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News Stories, Transnational Audiences and Cultural Decolonisation in Southern Africa: Media Coverage in Zambia of the Soweto Uprising of 1976

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This article takes news coverage of the Soweto uprising of 1976 as a case study to demonstrate the influence of South Africa and Britain on the media in post-colonial Zambia. In part, this can be accounted for by the growing popularity of Radio Republic of South Africa (RSA) among listeners in Zambia, particularly in regions that were on the front line of the liberation struggle. RSA defended the actions of the South African police, as did the BBC World Service. Remarkably, Zambia's own press and broadcast services also took a similar line at times, thanks to their reliance on Reuters news agency, which, in turn, made uncritical use of South African government sources. However, by reading news content in the light of audience research data, it is argued that, in other ways, Zambian independence represented a meaningful departure from the colonial past. Decolonisation enabled the development of a more pluralistic culture of news consumption, a trend further encouraged by an international boom in transistor-radio sales with short-wave capability. Zambia's news culture also illustrated the limits of one-party rule. Although Kenneth Kaunda sought to emulate the stifled atmosphere of the Northern Rhodesian media, it proved impossible in the changed circumstances of the later 1960s and 1970s.

Keywords: Zambia; media; radio; newspaper; news agency; audience; Soweto

Control of the news media was a major concern for African governments in the wake of independence. Zambia's United National Independence Party (UNIP) government was particularly worried about the problem as a front-line state in southern Africa's wars of liberation. By the 1970s, the battle with settler colonialism was being played out not only on the ground but also on the airwaves and in the press. With foreign radio stations 'beaming news on Zambia' and international news agencies seeming to flood newspapers with a 'torrent of subtle, western, status quo propaganda', UNIP ministers sought ever stricter limits on freedom of speech.¹

This article is a study of the content, provenance and impact of news stories in Zambia. The focus is on the mid 1970s, but my conclusions apply more broadly to Kenneth

1 Clement Mwananshiku (Minister of State Office of the Prime Minister), in Government of Zambia *Official Verbatim Report of the Parliamentary Debates of the First Session of the Third National Assembly*, 35, 20 February 1974 (Lusaka, Government Printers, 1974), col. 1799–1800; 'You're Being Manipulated', *Times of Zambia*, Lusaka, 7 January 1971.

Kaunda's time in office from 1964 to 1991 and, generally, to one-party states across Africa in the same period. The argument has two parts. First, that foreign influence on Zambia's news was profound, especially in the case of South Africa, and particularly in front-line regions. Second, this influence was not, however, overwhelming. By the mid 1970s, half of Zambian radio listeners were regularly tuning in to both local and foreign stations, while Zambian newspapers carried a blend of local journalism and international news agency copy. Popular news culture in post-colonial Zambia was characterised by a significant degree of variety, choice and cosmopolitan consumption, thanks paradoxically to a combination of one-party rule and 'neo-colonial' influences. To illustrate these conflicting dynamics, I take as a case study coverage of the Soweto uprising of 1976, one of the most dramatic stories to hit the Zambian news in the post-independence era.

My study seeks to address four specific gaps in media histories of Zambia, South Africa and southern Africa more broadly. First, more attention has been given to the history of media institutions in the colonial than the post-colonial era.² In the first section, I draw on Zambian official records, the UNIP archive and the Reuters' archive to give a more detailed picture of the aftermath of independence and the impact of decolonisation. Second, studies of the coverage of the Soweto uprising have focused on the media in South Africa, Britain and the USA and have been limited to press accounts.³ By contrast, my second section presents the first study of the Soweto story in a front-line state, using local newspapers and radio transcripts produced by international monitoring services. The following section considers the sources that were used and traces the origin of these reports. Third comes the question of audience. Robert Heinze's research on the institutional history of broadcasting offers invaluable insights into the nature of Zambian radio audiences from state archives, listener letters and oral history interviews with broadcasters. In a similar vein, Deborah Spitulnik's earlier ethnographic work on Zambian radio audiences remains a seminal study of the ways in which listeners used radio sets in the 1990s.⁴ My fourth section seeks to build on their work by using contemporary audience research and National Assembly debates to offer a more detailed picture of media consumption in the 1970s, paying special attention to local variation.

