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What brings foreign broadcasters to Africa?

Using the examples of China and Germany

If you think of international news and media, you may think of the BBC, one of the oldest players in this field. Since 1932 they have provided news not only for Great Britain, but for all commonwealth states. In 1939 the BBC launched its program in Afrikaans followed by Portuguese for Africa and Hausa, Swahili and French in the following years. Today the BBC offers a wide program range for the whole continent: it provides content for TV, radio and the internet in English, French, Hausa, Kinyarwanda, Kikundi, Somali, Kiswahili, Afaan Oromo, Amharic, Igbo, Pidgin, Tigrinya and Yoruba¹. And other countries have also reached out to the world. They are not only sending correspondents to report from abroad for an audience back home, but they produce content for the whole world. And the BBC is not alone; a lot of countries have entered the global media market. The big question is: why? What is the motivation behind this expansion?

In this paper we take a closer look at two global players: Germany with its programs for radio and TV through Deutsche Welle and one of the youngest actors on the world media stage: China, with the TV station CGTN, CRI radio, the news agency Xinhua and the newspaper China Daily, whose appearance in Africa had been watched and analyzed closely.

China's Media in Africa

Western media like the BBC and CNN have monopolized the global media market and they haven't treated China very well – from

a Chinese point of view. Reputation is a strong value in the People's Republic of China and especially after the Olympic Games in 2008 in Beijing the Chinese government realized how important media is to gain a good reputation worldwide². The financial crisis of 2009 came at the right time for China. The western world was occupied with saving their banks and the budgets for western media were cut. The timing was right for new media to fill the gap and it fitted perfectly for China's rising news agencies. Although the Xinhua News Agency opened its first bureaus in Africa in the 1970s, it took China more than 30 years to launch radio and TV stations in Africa. China Radio International (CRI) opened in 2006 in Nairobi, the TV station China Global Television Network (CGTN) - formerly known as CCTV - was launched in 2012 as well as the newspaper China Daily, both in Kenya's capital Nairobi. This city is perfect for foreign media to cover many of Africa's countries, because it provides a good transport connection, it's well-developed and one of the UN headquarters is based there. With this move, China followed the example of many international media companies.

Soft power is a term that is often used to describe China's policy. It means that a political player exercises power through international institutions and ideology and without military power. And whoever you ask to describe China's motivation for going global with their media, the answer is always "soft power". Because soft power relies on a good

¹ BBC: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/whoweare> (29.03.2018)

² Wu, Yu-Shan. 2012. *The rise of China's state-led media dynasty in Africa* (occasional paper no.117). Johannesburg: South African Institute for International Affairs, p.8

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reputation, a positive cultural credit and that you can gain through a strong media representation.

Soft power also includes economic power which is of course important for an export nation like China. And in this correlation one has to consider that China not only established media in Africa, but worldwide and that Africa is just a small market for China although it seems different³.

It's hard to find any voluntary disclosure on the internet from the different Chinese media companies, but CGTN writes on its website:

"By launching CGTN, we want to re-brand our product to the world, to cope with the global trend in media convergence [...] At CGTN, we cover the whole globe, reporting news from a Chinese perspective [...] Ultimately, we believe facts should speak for themselves and are committed to neutral, objective reporting"⁴

The headquarters is in Beijing and that applies to every Chinese news channel. Although all channels have studios across the world, the organization is still centralized and stories have to conform to the policy of the government. But the quote also shows that CGTN wants to "re-brand the product" and reports from a "Chinese perspective" two central aims that have been mentioned before.

