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Survival of 'radio culture' in a converged networked new media environment*

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Introduction

With emphasis on popular music and related entertainment rather than democratic culture and identity politics, this chapter examines the extent to which radio remains significant in socio-cultural and political landscapes in Africa given the proliferation of newer information and communication technologies (ICTs) more recently enlivened by cell phones and social networking applications. The new ICTs, though dearer presently, make local and cross-border communication much simpler and easier so radio would naturally be one of its casualties. Using recent conceptualization of the Habermasian public sphere, the argument in this chapter is that the post 1990s state loosening of grip on the broadcast sector through the licensing of several private FM stations – though mostly in cities – has rekindled 'radio culture' boosted by internet and cell phones that enable erstwhile rare audience feedback and participation. The chapter concludes that although radio's survival as a major cultural phenomenon may appear to be under threat from new media technologies such as the cell phone, convergence makes it possible for it to remain a significant arena of information dissemination and exchange particularly in rural and deprived urban areas underserved by modern cabled ICT infrastructures. Data has been gathered using online searches of presence of Africa-based and Africa-focused radio broadcasting, limited interviews and review of literature on radio and culture especially in Africa.

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Significance of radio in a converged mediascape

> There are an estimated 10 million radio sets in South Africa, with listeners many times that number, broadcasting a range of programming from ultra-hip urban music to community news and information in the deep rural areas. You can listen to radio on the airwaves, via satellite and on the internet, with most of the major stations – and even some community ones – offering live audio streaming from their websites.
>
> Alexander (n.d.)

The statement above captures how far radio has come, adapting to new media environment as the need arises – and playing a pivotal role in Africa's public life over the years. Due to characteristics such as portability, cost-effective, versatility and orality, 'the people's medium' (Van der Veur 2002: 81) that is radio remains 'the one to watch' (Girard 2003a). A recent detailed look at 40 African countries, with 17 in-country audience surveys, projected that although television ownership will grow by an average 17 per cent, radio remains dominant – especially in rural areas – with rapid increase in channels (Bizcommunity 2008, ITU 2008). Reliable data are hardly available, but from previous – sometimes disparate – figures (Fardon and Furniss 2000: 1, Jensen 2002, UNESCO 1963: 13) it is estimable that radio sets in Africa have grown from 1.4 million in 1950s to 5.3 million around 1960s to 170 million in 1997 to around 205 million in 2002 to 270 million in 2009. Like any technology, radio diffusion has been uneven within countries, within the Africa and between the continent and the rest of the world, but penetration rate – initially as low one receiver per 1000 inhabitants in 1950 (UNESCO 1963: 13) – has improved over the years, especially post-independence (Mytton 1989: 304, Bourgault 1995: 75).[1] However, the place of radio as a favourite medium is no longer guaranteed.

The story of exponential diffusion in Africa has changed from radio to newer information and communication technologies (ICTs). The number of internet users in Africa increased from three million in 2000 to 32 million in 2008 while that of mobile cellular phone users grew from 11 million in 2000 to 246 million in 2008, with growth in both services on the continent from 2003 to 2008 being twice that of the world – although penetration rates remain low by current

benchmarks (ITU 2009: 1).[2] Little wonder Francis Kasoma told this author in Lusaka in early 2000s that the cell phone is 'the new mass medium of Africa'[3] – although, as we will see later, the place of radio is still safe owing to technological convergence.

Indeed some scholars have underscored the significance in Africa of other media such as television (Wresch 1998), but the historical and contemporary significance of radio on the continent is generally accepted – to the extent that Domatob (1988: 168) called on African states to 'harness radio … in lieu of television'. In Namibia, 'the political importance of television is – at least on the surface – significantly smaller than the role played by the radio' (Meischer 1999: 19). For instance, radio is 'Namibia's mass medium' (Meischer 1999: 14, 18) as the population lacks a 'newspaper reading culture' (Heuva, cited in Meischer 1999:14). Alhassan (2004: 63) points out that although "it is often said, and justifiably so, that the anti-colonial press was the most important resource in the regaining of independence in 1957', he 'cannot imagine the coming into being of Ghana without radio' (p.25) which as a 'space-conquering technology' was also one of the 'primal agents of late postcolonial nationalism' (p.64). These deterministic views may have been expressed before the current ICT diffusion, but the role and place of radio remains – even if shaken.

Although Nyamnjoh (2005: 211) points out that the 'sweeping affirmation' that radio (and television) 'are indeed popular ... is more imagined than real', he seems to underscore the significance of radio through the allusion to this medium in reference to informal media in the African context, in particular rumour or unconfirmed information circulated by word-of-mouth. A number of Kenyan communities call this 'radio without battery'. It is 'pavement or sidewalk radio' in Cameroon and most of francophone Africa (*radio trottoir*) and lusophone Africa (*rádio boca boca*), not to mention other Cameroonian terms – 'radio one-battery', 'radio kongosa', 'radio 33', 'radio Kaake no-battery' and 'FM Malabo' (Nyamnjoh 2005: 209-210. See also Fardon and Furniss 2000: 2, Hyden and Leslie 2002: 24-5). Indeed the ubiquity of such informal media and that of radio, with some of the content crossing both media, forms a vital element of convergence – even if not sophisticated technologically. Of course the cross-feeding of such content between radio and other media has been done cautiously in sensitive political and cultural contexts.

