

NEWS CIRCULATION IN THE PORTUGUESE- SPEAKING SPACE:

news agencies exchange between Brazil
and the Lusophone Africa

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ABSTRACT – This paper addresses the news exchange between Brazil and Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa, as operated by each country's national news agencies. The main goal in this study is to understand how the information flow is carried by those news agencies. For this, a quantitative and comparative survey through content analysis is conducted on the usage of news from each agency in every other, by means of replication or attribution as source among the contents in their respective websites, within the timespan of May 2016 to May 2017. In spite of the great international exposure to developments in Brazil during that period, the exchange was recorded as minimal. In order to analyze this news exchange, we make use of the perspectives from the political economy of news agencies (Boyd-Barrett, 1980), and the circulation of news (Machado, 2008; Medina, 1998.) The paper applies the concept of network-territory to the analysis of news exchange and focuses on analyzing the structures of news production. The geocultural sphere of the Portuguese language is understood as a space of information circulation and an interlocution between the Geographies of Communication and Journalism studies is hereby proposed.

Key words: news agencies; journalism in Africa; geographies of communication; news circulation

CIRCULAÇÃO DE NOTÍCIAS NO ESPAÇO LUSÓFONO: Intercâmbio Jornalístico entre Agências de Notícias do Brasil e dos PALOPS

RESUMO – Pensar a atividade jornalística para além de suas formas tradicionais é uma prática já recorrente no jornalismo contemporâneo. A pluralidade de públicos, comportamentos e tecnologias desafiam os modelos clássicos do jornalismo em um movimento que incentiva a inovação em diferentes aspectos da atividade. No entanto, o termo inovação vem sendo aplicado de forma ampla sem um rigor e delimitação interessantes para a pesquisa em jornalismo. Nesse sentido, propomos no presente artigo direcionamentos iniciais sob quais aspectos podemos compreender o jornalismo de inovação. Partimos da origem do conceito na área da Economia e Administração para ampliar seu sentido nas Ciências Sociais e no próprio Jornalismo como atividade. Expomos três instâncias das quais o jornalismo contemporâneo já apresenta

novidades para entender o jornalismo de inovação como processo e produto, quais sejam: 1) conteúdo e narrativa, 2) tecnologia e formato, e 3) modelo de negócio. Para complementar essa segmentação, apresentamos algumas iniciativas a fim de ilustrar cada subcategoria e projetar uma conceituação atualizada de jornalismo de inovação.
Palavras-chave: Jornalismo. Inovação. Jornalismo de inovação.

CIRCULACIÓN DE NOTICIAS EN EL ESPACIO LUSOHABLANTE: intercambio periodístico entre agencias de noticias de Brasil y los PALOPs

RESUMEN – El artículo aborda el intercambio de noticias entre Brasil y los países lusohablantes de África, operado por sus respectivas agencias nacionales de noticias. Comprender de qué forma se pasa el flujo de información desde las agencias de noticias es el objetivo principal de este estudio. Para ello se llevó a cabo una encuesta cuantitativa y comparativa por medio de análisis de contenido sobre el aprovechamiento de noticias de cada agencia en cada una de las demás, mediante replicación o atribución como fuente entre los contenidos en sus respectivos sitios web, en el lapso comprendido entre mayo de 2016 y mayo de 2017. Pese a la gran repercusión internacional de sucesos en Brasil en ese período, el intercambio constatado ha sido mínimo. Para analizarlo, se utilizan las perspectivas de Economía Política de las agencias de noticias, de Boyd-Barrett (1980), y de la circulación de noticias (Machado, Medina.) El artículo aplica el concepto de territorio-red al análisis del intercambio de noticias y se centra en el análisis de las estructuras de producción de noticias. La esfera geocultural de lengua portuguesa se la entiende como un espacio de circulación de información y se propone una interlocución entre las Geografías de Comunicación y los estudios de Periodismo.

Palabras-clave: agencias de noticias; periodismo en África; geografías de la comunicación; circulación de noticias.

The constitution of the “world which speaks Portuguese,” a legacy from the colonial and imperial European past over three other continents (America, Africa, and Asia), was a historical, economic, and political, as well as cultural, process. With all these factors combined, it was even more specifically a communication process. Since the first Portuguese maritime expeditions, pioneers in European colonial expansion, still in the 15th century, the ocean became a quintessential space of circulation of commodities and information. Among the “commodities,” let it be emphasized, were enslaved Africans, traded within the mercantilist logic which brought about the holocaust of slavery. With them, however, much more than forced labor and demographic transit were displaced: information flowed from one side of the Atlantic to the other, carrying language, religion and other signs that helped form the current geopolitical and geocultural Lusophone space.

With the emergence of the press and journalism in the colonies, this circulation of information became intensified. The beginning of this only took place, however, in the 19th century, more than 300 years after the first Portuguese settlement. Although the newspaper was first printed in Portugal in 1626, the Portuguese colonies in Africa and Latin America were not allowed to do so during that period (Hohlfeldt, 2016.) Hohlfeldt affirms that “that the Portuguese crown took into account the fact that, in the lands of Brazil as well as in Africa, its populations were absolutely illiterate” (ibid., P.210.) In Brazil, the Royal Press arrived with the royal family in 1808, allowing the creation of the *Gazeta do Rio de Janeiro*. In Angola, the *Boletim Oficial* began to be printed in 1845; in Cape Verde in 1842; and in Mozambique only in 1854. Thereafter, other periodicals appeared that introduced the professionalization of news collection and distribution which had already crossed the world on board the ships that made the connection between the territories.

