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Zambia's Support for the African National Congress's Radio Freedom in Lusaka, 1967–1992

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the contribution Zambia made to the liberation struggle in South Africa by hosting the ANC's Radio Freedom in Lusaka. It relies on a combination of archival evidence (audio and documentary sources) from both countries, and interviews conducted with the broadcasters and other media workers of both Radio Freedom and the Zambian national broadcaster. The article argues that Zambia offered immense support to Radio Freedom in the form of broadcasting equipment, working space and airtime on the external services of the national broadcaster. While it waxed and waned in the early years, this assistance increased considerably in the aftermath of the Soweto student uprising of 1976, which enabled the ANC to have a sonic presence among its supporters back home, where listening to this radio was illegal. The support given to Radio Freedom was not isolated but part of a wider struggle and solidarity with the liberation movements in the Southern African region fighting white minority rule. Through Radio Freedom, the ANC was able to shape the course of the unfolding struggle and internal political developments and to attain the cultural hegemony of the Charterist tradition over the Africanist and Black Consciousness camp.

KEYWORDS

Radio Freedom; Zambia Broadcasting Services; Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation; propaganda; counter-propaganda; solidarity; liberation struggle

ABSTRACT IN ISIZULU

Leli phepha libheka iqhaza elabanjwa yiZambia emzabalazweni wenkululeko yaseNingizimu Afrika ngokufukamela iRadio Freedom yeNhlangano i-ANC, eLusaka. Lithembele ebufakazini obulondoloziwe (obulalelwayo nobubhalwe phansi) kuwo womabili amazwe kanye nezingxoxo ezenziwa nabasakazi kanye nabanye abasebenzi bezokwazisa beRadio Freedom kanye neZambian National Broadcaster. Leli phepha liqinisekisa ukuthi iZambia yanika ukweseka okukhulu iRadio Freedom ngokuyihlinzeka ngezinsiza zokusakaza, indawo yokusebenzela kanye nomoya wokusebenza ngaphandle komsakazo. Nakuba eminyakeni yokuqala wawushintshashintsha, lolu sizo lwenyuka kakhulu emva kwezidubedube zabafundi baseSoweto zonyaka we-1976; usizo olwenza ukuba abalandeli be-ANC emuva ekhaya bakwazi ukuthola izindaba, nakuba ukulalela lo msakazo

AMAGAMA ASEMQOKA

iRadio Freedom; iZambia Broadcasting Services; iZambian National Broadcasting Corporation; imfundisoze; impikisamfundisoze; ubunye; umzabalazo wenkululeko

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kwakungavunyelwe. Usizo olwanikezwa iRadio Freedom lwalungahlukanisiwe kepha lwaluyingxenye yomzabalazo ngokubanzi nokulwela inkululeko esifundeni se-Afrika eseNingizimu okwakuliwa nokubuswa ngabamhlophe abambalwa. NgeRadio Freedom, i-ANC yakwazi ukwakha isisusa somzabalazo owawusombuluka kanye nokwakuqhubeka ngaphakathi kwezepolitiki ukukwazi ukuqonela ngokwesiko lenqubo yeCharterist ngaphezu kwenkambi ye-Africanist kanye neBlack Consciousness.

> When we needed to fight with arms in hand, there were few countries even in Africa which had the possibility to extend assistance to us … And yet, because apartheid is truly evil and because there are men and women of conscience such as you who are gathered here, who would not connive at the perpetration of a crime by refusing to act against it, the anti-apartheid movement grew into perhaps the strongest international solidarity movement of this century, bringing together citizens of all countries, governments and international organisations.[1]

Introduction

The quotation above formed part of the opening address that Oliver Reginald Tambo, the president of the African National Congress (ANC) for about three decades in exile, delivered at the International Solidarity Conference held in Johannesburg on 19 February 1993. In his speech, Tambo paid tribute to the international community, governments, trade unions and civil society organisations for their contribution to ending apartheid in South Africa. He spoke eloquently about the "small and lonely voices of protest" in the early days of the international movement in the 1940s, the beginning of the boycott of Cape grapes and wines and Outspan oranges and the picketing at supermarkets in Europe and North America. He also commented on how, over the years, this effort had grown into a massive movement with the capacity to bring the apartheid regime to its knees and to effect far-reaching changes in South Africa. Tambo certainly also had the front-line African countries in mind, countries – such as Zambia – that suffered from intermittent apartheid military and air raids for harbouring "terrorists". Not only did Zambia host South African freedom fighters in transit to military camps in the countries to the north or on their way to infiltrating South Africa down south, but it served as the headquarters of the ANC in exile. Most importantly, Zambia supported the ANC's radio broadcasting venture.

Although scholars have paid some attention to the role of international solidarity organisations and governments in isolating the apartheid regime and supporting the South African liberation movements in their struggles against apartheid (Tarimo and Reuben 2013), not enough research has been conducted on the role of communication technology and the specific support given to the liberation movement in this sphere. In particular, the role that some African countries – notably the front-line states of Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania – played and the price they paid for supporting the liberation movements remain under-researched. This article supplements the existing scholarship by focusing on the support advanced to the ANC's Radio Freedom by the Zambian national broadcaster. This support ensured that, from the late 1960s through to 1992, the ANC in exile could maintain a sonic presence

inside South Africa, disseminate its own propaganda messages across enemy lines, and in that way be able to shape local political developments.