Lastly, I wish to emphasise throughout the article the transnational nature of news media in Africa. The radio network that Zambia inherited at independence, like much of the colonial world, was almost entirely reliant on short-wave transmission. Although it was originally intended to project late colonial power over a large territory in a cost-effective way, the decision to use a short-wave network had the unintended consequence that radio listeners were also able receive foreign stations. This encouraged listeners to venture beyond national boundaries and invited transnational broadcasters to court new audiences. In recent years, scholars have begun to explore the significance of the 'guerrilla radios' that were set up by exiled liberation or opposition movements, such as the African National Congress's Radio Freedom.⁵ I seek to complement this literature by highlighting the transnational

2 H. Englund, 'Anti Anti-Colonialism: Vernacular Press and Emergent Possibilities in Colonial Zambia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 57, 1 (2015), pp. 221–47; R. Heinze, "'Men Between": The Role of Zambian Broadcasters in Decolonisation', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40, 3 (2014), pp. 623–40; R. Heinze, "'The African Listener": State-Controlled Radio, Subjectivity, and Agency in Colonial and Post-Colonial Zambia', in W. Willems and W. Mano (eds), *Everyday Media Culture in Africa: Audiences and Users* (New York, Routledge, 2017), pp. 47–70; F. Kasoma, *The Press in Zambia* (Lusaka, Multimedia, 1986).

3 J. Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1978); J. Sanders, *South Africa and the International Media, 1972–1979* (London, Frank Cass, 2000), pp. 163–88.

4 D. Spitulnik, 'Radio Culture in Zambia: Audiences, Public Words and the Nation State' (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1994).

5 S. Lekgoathi 'The African National Congress's Radio Freedom and its Audiences in Apartheid South Africa, 1963–1991', *Journal of African Media Studies*, 2, 2 (2010), pp. 139–53; S. Lekgoathi, *Guerrilla Radios in*

impact of state broadcasters. The reliance of newspapers on international news agencies for foreign news also contributed to a cosmopolitan news culture. In this regard, I seek to challenge the traditional emphasis on the weakness of grass-roots ‘civil society’ in Kaunda’s Zambia and to build on Miles Larmer’s authoritative survey of political opposition by highlighting the plural nature of popular news consumption.⁶ In Kaunda’s own words, the international media ‘can form a formidable opposition party where there is organisationally none’.⁷

News Media in Zambia and the Limits of State Control

Decolonisation caused a transformation in the tone of Zambian news content from a stuffy settler conservatism to radical nationalism and vociferous anti-colonialism. But, in a structural sense, the formal end of empire was characterised as much by continuity as by change. During the colonial period, the Northern Rhodesian press consisted of settler-owned commercial newspapers and state-sponsored vernacular publications. Newspapers exercised considerable freedom and represented a range of views, most famously the antagonism between Roy Welensky’s *Northern News* and Alexander Scott’s *Central African Post*, but they rarely offered serious criticism of the colonial rule or settler domination.⁸ In a brief and exceptional period prior to decolonisation, two African nationalist publications appeared in the form of *African Life* from 1958 and the *Central African Mail* from 1960.⁹ After independence in 1964, Kaunda sought to put a swift end to the new press freedoms that had helped to bring him to power. Repressive colonial legislation was enhanced, and both of the daily national newspapers were eventually nationalised: the *Central African Mail* became the *Zambia Daily Mail* in 1965 and the *Northern News* became the *Times of Zambia* in 1975.

Radio and television in Northern Rhodesia were closely controlled state monopolies from their inauguration in 1941 and 1961, respectively. This was particularly true of radio, as Northern Rhodesia had been the first colony to pioneer the use of vernacular broadcasting to African audiences, while also developing the first affordable battery radio in Africa, known as the ‘Saucepan Special’.¹⁰ Decolonisation heralded a fleeting period of constitutional independence on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) model from 1963 to 1965, and broadcasting remained under the management of expatriate officials until 1968.¹¹ But state control was soon reinstated, and, from 1969, broadcasters were re-employed as civil servants.¹² Kaunda’s infamous dictum in 1973 that 90 per cent of music played on Zambia Broadcasting Services (ZBS) should be Zambian was typical of the restricted atmosphere of the period.¹³ By the 1970s, ZBS comprised two radio channels, one mostly in English and the other in local languages, and a single television channel. An external service was added

Southern Africa: Broadcasters, Technology, Propaganda Wars, and the Armed Struggle (Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 2020); M. Moorman, *Powerful Frequencies: Radio, State Power, and the Cold War in Angola, 1931–2002* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2019).