Although the colonial system has already been undone, the flow of international information in Portuguese still persists, not only in the form of cultural, artistic or entertainment products – of which *telenovelas* (soap operas) are perhaps the most widespread example, ahead of sports and literature – but also those of a journalistic nature, through texts, photos, videos and graphics produced in one country and used in others in the press, electronic media and digital platforms.

Therefore, we set forth from the premise that *the Lusophone cultural sphere is a space for the circulation of information* in order to sketch a cartography of the information flows between Brazil and the five African Lusophone countries. More than professional cultures, deontological norms or economic, political and technological constraints of journalism practiced in each place, we are interested in the communicational frontier zone, the movement of news from one continent to another, the network space articulated, a new Lusophone territory. Although Portugal is the nation that initiated this exchange and, consequently, the creation of the space, the focus will be placed in the southern hemisphere, more specifically on the exchanges of content between the news agencies belonging to the national states of Brazil and of Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa.

Establishment of Portuguese-speaking national news agencies

In this constant but asymmetrical international flow of information, a key role is played by news agencies, true carriers of journalistic content from one country to another. Although the largest volume of information traffic – and hence the best known and most studied – are those based in Europe and North America (the centers of global capital), such as Reuters, AP and AFP, in the Lusophone cultural sphere they coexist with the national agencies of the eight Portuguese-speaking countries¹. Although each of them adopts different models of ownership, institutional nature and their role, they all have public companies dedicated to the production and dissemination of journalistic content for mass media vehicles.

The national news agencies of the eight Portuguese-speaking countries are: Lusa – Agência de Notícias de Portugal, Agência Brasil (ABr), Agência Angola Press (ANGOP), Agência de Informação de Moçambique (AIM), Agência Noticiosa de São Tomé e Príncipe (STP-Press), Agência Cabo-Verdiana de Notícias (Inforpress), Agência de Notícias da Guiné (ANG), and the newly-established Agência Noticiosa de Timor-Leste (TATOLI), from East Timor².

Lusa – undoubtedly, the largest of those eight – is incorporated as a public-private partnership between the Portuguese State and business media groups. The commercial and closed business model that the Portuguese agency adopts restricts the access to news to the clients of the service.

In Brazil, ABr is a web-based service subordinated to the state-owned Empresa Brasil de Comunicação (EBC) and is often treated as just a news portal and not a distributor with its own logistics to send content to the media, with neither storage nor information management. Social networks (especially Twitter and Facebook) end up being used to disseminate the daily output, acting as “channels that converge to the official website of ABr, with the intention of taking the readers to the place where the news is displayed” (Lisboa, 2016). In Brazil, this “wholesale news” sector is dominated by syndication services established by private media conglomerates: Agência Estado and Broadcast, Folhapress and Agência O Globo (Aguiar, 2017).

It is also interesting to note how the Agência Brasil is, in some way, “unauthorized” and devoid of autonomy in the areas of international cooperation. In the forums and meetings of the news agencies of different countries, it is not customary for ABr to sign

for the Brazilian part, but rather the state company to which it is bound (from 1990 to 2007, it was Radiobrás, since 2007 it has been EBC.) Thus, in the statute and founding declaration of the Alliance of Portuguese Language Information Agencies (ALP) of 1996, Brazil was represented by Radiobrás (to which ABr was subordinate). In the creation of the Latin American Union of News Agencies (ULAN) in 2011, the signatory was EBC. Unlike the aforementioned African agencies, Agência Brasil was not the first exercise of the respective State in news distribution. It followed two other initiatives: Agência Nacional (AN), created in 1937, the same year of the establishment of the Estado Novo in Brazil; and the Empresa Brasileira de Notícias (EBN), which replaced the former in 1979, during a period of political openness. Following the purpose of these predecessors, to reach newspapers and small stations in rural areas and smaller urban centers in the country, ABr also provides texts, photos and videos free of charge.

In 1990, in the first year of Fernando Collor de Melo's government, an additional news agency was created: Agência Brasil. However, instead of being a company with its own legal personality, the new agency was constituted as a simple service provided by Radiobrás (this, rather, a state-owned company), with dedicated personnel and facilities, but without administrative autonomy. (Aguiar & Lisboa, 2016)

In the Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOPs, in the original acronym), national agencies are autonomous state-owned enterprises, or created as governmental bodies (submitted to the Executive Branch, usually ministerial portfolios of Communication or Information) or as autonomous entities with relative budgetary, administrative and editorial autonomy. In addition to the fact that all these countries had initially adopted socialist regimes, the newspaper distribution sector – which was run by news agencies – was considered strategic for national sovereignty in most of the countries in the process of decolonization. Like much of the “Third World” (now called “Global South”), PALOPs opted for a state agency model at the time of independence because the news stream was seen as “a significant sector to national sovereignty” (Aguiar, 2016).

The statist option, far from being purely an authoritarian resource, was due to a strategy of satisfying demands not met by capital in territories where the construction of circulation and communications infrastructure was built according to the colonial

projects of domination, aimed at exportation, and not to the internal logics of development. National agencies were organized as part of structures designed to tell the world, from a national point of view, the events taking place in these new countries.

The wave of independence of former Portuguese colonies began in 1973 with the unilateral proclamation of the political emancipation of Guinea Bissau on September 24th, recognized by Portugal the following year. The other countries would follow the same path after the Portuguese authoritarian regime of the *Estado Novo* was overthrown on April 25, 1974, in what would be known as the Carnation Revolution. Also in the same year, Cape Verde signed an agreement in December aimed at independence. The process was completed in July of the following year. Also in 1975 was the turn of São Tomé and Príncipe to proclaim independence on July 12; in Mozambique, on June 25; and in Angola on November 11.