The article argues that Zambia under Kenneth Kaunda's United National Independence Party (UNIP) supported the ANC's Radio Freedom. Initially uneven, this support increased quite considerably after the Soweto student uprising of 16 June 1976; this support was motivated by the Organisation of African Unity's (OAU's) goal of a decolonised Africa. Zambia accommodated Radio Freedom in the same way it housed other guerrilla radio stations in the region on the Zambia Broadcasting Services (ZBS), later renamed the Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC), using the external services channel called Radio Zambia International (Lekgoathi, Moloi, and Saúte Saíde 2020). Driven by pan-Africanist ideology, camaraderie and international solidarity, Zambia provided direct material support that enabled Radio Freedom to execute a protracted offensive of propaganda and counter-propaganda against white minority rule in South Africa. Zambia understood that its own independence was meaningless and insecure for as long as political power remained in the hands of the white settler minority regimes in Southern Africa. Therefore, despite the apartheid state's counter-surveillance strategies of jamming, the infrastructure of mass communication that Zambia provided to the ANC enabled Radio Freedom broadcasts to be infiltrated behind enemy lines, reaching the ANC's supporters back home. Through its insurgent broadcasts, the ANC was able to shape the political behaviour of its supporters inside the country and contest the apartheid government's monopoly over the airwaves.

Critical Discussion of Sources

This work is based on a combination of archival materials (audio, visual and documentary sources), and most notably interviews conducted with former broadcasters and other staff of ZNBC in Lusaka and those of Radio Freedom in Johannesburg, plus secondary literature (Morgenstierne 2003; Sellström 2002a, 2002b; Shubin 1999; South African Democracy Education Trust 2008). Although radio played a crucial role as a means of communication between the liberation movements in exile and their supporters back home, until recently historians paid no attention whatsoever to this medium. Historians studying African nationalism between the 1960s and 1980s hardly ever ventured beyond the written archive to look at how the liberation movements communicated their messages. Besides the dismal state of the sonic archives on the liberation movements, "the ephemerality of radio, the invisibility of sound, and the transience of intimacies created by this technology have all made it burdensome to undertake research on it" (Moorman 2020). However, since the beginning of the 2000s, new works on African radio histories have begun to flourish, including studies that explore some of the ways in which the liberation movements employed radio to propagate their messages, the impact of those messages on the liberation movements' supporters, and the colonial states' counter-insurgency measures (Gunner 2019; Gunner, Ligaga, and Moyo 2011; Lekgoathi, Moloi, and Saúte Saíde 2020; Moorman 2019).

To add to this burgeoning research, we carried out research in Lusaka in 2020. This involved conducting seven oral interviews (with broadcasters,[2] producers, the legal counsel at ZNBC and the engineer), as well as archival research on the workings of Radio Freedom in Zambia and the nature of the support it received from the Zambian

national broadcaster. The interviews give us a rich and detailed account of the way in which one front-line state supported the broadcasting efforts of a guerilla station. Additionally, we did a brief tour of the sound and visual archives at the ZNBC's Mass Media Centre, which revealed the shocking and pitiful state of neglect in which the archives have been left. We were informed that a few years ago when it rained there was a leakage in the roof, so the archive was flooded, thus causing untold damage to the visual and audio material that literally lies rotting from exposure to moisture. To compound this, there does not seem to be any technology to regulate the temperature and keep it at a level required to preserve archival materials. Nor is there any sense of urgency in trying to salvage the damaged resources. So, even though the actual audio recordings of Radio Zambia International have been destroyed, memories of the operatives who worked in the station provide valuable insights into its operation at a time when Zambia gave significant support to the ANC's Radio Freedom.

While the recordings of Radio Zambia International have been destroyed, the ANC, during the 1980s, preserved its segments. In fact, one of the Zambian broadcasters, Francis Ndovi (who joined ZNBC in 1988), remembers that officials from the ANC offices in Makeni, on the outskirts of Lusaka, were fastidious in collecting reels that had been played on the segment. He recalls:

> [I]f they [ANC's Department of Information and Publicity staff] bring a programme for transmission like today. Tomorrow, somebody will come to pick up the tapes. And the tape should not go missing. If I'm on transmission today, I should make sure because my shift would start at … transmission [of Radio Zambia International] would start at 17.00 hours and end at midnight. When I knock off at midnight, I'm even better off going home with the tape.

These tapes that Ndovi was so careful not to lose were among the materials shipped home after the unbanning of political organisations in 1991. Most of these resources have been deposited at the National Heritage and Cultural Studies Centre's "Liberation Archive" at the University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus, in the Eastern Cape, as well as at the Robben Island Museum and Mayibuye Archives at the University of the Western Cape. The Liberation Archive houses reports, memoranda, internal propaganda files (including scripts of the radio programmes) and collections of the journals of the liberation movement, as well as other documents from its external missions. In fact, more than 70 per cent of the documents in this archive belong to the ANC, and the rest were received from the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), AZAPO and other organisations.[3] The Mayibuye Archives, on the other hand, house the Radio Freedom Collection, which comprises hundreds of audio reels and cassettes of programme recordings, as well as the vinyl music records that were played on Radio Freedom.[4] Mayibuye also houses the Dr Karel Roskam Collection, which is another important source of information on Radio Freedom and the support given by solidarity groups in the Netherlands.

