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# From Revolutionary to Regime Radio: Three Decades of Nationalist Broadcasting in Southern Africa

by Lebona Mosia, Charles Riddle and Jim Zaffiro\*

## Abstract

This is the history of the last four anti-Apartheid radio stations in Africa. The authors discuss (i) the histories of the African National Congress station Radio Freedom, the South West African People's Organizations of Namibia (SWAPO) Station, Voice of Namibia, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) station, Voice of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) station Voice of the Revolution; (ii) the countermeasures taken by the colonial authorities against these stations; and (iii) the effect these stations had (or may have in the case of South Africa) on post-independence broadcasting in the respective countries.

The four stations had the same central purpose: opposition to white-minority regimes. They all have similar histories and their respective experiences impacted on post-independence broadcasting in Namibia and Zimbabwe. Radio Freedom will expectedly play a role in the restructuring of the South African broadcasting system. Examination of the dynamics of the four stations proves valuable in understanding the social and political transformation of the respective societies.

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# **De la Radio Révolutionnaire à la Radio du Régime: Trois Décennies d'Émissions Nationales en Afrique du Sud**

**par Lebona Mosia, Charles Riddle and Jim Zaffiro**

## **Résumé**

Il s'agit ici de l'histoire des quatre dernières stations de radiodiffusion anti-apartheid en Afrique. Les auteurs s'intéressent (i) à l'histoire de Radio Liberté de l'ANC (African National Congress); de la Voix de la Namibie, station de radiodiffusion de la SWAPO (South West African People's Organization); de la Voix du Zimbabwe de la ZANU (Zimbabwe African People's Union) et de la Voix de la Révolution de la ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union); (ii) les mesures adoptées par les autorités coloniales à l'encontre de ces stations de radiodiffusion; et enfin (iii) les effets qu'ont eu ces stations (ou pourraient avoir dans le cas de l'Afrique du Sud) dans le domaine de la radiodiffusion dans la période post-indépendance dans leurs pays respectifs.

Les quatre stations ont toutes eu un objectif central; à savoir: l'opposition aux régimes minoritaires blancs. Leurs histoires se ressemblent et leurs expériences respectives ont eu un impact sur la radiodiffusion au lendemain de l'indépendance en Namibie et au Zimbabwe. Radio Liberté aura, sans nul doute, un rôle à jouer dans la reconstruction du système de radiodiffusion de l'Afrique de Sud. Une étude de la dynamique des quatre stations fournit un support inestimable à qui veut comprendre la transformation sociale et politique dans les sociétés respectives qui les ont vues naître.

## Introduction

A chapter of Southern African media history closed in 1991—largely unresearched and undocumented by academics and almost certainly unnoticed by the ordinary person in the street. Unheralded, the African National Congress (ANC) radio station Radio Freedom, the oldest liberation radio station in Africa, slipped off the air that year as its broadcasters joined the queues of exiles on the road back home to South Africa. The continent's war of words was formally shut down by Thami Ntteni, director of Radio Freedom, at the Jabulani Media Conference in Holland in August 1991. Ntteni's quiet announcement that the ANC station had ceased operations ended almost 30 years of radio broadcasting in Africa by political groups seeking an end to apartheid and colonialism. Without fanfare, nationalist radio on the African continent had signed off.

This paper seeks to document the history of the last four African nationalist stations: Radio Freedom, the South West African People's Organisation of Namibia (SWAPO) station, the Voice of Namibia, and the two stations that broadcast to pre-independence Zimbabwe, namely the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) station, Voice of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU) station, Voice of the Revolution.

This article is concerned that the stations be placed within their historical African context. The four stations can be grouped together for the purposes of this study because

- (1) they all had the same central purpose—opposition to white-minority regimes;
- (2) they all have similar histories—relying on extensive help from, in the early stages, Nasser's Egypt and later Nyerere's Tanzania; and, finally
- (3) their respective experiences impacted on post-independence broadcasting in Namibia and Zimbabwe, and may be expected to play a role in the restructuring of the South African broadcasting system.

Examination of the dynamics of the four stations provides a valuable source of understanding of political and social transformation in post-majority rule. For the nationalist, radio furnished an effective means of military communication. It was also one of several tools of political education and consciencisation of the people, allowing parties to put forth their ideological goals and communicate changing conditions of the struggle with their often illiterate followers. Following independence in Namibia and Zimbabwe, radio and television were seen as important tools for bringing about a socialist transformation and rural

development, in addition to providing education, news and entertainment. A similar scenario is being painted in South Africa during negotiations toward majority rule.

While the political impact of such radio stations will always be a topic of debate, there is little doubt they were effective enough to worry the authorities in Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa. For decades the stations attempted to reach supporters through a barrage of State jamming and censorship. In turn, the Rhodesian and South African governments were closely involved in clandestine stations such as *Voz de Africa Livre* (which broadcast into Mozambique initially from Rhodesia and later from South Africa), but also more openly in their propagandistic use of public radio in all the countries under dispute.

One cannot examine the political significance of nationalist broadcasting in southern Africa without at least brief reference to the state-run services which existed side by side with it. Examination of pre-majority rule radio is also significant because many of the top managers, as well as reporters, and writers at the Namibian and Zimbabwean broadcasting corporations began their media careers with nationalist radio. Again, a similar scenario may be expected in South Africa.

