

July 9, 1954

Cairo Radio's External Broadcasts: Broadcasts in Swahili

Citation:

"Cairo Radio's External Broadcasts: Broadcasts in Swahili", July 9, 1954, Wilson Center Digital Archive, BBC. Summary of World Broadcasts. Part IV: The Arab World, Israel, Greece, Turkey, Persia. (No. 481. 9th July 1954), p. 32-33. Original contributed by James Brennan; transcribed and annotated by Cyrus Schayegh.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/291036>

Summary:

Already in the interwar decades, radio broadcasting became an important tool for seeking to shape public opinion at home and abroad. Thus, in the late 1930s, an Arabic-language "radio war" pitched Italy against France and Britain, both sides attacking the other for imperialist policies and intentions in the Middle East. With the onset of decolonization in Africa and Asia after World War II, also leading postcolonial countries began to use radio as a tool.

A case in point is the text printed here, from 1954. It is an English translation, reprinted in the British Broadcast Company's (BBC) compendium Summary of World Broadcasts, of Radio Cairo's announcement that it would start broadcasts in Swahili. While in the mid-1950s the early post-monarchic Egyptian government led by President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970) kept scoring successes vis-à-vis the country's earlier British rulers in Egypt itself, it sought to engage and keep busy Britain (less so other late European imperial powers) abroad, too. The most important foreign arena was Africa. Breaking Britain's radio monopoly the Egyptian government in July 1953 launched the radio station Sawt al-'Arab, The Voice of the Arabs, which from the start broadcast in Arabic also into East Africa where a few British colonial subjects understood Arabic. Moreover, in 1954 Sawt al-'Arab started Swahili broadcasts.

As Tareq Ismael's classic *The U.A.R. in Africa: Egypt's Policy under Nasser* (1971) and James Brennan's "Radio Cairo and the Decolonization of East Africa, 1953-64" (2010) show, these broadcasts attacked British rule and framed Egypt as decolonizing Africa's leader, a move that became ever more important as Egypt's international profile grew after the successes of 1956. (See the respective entries in this collection). At the same time, Egypt-based Arabic-language writers were keen to introduce decolonizing and early postcolonial countries to the Arabic-speaking public; they often framed political developments there in ways that were related to Egypt and/or claimed a certain lead role, in decolonization, for Egypt. While some books were written on Asia and Latin America, most concerned Africa, underscoring Egypt's location and leadership claims

there.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

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On 2nd July Cairo radio announced that on the following day it would be transmitting the first of its new broadcasts in Swahili. "Egypt's geographical situation requires her to work for the liberation of the African continent, in which the Nile flows, from all forms of imperialism. One of the means available to Egypt in her endeavors for the liberation of Africa is the presentation of a half-hour daily programme in Swahili. This will be broadcast at 16.30 on 42.52 and 24.93 metres. The transmission aims at linking the fighting peoples of Africa with the Arab peoples, who are also struggling for freedom, peace and prosperity."

The broadcast in Swahili on 3rd July was preceded by the following announcement in Arabic:

"The object of this transmission in Swahili is to strengthen the ties between this African country, Egypt, and the various peoples of this important part of the world in our dear continent of Africa. Africa is a rich continent with great potentialities. Its wealth and treasures belong to its sons. Today the people of the Nile Valley meet on the ether the sister people of East Africa. We are spreading our civilization and traditions, which are also your civilization and traditions. This transmission is being launched in the service of our own brothers, who have always had a special place in our hearts. Brothers, we have great hopes that the Swahili transmission coming from Cairo will contribute greatly to strengthening the friendly and brotherly relations between you and us. 'Peace and true friendship among nations and full independence for all' is the motto of all of us." (Cairo in Swahili, 16.30, 3.7.54)