The fourth major archive for this article is oral interviews with some of the former political activists who tuned in to Radio Freedom in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as with some of the former broadcasters of this radio station, conducted by the principal researcher of this project since 2009. The availability of this oral material, combined with interviews conducted recently in Lusaka, has enabled us to weave a highly textured and rich account that begins to fill major gaps in historical scholarship on the workings of

Radio Freedom in Zambia, particularly the relationship between the broadcasters of Radio Freedom and the operatives of the Zambian national broadcaster.

Radio Freedom's Faltering Starts, Demise at Home and Rebirth in Exile, 1963–1968

Before the launch of its pirate radio inside South Africa in June 1963, the ANC already had some access to radio broadcasting in Ethiopia and Egypt from as early as the 1950s. The first to shake off the colonial shackles in Africa, the two countries were also the first on the continent to join the "propaganda war of the air" and to broadcast anti-colonial messages. Possessing a powerful broadcasting service from the beginning of the 1940s, Egypt extended its broadcasting facilities to the ANC and the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia on Radio Cairo in the following decade (Mosia, Riddle, and Zaffiro 1994, 6). Soon after Ghana's independence, Kwame Nkrumah announced plans in 1958 to purchase three 100-kilowatt transmitters to establish a radio service that would ensure "the liberation and unity of the entire African continent" (Hachten 1971, cited in Mosia, Riddle and Zaffiro 1994, 6). In good time, the white settler regimes down south were picking up these hostile broadcasts that sought to influence the people in their territories.

Thus, the beginning of the 1960s was marked by intense contestation between the apartheid government and the liberation movement for the hearts and minds of the people, inside and outside the country (Ndlovu 2020, 154). Against the backdrop of external broadcasts perceived to be unfriendly to the regime, the government established a monopoly of the airwaves, through the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), by introducing the African-language radio channels – collectively labelled Radio Bantu – targeted specifically at African listeners. To counter this, the ANC decided to establish its own radio to present the liberation movement's counter-propaganda. Named Radio Freedom, this was the only pirate radio in Southern Africa to start operating and to have regular broadcasts within its target country.[5] This radio station was launched in June 1963 at Liliesleaf in Rivonia, a farm that served as a hideout of the high command of uMkhonto weSiwe (MK), the military wing of the then banned ANC. However, within two weeks of the inaugural broadcast by Walter Sisulu, the police raided the hideout, seized the transmitter and arrested the entire high command, including the broadcasters, who were sentenced to life imprisonment after being found guilty of high treason. Thus, the ANC learned a terrible lesson on the dangers of operating from within a target country (Mosia, Riddle, and Zaffiro 1994, 7).

Radio Freedom in Lusaka, Zambia: The Early Years, 1967–1975

Following the political clampdown and arrests of many political activists inside the country in the early 1960s, many skipped the country and sought refuge, mainly in independent African countries, where they immediately started rebuilding their liberation movements. The idea of tapping into radio broadcasting as a medium of countering the propaganda messages of the apartheid state was kept alive by those in exile who joined the ANC's newly established external mission that was hurriedly set up by Oliver Tambo, Moses Kotane and Tennyson Makiwane (Callinicos 2004).

Many independent African countries were sympathetic to the liberation movements in South Africa and sporadically broadcast speeches and interviews conducted with leaders of liberation movements, including the ANC. However, the ANC had a strong desire to revive its own mouthpiece in exile.

It was in fact to Tanzania (which attained independence from Britain in 1961) that the ANC and other nationalist movements in Southern Africa turned for support in the use of radio as a means of counter-propaganda. Under the leadership of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, who was an ardent Pan-Africanist, Tanzania became a political mecca for exiles from the region and committed itself to ridding the region of colonial domination through the promotion of nationalist movements in Southern Africa (Tarimo and Reuben 2013). As a result, this country played a pivotal role in the efforts of the OAU to organise forces directed against South Africa and its administration of Namibia (then known as South West Africa). From March 1964, Radio Tanganyika (as it was then called) began broadcasting daily news bulletins from its studios in Dar es Salaam to South Africa, giving a strong voice to South African exiles and opposition leaders (Mosia, Riddle, and Zaffiro 1994, 6). Radio Tanzania's external service was established in 1968, and it was tasked with supporting the liberation of Africa, forging African unity, harmonising good neighbourliness and portraying Tanzania's image outside its boundaries (Mosia, Riddle, and Zaffiro 1994, 6).

After Tanzania, Zambia was the next independent African country in Southern Africa to provide a home to the ANC. Zambia attained independence in 1964, and under the UNIP government led by Kenneth Kaunda, this country gave enormous support to the liberation movements in Southern Africa. At first, however, Kaunda and his party were not very enthusiastic in their support for the ANC. Instead, they preferred the PAC, whose Pan-Africanism they clearly understood. They found the ANC's non-racialism and alliances with "white radicals" and other non-Africans baffling, and were concerned especially about the influence of the communists within the ANC. Initially, the Zambian government supported the formation of the South African United Front (SAUF), whose mandate was to create a united front between the ANC and the PAC in their struggle against the white minority regime. However, the PAC was opposed to the idea, based on its distrust of communist influence within the ANC. Most importantly, internal feuding within the PAC in exile severely weakened the organisation to a point of complete paralysis. This may be one of the reasons why the Zambian government became increasingly critical of the PAC, to such an extent that its activists became among the first to be expelled from the country by 1968. Gradually, African governments, including Zambia, shifted their support in favour of the ANC, which appeared more organised and very active, especially in the period immediately after the 1976 Soweto student uprising.