## **External Broadcasting to Southern Africa**

Nationalist stations in Africa fall within the long tradition of the international political use of radio not only by nations but also by political groups. Much has been written about this elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

The first concerted attempt to influence political opinion in Southern Africa by means of radio dates to the 1930s when the Nazi station, Radio Zeesen, targeted sympathetic elements in both Namibia and South Africa before World War II.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the use of Afrikaans by Radio Zeesen arguably makes it the first Southern African language to be used on international propaganda radio. The war served to underline to the colonial powers the usefulness of radio in the conduct of international relations—even in Africa. The BBC, for example, began broadcasting in Afrikaans in 1937 to counter the perceived Nazi threat.

After the war, the major international powers did not stay out of the African either for long and the continent was soon dragged in to the Cold War. In 1958 Radio Moscow began regular broadcasts to Africa. Prague Radio and Radio Peking began regular African transmissions in 1959 as did the Voice of America. By the following year, as East Germany, Poland, Rumania and Bulgaria started broadcasting, the continent was in the thick of an international "war of words", the main themes of which were colonialism, white minority regimes, apartheid

and capitalism.<sup>3</sup>

As colonialism was rolled back toward South Africa, an increasing number of African states joined the radio war against apartheid, South Africa's presence in Namibia and the rebel white-minority regime in Rhodesia. Many made their radio facilities available to those political groups recognised by the Organisation of African Unity as fighting for the independence of their countries. The ANC, SWAPO, ZANU and ZAPU became major beneficiaries of this trend.

These four nationalist movements, active toward the end of the colonial struggle in Africa, fought at a time when the potential for propaganda by radio on the continent was on the increase as radio ownership climbed. Ironically, the British colonial office helped prepare the terrain with their "saucepan specials"—cheap battery-powered radios—which introduced the idea of radio ownership to much of British Africa<sup>4</sup>

Early on, the South African authorities were aware of the danger mass ownership of radios posed for the white settler regimes. Addressing the South African parliament in 1952, the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, Dr Albert Hertzog, said:

But a saucepan set is definitely not a success, not for the Natives. . . Those sets are shortwave sets and it makes it possible for them to listen to the whole world...take Moscow for instance. If they know those natives have all those shortwave sets there is nothing to prevent Moscow from giving them all types of information that we do not want the Native to hear about.<sup>5</sup>

The first African states to join the propaganda war were Ethiopia and Egypt—both having shaken off the colonial mantle. Ethiopia broadcast anti-colonial messages in the 1950s and was soon joined by Egypt. Egypt, by African standards, had a powerful broadcasting service dating back to the beginning of the 1940s. The station extended its facilities to the ANC and SWAPO and Radio Cairo's broadcasts were soon noticed by the authorities, with the South African newspaper, *The Cape Times*, describing the station in a front page report as broadcasting "diatribes against White rule in Africa".<sup>6</sup> The ANC and SWAPO broadcasts using Radio Cairo were monitored by the South African Broadcasting Corporation from the outset. In 1958, the Minister of External Affairs, Mr. E. H. Louw, told the South African parliament:

I am getting the monitored reports regularly, and I am thus fully informed on this matter....The only object of these broadcasts is to create discontent in this country amongst the natives.<sup>7</sup>

Ghana entered the radio war soon after independence when pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah announced plans in 1958 to buy three 100-kilowatt transmitters to launch a service to ensure "the liberation and unity of the entire African continent".<sup>8</sup> In due course these broadcasts were picked up by white settlers in Namibia, and in 1964 it was noted in the South African parliament that:

there are radio stations in the northern states which broadcast specifically in the Ovambo language (the dominant Namibian language) with the express purpose of influencing those people.<sup>9</sup>

The upshot of this was that by the early 1960s radio in Africa had become so much a weapon in the struggle of conflicting ideologies that journalists referred to a:

'propaganda war of the air', in which the external services of the leading African states compete with those of white South Africa on the one hand, and of foreign countries on the other, to influence the thinking of the continent.<sup>10</sup>

But it was not Radio Ghana or Radio Cairo that were to play the pivotal role in nationalist broadcasting in Southern Africa. Rather it was to Tanzania that the nationalist movements active in the 1960s turned to utilize radio as a means of communicating with supporters. Tanzania saw the promotion of nationalist movements in Southern Africa as one of its foreign policy objectives and was in the forefront of Organisation of African Unity (OAU) attempts to organise forces directed against South Africa and its administration in Namibia.<sup>11</sup> In March 1964, Tanzania started broadcasts to South Africa and Namibia, and Radio Tanganyika (as it then was) "began broadcasting daily news bulletins to the Republic (of South Africa)—bulletins which included and emphasized statements by South African opposition leaders and exiles."<sup>12</sup>

The use of the station by nationalist movements was boosted in 1968 with the creation of Radio Tanzania's External Service which was "given the task of supporting the liberation of Africa, African unity, harmonising good neighbourliness and portraying Tanzania's image outside its boundaries".<sup>13</sup> Broadcasts by liberation movements were intensified and eight nationalist movements, including the ANC, SWAPO, ZANU and ZAPU used Radio Tanzania in 1968.