Part of radio's appeal is its historical-nostalgic value alluded to already. 'No other medium of communication in Africa comes close to radio in terms of audience, political significance and cultural power' as 'the barometers and the agents of change' (Richard and Funiss 2000: blurb). Yet in most African countries, colonial and postcolonial governments maintained their stranglehold on state radio (and television), enjoying around 90 per cent national coverage, to serve elitist and propaganda interests characteristic of what Louis Althusser terms ideological state apparatuses, until the rulers gave in reluctantly amidst reform agitations mainly from the 1990s (see also Borugault 1995, Van der Veur 2002, Alhassan 2004: 129 and 136, Nyamnjoh 2005, Olorunisola 2005). 'Since state broadcasters lost their monopoly … (either as a result of regulatory policies or technological advances), broadcasting services on the continent now come in all shapes and forms, with various ownership and funding models, supervisory mechanisms, missions and programme offerings' (AfriMAP/NMP 2007: 2). A recent comprehensive survey of 12 countries covering 2007-2009 identified six categories mainly by ownership and control – state, public, commercial, political-interest, community and other special-interest – and recognizes internet broadcasting 'with possible overlaps, hybrids and yet other forms' (AfriMAP/NMP 2007: 2). The reluctant state slackening of control brought much needed variety and pluralism in the realms of radio – with subtle and obvious implications for democratic practice and theory on the continent.

In Cameroon, state control was not relinquished until April 2000 (Nyamnjoh 2005: 125). Ghana legally allowed private stations in 1992 but did not license one until around 1994-5, with Accra boasting nearly 20 FM stations by 2006 (Alhassan 2004: 128, Ansu-Kyeremeh 2007: 104). From 1994, state-owned Namibian Broadcasting Corporation had strong competition in the larger Windhoek area from a smaller, but growing number of private radio stations (Meischer 1999: 14). The new forms radio are not perfect or panacea for socio-political and cultural shortcomings of the state-controlled model. Writing on Ghana, Alhassan (2004: 129) notes that 'if the early postcolonial broadcasting was characterized by elite to elite communication the current media scene suggest that it is now an intra-urban affair with marginal participation from non-city dwellers'. In Namibia, Meischer (1999: 14, 18) notes that highly commercial stations such as Channel 7, Radio 999 or Radio Antenna and Radio Energy feature a large musical and

advertising menu and are concentrated in the larger Windhoek area. Similar stations can be found in Nairobi (Capital FM, Kiss FM, Easy FM), Kampala and other major cities. As we shall see later, this 'different approach' is an injection of variety that has a role in present-day Africa. Detractors of such stations also lament about the lack of professionalism, especially through formal training of staff who are often disc jockeys rather than real journalists. As Mytton (1989: 303) points out, there is a place for such media workers beyond emphasis on certificate-focused 'education achievement' as 'the point is surely to ensure that talented creative people receive adequate training'. Although the community model is participatory, it has not been spared the criticism of being too donor dependent (Meischer 1999: 14-15, 18). So no model is perfect, but all – the state one included – have a role to play.

The model that has attracted most scholarly and activist attention is the political-interest, sometimes perceived as 'independent', one – characterized by several examples of extra-judicial measures (state harassment, including raids and equipment confiscation/seizure). 'Examples abound from various corners of the continent… Equatorial Guinea … Niger … Mali …Gabon ... Similar shutdowns by security officers, have happened in many other African countries....' (Ogblondah 2003: 66). These tribulations of alternative radio stations are well documented, especially online, by various international freedom-advocate organizations.[4] It is worth noting that a number of the radio categories identified by AfriMap/NMP (2007: 2) are not necessarily mutually exclusive – so private commercial radio as well as community and religious broadcasters, such as Angola's Radio Ecclesia, can face state censure due to their perceived political stance. Indeed, while radio stations with special interest focus such as religion may have no problem gaining government license – any station that openly declares political, especially anti-government, interest is more likely to operate clandestinely.[5]