It is not very clear when Radio Freedom was established for the first time in Zambia, an issue that requires further research. However, Raymond Suttner (2008, 68) suggests that this happened in 1967 under the aegis of the ANC's Department of Information and Publicity (DIP). According to Lebona Mosia, Charles Riddle and Jim Zaffiro (1994), Radio Freedom went on air on Radio Zambia in 1972.[6] Hugh Macmillan (2013, 117–118) provides May 1973 as the date when Radio Freedom broadcasts commenced for an hour a day on ZBS's new shortwave radio transmitters supplied by China. These broadcasts were shut down in 1975 due to pressure from South Africa and President Kaunda's talks with B. J. Vorster (the prime minister of South Africa) during the period of détente

(1974–1976). However, Thabo Mbeki (in an interview cited in Macmillan 2013, 118), director of the ANC's DIP in Lusaka, insisted that the suspension of Radio Freedom broadcasts was related to the situation in Angola, whereby "Zambia wanted us [Radio Freedom] to write scripts in favour of Unita, or at least not critical of it. We refused to take instructions on what we should say and as a result Radio Freedom was closed down". The shutting down of Radio Freedom transmission from Zambia was felt inside South Africa, where enthusiastic young listeners and political activists such as Stanley Manong (a student activist at a technical college in Polokwane) were pining for political education. In his own words: "Unfortunately, during this time [1975 and 1976] Radio Freedom was no longer on air. In its place, we were listening to the Voice of Zimbabwe, a similar programme of ZANU [Zimbabwe African National Union], which was broadcasts [*sic*] from the studios of Radio Mozambique" (Manong 2015, 44).

It was only after the 1976 Soweto student uprising and as a result of the request made by Duma Nokwe (who was then involved in ANC diplomacy and propaganda) to the Zambian government and the ruling party (UNIP) in December of the same year that the Radio Freedom broadcasts were later resumed on the ZBS. Nokwe concluded that the resumption of Radio Freedom broadcasts would immensely enhance the morale of the oppressed masses of South Africa (Macmillan 2013, 124). In April 1978, Oliver Tambo together with Thomas Nkobi, ANC treasurer, informed the Swedish embassy in Lusaka that Radio Freedom was now transmitting regularly not only from Dar es Salaam but from Luanda and Lusaka as well (Sellström 2002b, 603). The Swedish government was one of the major financial donors for the ANC in exile from the 1960s. This financial support increased in the period after the Soweto students' uprising of 1976.

Radio Zambia International and Support for Radio Freedom in the 1980s

By the 1980s, Radio Freedom (just like SWAPO's Voice of Namibia) was receiving extensive support from the Zambian national broadcaster. Its programme, which covered a wide array of subjects from news and current affairs through to music, culture and other aspects, was accommodated on the external services of ZBS/ZNBC called Radio Zambia International, Lusaka on 7.3 megahertz, 41 metre-band shortwave daily.[7] Radio Freedom had its own mobile studio at Makeni on the outskirts of Lusaka, where the ANC had some safe houses. Comrade Castro Kwela (*nom de guerre*), an MK freedom fighter and head of Radio Freedom in Lusaka from 1982, recalls the following about Radio Freedom's (and other propaganda units') location in Makeni, his experiences and the working arrangements with Radio Zambia at Mass Media in Lusaka:

> Most Department of Information and Publicity [DIP] units in Lusaka, Film and Video, *Mayibuye*, *Voice of Women*, Research, *Dispatch* and Radio Freedom, operated from a complex of DIP residences and offices in Makeni outside Lusaka. The Printing Unit was based in Emmersdale [*sic*]. While members of Radio Freedom lived in Makeni, they drove to Radio Zambia every morning, where they spent their day.

He continued:

> I was the Head of Radio Freedom – Lusaka from 1982. I would drive my unit from Makeni to Radio Zambia. On my way, I would stop at the ANC Headquarters in Lusaka Central for

> consultation with the DIP top brass. There, DIP Director, Thabo Mbeki, shared office space with his Administrative Secretary, Victor Moche and ANC Spokesman, Tom Sebina.[8]

Makeni was clearly an important centre of ANC activity, the place where Radio Freedom's programmes, destined for consumption by listeners primarily in South Africa, were produced and prerecorded in a mobile studio before being transported to Mass Media in the city of Lusaka. Watson Kadwali, one of the main broadcasters of Radio Zambia International tasked with programming, echoes the view of Makeni being the ANC's base and talks more about the languages used in Radio Freedom's broadcasts, as well as about the destination of those programmes. In Kadwali's own words:

> The ANC had their own studio where they were doing their recordings, they used to bring a one-hour programme, complete, and within that one-hour programme there were segments. They were broadcasting in English, they were broadcasting in Tsonga, they were broadcasting in Sotho, broadcasting in Afrikaans.[9]

While most of the programming was prerecorded in Makeni, the ANC staffers also travelled to ZBS/ZNBC offices in Lusaka where they did some daily on-site work such as the writing of scripts. Kadwali remembered many other forms of assistance that the Zambian national broadcaster extended to Radio Freedom [see Supplemental file audio clip 1]:

