

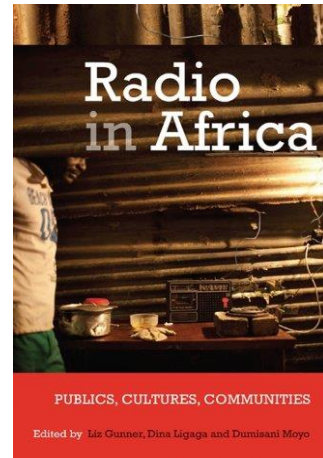
Liz Gunner, Dina Ligaga and Dumisani Moyo (Eds.), **Radio in Africa: Publics, Cultures, Communities**. James Currey: Rochester, NY, 2011, 336 pp., \$75.00 (hardcover). (Previously published by Wits University Press, Johannesburg, South Africa)

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When the Internet and cell phones became available for commercial usage, some sociology and economics pundits believed that print media and radio would become extinct, but they failed to poll governments, commercial radio license owners, and international development organizations, which saw a rapid increase in the number of radio programs. With more than 25,000 radio stations reaching some 2.5 billion people around the world—15,000 AM/FM stations in the U.S. alone (Waits, 2012)—the notion that the iPad, and other sophisticated information technologies will replace radio is senseless. In fact, radio's wireless capabilities, its affordability, and its ability to serve both rural and urban communities have extended its reach in every corner of the planet.



Similarly, in this era in which local, regional, and foreign economies are struggling and stock markets remain unstable, academic and commercial publishers are increasingly selective about the types of books they feel they can sell. Academic publishing houses such as James Currey, Wits University Press, and others have become the pinhole through which the intellectual community can see or hear important new and old voices as they operate on a shoestring budget. That is probably why the aforementioned presses have produced **Radio in Africa: Publics, Cultures, Communities**.

The importance of radio as a development tool or community organizer also has the attention of policymakers as well as international development agencies. For example, in 1996, the U.S. Senate's Subcommittee on African Affairs held a hearing on the role of radio in Africa; since the 1970s, UNESCO has commissioned studies, published monographs, and led the production of community development radio programs. Colin Fraser and Sonia R. Estrada's *Community Radio Handbook* (2001) draws on the experiences and initiatives of communication experts and practitioners. The book describes community radio's role and licensing in some countries in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Europe and its ability to respond to community needs and promote social change. Parts of the book focus on progress made in legislation and involvement of politicians.

The 17-chapter hardbound volume *Radio in Africa* features 19 contributing authors from 12 institutions, with some 85% serving in universities in Southern Africa and the rest from social sciences departments in Europe and North America. Wits University Press first published the book in 2011 to be sold exclusively in Southern African countries, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Madagascar, which is probably why the majority of contributors come from academic institutions in those regions.

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It seems that the contributors were carefully selected based, in part, on their exposure to the culture, publics, or communities in an African country or their experience conducting social science research on Africa. If that is the case, the editors made the right decision because no messenger can properly tell a good story retrieved from a secondary source. A comparison of each author's bio with his or her own chapter only enhances this stance. Ghanaian-born Wisdom Tettey, whose research interests include the mass media, the politics of survival in Africa, and public policy in Ghana, explores the role of talk radio in redefining civic and uncivil discourse in the public sphere. Kenyan national Christopher J. Odhiambo writes about FM radio stations in his native Kenya and the nature of dialogue space, while Makerere University-based Monica B. Chibita discusses multiple languages and contestations of the broadcasting language policy of her native Uganda. South African historian Peter Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, who has researched ethnicity and the history of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), appropriately writes about Bantustan identity, censorship, and subversion on Northern Sotho Radio under the dreaded apartheid era, focusing on its most intense period, the 1960s through 1980s. He vividly narrates,

Radio Bantu's mandate was the promotion of the government's perspectives. Towards the end, the SABC's Bantu Programme Control Board—the body responsible, among other things, for recruiting staff—had to carefully select the right type of announcer for the new positions in the radio stations. It was discovered that during the 1950s some black announcers had used the rediffusion service . . . subversively as a channel for anti-government propaganda. (p. 122)

Later on the same page, he states, "They [some black announcers] once played the song 'Hlanganani Mawerthu' on radio, a song that called on Africans to unite, thus directly turning the apartheid message of ethnic division on its head" (p. 122). Then he quotes the SABC Sound Archive (2001) as saying the two men were expelled from radio allegedly because they were communists.

Overall, this experience cannot be ignored if we know that, in the period following World War II, South African radio broadcasts were for Afrikaans and English-speaking whites, with virtually no access for the indigenous majority black population.