The focus of this chapter is not on the cases of radio struggle-vulnerability and public interest programming, aimed at informing and educating, as has been ably defined and covered by others (AfriMAP/NMP 2007: 3ff), but on the increasingly popular contemporary entertainment content – most common in private commercial radio, although other categories also try to incorporate such material in a bid to retain and win audiences in an increasingly competitive environment. In fact, some authors trace commercialization of broadcasting (even within the state model), with

investors – including foreign players – focusing on cities 'where consumers with money could be located', to 1960s and 1970s when state control was much tighter (Bourgault 1995: 80). The approach to the examination of infotainment here is not to lament about understandably detrimental aspects and trends already covered by other scholars, such as imperialism or 'foreignization' (Ansu-Kyeremeh 2007) and dumbing-down. There is no denying that 'privatization could well lead to increased domination of Africa's airwaves by foreign services and to greater opportunities for elite profiteering from scarce financial resources available around capital cities' (Bourgnault 1995: 68). Indeed, some of the owners of private stations have very close links to ruling elites – with preferential treatment when it comes to licensing and other forms of control measures. These owners may also find popular culture content, such as music and banal chats, much cheaper and safer, in line with what authors like Bourgault (1995: 82-3) rightly view as 'urban and elite bias'. However, some of the unintended consequences of pluralism and competition have been attempts to meet audience desires – which have included popular culture content with messages of resistance that is often subtle yet accessible to the discerning.

Popular culture, radio and democratic theory

Nugdalla (1986: 92) identifies 'three basic definitions of culture' and 'adopts the third, sociological definition, which varies from the [classical-broad] ethnographic and [narrow-confined] literary ones.' Here, we also adopt this approach which 'limits culture to the sphere of ideas, values, norms, attitudes, and all that distinguishes culture from structure in a social system' (Nugdalla 1986: 92). The term 'mass' may no longer be fashionable in the new media environment, but it has been inextricably linked to culture – especially of the popular kind. It is 'used to identify those everyday things that we all share through mass media and industrial technology. …that which is mass-produced, and is successful, is "popular" culture' (Roberts 1987: 276). Integral to popular culture – as distinguished from 'elite culture' – are 'pervasive' and 'invisible' icons, which 'reflect and communicate our values, hopes and dreams' and 'are given uncritical devotion' – with popularity entrenched 'principally by intense circulation, publicity and mass advertising' (Roberts 1987: 277). Radio plays a significant role in

purveying these icons and related artefacts.

One of the icons Roberts lists as popular in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, Jimmy Cliff – voted 'the most famous Christian of all', ahead of even Mother Theresa and Jesus, in a poll – revealed in a TV interview (ITV 2009) with former British tabloid newspaper (The *Sun*) editor, Piers Morgan that radio airplay had the power to make or break his career as a recording artist. Creativity is vital in popular culture, and radio can aid such innovation – which includes hybridization in genres. 'All forms of popular culture walk the fine line between what the scholar John Cawelti has called "conventions" [the familiar or recognizable or formulaic] and "inventions" [variety or surprise, in narrative or aesthetics]' (Berger, cited in Abdulkadir 2000: 131). In examining 'radio's role within popular culture', Hendy (2000: 194) identifies three main areas:

> The first is in the area of democratic life, and specifically the way in which radio lives up to its reputation as a medium of information and discussion. The second is in the more diffuse area of identity – how radio might nurture, or destroy, people's sense of 'belonging'....The third areas has a more specific focus: the way in which radio might shape trends in popular music.

Although the focus in this chapter is on the third aspect which implies radio culture is associated with consumption, this is inextricably linked to the first and second. In the early years of radio, '...collective acts of reception became a feature of everyday life' (Loviglio 2005: xiv). New media may have reduced or eliminated this in the developed world, but in Africa it is not unusual to listen to loud radio music in public transport – such as Kenya's *matatu* and Tanzania's *dala dala* – and from shops, including in small rural towns. From some homes or houses, the 'intimate space of reception' of radio (Loviglio 2005: xiv) is alongside a public one. This 'intimate public generated permissible crossings of the public/private boundary, leaving the larger principle of the public/private distinction intact' in 'a complex web of social performances...' (Loviglio 2005: xvi) is not unimaginable in a cell phone environment once units are appropriately enabled. 'Radio's promiscuous mixing of the interpersonal and mass communication' in the context of

identity and difference – evoking 'intense pleasure and anxiety' (Loviglio 2005: xviii) – remains durable and popular, including in Africa.

Despite the ingredients of contradictions such as 'repression and ... *face-powder democracy*' that are apparent in attempts to embrace liberal democracy in Africa, 'there is no doubt about the liberalizing, mobilising and empowering *potential*' of the conventional and new media in the continent (Nyamnjoh 2005: 23). Popular culture is one of the ways in which 'democracy comes in bits and pieces' (Ogundimu 2002: 235) – sometimes through subtle rather than direct struggle or agitation. A number of theories have been used to examine popular culture in general and in the African context in particular. One is the social learning theory of modelling espoused by scholars such as Melvin DeFleur and Everette Dennis who argue that 'under certain conditions people will imitate these models and adopt their patterns of behaviour' (Roberts 1987: 278). In keeping with the media effects approach, 'children and young adults' (Roberts 1987: 278) learn about these models or icons from the media. A related concept is the 'cultural norms theory …[which]… indicates that the media tend to establish the standards or norms which define acceptable behaviour in society' (Roberts 1986: 278). An unrelated but common approach is that of imperialism or (neo-/post-)colonialism. Domatob (1989) argues that radio – like African record shops, video shops and TV stations – is susceptible to the influence of western pop music and stars thus killing the continent's rich musical tradition in an imperialist 'cultural synchronisation' process. Domatob (1988: 162) charges that such western '…bourgeois mass culture' aid neo-colonialism. While the concerns in this approach are valid, there is need to take hybridization into account.