The creation of news agencies as a national communications strategy was adopted by the countries at two different times. In the continental PALOPs – Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau – national agencies were founded as early as 1975. However, in island PALOPs, Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe, news agencies were only launched in the 1980s. Sousa (2008, p.255) points out that the new agencies that emerged in the post-colonial period in Africa and Asia have not always “even been able to cover their own countries because of technical, financial and material difficulties.” Indeed, in PALOPs agencies, complaints from journalists and managers regarding the precariousness of installed equipment and demands for new and up-to-date devices often arise. With the exception of Angola, the countries that make up Lusophone Africa have not had, to date, an economic situation which would allow them to follow technological and, consequently, communicational advances.

Unlike in former British, French or Italian colonies in Africa, where several national agencies were formed from the confiscation and nationalization of real estate and equipment from local Reuters, AFP and ANSA branches (Boyd-Barrett, 1980, p.201), in Lusophone Africa it was necessary to start from scratch. The former Portuguese agencies, Lusitânia (1944-1974) and the ANI (Agência de Notícias e Informação, 1947-1975), were not so present in the colonies, in the context of wars of national liberation (the Overseas War) and withdrew little before independence (Ferreira, 1974, pp. 135-136).

In Angola, the Angola Press (ANGOP) news agency was

created at the time of independence, followed immediately by the outbreak of civil war between the two factions aligned to the opposite sides of the Cold War: the MPLA (Popular Liberation Movement of Angola, left-wing, officially in power) and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, right wing, the opposition.) The conflict lasted until 2002 and interfered in the agency's development projects, "especially those of expansion abroad³."

ANGOP was established in July 1975, under the name Angola National Press Agency (ANAP.) At the beginning, its work was distributed in the form of a printed bulletin, until, on October 30 of that year, it launched its first telegraphic office. Annually, the anniversary of the Agency is celebrated on 30 October. On December 2, 1975, the agency adopted its current and definitive name "Agência Angola Press," launching, on this date, its first office with the acronym ANGOP. On February 2, 1978, it was transformed into a State body, through a presidential decree. From an informative point of view, ANGOP opted in 1991 for issuing its work 24/7, and also introduced innovations in editorial and technical plans.⁴

Today, ANGOP is Angola's only news agency, set up as a state company, linked to the Ministry of Social Communication (ANGOP, 2017.) It provides text, photo, video (online TV) and audio (online radio) services, with special reports, interviews, ephemeris, obituaries, weather forecasts, newsletters, press releases and official announcements, official schedule, advertising and image bank. In addition to a website⁵, where there is a "subscriber center" with exclusive content for paying subscribers, accessible by username and password, ANGOP distributes content in news feed (RSS) and mobile platforms with free applications available for iOS Android and news sent by SMS to mobile phones.

The Angolan agency has cooperation agreements with Reuters, AFP (France), EFE (Spain), TASS (Russia), Xinhua (China), PTI (India), Prensa Latina (Cuba), PANA (Senegal), TAP (Tunisia) and with the above-mentioned Inforpress and STP-Press, in addition to partnerships with TPA and RNA, the public service broadcasters of Angola. It is also affiliated with the Atlantic Federation of News Agencies (FAAPA), the Alliance of Portuguese Language Information Agencies (ALP), the Non-Aligned News Network (NNN) and the World Council of News Agencies (NAWC).

In Mozambique, AIM was also created in 1975, in the form of a public entity (without autonomous legal personality) subordinated to the Information Office of the Mozambican government. Some

of the great supporters of the foundation of the agency were journalist and writer Mia Couto, journalist and playwright Luís Carlos Patraquim and journalist Carlos Cardoso, who directed it years before being assassinated in 2000. In a situation more precarious than its counterparts, AIM does not have a functional website, but a page hosted on the Portuguese portal SAPO, from which it is possible to access the news output in Portuguese language. There is also access from the website aim.org.mz for customers who pay for the service, where English service is available. The agency plans for a multimedia portal with a more detailed presentation on the services and new features⁶, but the budget for setting up the page is still under review.

The Mozambican agency provides text and photo services, including reports, opinion articles and a press review. AIM is also a member of ALP and NNN. Perhaps because of the accession of Mozambique to the Commonwealth of Nations in 1995, and because it borders English-speaking countries, AIM works in Portuguese and English simultaneously and keeps a correspondent in London, British journalist John Hughes. According to the coordinator of the service in English, Paul Fauvet, in an interview with the co-author of this article, the agency had operated a service in French between the late 1970s and early 1980s, but it was interrupted for not being profitable⁷.

