Call for papers

RadioMorphoses thematic issue n°11

Francophone journal dedicated to radio and sound studies

The war of the waves revisited. Cultural and political uses of radio

within contexts of domination

Coordination : Tristan Le Bras (Mondes Américains - EHESS) and Thomas Leyris (IRHIS - Université de Lille).

This thematic issue will gather researchers working on radio in contexts characterized by domination. Although it will especially welcome articles focusing on the uses of radio in colonial settings (Balandier, 1951), in situations characterized by racial domination (Wacquant, 1997) or ethnic domination (Brubaker, 2002), proposals relating to the wider field of domination (social, cultural, gendered, etc.) can be considered. The central question at the basis of this volume will be to analyze the dynamics binding together radio, community and power; either in aiming to reproduce social hierarchies or to contest it. We would also like to reflect about conceptual divergences depending on the cultural area conducting the research. Although similar processes are scrutinized in diverse radio settings, concepts such as race\(^1\), class, nation, gender, etc., are not always mobilized in the same manner. Is it because of structural differences in the field, or differential epistemologies according to different scientific cultures? This volume presents the opportunity for a comparative exercise over this matter.

Research about radio has long been interested in the role of domination. Serge Chakhotin’s *The rape of the masses. The psychology of totalitarian political propaganda* wondered early on about the role of radio in propaganda while Paul Lazarsfeld explored the political potential of broadcasting, both around the 1940s. In France, the « war of the waves » has been a matter of

\(^1\) By race we mean the belief in the heredity of social and moral traits. Although this social and cultural construction can be used to legitimate domination from certain groups over others, it can also be mobilized as an identity-builder by dominated groups to organize themselves.
historical investigation since the 1980s (Eck, 1985). But these early considerations are now reinvested by relying on new analytical frames. Indeed, despite very different historical contexts (from European public monopolies to American commercial broadcasting market), along with the diversity of programming situations (multilingualism, censorship, competition or lack of it, etc.), there is a strong dynamic towards the political study of radio. And this trend can be seen in multiple cultural areas. In Europe, projects such as Popkult60 in Germany and Luxembourg, or the GRER (Groupe de Recherches et d’Études sur la Radio) in France, have been carrying up-to-date research over the role of radio in European history.

In the African context, historians have explored the decolonizing process and the cultural consequences induced by the redefinition of power relations (Grabli, 2018; Ritter, 2021; Moorman, 2021; Leyris, 2023). Colonial authorities displayed an interest in broadcasting to African populations starting in the late 1940s and early 1950s, by providing content intended to satisfy this public (Tudesq, 1983; Ribeiro, 2017; Schaeffer, 1979; Breton, 1992; Robert 2009). At the very moment empires were starting to decline, radio was understood as a privileged tool in order to maintain domination (Balandier, 1951; Moorman, 2021). As a central instrument in colonial developmentalism (Frederick Cooper, 2012), this media is rapidly identified by independentists as a « technique in the hands of the occupier » (Fanon, 1959) which must be seized. However, what ought to be made out of it differs between those who conduct it and those listening to it (Grabli, 2019). While elites would prefer information and culture, masses demand specific music or useful information (regarding agriculture for instance), and administration remains focused on the developmentalist paradigm (Pauthier, 2014; Leyris, 2023) and nation-building (Frère, 2020). These divergent agendas produced vibrant debates and expanded the fields of possibilities around the 1960s.

In the United States, studies have shown the fundamental role radio played in the construction of racial categories (Vaillant, 2002). The legacy of the sonic dimension of racialization (Eisdheim, 2019) in radio history are two folded. First, the airwaves from the 1920s to the 1940s are characterized by the massive absence of African Americans, while they are caricatured by white announcers in shows such as Amos ‘n’ Andy (Ely, 2001); that period is also important for the construction of racially defined musical categories (old time music, race music) which are broadcasted to distinctive intended audiences (Miller, 2010). Then, the relation between radio and racial minorities was restructured by the arrival of African Americans over the airwaves starting
in the 1950s. White entrepreneurs, driven by new trade opportunities in an industry shaken by the arrival of television, turn to the African American market by relying on black employees (Baptiste, 2019). In the following decades, these workers are increasingly politicized and try to turn these lucrative businesses from money-making to community-organizing (Barlow, 1998). Yet, these two driving forces keep competing with each other, as the necessity to be profitable sometimes collides, sometimes intertwines with the demands for more political involvement (Le Bras, 2023).