In providing radio facilities to the movements it is evident that the use of radio by white regimes to shore up their positions had been noticed by newly independent African nations. According to the Tanzanian Minister of Information at the time, Radio Tanzania's external

services were formed:

...to promote African liberation movements, report their activities and broadcast correct information to counteract the false and malicious propaganda broadcast by radios in Mozambique, South Africa and South West Africa.<sup>14</sup>

Radio Tanzania gave studio facilities to liberation movements and paid "nominal fees to freedom fighters" who participated in the compilation and presentation of programmes. Between 1975 and 1985, approximately 17 per cent (10.5 hours out of a weekly external broadcast time of 60.45 hours) was devoted to programmes devised by the liberation movements.<sup>15</sup>

## **Radio Freedom**

Of the four stations, Radio Freedom is the only one to have started life as a clandestine station operating from inside its target country. Radio Freedom started its regular broadcasts inside South Africa from an ANC hideout in Johannesburg in 1963. With his organisation recently banned, ANC vice-president Walter Sisulu, launched the station with these words:

I speak to you from somewhere in South Africa. I have not left the country. I do not plan to leave. Many of our leaders of the African National Congress have gone underground. This is to keep the organisation in action, to preserve the leadership, to keep the fight going. Never has the country, and our people, needed leadership as they do now, in this hour of crisis. Our house is on fire.

But the smoke attracted attention and shortly afterwards police raided the hideout and seized the transmitter, thus providing a lesson in the dangers of operating from within a country's borders. According to Ntteni it took six years for Radio Freedom to get back on the air. When it reopened it was as a piggy-back station on Radio Tanzania's external service. Ntteni explained the move thus:

The need arose that there should be some form of contact between the people inside the country and the ANC in exile. The idea of radio arose because, at the time, we had activists going inside the country and we needed to compliment this with some form of political mobilisation ... We approached the Tanzanian government and the first broadcasts of Radio Freedom in exile began.<sup>16</sup>

The ANC was allocated 15 minutes, which gradually grew as the

station was given time on Radio Zambia (1972), Radio Luanda (1977), Radio Madagascar (1979), Radio Ethiopia and Radio Zimbabwe (1981). The station was obviously a political radio and had as its task the mobilisation of followers for resistance against apartheid. For this purpose its broadcasters were selected from the camps of the ANC, especially those of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the organisation's armed wing. While some of these recruits were sent to Eastern Europe for training most were later sent to the Harare Polytech following Zimbabwean independence.

But trained broadcasters had to be found long before 1980. After the collapse of Portuguese rule in Angola, the ANC was offered studio time at Luanda. Initially recruits for the new station were found at Nova Katenga, an ANC camp in Angola that was subsequently destroyed by the South African Air Force in 1979. Katenga was more than a military camp, it was also a bush school of politics. From the graduates of Katenga emerged the first post-Soweto uprising group of announcers. These were sent on to the Lenin Party School for further training, a course which announcer Themba Ntshangase subsequently described as lacking in sophistication, "more of a propagandistic type of course". It was this group which opened up Radio Freedom from Luanda in 1977.<sup>17</sup>

At first the station had no formal funding. But, then again, it did not need much. Airtime, production facilities and access to the news wire services were provided free by host countries. "All we had to do was to see to it that the guys were eating and smoking and that the radio was on the air."<sup>18</sup> Later, however, a Dutch organisation, Omroep Voor Radio Freedom, was established and did provide the ANC with some broadcasting equipment.

Radio Freedom broadcasts always started with a call-sign of automatic gunfire (a vast contrast to Radio South Africa's Afrikaans ditty "Ver in die Wereld Kittie") and generally consisted of a mix of news, political commentary and music composed and recorded by exiles in ANC camps. The organisation depended largely on the BBC Africa Service and South African newspapers for information of events inside the country as it had no formal correspondents. People, however, did send the station newspaper cuttings, hand-written transcripts of interviews and tape recordings of speeches, most of these being posted in Botswana and Swaziland to by-pass South African censors.

One of Radio Freedom's biggest problems was a lack of feedback from its audience. Everest Siyeka, who produced a "listeners' letters" programme in Lusaka for Radio Freedom, notes that on average "in a month we would get something like two or three letters coming in...

which did not give a clear idea of exactly what was happening on the ground".<sup>19</sup> Fellow broadcaster, Justice Maluleka, said people used to write to them but this "ran into problems because the letters were intercepted by the South African Government. So we ended up without feedback".<sup>20</sup>

## **The Voice of Namibia**

The Voice of Namibia followed much the same route as Radio Freedom in its development, piggy-backing host radio stations on the African continent. Although individual SWAPO representatives broadcast from Radio Cairo in the early 1960s, The Voice of Namibia officially started as a planned programme with the Namibian Hour broadcast from Tanzania in 1966.<sup>21</sup> In 1973 Radio Zambia also began broadcasting the Namibian Hour and in 1974 the service was renamed the Voice of Namibia, "since it became truly the main channel through which the patriots of Namibia could freely speak to themselves and the world about the colonial situation in Namibia".<sup>22</sup> The Voice of Namibia started broadcasting from Luanda in 1976 (the station often identified with its broadcasts in the 1980s) although it was also relayed by the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, the Voice of Revolutionary Ethiopia and the Voice of the Revolution (Brazzaville-Congo).

