

BOOK REVIEW

Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi, Tshepo Moloji, and Alda Romão Saúte Saíde, eds. *Guerrilla Radios in Southern Africa. Broadcasters, Technology, Propaganda Wars, and the Armed Struggle*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022. xii + 279 pp. Index. \$38.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-5381-4844-0.

Guerrilla Radios in Southern Africa: Broadcasters, Technology, Propaganda Wars, and the Armed Struggle is a groundbreaking collection of essays that offers a comprehensive and transnational perspective on how guerrilla radio stations operated and influenced the fight against colonial and minority rule in southern Africa. Edited by Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi, Tshepo Moloji, and Alda Romão Saúte Saíde, this volume situates guerrilla radios within the broader regional context of southern Africa, tracing the networks of solidarity and support that enabled these guerrilla broadcasters to operate from bases in newly independent African states and beyond.

The collection is organized chronologically by country, into twelve chapters, allowing readers to trace the evolution of guerrilla broadcasting across the region as the tide of independence swept through southern Africa starting with Mozambique, through Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia, to South Africa. The editors argue convincingly that guerrilla radio broadcasting was “a powerful technology for disseminating insurgent propaganda messages of the liberation movement and for mobilizing African workers, peasants, students, and youth in the struggle against white minority domination in the entire region” (4). This central thesis is substantiated using diverse primary sources, including archival documents, sound recordings, and interviews with former broadcasters and listeners.

This volume stands out for its insightful exploration of the experiences of broadcasters. It provides rich personal accounts that bring the era of guerrilla broadcasting to life through the lives of former broadcasters. For instance, Munyaradzi Nyakudya, Lloyd Hazvineyi, and Munyaradzi Mushonga’s chapter on Zimbabwe dedicates itself entirely to the lived experiences of war radio broadcasters. The stories of Jane Ngwenya and Nyasha Musiiwa, provide an intimate look at the challenges, risks, and personal sacrifices made by those who operated these guerrilla stations in exile. Particularly noteworthy is the volume’s inclusion of women’s contribution within liberation movements. By amplifying the narratives of women broadcasters like Rosario Tembe (Alda Romão Saúte Saíde’s chapter) and Jane Ngwenya, the collection sheds light on women’s agency in shaping the discourse and direction of southern Africa’s liberation struggles through radio.

The experiences of listeners form a crucial thread throughout this collection, offering a vivid portrayal of radio’s impact during the liberation struggles.

Several chapters, including those by Marissa Moorman, Dumisani Moyo and Chris Chinaka, Alda Romão Saúte Saúde, and Tshepo Moloi, meticulously reconstruct how both black and white residents of southern Africa risked severe consequences to tune into these forbidden broadcasts. The invisibility and transience of sound allowed guerrilla radios to have sonic presence “beyond the jurisdiction of colonial law but within the broadcast range of the colonial state and its territory” (57). Particularly illuminating are the testimonies from listeners who attribute their political awakening to these broadcasts, demonstrating that guerrilla radio stations not only disseminated information but also inspired and mobilized individuals to join the liberation struggles.

Equally compelling is the collection’s examination of colonial nervousness in response to these broadcasts. For instance, through the reading of state secret police and military archives, Marissa Moorman destabilizes the façade of colonial calmness to expose the colonial state’s nervousness to the activities of MPLA (Movimento Popular para a Libertação de Angola) and FNLA (Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola) from Kinshasa. The gravity of this threat is underscored by colonial counter propaganda and particularly a PIDE (Policia Internacional de Defesa do Estado) official’s assertion that these broadcasts were “no less dangerous than the armed war” (54). Through these analyses, the collection effectively demonstrates how both broadcasting and listening to guerrilla radio became subversive acts. These activities were strategically deployed by liberation movements and their supporters to challenge the colonial monopoly on information and public discourse.

Guerrilla Radios in Southern Africa offers valuable insights into guerrilla radio broadcasting during liberation struggles. However, it lacks a comprehensive concluding chapter that could have synthesized key themes, provided comparative analysis, and situated the work within broader scholarly debates. An extended conclusion could have highlighted contemporary relevance and suggested future research directions. Also, the volume would have benefited from a dedicated chapter on radio access and colonial policies on radio ownership. While Dumisani Moyo and Chris Chinaka briefly mentioned state policies on radio (99), this topic deserves more comprehensive exploration. A focused examination of how people accessed radios, and circumvented restrictions would have provided crucial context for understanding the radio landscape during southern Africa’s liberation struggles.

Notwithstanding these minor limitations, *Guerrilla Radios in Southern Africa* is an essential reference for scholars of southern African history, media studies, and anti-colonial movements. It also offers valuable lessons for contemporary activists and media practitioners on the power of alternative broadcasting in challenging oppressive regimes.

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