> The ANC radio broadcasters sometimes used the ZNBC's typewriters. Sometimes … they also used to come to ZNBC library, music library, to get some songs. We had some liberation songs from South Africa, which they used to spice in their programming.[10]

Some of the former broadcasters of Radio Freedom whom we have interviewed recall the various forms of assistance offered to them by the Zambian national broadcaster. Simon Ngomane (*nom de guerre* Afrika Mhlaba), who was deployed to radio broadcasting in Lusaka in the late 1980s, was emotional when he remembered:

> [Radio Freedom in Zambia] didn't have all the equipment … we had rudimentary equipment which we could broadcast from but we were using the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation to broadcast throughout Africa … At that particular time the range of Radio Freedom reaching South Africa became much, much, much higher and a lot of people were now listening to Radio Freedom and it was doing quite well, although I must accept we would not have made it had it not been for the assistance from the Zambia National Broadcasting authority, especially from Kaunda. Because the old man used to come to Radio Freedom – not only come to Radio Freedom but say something – the old man was good.[11]

The biggest form of support was the government of the Republic of Zambia actually making space on its external service to air Radio Freedom. This required salaries of the ZBS/ZNBC staff, equipment and maintenance of the transmitter site. Additionally, by the time this generation of broadcasters arrived at ZNBC, security was extremely tight both at ZNBC and at the transmitter site, as Ndovi remembers: "It [the transmitter site for shortwave] was heavily guarded by Zambia Army, Zambia Police, including our station Radio Three International … there was a Zambia Army officer there unlike all the other stations".[12] Hugh Macmillan (2013, 118) in *The Lusaka Years* notes that the shortwave transmitters provided in 1973 were Chinese, and that they required maintenance, electricity and guarding by the Zambian security forces. Additionally, as Ndovi has noted, the ZNBC studios needed extra security that would not have been provided without Radio Freedom's presence.

Even after acquiring their own mobile recording studio, the ANC still needed facilities at ZBS/ZNBC: "[T]hey'd bring the programme here [ZBS/ZNBC] for broadcast but sometimes they'd face challenges with their mobile machines recording", Justin Nshimbi remembers.[13] "Their console would break down. So, in that time, they'd come here and share our office. In fact, they were sharing some of the equipment that we had, typewriters and office space with us. So, literally, they were part of us as Radio Zambia International".

Justin Nshimbi sums up the feelings of solidarity engendered through these interactions:

> I think, for us that were working with these comrades and listening to their messages on their programmes, I think for us there was a lot of empathy. We really sympathised because we could feel the anger that was there, the anguish that was there. You know, you could see that these people were really, really going through a tough time and they want this to end and it must end soon, you know.[14]

Nshimbi adds:

> And if they come into the office, they are working, they are not talking, they are pensive. You know, deep in thought when writing the script. You could see that someone was literally transferring the pain from the heart onto the paper. I really sympathised with them.

Reuben Kajokoto, now the legal director at ZNBC, joined the broadcaster in 1989 and went straight to the newsroom, which collected news stories for all the radio channels including the external service. He notes that there was a degree of censorship in the stories allowed to be aired on the news of the external service in order to project a positive image of the liberation struggle to the outside world. He recalls one story he was involved in collecting about a skirmish between ANC members in Lusaka. While it was run on Zambia's local stations, Kajokoto recalls that, at the time, "We won't put it on Freedom Radio. Because it will show the enemy that there is disorganisation and that kind of stuff … There are some stories that were quite negative to the movement. Those were not usually used".[15]

Regardless of where Radio Freedom was based at any point in time, there were distinctive sound effects that made the station very easily recognisable to its audiences when it came on air. These were the trademark introduction and signature tune of the revolutionary song "*Hamba Kahle Mkhonto we Sizwe*" (Go well, Spear of the Nation), which was "taken from the record that was distributed at home in 1970". Accompanied by the crackling sound of AK47 assault rifle (the liberation movement's weapon of choice) and the call "*Amandla*" (power) and "*Mayibuye*" (Africa must be returned to her rightful owners), this tune was intended to inspire defiance and insurgency on the side of the listener, and to send a clear signal regarding the ANC's determination to employ violent means to end apartheid. Appended to this song was an oration that was also placed at the centre of the signature tune [see Supplemental file audio clip 2]:

> This is Radio Freedom, the voice of the African National Congress
>
> One of Africa's time-tested revolutionary movements
>
> Born of the people in the front line,
>
> To spearhead the people's struggle for the seizure of power from the oppressor;

> A product of the battles of the African continent for liberation.
>
> It is the voice of Umkhonto we Sizwe
>
> The ever-heroic people's army that draws its combat tradition from Hintsa, Shaka, Moshoeshoe, Sekhukhune, Ramabulane, Madingoane and other great generals and warriors of our glorious history of resistance.
>
> Comrades and compatriots, duty calls
>
> The battle lines are drawn
>
> The African National Congress commands and urges all of us
>
> To act for unity and, as one, to engage the enemy in united action.
>
> Let this be the year of the most powerful offensive against the apartheid regime and its puppets.
>
> Let this be the year of the greatest unity in action.
>
> Let this be the year of the great leap forward to the threshold of victory![16]