Voice of Namibia director, Vinnia Ndadi, noted that the station, like Radio Freedom, never engaged in a daily war of words with the SABC. But it did see its role as that of counter-propagandist:

...the station's role was to counter the enemy propaganda against the SWAPO and to educate our people on what they were expected to do, namely to support the struggle. For example we broadcast to the people in the villages telling them to provide food, water and shelter to SWAPO combatants. We also wanted them to know what was going on and what SWAPO was doing abroad and that we were actually not terrorists as our enemies were trying to imply but that we were really the true liberators of our people...The aim of the Voice of Namibia was to tell our people the truth, to inform them about the activities of other liberation movements, for example, the struggle in other countries such as Palestine and the Sahara. It was to make comparisons between what was going on in Namibia and other countries.<sup>23</sup>

The need to provide an alternative version of reality to break the agenda-setting attempts of the SABC was emphasised by another veteran Voice of Namibia broadcaster, Mvula Nongolo:

People wanted to hear about politics, about education, health in other parts of the world to compare it with what was happening in Namibia.

They wanted an overall picture of what happens in an independent country. They wanted an impression of reality outside that provided by the South Africans.<sup>24</sup>

The Voice of Namibia fell under SWAPO's Department of Information and Publicity, which was also responsible for a range of printed media. The printed publications were regularly banned in Namibia and had to be brought in and distributed clandestinely, particularly by SWAPO combatants. Penalties for being caught with SWAPO literature were high and their distribution inside Namibia was not a success.<sup>25</sup> The tight control South Africa exercised over Namibia, however, was all the more reason to make a success of the Voice of Namibia as a channel of communication. At a non-aligned Heads of State conference in New Delhi in 1983, SWAPO told delegates that widespread political resistance "had been fostered and strengthened through sustained underground political work by SWAPO militants inside Namibia as well as through concentrated political education beamed daily over the air through the VON radio programme."<sup>26</sup>

Although the vast majority of its listeners were black, the Voice of Namibia, like the Voice of Zimbabwe, did occasionally address itself to white Namibians. Broadcasts from Lusaka in 1974, for example, "warned Namibia's whites to rethink their position in the face of mounting resistance to the South African occupation".<sup>27</sup>

Specifically, the Voice of Namibia served a strong counter-propaganda role, often disputing information broadcast by the South West African Broadcasting Corporation (SWABC), the South African controlled station inside Namibia. SWAPO publications regularly attacked the SWABC calling it, in one instance, "nothing more than a mere local extension of the SABC"<sup>28</sup> and in another, a "racist broadcasting service".<sup>29</sup> Mwase goes so far as to describe SWABC's role as "essentially geared at boosting the sagging morale of the white settlers".<sup>30</sup> There can be little doubt that the SWABC, and in the north Radio Owambo in particular, were distrusted by the population:

The most popular stations were the South African stations because they were easy to tune in to and there was lots of music and the FM was used as a form of telephone. When someone died in a rural area the easiest thing the bereaved family could do was to broadcast it. People also listened to the news, but to us in SWAPO it was propaganda. When the news opened people used to stand up and walk away. When it was music people sat and listened. When the news came they would say 'Ah, stop that Radio Puppet'. We used to call it that.<sup>31</sup>

As in Rhodesia, attacks by the SWABC on SWAPO often had the effect of robbing the local station of all credibility. SWABC's declared

policy of "not creating a climate for communism"<sup>32</sup> meant the SWABC did not allow SWAPO any access to its stations and SWAPO spokespersons were never heard on the SWABC. One effect of this, however, was that the people developed a distrust of the station. At the height of the war, for example, people in the north of Namibia had a saying to describe a liar: "You're talking FM"—a clear reference to the SWABC FM stations.<sup>33</sup>

Unlike the Radio Freedom experience, the Voice of Namibia was able to stay in close contact with the situation inside Namibia. The South Africans were unable to stop direct telephone calls out of the country and it was an easy matter for SWAPO sympathisers to call the organisation's offices in London. But by the late 1980s the Voice of Namibia had a network of freelance correspondents (teachers, community leaders, nurses) throughout the country.

Almost in every region we had someone, as well as a lot of stringers. People gave information voluntarily, no one was paid. Some telephoned or faxed our London office, some used the telex and some our military communications networks. Some of the information was carried from Windhoek to the north where it would be driven to the border and taken across into Angola by courier.<sup>34</sup>

Turn-around time could be surprisingly quick. Information faxed to London from Windhoek was sent unaltered to Luanda "within the hour" where it was given political clearance by SWAPO's press agency NAMPA, established in 1987. Despatches were then telexed to all the Voice of Namibia stations as well as the Pan African News Agency regional pool office in Lusaka, which in turn transmitted the information to Dakar for translation into French.

## **The Voice of Zimbabwe and the Voice of the Revolution**

As it did with SWAPO, the Nasser regime in Egypt granted limited airtime to Zimbabwe nationalists over its external service as early as 1958. Radio Tanzania granted airtime to both the Voice of Zimbabwe and the Voice of the Revolution from as early as 1963, three years before UDI.<sup>35</sup> Kwame Nkrumah extended use of the new Ghana Broadcasting shortwave transmitter to ZANU until his fall in 1966. By 1967, both groups were also broadcasting from Zambia, in Shona and Ndebele, as well as to other language groups, for a few hours per week.<sup>36</sup> Following Mozambique independence in 1975, and after a bloody battle for leadership within ZANU in Lusaka resulting in the emergence of Robert Mugabe,<sup>37</sup> President Kaunda ordered Zimbabwe broadcasts halted.