During the fight against Apartheid, we had good relations with the news agencies of the other countries of the Front Line – ANGOP (Angola), ZIANA (Zimbabwe), ZANA (Zambia) and SHIHATA (Tanzania). But after the liberation of South Africa, such cooperation became less urgent. In each country there were changes – SHIHATA ceased to exist, and the other three agencies were heavily governed. In the 1980s, we were very active in the PANA (Pan-African News Agency, based in Dakar, Senegal.) But PANA had enormous financial problems, and was eventually transformed into a thing called PANAPress, which works closely with UNESCO. These days we do not have many contacts with this agency. We have always had good cooperation with LUSA, which is the only European agency with an office in Maputo. We have good relations with the Chinese agency, Xinhua. There are stringers from other western agencies such as Reuters and AFP, and we have friendly relations with them.⁸

ANG from Guinea-Bissau is one of the most modest of the five news agencies of the PALOPs. Like the Mozambican, ANG is a public agency without autonomy, subordinated to the Ministry of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Media and Parliamentary Affairs of Guinea-Bissau. It operates within the Press Center of the Bissau government, in the capital, and is subdivided into three directions: Technical and Administrative and Information (Lopes,

2015, p.134.) With a reduced internal structure, it provides only text and advertising services. He is also a member of FAAPA and ALP. Up to 2015, ANG did not even have its own website, and depended on a blog hosted on the Wordpress.com platform. That year, the current site went online⁹. Lopes (ibid.) reports that ANG maintained active cooperation agreements with other international agencies in the first decades of its existence, but that currently only the Chinese Xinhua remains a partner. When this external support ceased, the author says, “several crucial activities that characterized the only news agency in the country were suspended.” Lopes carried out an inventory of the equipment installed in ANG and counted “five desktop computers and one laptop computer; a digital camera, a car”. At the time, the agency pointed out “as acquisition needs: eight computers (of which two laptops) and two cameras”.

The lack of funds prevents ANG from hiring a French-Portuguese translator who would give it another informative dimension. In the initial phase, like the other public agencies (RDN and Nô Pintcha), ANG benefited from a budgetary framework assumed by the State Budget. In losing this support, it lacked a strategic vision that would frame the agency within its new reality. The news service produced by the Bissau newsroom continues to be operational. (Lopes, 2015, p.135)

In their institutional presentation, ANG managers demonstrate a very clear understanding of the role of news agencies in relation to journalism, the global information system, and national development strategies.

Most countries have their national agencies as a central institution, specially equipped to gather information from the state's territory for international exchanges of news articles. It is in this perspective that the agency emerges as an extremely important supplier for the media, an invaluable partner without which it would be impossible to effectively present a daily news service. Therefore, the need for an agency to provide news is universal. (...) This is why, for some time now, we have insisted on the need for the Guinean state to create indispensable conditions so that the Agência Noticiosa da Guiné (ANG) can, in turn, justify the reasons for its creation in August 1975. ANG currently has 26 staff members, among whom 13 are journalists.¹⁰

In the same document, ANG said it hoped to “relaunch the services of regional correspondents,” for which it affirmed that “eight more individuals are needed” to perform the job. Although dispatches are currently being sent “at zero cost,” the agency planned to “make our services available to the nation's

media through a paid subscription.” At the same time, it relied on the reactivation of cooperation with agencies in Angola, Portugal and France, among others, “for information exchange, technical assistance and training of staff”.

In contrast, Cape Verde (in colonial times, ruled along with Guinea-Bissau until 1879, and with which it had a unified independence movement) has a more active and well-equipped news agency: Inforpress was created in 1988 as Cabopress, and received its current name in 1998. In 2015, Inforpress, along with the Cape Verdean public broadcaster, was lumped into the state-owned company RTCI (Radiotelevisão & Inforpress, Sociedade Anónima), similarly to Agência Brasil in EBC. However, the merger of both companies was dissolved in August 2016, and journalist Carlos Santos took over as the new general director of Inforpress, at the moment during which the agency regained at least nominal autonomy. He left office in July 2017, claiming “lack of financial autonomy” due to the lingering, in practice, of the administrative subordination (O Arquipélago, 2017).

Inforpress works in “gathering, treating and distributing information, against payment, in the formats of news text and photography”¹¹ and still strives to provide customers with audio, video, and infographics. It offers reports, interviews, dossiers, news archives and official schedule of Cape Verdean officials. It is a member of FAAPA and ALP and receives support from the Camões Institute, the cultural promotion organization of the Portuguese Republic. In 2011, the book *Da Cabopress à Inforpress SA 1988-2011, duas décadas de jornalismo: um novo começo... online* was published by the Cape Verdean journalist José Mario Correia, who documented the agency’s history and considerably facilitated research about it. In a seminar promoted by Carlos Santos on “challenges of technological convergence for agency journalism,” in December 2016, Correia defended that the content of Inforpress should no longer be made available for free on the website and should be charged (A Nação, 2016). In March 2017, the Cape Verdean government received a report which it commissioned from the consultancy firm PD Consult, evaluating that there were three options for Inforpress: to extinguish the agency, to keep its current status or to invest 45 million Cape Verdean escudos (around \$488,000) in order to technologically restructure and reshape it (A Nação, 2017). The study recommended opening five more bureaux within the archipelago and another three abroad.

Finally, STP-Press has been operating in São Tomé and Príncipe since 1985, also as a branch of the Ministry of Social Communication, Youth and Sport. The agency offers text, photo, audio, interviews, news archives, press releases, official announcements and a web forum. At the international level, STP-Press takes part in FAAPA and ALP and maintains cooperation bonds with AFP, TASS, Lusa, ANGOP, AIM, ANG, Cuba's Prensa Latina and with other African agencies such as APS (Senegal), ABP (Benin), ACP (Congo-Kinshasa) and ACI (Congo Brazzaville.) According to then director Manuel Dênde, "STP-Press enjoys administrative autonomy and editorial independence, under the São Tomean Press Law, but works under "very precarious conditions"¹². Cooperation is essential to compensate the agency's shortcomings, so much that the first STP-Press foreign wire service was established only two years after its foundation, through ANGOP. In that same year, the Angolan agency installed two Telex machines in its sister agency in São Tomé, which were the latter's first. At the time, only one journalist worked at STP-Press, and, according to its director, the agency did not yet have its own headquarters. By 2012, in the midst of a digital era, the agency still operated 12 Telex machines. In the words of Dênde,