Zinjiva Winston Nkondo (1943–2003) was the voice behind the signature tune of Radio Freedom. A freedom fighter who served the ANC at various levels, both in exile and inside the country, Nkondo played a prominent role in student politics while studying at the then University of the North in Turfloop (today's University of Limpopo) in the 1970s. Nkondo was detained for 18 months in 1974 and was severely tortured by the apartheid regime. After serving in the underground structures of the ANC internally for many years, he went into exile where he joined the MK. Popularly known as Victor Matlou (his *nom de guerre*), Nkondo was a gifted orator, poet and cultural activist. He was put on Radio Freedom (where he moved up to the position of director), a move that immediately raised broadcasting standards at the station, winning it an increased share of listeners inside the country.[17]

In a video recording produced in 1982 for the Dutch support group for the ANC's radio in the Netherlands, Nkondo talks about the significance of Radio Freedom in the struggle against apartheid, the ways it connects with the oppressed people in South Africa from the studios in the front-line states, and the campaigns that this radio has launched within South Africa [see Supplemental file video clip 1]. In his own words:

> [O]ur Radio Freedom now and then has campaigns which we launch inside the country. The first campaign that I can talk about here is the campaign to politicise everybody, including the people who get into busses, who get into taxis. Now our problem then was, how do we reach them directly? We might not have radios directly to them. Now what we do is, through Radio Freedom, we organise [audio] cassettes which we distribute to all taxi drivers inside the country … We smuggle them in and we talk to them, and then they play them. And then this has been a very good campaign to [*sic*] us for the last two years [1980 and 1981]. But apart from that, using the radio itself, we have launched the campaign to popularise the Freedom Charter in 1980. And … the result was that the Freedom Charter was adopted by organisations which were not even the ANC, including church organisations.[18]

The opening orature of Radio Freedom fitted perfectly with the militaristic character of the signature tune and MK. It was also consistent with the ANC's broader strategy of an "armed propaganda" campaign adopted after 1979. Indeed, Nkondo's recollection

of Radio Freedom's aggressive distribution of cassette tapes contributed to the overall goal of generating a people's war within South Africa. The orature covered the theme of heroism, tying the anti-apartheid struggle of the 1980s to accounts of African resistance to colonial conquest during the nineteenth century. The present was linked to the past, drawing and expanding on several heroic African male leaders of nineteenth-century South Africa. This, according to Suttner, was because the ANC "wanted people in faraway areas to have a sense of affinity with the messages and not [to] feel that it is only Sekhukhuni and therefore not for Xhosa-speaking people, or that it is only Xhosa by virtue of mentioning Makhanda".[19] Coupled with the sound of gunfire and militant singing, allusions to the anti-colonial heroes were intended to legitimise the use of violence in the struggle against apartheid and to incite militancy and a martial mentality among Radio Freedom's listeners.

Many of Radio Freedom's listeners were enthused by the contents of the signature tune. Murphy Morobe, a renowned student leader allied with the Black Consciousness Movement during the 1976 Soweto student uprising, as well as a United Democratic Front leader in the 1980s, still has vivid memories of the kinds of emotional appeal that the station's opening credits had for him:

> When we used to listen to Radio Freedom … it wasn't always easy because the regime would also be interfering with the signal at all the times to ensure that we do not get absolute benefit of what is being transmitted. However, one thing they couldn't block out was that opening stanza. Now we were young people in our teens. Now to hear the opening stanza of Radio Freedom with the sound of a machine gun, after that we didn't even want to hear anymore (laughter). That was just sufficient to tell us that we must just carry on with the struggle.[20]

Another Radio Freedom listener, who was partly inspired by the station to escape the country and to join both the ANC and its military wing, is James Ngculu. His recollection resonates with Morobe's words above: "[T]he sound of the opening tune '*Hamba Kahle Mkhonto*', followed by a burst of gunfire, excited us. We would imagine ourselves pulling that trigger" (Ngculu 2010, 22). The sound of the AK-47 and the singing of "*Hamba Kahle Mkhonto*" were among the things that left an indelible imprint on the minds of the announcers of Radio Zambia International who worked with Radio Freedom broadcasters.[21]

The recurring theme that was echoed across the broadcaster's interviews was the feeling of taking part in a war, perhaps an information war, which was felt viscerally especially when in the booth and listening to the Radio Freedom broadcasts. Broadcasters did not just play the tapes; they listened to the messages and, in the process, got a political education themselves. As a result of his role as a broadcaster, Ndovi began to develop a deep sense of camaraderie, a desire to contribute to the liberation of "our neighbours". In his own words:

> I saw the need to be part of it. I'd actually take it personal … When I go on air, I'm playing music or whatever it is. If I'm running Radio Freedom for instance, it starts with the AK47, *ka ka ka ka ka* [makes sounds of guns], "This is Radio Freedom, the voice of the African National Congress. *Amandla*!" And I would be alone in the transmission booth, seated in my DJ's saddle and I would be responding, "*Awethu*!" "*Amandla*!" "*Awethu*!"[22]

Ndovi adds that he was provided with political literature, which he still has in his personal archive: "They'd bring a lot of literature about the struggle. We got to know a lot about the

struggle. For obvious reasons, if we were going to go on radio and do programmes, we must get content from them."

