

Workshop - Call for papers

Radio, community, power: domination and emancipation in segregated contexts



Disc jockey from radio station WRMA in Montgomery, Alabama - Alabama Department of Archives and History

Call for proposals regarding this Workshop that will take place on the Campus Condorcet, near Paris, France, June 15, 2023

Organized by Tristan Le Bras (CENA-Mondes Américains - EHESS) and Thomas Leyris (IRHIS - Université de Lille).

Deadline for propositions on February 27, 2023

This workshop will gather researchers working on radio in segregated contexts. The study of radio has been particularly dynamic in diverse 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. Africa has also been investigated by recent scholarship over the role of broadcasting in late colonialism and independence. In the United States, *sound studies* have renewed the history of radio by focusing on the sonic dimensions or racial domination.

Yet, these perspectives have been mostly blind to one another. Historical contexts were surely very different (from European public monopolies to American commercial broadcasting market), along with the diversity of programming situations (multilingualism, censorship, competition or not, etc.). Nevertheless, some issues seem to cross these differences and bind these fields together. Thus, the community question could be a powerful bridge. We can observe processes of reappropriation from public broadcasts that were initially created to rely on their consent. Be it radios for racial minorities in the United States, or public radios controlled by colonizing powers in Africa, they both experienced strong backfires around the 1960s with intense politicization. It would be desirable and fruitful to investigate the struggle for the control over the airwaves in different situations characterized by racial domination and/or unequal repartition of power according to ethnic status. This workshop is intended to be a platform for all research that questions the dynamic relation binding **radio**, **community** and **power**.

In the African context, historians have explored the decolonizing process and the cultural consequences induced by the redefinition of power relationship (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 colonialism (Frederick Cooper, 2012), this media is rapidly identified by independentists as a « 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). 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 traces 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 race 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). The relation between race and radio is therefore reshaped by political dynamics.

Henceforth, the same question could apply to all this research: what happens when racial or colonial domination is highly contested and radio becomes the object of community struggles? We would like to introduce a comparison between imperial and domestic situations. We also want to stay mindful of the music broadcasted and its stakes. Programming is often contested and its manufacturing can reveal political forces at play.

In a transatlantic perspective, we would like to offer an opportunity for discussion and encounters between seemingly sealed academic fields. We would also enjoy debate over methodological and conceptual approaches. The concept of *race* is omnipresent in the United States, while it is not always the case in french-speaking scholarship, especially in Africa. Concepts such as *community* or *nation* can be mobilized in colonial contexts, but should they be used in other situations? This workshop intends to start a dialogue about these epistemologies.

The organizers know very little about research done in other cultural areas. Nevertheless, proposals coming from other experiences where the history of the radio is related to racial, ethnic and colonial domination are more than welcomed. According to the propositions received, the scale of the workshop might shift from a transatlantic perspective to a global one. For that matter, we would like to remain open for research in connected history. In a cold war context, it is interesting to see how the US and the communist regimes both broadcasted to Africa and Latin America. The transnational circulation of musicians and broadcasters could also be another lead, offering crossed perspectives.

Modalities

Proposals can be written in French or English and should contain 1500 to 3000 characters (excluding the bibliography and brief biography). All disciplines are welcomed. They should be sent before February 27, 2023 to the following email addresses: tristan.lebras@ehess.fr.

The workshop will in hybrid mode, both in Campus Condorcet and online.

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