by considering the current constraints due to the lack of State resources aimed at strengthening institutional capacities, STP-Press has been betting on external partnerships, particularly at the level of ALP, Portuguese Language Agencies, and not just to mitigate its internal difficulties. Thus, STP-Press has embarked on a new phase, in search of both internal and external modernization, comprising mainly direct and close and agile contacts with the whole planet through its Internet site. Notwithstanding some successes already achieved and aware of the many challenges that still lie ahead, STP-Press visualizes a permanent update seeking technological means that are in line with the reality of news agencies, namely in website package, e-mail, web portal, video, sound, that is, on a multimedia basis, to meet the challenges that are inherent to the consolidation of democracy, the socioeconomic and intellectual development of men, as well as of São Tomé.¹³

In 2014, Mr. Dênde was replaced by Ricardo Neto as head of STP-Press, and an agreement was signed with the United States government's radio broadcaster Voice of America, which "allowed for the informatization national radio, TVS and STP-Press" (TÉLA NON, 2014).

Table I. Summary of news agencies in Brazil and Portuguese-speaking African countries						
	ABr	AIM	ANG	ANGOP	Inforpress	STP-Press
foundation	1990	1975	1975	1975	1988	1985
headquarters	Brasília	Maputo	Bissau	Luanda	Praia	São Tomé
ownership	state-run	state-run	state-run	state-run	state-run	state-run
hierarchical subordination	EBC	Information Office	Ministry of Communication	Ministry of Communication	Ministry of Culture	Ministry of Communication
Status	web service	ministry department	ministry department	company	company	ministry department
languages	Portuguese, English, Spanish	Portuguese, English	Portuguese	Portuguese, English, French, Spanish	Portuguese, English, French	Portuguese
Services	text, photo, video, audio...	text, photo, bulletin...	text, publicity	text, photo, video, audio...	text, photo	text, photo, audio, archive...
Billing	free	free/paid	free	partial/mixed	free/paid	Free
mobile interfaces	app EBC Rádio	N/A	N/A	app iOS, Android	N/A	N/A
bureaux abroad	Lisbon, Rome, Copenhagen, Buenos Aires, and Washington	Lisbon, London	N/A	Lisbon, Ottawa *formerly in Praia (2003)	N/A *formerly in Luanda (2003)	Lisbon
cooperation agreements	Lusa, Télam, ANSA, Xinhua	Lusa, Xinhua, Reuters, AFP	Xinhua [hopes to resume it with Lusa, AFP, ANGOP]	Lusa, Reuters, AFP, EFE, TASS, Xinhua, PTI, TAP, PANA, PL, STP-Press, Inforpress	Lusa, ANGOP	AFP, TASS, Lusa, ANGOP, AIM, ANG, APS, AZAP, ABP, ACI, PL
affiliation	ALP, ULAN	ALP, NNN	ALP, FAAPA	ALP, FAAPA, NAWC, NNN	ALP, FAAPA	ALP, FAAPA
institutional support	RFI	--	Rádio Nacional	TPA, RNA	Inst.Camões	Voice of America
source: agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br , www.aim.org.mz , www.ang.gw , angop.ao , inforpress.cv e www.stp-press.st						

Space and news circulation

The creation of news agencies in the 19th century made it possible to increase the traffic of newsworthy information around the world. In his attempt to historically analyze the process of globalization of communication in the light of cultural variables, Thompson (1998, pp.139-141) interprets the expansion and consolidation of news

agencies as closely linked to the formation of neocolonial empires in the 19th century. Later, even amidst the post-World War II decolonization struggle, the spheres of influence of several former European imperial powers – such as Portugal – were retained, reflecting this continuity in bonds of production, export and consumption of symbolic goods such as entertainment and information.

When Frenchman Charles-Louis Havas created the first news agency, Havas, in 1835¹⁴ in Paris, the distribution of the news material produced was rather rudimentary if compared to today. Reports were already circulating across borders, but information took months to be conveyed through oceans and mud roads. The agencies organized and professionalized the circulation of information, but the regular and systematic distribution of news would only come with the telegraph and the railroad. The underwater submarine cables installed for the operation of the electric telegraph connected continents and allowed for the expansion of the business and the reach of news agencies.

According to Briggs & Burke (2016, p.173), telegraphy was “the first major electrical breakthrough in communications”. It allowed the connection of markets and accelerated the information transmission. “Distance was conquered when information relating to family, business, government affairs, the weather, and natural or manmade disasters was transmitted, much of it in the form of news” (ibid., p.175.) This observation reflects what Machado (2008) says was a creation of journalistic companies: the conception of distribution systems “according to the successive changes of territory in the course of time”.

The technological evolution that marks the stages of the work process and social relations at the same time points to the particularities of the systems of both distribution and circulation of news. It is in consideration of the functions of space and processes in which networks are activated in the time that a journalistic system is distinguished from the others. Because over time a system of information dissemination acts in line with a system of techniques, the emergence of digital satellites supposed for news agencies, for example, new forms of actions and functions within the journalistic ecosystem in contemporary societies. From wholesale information sellers, the agencies start to meet specific demands in niche markets. (Machado, 2008)

Mattelart (1996, p.213), on the other hand, recalls that the “pathways of the national communication networks” of peripheral areas, such as the telegraph and railways, were designed on behalf of imperial interests, aimed at extracting and exporting natural

resources and agricultural products: “Extraversion will be the rule”. The author also confronts the definitions of Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg on the concept of imperialism – in which the former highlights almost exclusively the economic aspect, while the latter reinforces the political importance of coercive and symbolic apparatuses, including communication networks – in order to emphasize the imperial logic of news agencies. As a tool of this expansion, Mattelart (1996, p.235) lists the four languages most prone to “conquest,” listing Portuguese as the fourth most powerful.