"Actually, we looked at each other as brothers and sisters", Watson Kadwali recalls.[23] Beyond this fictive kinship that was echoed by several interviewees, Ndovi noted that Zambian staff at the national broadcaster got so involved in their visitors' lives that they spent time learning some words from South African languages. "They just walk in, '*Dumela*' (meaning 'hello')", Ndovi remembers. "They make you run through the language, you got to understand, you started speaking the language." Some of the Radio Freedom broadcasters corroborate these memories of working closely and even socialising with their Zambian colleagues outside working hours. Simon Ngomane reminisced:

> I had friends there, you know, in the evening I would go there and we put our input they broadcast and then they knocking off and they have got money they take us to shebeens and we drink. You know, cigarettes, you say you don't have cigarettes they buy you.[24]

Corroborating some of what Ngomane and Ndovi had to say about the closeness of working relationships between the Radio Freedom broadcasters and their Zambian hosts, Clarence Kwinana (*nom de guerre* Patrick Makhaya), who was deployed to Radio Freedom broadcasting in Luanda, Angola in 1978 and became the head of Radio Freedom in Lusaka between 1982 and 1984, stressed the importance of broadening social networks in those exile spaces. For him as a broadcaster, cultivating friendships particularly with local journalists in the different front-line host countries where he was deployed was critical as this enabled him to learn local languages and tap into new local sources of information for inclusion in Radio Freedom's news programmes. It was about "turning adversity into opportunity". Most importantly, Radio Freedom broadcasters interacted and collaborated with journalists and broadcasters of other guerrilla radios operating in the cosmopolitan cities such as Lusaka. Kwinana remembers working with the head of the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Voice (ZPRV), Joseph Madotshi Moyo, and the head of SWAPO's Voice of Namibia, Sacky Namugongo. In Kwinana's own words:

> Now we would – um – we would meet at the studio and then discuss with them topical issues in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, you know, share stories about what was happening in those countries. If Sam Nujoma releases a statement then they would share. If ZAPU's Joshua Nkomo releases his, the ZPRV would share. Even us, when Oliver Tambo released his statement we would share it with them. We would also listen to each other's programmes in order to be able to follow what was happening in the region. And then we would also occasionally do a programme on Namibia, sometimes a programme on Zimbabwe as part of our solidarity gesture, you see? And the SWAPO radio would have something on South Africa in support of the ANC.[25]

The connections that Radio Zambia International staff developed with Radio Freedom broadcasters were deeply felt. Nevertheless, the Zambians at times felt frustrated that the ANC members did not live in Lusaka for long periods of time. Justin Nshimbi laments: "What was very noticeable is that our colleagues kept on moving. So, you'd work with someone for three, four months, then he moves on."[26] While several of the Radio Freedom broadcasters that we interviewed echoed the transient nature of their work, their stay in one locality was on average two to three years.

Some relationships between Radio Freedom broadcasters and the Zambian broadcasters went beyond the social and became personal. For example, Ndovi recalls that during his early days at Radio Zambia, a romantic relationship was brewing with one of the South African comrades, "until I heard that she was transferred to another place, I think it must have been Tanzania or Canada or something, and I mourned that day". From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that Radio Zambia International, with its coterie of broadcasters working together with their South African counterparts, served as a sonic device through which the propaganda messages of Radio Freedom and other guerrilla radios in the region could be transmitted on the airwaves behind enemy lines to the listeners back home.

Shortwave Technology and Jamming

This article has indicated earlier that supporters of the ANC were able to tune in and listen to Radio Freedom broadcasting from the front-line states including Zambia. This was made possible by the erection of powerful transmitters in those states and the use of shortwave frequency. Bright Nkaka, an engineer at ZNBC, explains that shortwave technology uses the vibration of particles in the ionosphere to transmit a signal, which is then decoded at a receiver and can thus travel over long distances compared to frequency modulation (FM), which requires a line of sight and can be blocked by geographical features. Despite advances in technology, many states still maintain shortwave transmitters so that listeners in remote areas can receive government propaganda and vital information at times of crisis.

The shortwave technology enabled Radio Zambia International in Lusaka to transmit Radio Freedom propaganda over more than 1,600 kilometres into the heart of apartheid South Africa. Received clandestinely by the supporters of the banned liberation movement at home, these subversive broadcasts triggered nervousness on the part of the apartheid regime. In response, the apartheid state established some technical mechanisms to block reception of these broadcasts inside the country and jamming them – that is, the overcrowding of the radio frequency transmission so that the listeners could not get the benefit of receiving the broadcasts.

The interviewees from both Zambia and South Africa noted jamming as a frequent challenge. Jamming, according to Bright Nkaka, "is achieved by switching on a transmitter at a higher power on the same frequency. This effectively cancels out the less powerful transmitter. The counter-transmitter could either transmit their own propaganda or simply a tone or noise".[27] Ndovi recalled an experience of jamming that occurred when he was on duty:

> You find that sometimes you'd be broadcasting, and it was very frustrating, you'd be transmitting, broadcasting, and you're really on top of it only to be told – maybe after three or four hours of the transmission – then the transmission controller comes and says, the man from master control room, comes and says, "Oh, sorry, Mr Ndovi, you've actually been talking to yourself. The signal has been jammed by the other forces on the other end, so now we have to change frequency".