China also promotes "positive reporting" with the aim of changing the common narrative about China and Africa.⁵ This is what also attracts many Africans who are tired of reading stories about their continent which are only about crises, wars and poverty. And it's also helpful to "correct" the image

³ Cf. https://www.usitc.gov/publications/332/2013-04_China-Africa%28GamacheHammerJones%29.pdf in 2011: Africa accounted for only 4% of China's global trade

⁴ CGTN: https://www.cgtn.com/home/info/about_us.do (29.03.2018)

⁵ Grassi, Sergio. 2014. *Changing the narrative. Chinas mediale Offensive in Afrika*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, p.5

of China in Africa. With this strategy China also tries to reduce fears of military strength. And the country has a lot more to prove than other countries. In the western media its image is often: they are coming for the African resources and to exploit the continent.

But positive reporting and constructive journalism could also lead to biased coverage.

A journalist from an African country, who has worked for China Daily and Xinhua since 2013 and who prefer to remain anonymous, tells about his work: China Daily and also Xinhua have a very strict policy on what is published and which stories are covered. Only events that apply to China-African relations are interesting for the media companies. Negative and even critical voices are removed from the articles.

When this journalist wrote about current political events he was told to stop criticizing former South African President Jacob Zuma for example. "Once I wrote a story about the Dalai Lama. And my editor was really offended and hurt. He told me to never send him a story like that again," he said. From this example you can see that the media content of Chinese media abroad is still tightly connected to the official policy of the government in Beijing.

China is a new player in this media game, which was dominated by western players for a long time. It still has to learn a lot about the business and about dealing with local employees, an area where they are still acting quite unprofessionally, explains the African journalist: "The editor always has to be Chinese. But sometimes, they don't even speak English, but nevertheless they are editing the articles for the website. Also the payment is quite poor compared to media companies from America or Europe."

Nevertheless he also welcomes the diversity in the media sector that is provided by the new companies. This is also a fact that researcher Yu-Shan Wu from the South African Institute for International Affairs (SAIIA) highlights. "China is also often accused

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of not respecting human rights and that its agenda is to bring their ideology and political system to Africa. What is often neglected is that China provides platforms for exchange and thereby a possibility for people to get informed and to communicate." There is also new technical infrastructure in African countries and also cheap communication systems that are produced in China. And one mustn't forget that the readers and listeners are also aware that they are watching/ listening to media content that is financed by a certain government.

China is also offering scholarships and funding for journalists often combined with journeys to the country itself. But that is, as Wu explains, also a possibility for both sides to learn from each other and to develop together. The other part of such workshops can be to learn to watch western media more critically. This can also be summed up under the diversity of media that China's content is offering: one doesn't have to rely just on western media anymore.

But still, there is a lot to do for China as Wu explains: "Chinese media are quite new to the global market. They have to learn a lot. But they are developing."

Today Xinhua has over 30 offices across Africa with more than 400 employees and it provides its news for free. The radio station CRI broadcasts on shortwave and FM two hours per day for African countries in Hausa, English, French and Swahili. And CGTV (former CCTV) broadcasts have a one hour daily news program called Africa Live. In Nairobi and in Johannesburg China Daily is available in a printed version. The presence of Chinese media is undeniable and although it's still a long way to reach the league of old players like the BBC, one has to be aware of the rising importance of Chinese media on the African market.

German Media

"Everyone has an agenda, not only China," says Yu-Shan Wu. So after looking closely at Chinese media we turn to Deutsche Welle (DW) a German broadcaster for TV and radio. It is one of the oldest foreign media

producers, establishing its program for Africa in 1962. Since 1963 the radio program could be received in Swahili and Hausa and Amharic followed in 1965. Nowadays the radio program is reduced; in East Africa it's broadcast three hours daily and on shortwave it's still also available in Amharic and Pashtu one hour per day. The last big relay station in Kigali was closed in 2015, so DW cooperates with local radio stations to broadcast their program via FM.

The TV channel is available via satellite or cable – in English, German and Arabic. DW also offers vast internet content with different projects like *77 percent* for the 77% of Africans who are younger than 35 or *African Roots* a history project about important African leaders. DW is also very active on social media, where the team interacts with hundreds of thousands of followers. The broadcaster is financed by German taxes with an annual budget of around 280 Million Euro (~\$340 Million). Over 3000 staff from 60 nationalities work for DW in Germany and worldwide and the DW Akademie offers media trainings for journalists all over the world. It also offers internships for local journalists in the African countries where DW works.