6 For instance, B. Phiri, *A Political History of Zambia* (Trenton, Africa World Press, 2006), pp. 165–9; M. Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics: A History of Opposition in Zambia* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2011).

7 Kenneth Kaunda, speech to International Press Institute, Nairobi, 4 June 1968, quoted in G. Mytton, *Mass Communication in Africa* (London, Arnold, 1983), p. 58.

8 Kasoma, *The Press in Zambia*, pp. 19–62. For individuals who challenged the overall picture of state control, see Englund, ‘Anti Anti-Colonialism’; and Heinze, “‘Men Between’”.

9 Kasoma, *The Press in Zambia*, pp. 66–77.

10 P. Fraenkel, *Wayaleshi* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1959), pp. 16–21. The casing of the set looked like a saucepan.

11 Heinze, “‘The African Listener’”, pp. 75–109; Heinze, “‘Men Between’”, p. 636; *House of Commons Debates* (London, Government Stationery Office), 18 October 1966, vol. 734, col. 29.

12 Heinze, “‘Men Between’”, p. 637.

13 Heinze, “‘The African Listener’”, p. 93.

in 1973, with Chinese assistance, to broadcast across southern Africa and to play host to the African National Congress's (ANC) Radio Freedom.¹⁴ As has been mentioned, it was of great significance that the national radio network inherited from the colonial state used mostly short wavebands.

The creation of local news content during the colonial period had been dominated by the settler press. At independence, control passed to staff at the ministry of information, but 'none ... had had any real experience of a news agency', according to a government report in 1969. After a 'crash course in news agency practice' featuring daily training lectures by the local Reuters correspondent, the Zambia News Agency (ZANA) was launched in 1969 as a department of the ministry of information.¹⁵ ZANA news was carried exclusively by ZBS and the *Zambia Daily Mail*, ostensibly giving UNIP complete control of Zambia's mass media.¹⁶

Initially, Zambia experienced an ebb and flow in freedom of expression, but the increasingly frequent imprisonment and intimidation of journalists from the late 1960s created a regime of tight control that went beyond legislative restrictions. From 1972, Zambia was officially a one-party state, and, in January 1976, the extensive censorship powers of the Second Republic was further enhanced by the declaration of a state of emergency that would last for the rest of Kaunda's presidency.¹⁷ As Miles Larmer has commented, by the late 1970s the 'ruthless repression' of all opposition parties had created a 'political desert' at the national level.¹⁸ In the media, this meant that news stories carried by the *Mail* and ZBS radio and television were largely identical, with only minor variations. ZANA news content was dominated by ministerial activities and was widely criticised for being poorly presented, propagandist and dreary.¹⁹

However, Larmer's study of opposition demonstrates that dissent continued in other arenas, such as the churches and the labour movement.²⁰ In the same way, there were practical limitations to state control of the media, and Zambia fell far short of a Soviet-style regime. The UNIP archive reveals that journalists continued to exercise considerable freedom during the First and Second Republics, especially at the *Times*. Until 1975, the newspaper was owned by the British commercial giant Lonrho, but, even after its *de facto* nationalisation in 1975, it continued to offer a critical voice: between 1975 and 1983 the paper singled out individual ministers or policies for criticism on 73 occasions, while carefully avoiding 'KK' or the government as a whole.²¹ When Bill Saidi was appointed deputy editor in 1977, he was told by the party that 'most people of late felt that the Times of Zambia had been working against the party and the government' and that while 'constructive criticism would be welcome ... unwarranted attacks against the Party and the Government would no longer be tolerated'.²² UNIP did gain a degree of control over the *Times* by hiring, firing and sometimes re-hiring journalists, including Saidi, who had been

14 BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham (hereafter WAC), E3/783/1, *Zambia Broadcasting Services*, pamphlet (Lusaka, ZBS, 1976), pp. 7–9, 12.

15 Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Tourism, *Annual Report for the year 1969* (Lusaka, Government of Zambia, 1971), p. 1.

16 Kasoma, *The Press in Zambia*, p. 108; G. Mytton, *Listening, Looking and Learning: Report on a National Mass Media Audience Survey in Zambia 1970–1973* (Lusaka, Institute for African Studies, University of Zambia, 1974), pp. 37–9.

17 A. Maja-Pearce, 'Zambia', *Index on Censorship*, 21, 4 (1992), p. 59.

18 Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics*, p. 92.