**Volume’s aims**

Yet, these perspectives have been mostly blind to one another. This edited volume intends to provide a platform for these perspectives to cross one another. It is the opportunity for a collective effort to better understand how a mass media involving a potentially massive audience has been the subject of power struggles throughout the 20th Century, especially regarding colonial or racial domination. How has radio been used to build cultural identities within oppressive situations? Did it rely on community, particularly race-based ones (Schaub, 2019)? How diverse publics have appropriated broadcasting contents, often in unexpected manners? These are examples of the ways we can address the relations between radio, community and power. Possible topics might include (but are not limited to) the following themes:

**Theme 1: Domination/resistance. How domination and subversion are broadcasted and heard?**

This theme calls for articles interested in the production of a political language by programmers on radio stations operating within domination contexts. It is divided into two subthemes.

**Subtheme 1: Dominating through radio.** Here the focus will be placed on the ways in which radio programming, through its aspect (voice, sound, music) and its content (shows, rhetoric, speeches, etc.), has been utilized to capture an audience defined by race, ethnicity, class, gender, or any category. Either from state radios operating in colonial or occupation settings, or private radios participating in the reproduction of a social order for commercial reasons, the aim is often to take advantage of the listenership’s consent, one way or another.

**Subtheme 2: Subverting through radio.** How do certain actors rely on radio in their struggle against domination? This subtheme is interested in the diverse ways in which contesting radios have tried to reach a dominated group. What voices, what languages, what messages, what
music are mobilized to catch the intended audience? What practices do radio personnel use to encourage identification with their listeners?

Theme 2: Listening to domination. What can “dominated” listeners do with radio?
The second theme deals with the reception side of broadcasting. How do listeners receive, interpret, decode the messages intended to them? How do they decipher the voice, tone and music used to reach them? What do they make of that content? Is it sometimes diverted from its original purpose? Do these shows reinforce identity-building among particular groups? How much do these groups trust the medium, be it dominant or subversive, public or commercial? Articles stressing agency - meaning the ability to evaluate, criticize and act - among listeners will be especially welcomed. Indeed, following World War II, political systems relying on racial domination - such as colonization and segregation - are contested everywhere (Cooper, 2012). Both in the US and in Africa, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, we can observe processes of reappropriation from public broadcasts that were initially created to rely on their consent in a unilateral, top-down perspective.

Theme 3: Broadcasting within a dominated context: circulation of practices, connected and transnational studies.
How do practices and contents travel around the world in the field of radio? How do approaches to programming, talking or formats follow a transnational path? Are there models of dominant or subversive stations that are replicated elsewhere? Are there radio techniques that can be identified as particularly relevant to domination or resistance? Can we follow specific trajectories from prominent stakeholders in radio, carrying practices, advice or formation with them? The steady rise of imperial broadcasting in the 1930s, followed by international radios after World War II, have dramatically increased competition among radio players. Traditional radios were thus forced to adapt in order to maintain their audience, facing sometimes hostile competition (Cold War broadcasting, anti-imperialist Voice of the Arabs, black nationalist Radio Free Dixie, etc.).
In the global perspective suggested by this third theme, we would like to oppose the tendency for cultural areas to remain sealed from one another. This volume intends to open a platform for the exchange of methods and concepts diverging according to the field explored. For instance, if race is a central category in American analyses, it is not always the case in Europe, especially in France where its historical legacy and scientific rebuttal makes it an inoperative concept for many. Community, ethnicity or nation are sometimes favored in the analysis in Europe, Africa or Latin
America, to explore realities that are widely different while still converging in some ways. This edited volume will thus be an opportunity for an epistemological discussion as well.

Bibliographie


Frère Marie-Soleil, Journalismes d’Afrique, Louvain-La-Neuve, De Boeck Supérieur, 2020;


Leyris Thomas, La Société de radiodiffusion de la France d’outre-mer. Naissance d’un empire radiophonique franco-africain au temps des décolonisations (1939-1969), 2023, Thèse de doctorat sous la direction de Mme Isabelle Surun.


**Calendar and recommendations**

**Calendar:**
Deadline for submission: September 15, 2023

The article proposal will develop, on 4000 to 5000 characters including spaces, the theoretical framework, its problematic and hypotheses, the methodological approach and bibliographical indications. We will accept proposals in French, English or Spanish.

Proposals (format .pdf, .docx or .odt) will be sent to the following address no later than September 15, 2023: tristan.lebras@ehess.fr and thomasleyris@hotmail.com.

Late September 2023: notification of acceptance or December 1st, 2023: Full paper submissions deadline for double-blind evaluation. Contributions must be a maximum of 35,000 characters, including spaces and bibliography.

Late January 2024: Notification of the decision after double-blind evaluation
Late March 2024: Publishing.

Recommendations

Here are the editorial guidelines: https://journals.openedition.org/radiomorphoses/1634