

revolutionary moment and the political experiences and changes that newly independent Mozambique witnessed.

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HARRI ENGLUND, *Human Rights and African Airwaves: mediating equality on the Chichewa radio*. Bloomington and Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press (hb £31.99 – 978 0 25335 677 2; pb £19.99 – 978 0 25322 347 0). 2011, x + 294 pp.

Harri Englund's latest book is a challenging synthesis of theory and ethnography. The theory develops from the critique of developmentalism and liberalism in his previous book, *Prisoners of Freedom: human rights and the African poor* (2006): here it largely revolves around the vicissitudes of the idea of equality and its applicability to African discourses—whether by or about Africans. The ethnography takes us back to Malawi and to the creators and audience of a particular Chichewa-language local news programme—'Nkhani Zam'maboma' or 'News from the Districts'—transmitted by the public broadcaster, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, since 1998. For the most part, the stories broadcast are submitted to the radio journalists by members of the public, some of whom contribute so frequently as to become correspondents, and they are edited before transmission. The news items concern a wide variety of local scandals and misbehaviour of one kind or another, and are explicitly related to particular places but not lately to named individuals, although locals can still infer the identities of these. The programme thus exposes holders of power to potential criticism, but does not do so, Englund claims, by making the same kinds of rights-based claims as human rights activists. Rather, the programme seeks to explore expectations of equality that arise out of specific obligations and particular claims made even, or indeed especially, in hierarchical settings. The programme explores people's accountability for their social ties in specific instances in such ways that the general possibility of being held to account can be inferred from these and provide the basis of a kind of constitutive equality between people.

The book is structured in three parts, each consisting of three chapters. Against the background of the development of radio in Malawi (and the political history of that country), Part 1 presents the critical ethnography of 'Nkhani Zam'maboma' as an anthropologist's and ethnographer's response to questions otherwise arising only from theoretical approaches to equality and conviviality in Africa. What, for instance, is a public, or equality, or editorial licence under the circumstances of the programme? Can claims to equality be made through hierarchical practices in unequal settings? Chapter 3 particularly highlights instances of the abuse of power and the creation of a critical listenership. Part 2 most closely engages with programme making and is ethnographically the richest: Chapter 4 in particular is compelling for its case analysis of news stories in search of the genre characteristics of their subject matter, notably stories of the occult and involving matrimonial and sexual misdemeanours; Chapter 5 examines the ways editors work upon stories submitted by the public in order to make them open to interpretation, often by

adding proverbial interjections; Chapter 6 on editorial verification and the making of local correspondents is an intriguing exploration of the relationship between testimony and verity. Part 3, taken up by reception in a broad sense, feels diverse, successive chapters (7 and 8) examining the reasons for the absence of stories from Englund's main fieldwork site from the programme, and arguing that the programme works as a general moral instruction regardless of this; and then presenting the contrasting narrative preferences of born-again Christians, who look for more inspirational content in radio programmes than is offered by the narratives of 'News from the Districts'. A brief but wide-ranging conclusion returns to the possibility of equality based constitutively in obligations between people in non-egalitarian circumstances for which they are held to account by means which include programmes like '*Nkhani Zam maboma*'.

Supplying a chapter breakdown is by way of saying that this is not an easy book to summarize. Rather than a descriptive ethnography in a conventional sense, Englund has created his text from a series of linked engagements with, and discussions of, his evidence theorized from different perspectives. Many of the chapters can and no doubt will be used as stand-alone teaching texts, and the most discussed of the case studies are given verbatim in Appendices so that readers can follow his interpretations up from source. An extensive and wide-ranging bibliography is indicative of the extent to which this is also a theoretical work in anthropology. Anyone interested in African media and politics, irrespective of whether they work on Malawi, will want to read this serious work for the originality both of its case study of a single long-running programme, and of its construction through a variety of questions into which that case study can be drawn.

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JOHN MCCRACKEN, *A History of Malawi, 1859–1966*. Woodbridge: James Currey and Rochester NY: Boydell and Brewer (hb £85–978 1 84701 050 6). 2012, 485 pp.

Inspired by John Iliffe's *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, John McCracken's long-awaited *History of Malawi* is the first attempt to write a comprehensive synthesis of the modern history of this small but significant Central African country since the 'nation-building' histories of the 1970s. The book weighs in at a whopping 485 pages, covers considerable thematic and chronological ground (its dates are 1859–1966) and integrates a prodigious amount of primary and second material to produce a very readable survey of Malawi's colonial past.

The book is divided into sixteen chapters, beginning with the tumultuous nineteenth century and the advent of European missionary enterprise in the region. Subsequent chapters establish the background to the colonial economy and the central roles played by both Islam and Christianity in forging new types of identity and, sometimes, unique forms of political action. There is an entire chapter, for example, that revisits the Chitembo rising and its significance for Malawian history, with particular emphasis on its millenarian overtones. There are also chapters on the First World War and on the crucial inter-war years