19 W. Hachten, *Muffled Drums: The News Media in Africa* (Ames, Iowa University Press, 1971) p. 232. See www.huntleyarchives.com/preview.asp?image=1017233&itemw=4&itemf=0001&itemstep=1&itemx=8, retrieved 29 April 2021, for a rare surviving example of ZBS coverage of the election of 1973.

20 Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics*, pp. 93–5, 225–39.

21 Kasoma, *The Press in Zambia*, pp. 142, 190.

22 United National Independence Party Archive, Lusaka (hereafter UNIPA), 8/11/27, 'Record of the Meeting held on 12th January, 1977 in the Chairman's Office' between J.B. Litana, Chairman of UNIP Elections, Publicity and Strategy Committee and W. Saidi.

dismissed in 1975, in the over-optimistic belief that the editorial staff would enforce a more sympathetic line.²³ Another tactic was the repeated but never enacted threat to pass a bill creating a repressive Press Council of Zambia, which would have the power to withdraw any journalist's accreditation.²⁴ But this approach had limited success until the legal nationalisation of the paper was completed in 1982.²⁵

State control of ZANA also had its limits. Although it was staffed by civil servants, it was able to generate only domestic news as it could rarely afford to send reporters to other countries. Like most other newly independent governments throughout the global south, Zambia had no choice but to use commercial agencies to source news from beyond its national boundaries. During the colonial period, foreign news had been provided initially by Reuters, before it franchised its southern African operations to the South African commercial news agency the South African Press Association (SAPA) in 1938.²⁶ After 1964, SAPA news wires were no longer politically acceptable, so alternatives had to be found. Although ZANA subscribed to Soviet TASS and Agence France Presse news wires, it was Reuters that came to dominate foreign news, thanks to a contract signed by the colonial government just before independence.²⁷ Reuters signed similar agreements with most anglophone African governments, including contracts to train staff at the new national news agencies.²⁸ As a commercial agency, Reuters' content was supposedly apolitical. However, its Africa wire service tended to take a conservative line that favoured business interests and the political status quo in southern Africa, reflecting a regional customer base that was dominated by mining companies. Of its non-corporate subscribers, SAPA was one of the most valuable – worth about four times the ZANA contract – while many other African state news agencies increasingly struggled to make payments on time, if at all.²⁹ These arrangements gave Zambia's media outlets a confusingly inconsistent quality, as Reuters content was often framed by nationalist UNIP commentary. ZANA's reliance on Reuters caused the UNIP government considerable discomfort, but ministers maintained that it was the only option until Zambia could afford its own foreign correspondents.³⁰

The other major challenge to UNIP's control of the news was foreign radio broadcasting. Across Africa, the decolonisation era coincided with a boom in sales of cheap transistor radios that transformed radio listening from an elite, urban pastime to a near-universal feature of daily life even in rural areas. In 1954, the 1.6 million Africans in Northern Rhodesia had owned approximately 30,000 wireless sets. By the early 1970s, the number of sets had risen exponentially to 262,000, by which time half of all Zambians had become regular radio listeners.³¹ Since most sets had short wavebands, this cultural revolution caused a transnational turn in media consumption, as listeners were able to pick up a variety of regional stations, ranging from the radical socialism of Radio Tanzania to the polished

23 UNIPA, 16/3/10, Correspondence between UNIP and Times of Zambia, 1974–1976.

24 UNIPA, 8/10/8, 'Press Council of Zambia Reports, 1975–1978'; see also UNIPA 8/4/16.

25 Kasoma, *The Press in Zambia*, pp. 139–59.

26 D. Read, *The Power of News: The History of Reuters* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 391.

27 Reuters Archive, London (hereafter RA), LN255, 'News Agreement' [with the Government of Northern Rhodesia], 27 April 1964. The charge for the African Newswire was £12,000 per annum: 1/8812601, J. Henry 'Survey on Reuters' links with Africa from 1860s', 1988, p. 47–8.

28 J. Brennan, 'The Cold War Battle over Global News in East Africa: Decolonization, the Free Flow of Information, and the Media Business, 1960–1980', *Journal of Global History*, 10, 2 (2015), pp. 341–7.

29 SAPA's annual subscription was around £200,000 in 1979, while ZANA paid around £45,000 in 1974; RA, 1/8812601, 'Reuters' links with Africa', pp. 49, 55; *Parliamentary Debates*, 35, 21 February 1974, col. 1846–7.

30 For example, Clement Mwananshiku (Minister of State, Office of the Prime Minister) in *Parliamentary Debates*, 36, 20 February 1974, col. 416.