Radio in Africa provides reliable reference material for scholars, researchers, and students because the essays vividly describe the different roles of radio in the lives of listeners in Africa. Using archived recordings and theatrical performances, the authors describe the impact of radio broadcasts on the sociopolitical and cultural experiences of Africans in the villages and cities, highlighting what Graham Furniss of the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies calls "an absorbing and illuminating, kaleidoscopic picture of radio in action all across the African continent" (Furniss, para. 4). In addition, most chapters address the role of language in identifying and bringing together radio communities, creating an audience, and increasing audience size. Thematically speaking, the content is sound, the text is well written, and the ideas are properly developed with historico-contemporary accounts, some based on personal observation.

Because of its well-documented fluidity and pervasiveness, its recent links with new media, and its ability to extend its range and potential, radio remains the most important tool for social change for the majority

of Africa's 1 billion people. For example, Dorothea Schulz's chapter, "Islamic Revival and Female Radio Preachers in Urban Mali," describes contradictions in the public's reception of women preachers in Mali's airspaces; it is fraught with debates on gender and religious conservatism. Her article reminds us that speech is powerful. Winston Mayo's chapter explains why radio is Africa's preferred medium of communication in the global information age, and Tanja Bosch describes the role of talk radio in negotiating democracy in South Africa. She explores how the broadcasting content of 567MW, a station in Cape Town, organizes the public as a body participating in critical discussions on politics and democracy. The chapter presents the station as a space-creating entity within the framework of deliberative democracy.

The didactic approach taken by some of the contributors also lends credence to radio's functional role as the citizen's voice, a view somewhat like the one put forward in Ben Rawlence's *Radio Congo: Signals of Hope from Africa's Deadliest War* (2012), published a year after *Radio in Africa*. Although Rawlence writes in a pseudo-journalistic, half lyrical tone, the Kenya researcher for Human Rights Watch, whose writings have appeared in *The Guardian*, the *London Review of Books*, the *Huffington Post*, and other outlets, uses radio as the medium for the Congolese people (militia men, entrepreneurs, pygmies, refugees, and former child soldiers) to tell their own story about their land, devastated by war. Like Rawlence, the authors in *Radio in Africa* show a deep understanding radio's role in conveying socio-political conditions in Africa and in shaping public policy in some African countries.

That notwithstanding, *Radio in Africa* has its own flaws, one being the absence of detailed definitions of local dialects and idiomatic expressions. At times, the narrator/observer seems so immersed in recounting an experience that the presence of the nonindigenous listener and reader is apparently forgotten. For example, Skeibakiba Lekgoathi, in his chapter on identity, censorship, and subversion on Northern Sotho Radio, recounts the words of H. J. Shungu, a pioneering member of the northern section of Radio Bantu, like this: "Radio was one of the three things that Verwoerd initiated. The first was a vernacular newsletter called Tswelopele" (p. 110). The author leaves out a vital piece of information by not telling the reader why the newsletter was given that name. Certainly, the external reader may find it difficult to pronounce the names or understand local terms in the narrative. Although James Currey may have obtained publication rights from a South Africa-based press, the press should have produced a second edition of this text with better expository writing given that its readership extends far beyond Southern Africa.

The volume editors elect to display contributor biographies right at the beginning of the book, not at the end as is the norm, which may raise questions about what they value—showcasing of individuals or presentation of the connection between radio and "soundscapes, captured in [Africa's] long and extensive use of orality" (p. 1) as the editors themselves state in the introductory chapter. The reader can easily be sidetracked by the contributors' impressive credentials instead of investing the time to assess the quality of the book's content. Although end notes are provided after each chapter, facilitating the logic of understanding numbered diacritics within the narrative, the details of other works in all chapters appear at the end of the book and the type size of the notes is smaller than that within the narrative. This disjointed, inconsistent documentation format is a distraction, but the structural weakness should not discourage anyone from exploring this material. All acronyms and abbreviations are clarified ahead of the

first chapter, lines are evenly spaced, and at the end an index of approximately 1000 items is provided. These elements should make reading easy. In the cataloging section, the publisher warns readers not to rely on the content of third party (external) URLs and websites as it may be inaccurate, change or become obsolete. Such a disclaimer is consistent with the rules of engagement in academics; it gives researchers reason to decide whether, how or when to utilize those sources.

In summary, *Radio in Africa* is a smooth read, eclectic and timely. Persons interested in the contemporary cultures, community livelihood, and the future of Africans in Africa need to read this book which stands at the crossroads of cultural history sociology, sociolinguistics, and mass media. Mass media technicians, communication advisers in non-profit international development organizations, and community radio producers can also harvest useful problem solving information if they carefully examine the content of this book

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