From March 1976, with the help of the Frelimo government, Maputo became the main centre of ZANU broadcasts. Radio Mozambique gave VOZ 30 minutes per day, between 8.00 and 8.30pm on six shortwave bands and on medium wave. As the struggle progressed airtime was increased to one hour. In the words of one of its directors, Grey Tichatonga:

We aired mostly news related to the struggle for independence and we tried to add stories of the worldwide struggle for independence and social justice....We wanted to show our people that the struggle was wider than just Zimbabwe.<sup>38</sup>

The VOZ was launched "for the purpose of explaining the plight and suffering of the Zimbabwe masses under the yoke of colonialism and racialism, to mobilise public opinion and support for our cause from friendly countries, organisations and individuals".<sup>39</sup> With the assistance of the OAU Liberation Committee and the Front Line States, VOZ relayed news bulletins on the struggle, war communiques, speeches by nationalist leaders, and revolutionary songs to "mobilise the people of Zimbabwe to join hands with the National Liberation Movement in order to defeat the colonial regime and its state apparatus".<sup>40</sup> There was a strong sense that South African and western media reporting during the liberation struggle was negative and damaging, portraying the parties as "misguided and communist-inspired".<sup>41</sup> Broadcasters received training and assistance from friendly socialist and non-aligned countries. The BBC sometimes monitored VOZ broadcasts (as it did Radio Freedom and Voice of Namibia) for retransmission on its Africa Service.<sup>42</sup>

ZANLA forces provided continuous reception reports and, like the Voice of Namibia, VOZ sent correspondents into the war zones, for interviews with fighters.<sup>43</sup> Charles Ndhlovu, Eddison Zvogbo, and Richard Hove, along with Tichatonga, were the main VOZ staff. Zvogbo believes that VOZ was aimed more at the fighters than as a serious attempt at general audience broadcasting.

VOZ was the only common thing every combatant could listen to. It was often used to convey battle objectives and military orders...[in a way] understood only by the officers. Each guerrilla unit was required to have a radio. Of particular significance was the frequent use of VOZ for speeches by comrade Mugabe...on any subjects we felt the people had to be briefed on. General Togongara often used VOZ to pass instructions.<sup>44</sup>

ZAPU also intermittently broadcast over Radio Moscow transmitters, beginning in 1968, and from Luanda after 1977, while ZANU was

granted access to external services in Addis Ababa and Tananarive from 1978.<sup>45</sup>

After formation of the Popular Front (ZANU-ZAPU) in 1978, an attempt was made to consolidate all broadcasts but this failed, except in Tanzania where the Nyerere government would allow only PF broadcasts, no separate transmissions. In that year, Willie Masarurwa and Eddison Zvogbo, respective publicity chiefs for ZAPU and ZANU, met at Dar es Salaam to discuss means of coordinating their external services. It was agreed that two broadcasters from each section of the PF would work from Radio Tanzania. This was done effectively from 1978 until independence in 1980, when all Radio Tanzania transmissions to Zimbabwe ceased. In other locations, the attempt at dual broadcasting failed. One of the points of disagreement was over the use of slogans:

ZANU wanted to keep using its own, referring to the struggle as "Chimurenga" [while] we (ZAPU) wanted to project the PF as the dominant organisation, neither influenced by ZANU or ZAPU.<sup>46</sup>

Divisions persisted because, in the words of the ZAPU Publicity Chief, Willie Masarurwa, "ZANU still wanted to project itself, thereby weakening PF broadcasting". Both Lusaka and Maputo (VOZ) stressed positive propaganda and generally did not attack each other via radio broadcasts.

The main ZAPU broadcast center remained Lusaka. Transmissions were for 30 minutes each morning, in English, Shona, and Ndebele. ZAPU transmissions from Moscow continued for a while after independence in April 1980, attacking the election results. The Mugabe government formally protested and the transmissions ceased. The call signal was a lion's roar followed by gunfire and then a ZIPRA song, "ZIPRA is Invincible". Content consisted of news, commentary, letters and revolutionary song requests. Lusaka transmissions were intended to provide reliable information on the military aspects of the struggle to "combat the misinformation of the Smith regime", and to "project the role of ZAPU as the leading and first party in the struggle, via its leadership in the fighting".<sup>47</sup> Broadcasts were also used to recruit fighters and supporters.