Dominant foreign content is not an all-pervasive ill, affecting all media areas all over the continent. While Mytton (1989: 304) notes that some contributors in a mid 1980s book on this topic decry such domination in Liberian radio and Ghana due to 'cheap, well-produced recorded music, evocative of a lifestyle aspired to', he points out that 'this is not true in Nigeria … where flourishing record labels mean that Nigerian music is usually well up in the local hit parade, and most music on the radio in that country'. Mytton raises a different problem – ethnicity. 'Nigerians don't much like Nigerian music unless it is from their own area. With some exceptions, you don't hear much Hausa music in the clubs and bars of Lagos. The same cultural

exclusivity is seen everywhere' (1989: 304). It would not be too far-fetched to try extrapolating that this was the case in a number of multi-ethnic sub-Saharan African countries. Although one may argue that the ethnic-linked ownership and target audiences of some of the recently licensed FM stations may exacerbate such ethnic exclusivity, popular artistes who have borrowed from the west and from other African cultures have wider appeal resulting in radio airplay beyond ethnic lines. In Kenya, popular hybridized songs such as *Unbwogable* ('Unscarable') and modified previously ethnic-based artefacts or even genres have enjoyed popularity all over the country, especially if they have subtle political undertones around election time. Such hybridization is crucial especially given that one of the consequences of unshackling airwaves has been an increase in often localized 'ethnic' radio – such as Kenya's Kass FM (www.kassfm.co.ke). A recent report points to

> an explosion in the number of radio stations, particularly those broadcasting in local languages. Known in East Africa as the 'vernaculars,' these stations have been a high growth area over the last five years. The most vivid example of this trend is in Uganda, where there are now more than 150 radio stations, 69% of which cater to audiences in the country's 38 languages.
>
> Bizcommunity 2008, ITU 2008

Ethnic-based or regional radio is not a new phenomenon, with some of the previous often state-backed ones being segregative in the case of Namibia (Meischer 1999: 15) or hate-based in the well-known case in Rwanda. Given that such radio categories are inevitable, a more useful perspective – rather than that of provincialism – is their role in the expansion of the public sphere in a manner that is more in tune with ordinary local populations and beyond, including through popular culture. By this token, this chapter favours the new public sphere approach due to its emancipatory appeal – in relation to open, free and fair discourse.

Although his study was based on pre-radio 17th to 19th century Western Europe, radio epitomized Habermasian concerns in blurring public-private spheres. His theory has been linked to '... the ritual power of radio to conjure a new social space – public and private – national and local'

(Loviglio 2005: xiv). The Habermasian idealistic yet pessimistic early public sphere theory has been criticized for its emphasis on elitism, state-centricism, singularity, rationality and universalism. To postmodernist Mark Poster, '...when Habermas defends with the label of reason what he admires in Western culture, he universalizes the particular, grounds the conditional, absolutizes the finite' (Crack 2008: 29). Scholars like J. B. Thompson point out that in the new public sphere, ICT – increasingly converging with radio as we will see later – increases the 'vulnerability and visibility' of political leaders 'before audiences' – limiting their control on content reception and interpretation (Crack 2008: 36). In the recent 'revisions of the public sphere theory, the mass media are not considered the source of a sham public but rather the site for a reconceptualization of the meanings and the uses of publicity' (Loviglio 2005: xx). This new conceptualization is that of a public sphere that is pluralist, differentiated, inclusive and extra-territorial, with mutual affinity playing a vital role (Crack 2008: 47-68). In a converged digital environment, radio still finds a place in the 'complex mosaic of differently sized, overlapping and interconnected public spheres' (Keane 2000: 76). Radio maintains a role in this.

Nugdalla (1986: 102) points out that broadcasting – especially radio – can contribute to 'cultural renewal' through 'the arts: music, songs and drama' which broadcasting has made 'popular' and given 'a touch of respectability'. He elaborates: 'It is the sphere of artistic production that broadcasting becomes more of a cultural than an ideological or propaganda institution' (Nugdalla 1986: 102). Of course there is the paradox that the political ideology and propaganda 'manifest and repulsive in talks, speeches, and preaching' via radio is replaced by what may be considered imperialist ones 'latent and subtle in the works of art' (Nugdalla 1986: 102) but the question is whether change is more likely to be achieved through some toleration of what Thomas McPhail (1981) terms electronic colonialism or by embracing ideologies of self-centred African political elites. Although popular culture is mostly associated with commercial broadcasters, the works of scholars such as Fairchild (2001) show community radio can also play a role in this area, beyond the African context of development and political communication approach that is often mostly donor-driven. There is a place for radical political approach by clandestine and legitimate radio, but commercial and community radio broadcasts can also play a role in democracy by strategically focusing on popular culture – in spite of what Kellner (2003)[6], echoing Guy Debord, would term the triumph of the spectacle under technocapitalism in a high consumption society

with commodity pleasures.

