

Radio Soundings

Zulu radio in South Africa is one of the most far-reaching and influential media in the region, currently attracting around 7.7 million listeners daily. While the public and political role of radio is well established, what is less understood is how radio has shaped culture by allowing listeners to negotiate modern identities and fast-changing lifestyles. Liz Gunner explores how understandings of the self, family, and social roles were shaped through this medium of voice and mediated sound. Radio was the unseen literature of the auditory, the drama of the airwaves, and thus became a conduit for many talents pushed aside by apartheid repression. Besides Winnie Mahlangu and K. E. Masinga, among others, the exiles Lewis Nkosi and Bloke Modisane made a network of identities and conversations that linked London and Africa with the heart of Harlem and the American South. As such, this dense network drew together the threads of activism and creativity from both black America and the African continent at a critical moment of late empire.

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Radio Soundings

South Africa and the Black Modern

Liz Gunner

University of Johannesburg

International African Institute, London
and



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-47064-3 — Radio Soundings
Liz Gunner
Frontmatter
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108470643
DOI: 10.1017/9781108556903

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First published 2019

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-47064-3 Hardback

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To Wiseman Masango, and to the memory of
'the King' K. E. Masinga

Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices,
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that, when I waked,
I cried to dream again. Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Act 3, Scene 2

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Acknowledgements

There are a number of people who need a great deal of thanks in the making of this book. It began its life mainly as papers for seminars or workshops or conferences, but also from conversations, or even overheard remarks. The workshops or panels were often stimulating and nerve-racking; among these was the panel on radio at the African Studies Association of the UK conference in Leeds in September 2012, when Harri Englund, Jendele Hungbo, and I spoke on radio; another was the African Studies Association meeting in Philadelphia, 2013, and a panel on media and popular culture where I was interrogated, politely, by Hlonipha Mokoena and also met Peter Bloom.

I benefited hugely from contact with a huge range of people. And from contact with – through listening to or simply seeing – many different radios, usually quite small and often in unexpected places. One was the battery-operated radio used, among other things, for listening to serial dramas that sat in the bedroom of Mlomo Mhlongo, who ran a bar on the bend in the road in Qwayinduku, looking out towards the hills of the Ongoye Forest; another was the small transistor that would be hung up in the branches of the guava tree in the yard of the Dindi family, also in Qwayinduku, so we could sit and listen to it; another was the small, rather battered radio in the shop in the Shembe village of Ebuhleni on the edge of Inanda, Durban. There were others.

In terms of funding, I was fortunate to be funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF) for a project on ‘Radio and the Making of Community in South Africa’ while I was at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus, and for a while thereafter when I was at Wiser, University of the Witwatersrand. This enabled me to employ Wiseman Masango, my valued research assistant, with whom I worked for a number of years. His extraordinarily detailed knowledge of Radio Zulu/Ukhozi FM, its announcers, and the serial radio dramas never ceased to amaze me. He is a kind of ‘walking bible’ on the topic. The funds from the NRF grant also enabled me to visit several archives, chief among these being the Sound Archives at the SABC in Durban, Old Fort Road, now K. E. Masinga Road, and also the SABC Sound Archives in Auckland Park. At the Durban SABC, Selby Goba, the radio tapes archivist, assisted me generously and, of course, very patiently. I was in

awe of the resources that he guarded and ordered meticulously. He was indeed the keeper of treasures. After he retired I worked with Dennis Mseleku, who has also been unfailingly generous with his time, and with his expert knowledge of a range of subjects relating to the huge resource of radio dramas so carefully preserved by the Durban branch of the SABC. I cannot thank them both enough for their help.

Researchers can eat into the time of busy people, particularly broadcasters, so I was very fortunate to be able to interview such Durban SABC luminaries as Khaba Mkhize, Bheki Msane, Dumisani Nkosi, and Patrick Masonto Buthelezi. All these have now passed on and the world is a poorer and rather greyer place without them. Lawrentia Madlala and Winnie Mahlangu, two of the most famous voices in the long history of Radio Zulu and Ukhozi FM radio drama, also made time to talk to me, and I am very grateful to them. At the SABC in Auckland Park, I was able to interview Koos Hadebe, the famed football commentator and sometime radio drama actor. At the Johannesburg Sound Archives, where the main databases of all the variously situated regional archives are held, I was extremely fortunate to be helped by 'Uncle' Peter Raseroka on many occasions over a number of years. Ilse Assman, formerly at the SABC Sound Archives and then librarian at the SABC, was of immense help and a mine of information. Benny Jacobs, now Head of Sound Archives, was also extremely generous. My thanks to you all.