We wanted to get people to rally behind the war [and] form a link with the fighters, so that whatever they did was played back in a 2-way flow of information: those inside Zimbabwe could get news of the outside and those outside got news of the movement.<sup>48</sup>

## South African and Rhodesian Countermeasures

The South African authorities joined the war on two fronts. Firstly, they had broadcast to Africa on an experimental basis since 1950 and in 1965 commissioned the external service of the SABC.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, they introduced a network of ethnically distinct radio stations in South Africa and Namibia using the technically advanced short-range FM system. While a report at the time described the external service as "South Africa's answer to Radio Peking", the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, Dr. Albert Hertzog, thought differently stating that the government believed the South African cause was quite good enough "and did not need a propaganda service."<sup>50</sup> Despite this, the newspaper said the transmitters had been brought into action to counter

the propaganda war being waged in Africa by Communist China and Egypt. Radio Cairo, at the one end of the continent, is already catching the ears of Africans. And from China, for the past two years, Radio Peking—probably the world's most powerful transmitter—has been beaming broadcasts to eastern and southern parts of Africa....Now at the end of the continent, South Africa intends getting into the picture.<sup>51</sup>

The following day the newspaper noted that Prime Minister Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd had called the "Voice of South Africa" an "adventure in which we are trying to open a path to truth". Quoting examples of propaganda broadcast against South Africa, Dr Verwoerd said:

We can speak with feeling about the misuse made of broadcasting services projected at this continent. If there is one country against which they have sinned, this is the one. Therefore we are justified in wanting our voice to be heard far and wide.<sup>52</sup>

With regard to the FM system, while it was undoubtedly the correct technical choice, it also had the added advantage of answering Hertzog's doubts about the British Saucepan Special. Motivating the introduction of the system in Parliament, Hertzog said:

The problem is that the moment we give the native a radio and encourage him to listen, we place in his hands a weapon that may harm the native himself. He may not use his radio to listen to what is good for him, but listen to all the propaganda coming from abroad....The problem is to provide this radio service to the native in such a way that he will derive what is good from it, but will not be exposed to these evils. The question is how? There are certain solutions and the obvious solution is to use not the normal shortwave transmission, but the ultra-shortwave transmission

(FM) because the ultra-shortwaves have a certain peculiarity, namely that they move in straight lines. If we use these wavelengths which move in straight lines, and we give the natives sets which are adjusted to receive those wavelengths, we shall obviously eliminate the possibility of their being influenced from overseas.<sup>53</sup>

The FM strategy was a success in South Africa, less so in Namibia and Rhodesia. A 1989 BBC survey of South Africa noted that although an estimated 53 per cent of urban blacks owned radios with shortwave bands only 11 per cent had heard a foreign radio station the year before. The most popular foreign station was Radio Botswana with a regular black listenership in English of one per cent. Radio Freedom had a regular listenership of 0.3 per cent. "It has been the policy of the SABC, encouraged by the government, to promote the use of FM for its services, making the radio audience less 'attuned' to shortwave as a medium and thus to overseas broadcasters," the survey noted in explanation.<sup>54</sup> In effect, the strategy tended to "white-out" the ANC's and SWAPO's shortwave initiatives through Radio Freedom and the Voice of Namibia. Thus, both the ANC and SWAPO found themselves broadcasting on shortwave to target audiences who listened to music and entertainment shows on local SABC ethnic, and undeniably popular, FM stations.

The popularity of the local FM stations was recognised by the ANC. The limited impact of Radio Freedom was openly acknowledged by those who worked for it:

I think there were successes and there were failures. I would say we did not, for example, have as much impact as we would have liked to have in the country. We were on shortwave and we were kind of far and also did not have the resources. When South Africa was using 500 kilowatts to beam to the whole world we were using 50 kilowatts. There was nothing we could do about it. But we had our successes also. We gained in experience, we trained people and you do find people today who say they were introduced to politics by Radio Freedom. Even now there are many asking 'Where is Radio Freedom?' That gives one a sense of achievement. It may have been bigger, it may have been more, but one has to be content, one must not feel that all the effort was in vain.<sup>55</sup>

While the aims of the the Voice of Namibia were similar to those of Radio Freedom, the former was arguably more successful in gaining a wider listenership. There are a number of reasons for believing this. The lack of an effective domestic broadcasting network inside Namibia before the late 1960s had encouraged people to buy shortwave sets. As the member of parliament for Etosha (a constituency in northern Namibia), Mr. A. Webster, noted in parliament in 1962:

More and more natives there today possess shortwave sets. They are using those sets to listen to the broadcasting services from elsewhere because the broadcasting service to South West Africa is so poor. The natives mainly tune in to transmissions from the African states, America and Moscow.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, even when South Africa did establish a short-range FM service in Namibia (Radio Owambo opened in 1969) many of the local people had already developed shortwave listening habits.

This willingness to listen to foreign stations was noted by two researchers, Totemeyer<sup>57</sup> and Schuring<sup>58</sup> in separate studies. Totemeyer noted that the modernising elite in the north of the country were "keen listeners to radio stations abroad. Radio Tanzania and Radio Zambia, as the 'Voice of Namibia'... are very popular."<sup>59</sup> Schuring's study also states that "as many as 32 per cent" of Owambo teachers (Totemeyer's modernising elite) listened to various world stations, especially the BBC but also Radio Zambia.<sup>60</sup>

Listening habits in Namibia were, therefore, clearly different from those in South Africa. There are a number of reasons for this use of foreign stations in addition to the shortwave habit encouraged by South Africa's slow introduction of FM to Namibia. The Namibians were a nation under foreign occupation, directly involved in a bitter war and subject to strict censorship. It is a widely observed phenomenon that under such conditions people who, as Nicolson put it, "live in the monotone of doctrinal uniformity" feel a strong urge to listen to outside messages.<sup>61</sup> In addition, SWAPO (unlike the ANC in South Africa) was not banned in Namibia and its internal leadership often made use of political rallies to encourage people to listen to the Voice of Namibia. For example, when the SWAPO Youth League held its first official appearance in the south of Namibia in 1973, chairman Jerry Ekanjo called for a boycott of "South African radio" and urged people to listen to SWAPO broadcasts from Zambia.<sup>62</sup>

The Rhodesian authorities also approached the threat of liberation radio in a systematic way. Measures included periodic jamming of nationalist shortwave frequencies, prohibition of all but FM receivers in rural areas, regulation of battery sales, and prohibition of listening to any station but RBC in rural settlement hamlets, or "keeps", where an estimated 750,000 Africans had been moved.