Ndovi continues:

> So we had to change frequency then you start announcing on the new frequency there and then. Say, "We've now changed our broadcasting from so many kilohertz we're going to start

> kilohertz". Just to let people know, okay, now you also switch your radios, you pick us on this channel. Because we'd get the feedback that we've been jammed by the other powers that be.[28]

Conclusion

On 22 March 1991, O. R. Tambo, still recovering in London from a stroke he suffered in August 1989, penned an official letter to President Kenneth Kaunda, expressing how deeply he and the ANC were in his (Kaunda's) debt for the long and unstinting support Zambia gave to the liberation movement. In Tambo's own words:

> Our political association dates from the 1960s when the ANC, forced into exile by the repressive apartheid regime in South Africa, was looking for allies amongst the international community. I have always been and continue to be deeply appreciative of the crucial role you played and continue to play in the history of my country's struggle for liberation. The assistance the ANC has received from your Government over the years is unequalled throughout the world. Not only did you welcome us and protect us, but you gave me personally, great security by inviting me to live within the Presidential Complex. I very much appreciate this, as did the whole of the National Executive Committee. The successful efforts which we have made with Zambian assistance resulted in the South African Government deciding to abandon apartheid and it has been forced to agree to negotiations aimed at ending apartheid. No country in the world has persisted in giving the measure of close aid on a political and social level as that we have received from Zambia.[29]

We have seen in this article that the support for Radio Freedom in Zambia, which was part of broader solidarity with the liberation movements against white racist regimes in the Southern African region, was indeed immense but variable, dipping in the early 1970s but reaching its highest point in the period after the 1976 Soweto students' revolt. By extending transmission on the external services of the national broadcaster, providing basic equipment such as audio reels and cassettes, as well as studio space and a group of dedicated broadcasters and technicians, Zambia made it possible for Radio Freedom to link up with its supporters back home. In this way, Radio Freedom was able to have a sonic presence at home, to disseminate its propaganda among its supporters, and to influence internal political developments.

Notes

1. Accessed 3 September 2023. https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/opening-speech-international-solidarity-conference-theme-apartheid-peace-democracy-and.
2. Justin Nshimbi, Watson Kadwali and Francis Ndovi joined ZNBC Radio's external service in the late 1980s, just as SWAPO was wrapping up. The ANC was still heavily involved in producing their Radio Freedom programmes.
3. Personal conversation with Luvuyo Wotshela, Makhanda, Eastern Cape, 25 June 2019.
4. In fact, the researchers have seen reels in the ANC's audio collection at Mayibuye that still bear the branding of Zambia Broadcasting Services.
5. For a more comprehensive analysis of the founding of Radio Freedom inside South Africa, see, for example, Lekgoathi (2010, 2013).
6. In Zambia, Radio Freedom programmes were aired on Radio Lusaka shortwave 41 metre-band 7.3 megahertz. See contents page of *Sechaba: Official Organ of the African National Congress South Africa,* June 1981.

7. Besides the announcers mentioned already, the other staff on Radio Zambia International were the late Lazarus Kanyungu, who was the manager of the external service in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the announcers (some of whom have passed away), including Kenneth Maduma, Bridget Nyirenda (later Ndovi), Martha Nambeye and Irene Ndoso.
8. Text posted by Comrade Castro Kwela on WhatsApp group of former ANC exiles, May 2022.
9. Interview with Watson Kadwali, conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Lusaka, 22 October 2020.
10. Ibid.
11. Interview with Simon Ngomane, conducted by Tshepo Moloi and Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, Middelburg, 12 November 2015.
12. Interview with Francis Ndovi, conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Lusaka, September 2020.
13. Interview with Justin Nshimbi, conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Lusaka, 30 September 2020.
14. Interview with Justin Nshimbi, conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Lusaka, 16 October 2020.
15. Interview with Reuben Kajokoto, conducted by Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, Lusaka, 24 November 2020.
16. University of the Western Cape (UWC), Mayibuye Centre Archive (MCA) 8, Radio Freedom Programme.
17. Mr Zinjiva Winston Nkondo. Accessed 15 May 2022. https://thepresidency.gov.za/. See also Lekgoathi, Moloi and Romão Saúte Saíde (2020).
18. University of Fort Hare, National Heritage and Cultural Studies (NAHECS), # 1070_154, video recording of Victor Matlou interview for Omroep Voor Radio Freedom, Netherlands, 1982.
19. Interview with Raymond Suttner, conducted by Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, Johannesburg, 2009.
20. Interview with Murphy Morobe, conducted by Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, Pretoria, October 2009.
21. Radio Zambia International also aired programmes made in-house geared towards a foreign audience, as well as the programmes of other liberation movements like SWAPO. As liberation movements began to pack up and leave Lusaka, programmes aired on other ZNBC radio stations were increasingly syndicated on the external service until its eventual closure in the mid-1990s.
22. Interview with Francis Ndovi, conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Lusaka, September 2020.
23. Interview with Watson Kadwali, conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Lusaka, 22 October 2020.
24. Interview with Simon Ngomane, conducted by Tshepo Moloi and Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, Middelburg, 12 November 2015.
25. Interview with Clarence Kwinana, conducted by Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, Midrand, 10 July 2023.
26. Interview with Justin Nshimbi, conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Lusaka, 16 October 2020.
27. Interview with Bright Nkaka, conducted by Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, Lusaka, 23 November 2020.
28. Interview with Francis Ndovi, conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Lusaka, September 2020.
29. University of Fort Hare, Liberation Archives, OTP/069/0725/18, African National Congress, Office of the President, Letter from O. R. Tambo to President Kenneth Kaunda, 22 March 1991.

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