The grant from the NRF and research funds from the University of KwaZulu-Natal also meant that we could have a number of seminars and workshops on what seemed to be key areas that needed opening up in the study of radio beyond the ground-breaking work that had already been done by Keyan and Ruth Tomaselli, for instance. The focus on the cultures of radio, and on radio *in* culture, led to an exploration of popular culture, radio, and the media more broadly. A workshop in the early 2000s at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg brought together Birgit Meyer, Joyce Nyairo, and Isabel Hofmeyr as well as colleagues and graduate students from the Maritzburg campus such as Khaya Gqibitole and Mandla Maphumulo. A later workshop, also on the Maritzburg campus, was conducted largely through the medium of isiZulu; on that occasion, among those present and contributing were Welcome Msomi, Eric Ngcobo, Lawrentia Madlala, and also Nakanjani Sibiyi, a radio dramatist and novelist. Dina Ligaga from Wits spoke on her work on Kenyan radio dramas, then at an early stage. These events, and a later one held at Wiser, Wits in 2007, were hugely stimulating forums for avid, passionate, and often very knowledgeable discussions and debates about radio and its role and place in the country and the region at the time. My Wiser colleagues were always rigorous and supportive – a great combination. And sometimes they were inspiring.

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I thank them for all that. I also wish to thank my colleagues on the Volkswagen-funded research project ‘Passages of Culture: Mediations of Culture in African Society’. This ran from 2008 to 2013, was headed by Till Forster of the University of Basel, and brought together colleagues from Switzerland, Germany, Cameroon, Nigeria, and South Africa. It was a very productive interchange with rich research results and forged long-lasting links between those who were involved in it, and it made Africa seem a smaller, closer place, and Europe too.

I decided quite early on in this project that I wished to include in the book a section on the two exiled South Africans Bloke Modisane and Lewis Nkosi as they were intimately connected with radio, although, through no choice of their own, they were located outside South Africa and unable to return in the apartheid era. I made use of research funding from the University of KwaZulu-Natal to visit the Written Archives of the BBC, based in Caversham, Reading, and also to make use of the National Sound Archives, located in the British Library in London. In addition to visiting these two locations, I followed up on information about Lewis Nkosi held in the Transcription Centre records at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Austin, Texas. Bernth Lindfors helped in alerting me to the importance of the Transcription Centre and I am most grateful to him. I have only begun exploring these rich records, which have so much more to yield. I also used the resources of the National English Literary Museum (NELM) at Rhodes University, Grahamstown to research their valuable material on Bloke Modisane, and his correspondence with Langston Hughes.

Colleagues at Columbia University – in particular Marcia Wright and Gayatri Spivak – hosted a seminar on Bloke Modisane. Much of value came out of it, including comments by Mark Sanders that were of great help to me. A later workshop at NYU as part of a project on ‘Commodities and Empire’ led to my paper on K. E. Masinga that now forms the first chapter of this book. It was a most stimulating event. Some of the chapters have had earlier lives as articles, and now, in revised or mangled or cannibalised form, have a place in this book. Sections of the Introduction and Chapter 7 are drawn from Gunner (2000a), Chapter 5 appears as it is in Gunner, Ligaga, and Moyo (2011); Chapters 3, 4, and 6 each had other lives. The journals in which early versions of these chapters appeared are: *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 15 2 (2003): 49–62; *Social Dynamics* 36 2 (2010): 256–271; *Social Identities* 11 2 (2005); *Social Dynamics* 41 1 (2015): 124–139.

All those I mention, and many more, including my most patient readers, Graham Furniss and Kai Easton, and wise friend Loren Kruger, have helped in this project. My sincere thanks to you all. My recent colleagues at the University of Johannesburg in the School of Languages have encouraged me cheerfully and in some cases with a certain

Acknowledgements

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ruthlessness to complete this book. I am grateful to them. My thanks, too, to Marne Pienaar, Head of LanCSAL, and to my colleague Thabisi Adams, who checked the isiZulu orthography and some of my translations when she had little time to do so. Dennis Mseleku, Head of the SABC Sound Archives in Durban, was patient and wise, and we are still friends in spite of my persistent claims on his time. Thank you, Dennis! My deep gratitude to Di Stuart for shaping and copyediting the manuscript and to Bianca Nienaber, my wise and skilled research assistant at the School of Languages, University of Johannesburg, for help in a number of crucial ways.

I have been very lucky with the publishers and skilled team of copyeditor, typesetter, and publicists at the IAL and CUP. I would particularly like to thank Stephanie Kitchen and Harri Englund from the IAL, the two anonymous readers, and also Judith Forshaw for being an amazing and very patient copyeditor. Veronica Klipp at Wits Press offered sound advice on many occasions and I am most grateful to her.

Finally, my thanks to Tom Gunner for many stays at his flat in Whitechapel when I spent time in the British Library.

Liz Gunner

Abbreviations and acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth League
AWC	African Writers Club
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBCWA	BBC Written Archives
BOSS	Bureau of State Security
BPCB	Bantu Programme Control Board
CALS	Centre for African Literary Studies
CBD	central business district
HAYCO	Hammarsdale Youth Congress
HRHRC	Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center
TC	Transcription Centre
IBA	Independent Broadcasting Authority
KADU	Kenyan African Democratic Union
KANU	Kenyan African National Union
MK	Umkhonto weSizwe
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NAC	Native Affairs Commission
NAD	Native Affairs Department
NELM	National English Literary Museum
NET	National Educational Television (US)
NSA	National Sound Archives
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SABC SA	South African Broadcasting Corporation Sound Archives
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAMRO	Southern African Music Rights Organisation
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNIA	United Negro Improvement Association
WDR	West German Radio