The Ian Smith regime employed a divide-and-rule strategy in its broadcasting policies. Ethnic animosities between Shona and Ndebele-speaking listeners were fuelled by RBC reports of tribal rivalries and leadership feuds within the liberation movements. The regime also set up an Ndebele radio station, Radio Mthwakazi, near Bulawayo in 1975, using the powerful "big Bertha" transmitter which had earlier

been used to jam the BBC transmissions from Francistown. Reports of bloody clashes between ZANLA (ZANU) and ZIPRA (ZAPU) units filled its news headlines, in an unsuccessful effort to create the impression of a hopelessly divided military challenge to the Rhodesian state and to fuel actual ethnic violence.

Evidence suggests that such efforts became increasingly unsuccessful as the armed struggle became increasingly intensified. As an internal settlement loomed, more and more Zimbabweans, including many whites in the cities, listened to one or more of the proliferating nationalist services, along with the BBC, in an attempt to find out what was really going on. By 1973, it was estimated that daily RBC listenership had dropped by half, from a decade previous. Some whites remained loyal to RBC for news of the war and the political negotiations right up to the bitter end. Ultimately, there were three competing broadcasting operations serving a racially and ethnically polarised national listenership.

Instead of helping the Rhodesian Front regime to shout out or deflect opposing points of view and upsetting political information, RBC policies may actually have reinforced or increased doubts in listeners' minds about regime policies and claims of success in "the war against the terrorists". As RBC news and current affairs programmes began to more blatantly contradict experienced political and security realities, heightened political awareness among formerly passive audiences resulted, surely an unintended consequence of Rhodesian Front RBC information manipulation. African awareness of RBC distortions rapidly resulted in a listener boycott. As happened in Namibia with the SWABC, RBC and the regime which spoke through it seem to have hastened their own demise over the airwaves, strengthening nationalist radio's own *raison d'être* immeasurably in the process. Ultimately, RBC unwittingly proved the best advertising VOZ could have had.

But overall, the impact of external broadcasts inside Zimbabwe, as with the Voice of Namibia and Radio Freedom, remains difficult to assess. There were few radios in many rural areas, home to 80 percent of the population. There was limited information on programming available to rural listeners even if they had radios. Finding the frequency was a problem, along with the weak and fading signal, versus the much stronger RBC signal.<sup>63</sup> ZANU was generally more successful than ZAPU in sustaining an effective external radio service to its followers and the Shona-speaking majority, primarily due to its stronger, harder to effectively jam signal and the fact that it was able to broadcast from Maputo on medium wave (AM) frequencies. VOZ Maputo also had an English language transmission aimed at white

Rhodesians, with Ian Christie.

## **Post-Independence Broadcasting**

In both Namibia and Zimbabwe many returning nationalist broadcasters were absorbed into the state radio structures, although in different ways. In Namibia, one of Africa's first "New World Order" multi-party democracies, the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (as the SWABC was renamed) was set up as an objective national broadcaster constitutionally allowed under Article 21 of the Namibian Constitution, to operate independently of the ruling party (SWAPO). This allowed the Namibian Ministry of Information to claim the NBC had acquired with independence a "freedom to debate facts and events without fear of reprisals".<sup>64</sup> The new director of the NBC, Nahum Gorelick, noted that:

The relationship is very sound between us and the minister [of Information and Broadcasting]. There is no proscription whatsoever as to what should be said and how it should be said. And policy—they have stayed out of that completely.<sup>65</sup>

In Zimbabwe, however, the ZBC after Mugabe's victory was quickly brought under ZANU control. Even before independence in April 1980, top VOZ broadcast managers from the Maputo operation, main centre of ZANU external broadcasting during the key years of struggle and political negotiations from 1976-1980, were in place at ZBC.<sup>66</sup> The newly-appointed Deputy Director-General outlined the ZANU (PF) government's motives for this action:

At independence, the ZBC found itself in a hostile media environment, surrounded by institutions with long colonial experience. We had to penetrate and transform RBC/RTV to serve the people of Zimbabwe as a whole. Comrades were attached to RBC, to assist in preparations for our independence celebrations. After independence they became regular employees. Along with this physical penetration there was also the political and ideological penetration.<sup>67</sup>

In the words of the new Minister of Information, Dr. Nathan Shamuyarira, "the comrades we've brought in from Maputo, who were running the VOZ, were put into key posts at ZBC, so they are in a position where they can direct policy".<sup>68</sup>