A later turning point in the distribution of news by news agencies came with the Internet. “With the creation of digital networks, the role of news circulation systems as activators of social spaces was accentuated across the world” (Machado, 2008). The author specifically cites Reuters news agency, which expanded its financial services after technological development. The creation of individualized agency services was a milestone in this new period of digital networks, changing the exclusively wholesale nature of these companies. In the agencies analyzed here, nevertheless, the Internet allowed a total opening of their news output to the public. Agência Brasil, as well as African agencies, relies on websites as a platform to make their news available for free. Despite the effort to generate their own revenue, as is the case of ANGOP, AIM and Inforpress, the prevailing strategy among the Portuguese-speaking news agencies in the Global South continues to be open access to their news output.

This system differs from the centralized distribution model exercised by the news agencies of the “Global North”. Although Machado (2008) has the press *per se* in mind, the same idea can be transposed into the reality of the agencies: “As the architecture of the media reflects the relations of power in a given society, the creation model of both distribution systems and the circulation of news varies, and, depending on the set of forces involved, it may assume symmetrical or asymmetrical conformations.” Technology does not determine the adoption of such systems, but it pushes for the establishment of distribution and circulation networks that presuppose a “spatial extension” of the reach of news output.

Medina (1998, pp. 15-19) locates journalistic information as a product of industrialized societies whose most emblematic expression are news agencies and associates this product with the dimension of the “space of social interaction”. Space, in turn, is closely associated with shared symbolic codes – among which, notably, is

language. On the other hand, according to the same author (*ibid.*, pp. 411-42), if all this “analysis scheme” is based on the “global centers of development,” in the peripheral zones there coexist “superimposed realities in the same geographic space,” which require contextualized analyzes to avoid the risk of imposing the parameters of “elite” areas onto “marginalized” communities.

As proposed by Aguiar & Pasti (2016), the concept of space is key to understanding the performance of news agencies. Since these organizations exist to convey information to news media that otherwise would not reach them, they operate news circulation between dispersed points on the globe, spatially determined and constituting specific territories of action. These territories are constituted precisely by the information flows, in the way elaborated by Haesbaert (2011 [2004], pp.281-287) as “network-territories,” which are as extensive as is their scope of distribution, reception and exchanges of news content performed by agencies.

Boyd-Barrett (1980, pp. 195-198) had already drawn attention to this articulation by demonstrating that much of the news flow was a result of exchange between news agencies (“news flow as news exchange”). However, even with such exchanges always being unequal, in the cases of the countries of the Global South they are generally unbalanced to the extreme, exerted between small and medium-sized national agencies and transnational (or global) agencies with broad economic power and scale of action. This is the case of the aforementioned “cooperation” agreements between the news agencies of the Global South and the huge Reuters and France-Presse agencies, signed in the 19th and 20th centuries in the wake of European imperialism. Therefore, a “balanced” cooperation, in which the volume of text and photos exchanged – that is, made available to partners and actually used in smaller news services – are equivalent, at least in magnitude, is a rare occurrence among news agencies. What prevails is an unequal exchange, in which one side receives and takes much more news content than the other.

Empirical observation: the news exchange

In order to understand how these exchanges take place in the Lusophone sphere between Brazil and the Portuguese-speaking African countries, web searches were made about the six agencies in order to

verify the volume of traffic exchanged by means of mentions to each agency by the others (Table II). Search was performed directly on the respective websites of the Portuguese-speaking agencies and also by means of Google's "advanced search" tool, by delimiting keywords and target domains. The timespan included in the survey was one year, from May 2016 to May 2017. The result of the survey is displayed on Table II, where the numbers correspond to the quantity of news items that reproduce or quote another Lusophone news agency as source (columns) in each of the news agencies surveyed (rows).

Table II. News agencies mentioned by Lusophone agencies (row) by each other (column)						
	ABr mentions	AIM mentions	ANG mentions	ANGOP Mentions	Inforpress mentions	STP-Press mentions
by ABr	--	0	0	0	0	0
by AIM	1	--	0	1	0	0
by ANG	0	0	--	7	32	0
by ANGOP	1	279	1	--	22	0
by Inforpress	0	0	0	0	--	0
by STP-Press	0	0	0	1	0	--
sources: agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br , www.aim.org.mz , www.ang.gw , angop.ao , inforpress.cv e www.stp-press.st						

The numbers are smaller than expected, especially in the relationship of the Brazilian agency, ABr, with the others. When the search was performed on the news events of Agência Brasil by the other companies, only two occurrences were found – and this was a timespan that included events of great international exposure of Brazil, such as the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff and the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. AIM, ANGOP, and Inforpress run Brazilian news mainly through global agencies such as AFP, Lusa and EFE, as well as their own staff writing in cases where the news involves issues from both countries. Given that ABr provides open access to its output for free, what could be a quick and costless access does not seem to result into frequent sourcing. Perhaps because of lack of knowledge or even a lack of relationship between ABr and its African counterparts, the exchange rate is very small. In the case of ANG and STP-Press, interest on Brazil is reduced to sparse news on their own output and some use of external sources such as Portuguese and other foreign media.