Radio's popular culture content under convergence

Content, regardless of media, is king – technologies only offer varying conveniences. There is no doubt that a number of popular culture content especially in private commercial FM stations in African cities exhibit 'Western' features that Ansu-Kyeremeh (2007: 108) identifies as 'use of foreign languages; imitation and mimicry of foreign programs with their broadcast formats; and … less diversified programming' but at the same time, as the author indeed acknowledges, resistance rather than victimhood has been expressed in the audience preferences. In fact a great deal of creativity and blending in modern radio programming injects local style, languages or dialects, idioms, anecdotes, jokes, rumours and music. Hendy (2000: 194) notes that although radio 'is very much the global purveyor of both American music and American formatting conventions', there is really no longer – and perhaps never has been – pure cultures due to borrowing in one way or another, with radio as an enabler of such hybridization. Fardon and Furniss (2000: 1) note that 'the growth of African broadcast culture on radio has been spectacular ... Via radio, African cultures are broadcast, both widely and narrowly, and is influenced by the broadcasts of other cultures'. In other words, popular culture content is not necessarily always 'culture-corroding' (Ansu-Kyeremeh 2007: 101).

What constitutes popular culture content? Abdulkadir (2000: 129-130) lists music request programmes, drama and comedy and variety shows but this is not all. 'Local popular cultural genres, such as proverbs, catchphrases, jokes and funny stories abound, while whatever people are talking about on the streets regarding fashion, personalities and events – in short all of current popular discourse – form the stuff of chart shows and other discussion programmes' (Abdulkadir 2000: 130). Although Abdulkadir (2000: 130) identifies drama as the most popular on Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), 'much of the most popular content tends to be music on the radio' (ITU 2008). This is more so the case in the recently licensed FM stations across Africa, as confirmed by a recent survey.

> The most striking trend in terms of audiences is the rise in radio listenership. There is a huge appetite for FM music radio... Africans, both sub-Saharan and North African, surround themselves with music in cars, public transportation, shops and homes. Wherever deregulation has taken place, multiple FM channels have emerged.
>
> Analyst Hugh Hope-Stone – Bizcommunity 2008, ITU 2008

To Hendy (2000: 214), 'radio's intimate connection with *music* … Music, rather than talk, is the main component of most of the world's radio stations and networks'. Citing M. Pickering and R. Shuker who while recognizing the *enriched-swamped* paradox with a view that 'quotas on radio' could 'help rebalance the forces of localism and internationalization' appreciate 'radio's role in the *dynamic* aspect of popular music culture', Hendy (2000: 224-5) notes that radio is 'capable of providing "the conditions of interaction" in the ongoing creation of "hybridized" symbolic forms and practices'. Such conditions could lead to segmented 'taste publics' (Hendy 2000: 227) and what S. J. Douglas has called barrier-erecting 'mutually exclusive auditory niches' (Hendy 2000: 229). These niches may be ethnic, generational, extra-territorial or virtual, but with intersections among them – so the barriers may not necessarily be exclusive especially in a networked society. 'In its pervasiveness and variety, radio thoroughly disrupts any neat association between the local and global as geographical referents' (Fardon and Furniss 2000: 2), given the presence of local broadcasters online and the re-transmissions via local FM stations of output from international broadcasters such as the BBC, VOA and RFI. Whether among mass or niche audiences, music remains the most popular content – and a carrier of socio-cultural and political nuances-messages.

Like other content, the ruling elite have used music – especially the traditional type – on state radio to serve them.[7] In the early stages of private radio in Africa, music was mainly American with most news being rebroadcasts. This is how Peter van der Akker (in Van der Veur 2002: 101) captures the recipe for success: '...a huge dose of Western pop music, lard it with talk radio and commercials and your popularity is guaranteed'. In Kenya, music was virtually the only content that the initial private radio disseminated (Van der Veur 2002: 90). This was partly because, as journalist Charles Onyango-Obbo notes, owners mostly supportive of the ruling elite

‘know a respectable news program is likely to annoy someone in government’ (Van der Veur 2002: 100). In recent years, some of the music contents have increasingly become political, thanks to ‘socially conscious musicians ... borrowing a page from groups like U2 ... a clear indication that a fear of authority is waning’ (Kairmi 2009). That ‘their message – in a mixture of English and native languages – is popular with locals’, underscoring hybridization, means private radio ignore them at their own commercial peril.