In Zimbabwe most RBC staffers resigned and were replaced by largely ZANU members. ZAPU media specialists and followers were systematically excluded from key posts at ZBC.<sup>69</sup> Some who were hired

privately complained of continuous scrutiny and harassment by ZBC managers, all ex-VOZ or ZANU members. Ex-combatants from ZANLA (ZANU) were favoured over others for lower positions in broadcasting because of their ideological and political reliability, often being hired over highly qualified and experienced ZAPU media workers or Zimbabwean students returning from overseas training.<sup>70</sup>

The key ex-VOZ appointment to ZBC by Minister Shamuyarira was "Comrade Charles Ndhlovu", as Director of Programming. Prior to service for ZANU he had been employed by the RBC Africa Service, where he had been a target of death threats for his "collaboration with the Smith Regime".<sup>71</sup> He joined the party in 1973, after allegedly being kidnapped, surfacing in Lusaka. By 1976, when VOZ shifted its operations to Mozambique he was one of its directors. He was brought into ZBC management in March 1980.<sup>72</sup> One colleague said he viewed his work at ZBC as identical with his duties at Maputo.<sup>73</sup> Ndhlovu served as the "eyes and ears" of the government at ZBC during his tenure which was followed by a brief political career until becoming a major casualty of the Willowgate scandal in the late 1980s.

In the end, ZBC content, management, and the uses it was put to by the Mugabe regime came to resemble those of its Rhodesian predecessor in certain basic respects. State control of radio and television to serve the legitimization needs of the regime and its policies became the hallmark of the new ZBC, as the revolutionary infusion was diluted by the stresses and temptations of politics and corruption.

In Namibia the NBC's Board of Directors and management were restaffed but pre-independence negotiations guaranteed civil servants (including most radio journalists) their jobs. Unlike Zimbabwe, few of those who had worked for the SWABC resigned, most electing to stay on and work in post-independent Namibia. The immediate result at the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation was overstaffing as additional positions had to be created for returning Voice of Namibia broadcasters. This policy, which resulted in a volatile mix of SWAPO journalists trained in partisan reporting working side-by-side with non-SWAPO journalists (for a national broadcaster supposedly committed to balanced reporting in a multi-party democracy), led to predictable problems:

Before independence they appointed some people, mainly ideologues that they brought into the political department to supposedly give the political people perspective on what was happening. But one landed in a situation where those people were so ideologically inclined to the SWAPO doctrine—they would talk about the 'Glorious Party, and this that and the other'—that it was very difficult. We were complaining about a bias on the one side and these guys were coming in with a bias on the other side....In

terms of the integration of the Voice of Namibia people it is problematic....One questions whether it has been the right decision or not but in terms of affirmative action, in terms of putting a message across that things have changed we have to make allowances....Our standard has not dropped because of it. What has happened is that we have put a lot of burden on reporters trying to do the job that now have to assist their colleagues.<sup>74</sup>

The burden has been a difficult one so far and in 1992 the NBC was still wracked by strained staff relationships, dissatisfaction with the numbers of foreigners and whites (many South Africans) holding senior positions in the organisation and frequent allegations of racism and nepotism.<sup>75</sup> Staff have also demanded the retrenchment of some journalists who worked for the SWABC on political grounds, reasoning that ex-SWABC staff "still live in the previous order and therefore cannot make any contribution to the new order".<sup>76</sup> Recent attempts (by a neutral British consultant) to restructure the NBC and retrench journalists have met with stiff resistance by all staff in the form of strikes.

The experiences of Zimbabwe and Namibia provide two scenarios for the future of broadcasting in South Africa. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), like the ZBC and NBC on independence, is state-owned. There is very limited private broadcasting in South Africa at the moment (although there is talk that 40 private stations may open in 1994) and, as such, the status of the SABC has been the subject of intense negotiations between the South African government and the ANC.

Thami Nteteni makes it quite clear that the Radio Freedom journalists expect a deal similar to that which occurred in Namibia—"We are going to participate in public broadcasting as well as community broadcasting," he notes.<sup>77</sup> To date, however, more than two years after the return of ANC exiles, no Radio Freedom broadcasters have yet secured a post with the SABC, although three do work on an independent station, Capital Radio, and a fourth has a job with a magazine.

The Nationalist government has accepted the idea of an Independent Broadcasting Authority along the lines of the British model for the SABC and, in the interim, a new SABC Board of Control was elected in mid-1993 by a panel of eminent South Africans in open proceedings.

Political predictions are inherently dangerous, but it is extremely unlikely the future of the SABC will be left undecided before a hand-over of power. Such an agreement will probably guarantee the jobs of those already working for the SABC as well as make provision for affirmative action placements, probably including some journalists

from Radio Freedom. In the immediate future the organisation is therefore likely to undergo similar stresses to those experienced by the NBC as journalists of differing political persuasion and with differing professional philosophies on the relationship between the state and broadcasting learn to work together. In the case of the SABC, however, with its approximately 5,000 employees and 25 radio stations, the effect of the placement of a few dozen Radio Freedom journalists on the structure is hard to predict but is likely to be muted. There is also the possibility that newspaper journalists from South Africa's opposition press will be retrained and given posts in the SABC.

Nevertheless, the negotiated Namibian model, and not the party takeover experience of RBC, seems the most likely outcome for broadcasting in South Africa.

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