there are cultural and linguistic interests that are quite expressive in all the goodwill of France in relation to its former colonies.

Other changes take place at BBC Africa, which feature some radio programs made by Africans, such as Focus on Africa, Network Africa, Fast Track and African Performance, in which they address a variety of topics, from sport, business, art, literature to religion. There was a small drop in investment in this field, due to the contention of costs with international programs. The BBC demonstrated an advance in the production of positivist narratives about Africa, drawing interest from the global audience to gain new perceptions about the continent.

It can be seen in this discussion that the radio stations of Western imperialists had a wrong perception of Africa. One of the reasons for the poor understanding of Africa is due to the analysis of African events or occurrences from a Western perspective. Another observation is the fact that the large number of African radio stations present a fragile picture of sustainability, namely, the lack of essential resources for the proper functioning of the media, such as printers, paper, distribution vehicles and many other instruments indispensable for publishing and newspaper distribution (Levingston, 2011).

The main justifications for the presence of international channels in Africa are due, on the one hand, to the reasons of diplomatic projections from western countries to Africa. On the other hand, it constitutes, for listeners living in African countries, an alternative means of information whose regimes strive to control the internal media. In other words, transnational radio waves allow African listeners to bypass official censorship policies, giving them access to Western radio, which allows them to form their opinion (Mattelart, 2015).

In general terms, Western media policies initially focused on issues of cultural hegemony and civilization, but in recent decades there has been a new framework of approach based on a consensual relationship characterized by the inclusion of African narratives on international radio, responding to the new order in a world of balanced communication.

African perceptions about Western radio

In March 2015, a group of 159 scholars, writers and journalists from various countries addressed a letter to the executive producer of the US television program *60 Minutes*, criticizing the distorted way in which Africans were represented in three reports: two about wildlife and another about the ebola epidemic in Liberia. According to the content of the letter, the addressers claimed that the Africans were limited to the role of passive victims or brutal, corrupt and incompetent villains. They were presented as if they had no capacity for action.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, one of the great African writers, in his speech delivered on May 25, 2012 at South African Free State University, said that this negative image of Africa is spread and intensified in everyday images in the West, in the form of television documentaries to illustrate hunger, cyclone victims, violent crime, and ethnic warfare (Dersso, 2014).

Ngugi Wa Thiongo's view is shared by Kenyan writer Nanjala Nyabola, in which she noted that Western journalists continue to approach African issues in the wrong way: (a) analyze reality in opposition to the West and not from intrinsic reality; (b) when working in countries with a language other than their own, they need interpreters, which affects the understanding of the phenomenon. The writer pointed out as a solution the employment of local journalists to report, instead of being hired to advise Western journalists (Nyabola, 2014).

Mamdani (2009), one of Africa's leading critical and intellectual thinkers, criticized in his book Saviors and survivors: darfur, *politics, and the war on terror*, those who rely on Western media for information about Africa. For the writer, the Western media come to think that Africa is the source of information to feed their televisions, above all, armed conflicts, ethnic wars, contagious diseases, and other evils, instead of building journalistic narratives of peace and reconciliation.

Going deeply into the position of Mamdani (2009), the technological hegemony of Western radio creates in African audiences the idea of the only reliable and reliable news media, to the detriment of local radio.

From another angle of analysis, it is not true that African radio stations rely on international media outlets based in the West to spread their news. According to Asante (2013), this is a systematic way of lowering Africa, which is part of the philosophical and cultural fabric of Europeanization in Africa, according to which Africa cannot report its own stories. In fact, "they", read Africans, are part of the problem, perpetuating and disseminating Western perspectives, prejudices, and stereotypes (Gathara, 2014).

African narratives on web radios via streaming

Radio is still the most dominant mass media in Africa with the greatest geographic reach and the largest audiences compared to television and newspapers. In general, radio is undergoing a process of "radiomorphosis" and a renaissance due to more accessible technologies, a perception that technology has made radio a two-way medium and that it can help to close the digital divide by providing a powerful medium for the dissemination of information, especially for rural audiences that are difficult to reach.

Social media platforms and streaming radio broadcasts open up opportunities for Africans to tell their stories first hand, removing mediation from international radio stations in Africa and giving them another visibility told by themselves. At the same time, webradio wants to offer a new perspective in the field of information compared to that provided by Western media.

There is a rediscovery of radio in the context of new ICT (information and communications technology), a perception that streaming technology is transforming radio into a medium in which it helps to narrow the digital divide, providing a powerful tool for disseminating information to the public with access to the internet.

As Girard (2004) puts it, African radio stations with websites that offer audio streaming are a minority, but tend to increase as internet bandwidth costs gradually decrease. The number of people listening to streaming web radios is very low. But in depth analysis, the interest in such streaming stations attracts more the young audience with mobile devices and with internet access from mobile phone companies and the African diaspora, which is one of the main audiences of webradio and social media.

The advantages of streaming radio stations are still not easily accepted, especially in impoverished populations, where internet connection is still not the main priority.

However, for many radio stations, particularly those that are serious about collecting news and reports, the internet is a huge benefit. Now, international news, sports, weather, etc. are available almost instantly.

The Internet World Stats 2020[2] report reveals that in Africa, internet penetration rates have grown by 39,3% until March 2020. Out of the universe of 4.575.578.718 internet users in the world, 11,5% are located on the African continent.

As for the cost, according to a survey carried out by Cable.co.uk, it showed that out of 36 African countries surveyed, only seven countries (Egypt, Tunisia, Réunion, Algeria, Mauritius, Morocco, and Mayotte) had packages that cost less than US $ 50[3].