> Kenyan musician Eric Wainana became a household name after he released the Swahili song *Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo* (‘Land of Petty Bribery’). The song, which became an unofficial anthem, left government officials uncomfortable. State-run broadcasters did not play it for years.
>
> Karimi 2009

The ‘independent radio’ that appeal to the ‘young urban audience’ may prefer the ‘immensely popular rappers’ for commercial reasons (Ruigrok n.d.), but the musicians are increasingly injecting political messages in their popular songs. Some rulers are much less tolerant of popular music with political messages so this is not always a safe escape route away from news. A report on fragile Somalia in October 2009 by International Press Institute’s Press Freedom Adviser indicated that radical Islamist militants Al-Shabab that controlled the southern town of Baidoa shut down privately-owned Radio Warsan, and took the station’s director and news editor into custody, for airing ‘un-Islamic’ content, ‘especially songs and music’ (Hunt 2009). In Zimbabwe, 2005 presidential candidate Jonathan Moyo’s election campaign ‘smashing hit’, *Phambili Le Tsholotsho* (‘Go Tsholotsho!’) was so popular it could be heard in cell phone sound tracks and bars but it was banned from national radio using the very rules he put in place as Information Minister under Mugabe (Ruigrok n.d.).

Popular music is not just a feature of private commercial radio; it is embraced by some state and community broadcasters – only that these are often more selective in attempts to avoid upsetting the status quo. For example, South Africa’s (Western Cape) community Bush Radio music shows included *Everyday People*, on local music and artists, mid-weekly *Soul Makossa*, on music from around Africa, and Friday’s *Head Warmers*, on American Hip Hop music and the

related culture (Olorunnisola 2005). While Bush Radio was shut down and its owner prosecuted before the charges were later dropped, Radio Zibonele in Khayelitsha – popular for its trendy music in shows such as *Party Time* and *International Top 20 Countdown* – survived open harassment due to its softer strategy (Olorunnisola 2005). It is not just the music that are popular, but all that goes with it during a number of shows. These include commentary by hosts and contributions from audience members. Before privatization, a popular radio commentary was a monologue on the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), Leonard Mambo Mbotela's *Jee Huu ni Ungwana?* (Is this really gentility/decency?), criticizing the daily habits of ordinary people – safely eschewing the foibles of the powerful. In recent programming, especially on private radio, talk or chat shows have become more interesting and critical of the powerful and music shows are increasingly interspersed with comment. The style is often informal, satirical and jocular – sometimes with rumours and innuendos. With the ethical problems raised by such formats, one is reminded of Habermas' reference to 'talk shows as the epitome of the "sham public" that had replaced the authentic one...' – 'in a strange echo of Walter Lippman's "phantom public" ' (Loviglio 2005: xx). In Africa, such shows have opened up spaces of expression, right from before privatization. Although Nugdalla (1986: 96, 97) found in a 1980s Sudan study that talks and discussions were 'generally monotonous', they 'contributed ... to the promotion and consolidation of the new human values and practices' – which included acceptance of women's contributions. Nugdalla (1986: 97) recalls that 'religious fanatics and rigid traditionalists' found the spectre of a woman singing or acting on radio 'an unforgivable sin' and even males who did so 'were spoken of as "vagabonds"' but with time singers became 'popular and singing acceptable'. Recent attempts to stretch the boundaries in controversial chat shows by state broadcasters such as Namibia's national radio 'on occasion leads to the termination of a broadcast' (Meischer 1999: 16).

Recently licensed private stations have found it more exciting pushing boundaries in chat and discussion. Kenyan Kiss FM presenters Caroline Mutoko and Walter Mong'are's language against cabinet minister Martha Karua in a memorable 2004 edition of *Big Breakfast* was beyond the bounds of decency, but it was in-keeping with the satirical style that the presenters had adopted and which made their show popular (Bath 2004). This was perhaps their way of building genre-awareness, with the legal risks that came with the experiment. This was within what Boler

(2008: 393) sees as 'the function of political satire ...saying what is otherwise unsaid within a given political climate...' given the controversial Karua had declined to respond to Kiss FM crucial questions public interest affecting her significant water ministry.

> Satire speaking truth to power is a central place of optimism in political discourse … It is not a coincidence that political satire is popular during times of political repression and censorship. People respond to satire because it pokes holes in the entire edifice of lies that have been built…"
>
> Boler 2008: 22

Boler argues, with S. Turpin, that the appeal of 'ironic approach to truth' – at multiple levels in form and content – challenges and critiques complicity in what Guy Debord terms a 'spectacular society' (Boler 2008: 387).

Under freer airwaves, audience participation for instance through phone-in signalled 'that private-enterprise radio may be experimenting with forms of political expression that contradict prevailing orthodoxy' (Van der Veur 2002: 101). An example is Ugandan Capital Radio's *Capital Gang* discussion show which includes live phone-in, which has sometimes been in trouble with the government – although it has featured President Museveni on occasions. As part of demonstration of resistance to 'foreign' content in Ghana, Ansu-Kyeremeh (2007: 107) points out that 'discursive, and especially interactive, listener phone-in programs on radio that usually focus on local issues are very popular'. Due to the discomfort by authorities with audience input – and the live nature of some of these – such shows have been met with bans, for instance in Togo (RSF 2009), or threats of various forms. Audience input and chat usually offer opportunities for radio to converge with informal media which is characterized by innuendos and rumour, a risky territory that has led Kenya to propose 'legislation on broadcasting seeking to criminalise unconfirmed reporting' (Maina 2009).