When the opposite search is effected, with the African agencies

names and bylines in Agência Brasil's website, the result is not very different. In the period 2016-2017, ABr did not have any of the PALOP news agencies as a main source. Those countries appear in the news listings of the Brazilian agency only when quoted via Agência Lusa or in its own output, when issues include the CPLP or the Portuguese-language spelling agreement of 1990. There were also occurrences that dealt with sport matches between athletes from these countries during the 2016 Olympics. The exception was Angola, which was highlighted mainly after complaints involving the scandal of Brazilian contractor Odebrecht, which also operates in the African country, and was included in the news coverage made in Brazil.

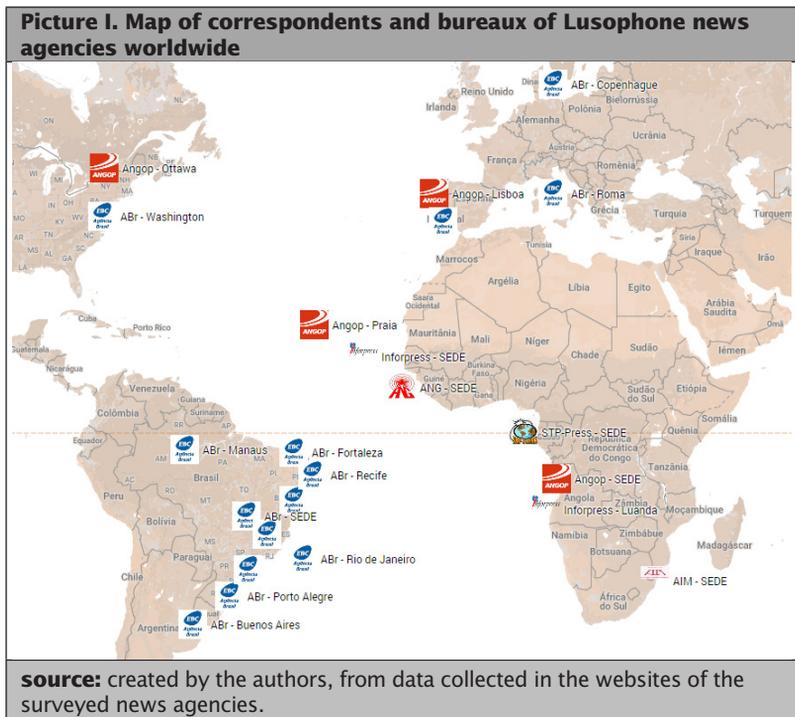
The lack of mutual citations between the agencies of the smaller PALOPs is the most striking fact: STP-Press, Inforpress and ANG do not make use of each other's dispatches, despite the existence of instances of cooperation, such as ALP. In particular, the São Tomean agency is not mentioned by any fellow news agency, indicating a slowdown in cooperation between these news agencies, despite having been active in the 1980s.

Another exception in the table appears in the volume of news from AIM run by ANGOP. The Mozambican news agency (along with Portugal's Lusa) is the main source for news about the country, but it is also important in the coverage of other African countries. Among the nearly 280 news items ran on ANGOP website that reference AIM, many are about countries like South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, all of which border Mozambique. Notwithstanding, news from AIM on Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Lesotho, Ethiopia and The Gambia were also found. Lusa is also the source of ANGOP to report on events in Mozambique, but it is important to note that some news had AIM as their original source, which means that the information left Africa, was sent to Europe and then returned to the continent of origin.

The same interest is not evidenced when observing the occurrences of ANGOP in the AIM service. Only one news item was found in the mentioned period. However, as already noted, the AIM page is hosted on SAPO and the search covers results beyond what is published by the agency. That way, the survey was only performed through Google. Angola also emerges as a point of interest, with its own production especially in themes that cover the two countries. The AIM has a daily production volume much lower than that of ANGOP and operates with a reduced team, which can be pointed out as one of the reasons for the disparity in the flow of trade between the two main PALOPs.

The figures also reveal the commercial and cooperation relations that take place between the news agencies. ANG, for instance, mentioned ANGOP and Inforpress, with Cape Verdean news being the largest amount (32), of which 19 had Lusa as the original source – mostly foreign news coverage. In Cape Verde, there were still other news items which directly source Lusa. The ANGOP website had 22 news items from Inforpress, while ANG had only one. The flows show themselves different, and the agencies web pages do not have the same functionalities, services and volume of production. The differences do not prevent all references from other Portuguese-speaking countries, which indicates an interest in events in other territories of this Lusophone cultural space.

Finally, the overlapping of bureaux and correspondent placements is also rare (Figure I), meaning that agencies generally do not dispose of their own resources to cover the other Lusophone countries, which should stimulate exchange as a way of acquiring news input, but this does not happen in concrete terms.



All surveyed news agencies maintain relations with Lusa, reflecting the ties with the former colonizing country.

And much of what is said about the member countries of the space passes through the Portuguese agency. Also noteworthy is the cooperation of China's Xinhua agency with four of the six surveyed, indicating a growing presence of China in South-South information flows. Although the institutional frameworks for cooperation exist on the international regional scale (such as the ULAN, Latin America and the Caribbean, of which ABR is part, and FAAPA, for the Atlantic coast of Africa, which includes ANGOP, ANG, STP- Press and Inforpress), and in the geocultural-linguistic sphere (with ALP), most information flows are through bilateral exchanges. The respective associations of agencies further play the role of consulting, joint training efforts (such as FAAPA, which provides training courses for journalists from member agencies) and lobbying with multilateral entities (such as ITU – International Telecommunication Union, body of the UN system).