In the field of social media, they are a powerful platform for creating various stories about Africa, thanks to the accessibility of modern technology. So, traditional radio stations, bloggers, and commentators on African social media are using Facebook, YouTube and other platforms to create their narratives to reach the universal audience. An example of this is "The Africa, the media never shows you campaign", led by young Africans, which broadcasts via web radio and "posts" positive images about the continent to combat the stereotype shown by Western media.

Social media in Africa is capturing positive human stories. They open space to tell and share the multiple African experiences. These moments of joy, play, celebration, love and human interaction create narratives of Africa. These new representations can trigger a change in the way of telling the stories of Africans, in an uninterrupted way.

The penetration rate of the internet and mobile devices, the massification of social networks on the internet, are elements that contribute to the manifestation of different and multidirectional narratives about the African continent. For example, web radios, blogs, web news pages and social networking sites tell stories, show photographs and videos captured in Africa by Africans in an attempt to form a more complete picture of life on the continent.

The various African voices on social media can be interpreted as an African attempt to construct their post-colonial discourses to challenge narratives of African mischaracterization.

In the field of mobile phones, despite the majority of the population facing the digital divide, mobile smartphone devices accounted for over 620 million mobile connections in September 2011 and are expected to reach 735 million in late 2012 (Global System for Mobile Communications [GSMA], 2011). Technologies provide an opportunity to boost African web radios to reach global audiences, journalists can advertise their phone numbers over the air and invite listeners to call or send messages with comments on news, questions, greetings, music requests, etc.

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[2] Available in https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm

[3] Retrieved from https://www.cable.co.uk/broadband/pricing/worldwide-comparison/#regions

Discussion

Since the installation of international radio transmitters in Africa, after World War II and the independence of African countries, the policies of Western imperialism were clear. According to the critics of the French school of communication, Western states maintained an ideological and cultural influence on Africa, first through radio and second through television and cultural industries, later through the strategy of technical cooperation agreements and commercial counterparts for signal retransmission. This latter strategy was applied by RFI, RTP, and BBC both through radio and television media.

The construction of Western narratives about Africa, through radio transmission, often loaded with prejudice and pessimism, was a practice that lasted for many years, above all, the way the African continent and its countries are described in the West, where the African situation is assessed by the tribal struggles and miseries in their countries. A reflection carried out at the "Media and development forum" held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in September 2008, established new communication frameworks between the West and Africa, in a process that Bourges (1978) called "information decolonization".

In the period following the independence of African countries, it was not only Western radio stations that were blamed for political and cultural imperialism in Africa. Internally, the local radio stations of the colonial heritage have become a monopoly of the State, on the one hand, as an instrument of political propaganda and, on the other, as a means of encouraging social development (Agbobli, 2016).

After the 2008 Burkina Faso forum, subsequent changes in the communication model of Western radio stations in Africa could be seen, given that the new cooperation and information policies that have been established between Africa and the West, where BBC Africa, RFI and Deutsche Welle showed significant changes by incorporating African languages into their news broadcasts.

Interpreting Jeanneney (1996), Archangelo (2006), and Hirsch (2012), in the periods following the Burkina Faso Forum, Western radio in Africa became a system that influenced democratic policies, promoted human rights and, simultaneously, operated in a way to convert audiences into an internal critical mass.

In the beginning, the presence of the great western radio channels in the African continent imposed a kind of media hegemony over the local media, as well as the overwhelming power in the (re)interpretation of the facts, as well as in the decisive influence of public opinion and, at times, in political interference.

In recent decades, although there have been improvements in the new framework of approach to Africa, in which it seeks to introduce formats for the inclusion of African narratives in the western media, reversing the old scenario of unique narratives, however, the negative coverage of the continent persists in some international radio stations, a scenario that can be overcome by African countries through more practical measures to tell their own stories to the outside world.

Conclusion

The role of international radio in Africa is a subject of great African interest both as a historical memory and as an object of study that needs to be evaluated before the memories fade.

The reflection allowed us to bring new paths for the historical analysis of international radio in Africa in a multidisciinary structure that links the sciences of communication, history and politics. Other more specific approaches centered, for example, on the objectives of creating each international radio, on the geographic distribution of radio stations in Africa and the typology of narratives, could allow us to complement the results of the study and bring reality closer, thus contributing to the holistic debate around western radio narratives in Africa.

The question of departure of this essay was about the western radio narratives about Africa in the post-independence periods and the perspectives for the future of radio in Africa. The answer is found in the discussion of results. It was found that they portrayed in three types of discourses and different ideologies in three historical moments: first, the development of a narrative to accompany colonial politics, maintenance and transmission of Western culture and civilization; the second narrative of ideological wars during the cold war period, time for the massification of western radio on the African continent and the third interest, after the Cold War, was in the development of cooperation and the production of new narratives focused on conflict regions in Africa.

The "Media and development forum" held in Ouagadougou was the main milestone in changing the narratives of Western radio in relation to Africa, from which began the process of "information decolonization" initiated by the BBC, RFI, Deutsche Welle, and VOA radios by incorporating African languages in their broadcasts so that Africans had the opportunity to present their own narratives and change the social imaginary of the West in relation to Africa.

It is necessary to consider that the "decolonization of information" did not liberate African countries from imperialism on the western radio, while internally the radio was taken by some political regimes as a means of political propaganda.

Despite all the historical vicissitudes of radio in Africa, today they are moving towards greater autonomy in the production of local content, within the framework of freedom of the press and expression.

The future prospects for radio in Africa, as far as can be predicted, FM still seems to have a solid future in Africa. web radio and digital audio broadcasting (DAB) may be adopted by African broadcasters in the near future, given the drop in internet prices and the widespread use of smartphones with built-in FM radio.

Translation: Jonas Tembe

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