A more significant form of convergence in recent times involves dissemination of radio content via modern ICT platforms in an adaptation to the digital future (McCauley 2002, Attias and Deflander 2003, Girard 2003b, Ilboudo and Castello 2003, Jallov 2003). Radio has not been left

out in the increasing intersection between mass media, social media and personal media. Radio has joined creative appropriation of new media platforms such as the Internet and cell phones which, along the lines of arguments by Spitulnik, offer 'real alternatives, if well harnessed to serve popular social causes' (Nyamnjoh 2005: 205). Values associated with African realities and which have made such convergence easier are listed by Nyamnjoh (2005: 4, 15-17, 20, 205), citing others such as Gecau and Olorunnisola, include: sociality, negotiation, interconnectedness, interdependence, coexistence, creativity and conviviality. These qualities have been catalysed by 'communicative hurdles and hierarchies ... [and] ... histories of deprivation, debasement and cosmopolitanism' (Nyamnjoh 2005: 4). Radio's appropriation of new ICT media, despite such risks as exploitation (through commodification, commercialization and conglomeration), inequality (through the digital divide) and Orwellian surveillance, show that 'globalization does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenization or Americanization' (Appandurai, cited in Nyamnjoh 2005: 7). One of the best examples of radio convergence, on political realms, is that of London-based Zimbabwean exile radio, SW Radio Africa (www.swradioafrica.com) which uses short message service and podcasts (Bunz 2009).

The internet has been the most dominant platform of convergence for the radio. Indeed 'radio is now proving itself versatile enough to go hand in hand with the Web' (Gardner in Girard 2003a: blurb). Although pointing out that 'many … argue that the Internet is the ultimate Western tool for the acculturation of the South', Ansu-Kyeremeh (2007: 107) acknowledges that 'the Internet may somehow relate the global/international to the community'. In Ghana, Alhassan (2004: 196) notes that 'several FM stations stream their audio content on their web pages and also provide alphanumeric content. … the 'digirati' [the new elites of digital literacy in Ghana] prefer to get their news via the Internet'. Radio broadcasters in most other African countries have similar online presence – some offering live streaming.[8] A number of websites for African radio stations, especially South African and Kenyan ones, have improved over the past few years – with a number of features that allow audience participation and choices. One level of interactivity and convergence is that subjects covered on radio find their way in the websites of national daily newspapers. For instance, a dispute between Kenya's Kiss FM and Water Minister often featured on the comment pages of the online edition of the *Daily Nation* and *Sunday Nation* newspapers (Bath 2008).

An emerging phenomenon, especially for Africans in the diaspora, is that of popular music broadcasts based mainly or entirely online – with sites hosted in Europe and the USA. These include: African Internet Radio or A.I.R. (www.africaninternetradio.com); Radio Africa Online (R.A.O.), formerly Soukous Radio (http://soukous.org or www.live365.com); Tanzania's Bongo Radio (www.bongoradio.com); Addis Live (http://www.addislive.com/ethiopian-music.html). RAO has an icon for various qualities of connection, including one for slow dial-up internet; it is also possible to listen via cell phone (http://soukous.org/mobile.htm) – which means it would be usable by Africa-based audiences. Music played on these websites includes popular genres such as Soukous, Coupe Decal, Ragga, Kwaito, Hip Hop and Genge. That these websites use AutoDJ make some of them rather robotic and consumerist. However, some of the songs are linked to the themes relevant to Africa. For instance, when I listened one weekend in November, one of the songs played on Germany-hosted A.I.R., *Soldat Tirera* (Concert Radio Blagon 2006) by Cameroonian Idy Oulo, on multiparty democracy, good governance and human rights. On R.A.O., which has comments and discussions sections, one of the discussions was about 'Protest Music', partly referencing recent media stories on political significance of music – such as Femi Kuti's music.[9] In his contribution to the subject, 'Protest music' – a genre on its own? on R.A.O., Kenyan listener Wuod Kwatch writes:

> I am left thinking/wondering that certain strains of African music are really suited for agitation and protest. Afrobeat, Reggae (historically), S African music (not sure what to call it, I mainly listen to SA Jazz) and now this new thing in Kenya – 'Genge'... It seems to me that some musicians will forever get stuck doing their 'shtick' about vocalizing or channeling their anger toward the political order of the day in their music. And they do this day in and day out. It's their right all right to do whatever. This is where Franco and the likes of DO Misiani, Remi Ongala, Mbaraka Mwinshehe excelled. They knew how to strike a balance, singing about the mundane from clothing and tailors, to adverts for cars, to women (backstabbing ones) and philandering men.[10]

He concludes with a critical reflection on the efficacy of Kenya's current crop of so-called politically and socially conscious musicians, especially for hardly using clever metaphors as their predecessors did.