As seen, several of the African agencies face permanent problems such as equipment precariousness, the difficulty of access to the technological update, the high costs of maintenance and telecommunications tariffs and the difficulty in training professional staff. The lack of budget for the acquisition of new technical equipment limits the possibilities of the journalistic services that can offer. At least two agencies – ANG and STP-Press – reported the demand of journalists for professional retraining courses (Lopes, 2015; On the one hand, this encourages alternatives for integrating these services into the digital convergence scenario, using simple and free channels of content distribution (such as the web, blogs and social media) as a way to reduce costs. On the other hand, it reinforces the dependence of the Global South agencies on the Northern private companies that control these platforms and channels, without the autonomy that would be possible with own controls on the telecommunications infrastructure (such as satellites and intercontinental submarine cables.) If an agency has its publishing platform hosted on Wordpress, Facebook or Twitter, it is subject to the determinations and volatility of these companies (in this case, three North American ones), and may lose them if access is suspended or the companies are acquired or closed.

Of course, none of the six agencies discussed here has the pretension or possibility of reaching the size of a transnational agency such as Reuters or the Associated Press. However, they are geared towards operating in a specific geo-cultural space, that of

Lusophony, which extends beyond the Atlantic and extends to Asia (with East Timor and Macau), with a presence on four continents. In this space, they promote journalistic exchange among themselves – either directly, in bilateral exchanges, or indirectly, through global agencies such as AFP¹⁵ and also Lusa¹⁶ – by effecting circulation of information, the flows of which draw a “network-territory” in the aforementioned elaboration of Haesbaert (2011).

In fact, the Lusophone space of information circulation resembles a new “triangular trade,” as in the colonial period, but for the purpose of this work, the European vertex was excluded. As seen, news agencies of the Global South rely on the services of other European agencies, demonstrating the lack of direct exchange between ABr and African Portuguese-speaking agencies.

Needless to say, the analysis of the presented survey does not finish here, nor can it claim to do so. It also demands a more detailed study of the conditions for the practice of journalism in the peripheral contexts of underdevelopment. The challenges imposed on the journalistic profession by technological and economic transformations such as digital convergence are, in peripheral and semiperipheral countries, much more profound than in central countries, if not others. Issues dealt with as “given” in developed centers, and therefore often overlooked there, are crucial in underdeveloped areas: infrastructure installation, access to technology and affordability, corruption and protection against the influence of economic and political powers, freedom of press and regulation that protects rights to communication are some of them – and their understanding requires further research.

* Translated into English by Maira Manzali

NOTES

- 1 Ecuatorial Guinea, ninth country to join the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), was welcomed into the group in 2014, in a decision led primarily by political and economic issues in spite of cultural ones, since the country was colonized by Spain and still uses Spanish as its official language. Although now made co-official, Portuguese language is yet to be

- spread among the population. The country's official news agency, GEP (Guinea Ecuatorial Press), works exclusively in Spanish.
- 2 The approval of the creation of TATOLI, the East Timor News Agency (initially under the acronym ANTIL), was only announced by the government in March 2017, but the agency has been operational since July 2016. <http://noticias.sapo.tl/portugues/lusa/artigo/22058855.html>, accessed in April 2017.
 - 3 http://www.angop.ao/angola/pt_pt/portal/informacoes/ministerio-da-comunicacao-social/mcs/2012/9/40/Historia,84b7e591-6724-4f29-a715-e9abba34f613.html, accessed in 24/May/2017
 - 4 http://www.angop.ao/angola/pt_pt/portal/informacoes/ministerio-da-comunicacao-social/mcs/2012/9/40/Agencia,3a2b845a-3429-4a3d-8b81-0ca665081cf8.html, accessed in 24/May/2017
 - 5 <http://www.angop.ao>
 - 6 This information was obtained in April 2017 in an e-mail interview granted to the co-author by the AIM board.
 - 7 FAUVET, Paul. Interview granted to the co-author, by e-mail, em 19/Nov/2015.
 - 8 idem
 - 9 <http://www.ang.gw>
 - 10 <http://www.ang.gw/ang.php>, accessed in 25/May/2017
 - 11 <http://www.inforpress.publ.cv/> - acessado em 25/5/2017
 - 12 DÊNDE, Manuel. Interview granted to the co-author, by e-mail, em 5/12/2012.
 - 13 DÊNDE, Manuel. Interview granted to the co-author, by e-mail, in 5/Dec/2012.
 - 14 Agence Havas (which would be followed by Agence France-Presse - AFP), appeared in Paris, in 1832, first built as a foreign news translation office. The agency would be incorporated in 1835 and re-founded as AFP in 1944.

- 15 http://www.angop.ao/angola/pt_pt/noticias/internacional/2017/4/21/Brasil-Temer-diz-ter-sido-ingenuo-escandalo-que-pode-lhe-custar-cargo,74e426b2-cc95-4e79-9af0-e8ddc38baaee.html, acessado em 25/5/2017
- 16 http://www.angop.ao/angola/pt_pt/noticias/africa/2017/4/19/Mocambique-Brasil-juntam-hoje-inauguracao-corredor-Nacala,2661d0d7-7884-4c66-a032-65d2a9ddb89e.html, acessado em 25/5/2017

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