

Lingala Facile and the City: How "News" Circulates in Kinshasa

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The paper sets forth to analyse the entanglements of various communication technologies in urban Africa. I will do this by exploring the production of “news” in DR Congo’s capital city, Kinshasa, and the circulation of information via and beyond mass media broadcastings. I thus hope to enlarge our understanding of how information travels in contemporary urban African spaces, of which many have profoundly changed since the liberalisation of mass media in the 1990s. In particular, this presentation will deal with the intertwinement of television news and various kinds of “small media” (Spitulnik 2002).

The material derives from ethnographic research with Kinshasa’s most popular television journal *Journal Télévisé en Lingala Facile (JTLF)*. Unlike the other news broadcasts on local TV stations, which usually focus on national events and international actions, *JTLF* explicitly deals with urban issues experienced by Kinshasa’s inhabitants. Personal testimonies and rumours are the main sources of *JTLF*’s news items. Jokes, songs, and cartoons are integrated in the *JTLF* broadcasts as well, and contribute to the high popularity of this TV program. The *JTLF* news stories themselves feed into pavement radio, and the *JTLF* journalists and the individuals who are offered a platform in their broadcastings become protagonists in urban narratives; further, the *JTLF* slogans are picked up in sermons, political speeches, advertisements, and private conversations.

Although I agree that a distinction between “formal media” and “small media” serves analytical purposes, I argue that, if we want to gain a better understanding of how Africa’s media influence everyday lifeworlds, we should look into the ways in which “formal” and “small media” are integrated into one another, and in particular we need to study how images, signs and narratives appearing in one communication zone are transferred to other zones; how the transfer happens; which elements are borrowed; how they are transformed; and what new meanings and values they acquire when arriving in another circuit of information distribution. “Formal media” and “small media” might be distinct zones of communication, and they have their own modes of transmission and styles of representing reality; still, they are part of one and the same larger communication space, and are constantly feeding each other, producing new instances for reflection on urban morality and values; thus offering citizens/spectators/gossipmongers endless moments of engaging with their own lifeworlds and with realities beyond their personal horizons.