While the internet is currently the main convergence platform for radio broadcasting, the cell phone has the potential to be the really true mass platform in Africa – given the right applications at the right price. With the help of the UK's Guardian Media Group, SW Radio Africa is looking for a better solution to broadcast to Zimbabwe cost-effectively – with the cell phone being an option (Bunz 2009). At the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism, one of Prof Jeff Jarvis' students, Adeola Oladele, won $3,000 prize in 2008 for her proposal to audio-broadcast via cell phone.[11] However, it is not an easy option as one has to go through phone companies.

> After contacting phone companies, I'm finding out that it would be more expensive for me to broadcast through phone companies. The original plan was to have people call in to listen to the News or have me call them with the News and shows. Now I'm thinking it might be better for me to start a community radio station and people can tune in on their cell phones free of charge... People are already listening to radio on their cell phones back home. So, it will still be broadcasting via cell-phones, except that I would also have a station instead of going through phone companies (Oladele 2009).

Conclusion

Along the lines of the original concerns of Habermas about refeudalization of the public sphere, there are arguments that the consequences of recent liberalization of the airwaves in Africa include tabloidization or dumbing down of radio through over-emphasis on infotainment, especially urban popular youth music and related genres, at the expense of serious grown-up news and information useful to rural dwellers who are most reliant on the medium.

> According to the report *Making Waves* by censure guardian Index on Censorship, the information now heard on the radio in many African countries is even more shallow [sic.] than it was under strict government censure.
>
> (Ruigrok n.d.)

Before and soon after independence in most African countries, radio broadcasting was an ideological tool for the ruling elite – the colonial regimes followed by the mostly authoritarian postcolonial governments. One way of escape from this stranglehold, part of politico-economic reform bargains into liberalization and privatization, has been the initially gradual (1980s) and later rapid (1990s) move from dominantly political propagandist-ideological programming to the increased incorporation of cultural content not directly threatening to the status quo – but subtly significant for change politics, especially in the less restrictive new media environment. The paradoxical processes of globalization, media ownership convergence or conglomeration and content homogenization on the one hand, and glocalization-hybridization, proliferation of alternative small-scale entrepreneurial initiatives and fragmentation of content-audiences on the other hand reduce the force of arguments about radio, or any other electronic media, as cultural-media imperialism or electronic (post-/neo-)colonialism instrument.

While this chapter has shown that popular culture is mostly associated with commercial radio in Africa, a number of state and community broadcasters attempt to engage with the public cultures in order to remain relevant. Popular culture content such as music can sometimes – not always – be used to communicate political, in addition to social, messages often in less direct ways. To win over the youthful generation in particular, radio broadcasters are embracing convergence through the use of new network media as alternative platform.

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[1] Radio receivers per 1,000 grew from 32 in 1965 to 69 in 1975 and 164 in 1984 (L. J. Martin, cited in Bourgault 1995: 75). National surveys in the late 1980s found that 42 per cent of rural households in Kenya and 62 per cent in Nigeria had a radio set (Mytton 1989: 304).

[2] In 2008, penetrations were: Internet users – 4.2 per 100 inhabitants (compared to 15 for developing countries and 23 for the world); mobile cellular subscriptions – 32.6 per 100 (49 and 59). See ITU 2009: 1-2.

[3] The date of this interview could not be traced at the time of writing, but it was around 2001/2002 at the University of Zambia campus.

[4] Examples include: Reporters Without Borders (www.rsf.org), Committee to Protect Journalists (www.cpj.org), International Press Institute (www.freemedia.at), International Federation of Journalists (www.ifj.org), and Amnesty International (www.amnesty.org).

[5] A useful database for clandestine radio, including in Africa, is at: <www.clandestineradio.com>.

[6] Note that Kellner does not specifically single out radio as a platform for today's 'infotainment society' – along the lines of Debord's idea of the spectacle society.

[7] For brief overviews, see B. Posthumus in 'Radio and music industry', <http://www.powerofculture.nl/uk/specials/radio/muziekindustrie.html> and M. Oord, 'Radio and traditional music, <http://www.powerofculture.nl/uk/specials/radio/traditie.html> (accessed 9 November 2009).

[8] More details available on the directory at Radio Station World (http://radiostationworld.com/africa.asp) and another extensive list is available at University of Stanford African Radio Online site, Radio Stations – Radio in Africa (http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/radio.html). For North Africa, check Radio Culture Tunisia (http://www.listenarabic.com/Radio+Culture+Tunisia+radio174.php).

[9] CNN online, 'Femi Kuti: Blending Afrobeat and Politics', 11 November 2009, http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/africa/10/26/african.voices.femi.kuti/index.html and CNN TV, 'African Voices', 31 November 09; Karimi (2009).

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