On the website you can easily find information about the mission and the background of DW.

"We convey a comprehensive image of Germany, report events and developments, incorporate German and other perspectives in a journalistically independent manner. By doing so we promote understanding between cultures and peoples. We simultaneously also provide access to the German language".⁶

Besides the promotion of cultural understanding, one function of the German broadcaster is also to sharpen the image of the Federal Republic of Germany; it should explain the values and aims of Germany and promote the German language. An es-

⁶ DW: <http://www.dw.com/en/about-dw/profile/s-30688> (29.03.2018)

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sentinal value for Germany as well as for the DW is the constitutional democracy. Meanwhile, the reporting of DW in autocratic countries is also essential; the mission of the broadcaster is to provide access to neutral information where regional broadcasters can't. So being an alternative to national media is also a function of DW. In some African countries people rely more on foreign media than on national ones, especially in countries where freedom of opinion is restricted and the media is controlled by the government.

DW started as a broadcaster for Germans living abroad, but began expanding its program in other languages. This was a result of the Cold War, where the battle for the hearts and minds of Africans was fought between the Western countries and the Eastern bloc states. Russia and East Germany, but also the USA, Great Britain and of course West Germany were investing a lot in radio productions for Africa. And although circumstances have changed, DW is still a reliable source of information from all over the world for a worldwide audience.

This aspect is also highlighted by Isaac Kaledzi, a journalist from Ghana who has worked for DW since 2012: "In local media the focus is of course on local events. Foreign media like DW cover a whole range of events worldwide and put it in context."

To open a new range of news for the local community and to support democratic values through that, is still a basic value of DW.

The initial idea behind the founding of the DW was a different one. It was to remove the tension between Germany and other countries after the Second World War and to represent these new values of the country to the world. And media was a perfect tool for that mission because it reached more people than the official foreign policy. In Africa radio was and still is the most important medium, because it is affordable and accessible and it's perfect to spread ideas. Rebels don't occupy broadcasting studios first thing after a coup for nothing! And that's where DW stepped in to spread

the ideas and renew the image of Germany in the world.

So it is interesting to notice that in the beginning Germany's motivation behind going global with its media is almost the same reasons as China now: remediate its negative image in the world. And it still has the mandate to present Germany, the language and the values of the country.

But the DW is now an experienced player in the field of global media. They rely on local journalists and Isaac Kaledzi for example is happy to have the opportunity to report about his country to the rest of the world. But he also explains that working for DW is connected to stricter rules and more effort to convince editors about covering a certain local story. He is convinced that foreign media in general are very important for his country:

"In instances where there are no means to tell the stories of citizens, the foreign media usually does so and projects their circumstances to the bigger world."

Conclusion

By looking closer at the German and the Chinese broadcasters you can see that the motivation behind their global approach wasn't very different in the beginning and somehow still isn't. Both countries set out to establish a positive image of themselves in the world, primarily interested in the regions where they invest and export a lot. Both cover mostly stories which have a connection to the origin country and both have a wider view than local media.

It is interesting that there is a lot of research about the Chinese media approach but little about DW. The western media sector is somehow seen as more positive and isn't questioned any more. Perhaps because the western media is already a stable and reliable news source for many Africans. But nevertheless, DW also has a certain agenda that is connected to the German government.

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While talking to journalists and academics you get the impression that China's biggest problem in the field of global media is that it is quite new and still unprofessional and inexperienced. But this disadvantage could be settled after a few years of operation.

With radio and TV stations, English language print publications and a news agency, the arrival of the Chinese onto the global media stage cannot be ignored. Their presence could help diversify the African media landscape and offer an alternative to the Western perspective. Nevertheless it should also be remembered that these media offerings are connected to the Chinese government, which is not a democratic one.