31 S. Bowden, D. Clayton and A. Pereira, 'Extending Broadcast Technologies in the British Colonies during the 1950s', *European Review of Economic History*, 16, 1 (2012), pp. 29–36; Mytton, *Mass Communication in Africa*, pp. 76.

revanchism of Radio Republic of South Africa (RSA) and Rhodesian radio. Malawian radio steered an uncomfortable middle course, reflecting its friendly relationship with South Africa. From further afield, Zambians could hear radical broadcasts from Soviet and Chinese radio, and All India Radio. The BBC World Service and the Voice of America (VOA) were less overtly political but often partisan.

Coverage of the Soweto Uprising in Zambia

The Soweto uprising has become synonymous with the worst excesses of the apartheid state. At the time, it attracted a degree of global media attention equal only to the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. Mass demonstrations started on 16 June 1976, organised by the South African Students Movement in response to a government decision to make Afrikaans the compulsory language of instruction for 50 per cent of teaching in black schools, and the longer-term inequalities of Bantu Education. The student marches in Soweto quickly triggered a more general uprising in townships across the country against the whole system of apartheid in a near-continuous cycle of insurrection and repression that lasted from June 1976 to October 1977. Characterised by youth activism and police violence, the uprising culminated in the death of Steve Biko and the brutal suppression of the Black Consciousness movement.³² This study focuses on the events of 16–22 June 1976, which, as the first and most violent week of the unrest, received the most media coverage.

The ways in which the Soweto story was covered in Zambia offers a particularly clear illustration of the cosmopolitan news culture in the country. Reports diverged on several points: the nature of police actions and the question of culpability, the motives of demonstrators, the causes of the riot, and the language and tone used. What follows is a partial reconstruction of this ephemeral world, using Zambian press content, transcripts of radio broadcasts by ZBS and other regional stations generated by British and American state monitoring agencies, and BBC World Service news transcripts. Since the monitoring transcripts offer only selected glimpses of broadcast output, I have also used the *Zambia Daily Mail* as a more comprehensive guide to the content of news broadcasts, as it shared the same newsroom with ZBS (in the form of ZANA) and editorial pieces were often read out verbatim on the radio. The same was true of Zambian television, although, sadly, recordings and transcripts have not survived. In the same way, I have been able to reconstruct Malawian radio news by using Malawi News Agency content carried by the state-owned *Daily Times*. Rhodesian radio has not been included in this study, as its coverage of the Soweto uprising was similar in content to RSA. Unfortunately, Voice of America transcripts for this period are not available.

Police Conduct

One of the defining characteristics of the first week of the uprising was the conduct of the police. On the morning of 16 June, about 15,000 Sowetan schoolchildren took to the streets to protest against the language decree and the apartheid state that had mandated it. After a few hours, several hundred police arrived to stop the marches. When some of the children started throwing stones, the police attempted to disperse the demonstration by firing live ammunition into the crowds from pistols and automatic rifles. Some of the police threw teargas canisters first or fired shots above their heads but, in general, the children appear to have been given little or no prior warning. Within minutes, two boys, Hector Pieterse and

32 W. Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 236–9.

Hastings Ndlovu, had been shot dead.³³ It is estimated that 13 more children were killed by the police on that day and, in retaliation, the demonstrators killed two white officials. Over the next two days, a further 93 Sowetans were shot dead by the police, while demonstrators torched buildings and vehicles associated with the authorities before the violence spread to other townships, where many others died.³⁴ During the violence, the police repeatedly made the false claim that officers had fired in self-defence, but it later transpired that they had been given orders to shoot to kill, hitting demonstrators above the waist and often in the back as they ran away.³⁵ Even a state pathologist admitted to a government enquiry in 1980 that more than half were shot in the back, certainly an understatement.³⁶

The news commentary available to Zambians in June 1976 offered widely divergent interpretations of the conduct of the South African police. National radio and press coverage from ZANA presented the uprising as a massacre. A typical leader from the *Mail* on the day that the story broke reported that a 'brutal murder' of Africans had occurred when 'trigger happy white troops opened fire on peaceful youngsters'. The editorial referenced talks that were due to start between John Vorster and Henry Kissinger in Munich, warning that the South African prime minister was 'as much as a bloodsucker as the men who killed the Africans in Soweto while carrying out his orders'. The *Mail's* commentary was broadcast by ZBS in full that morning.³⁷ On the same day, the *Times* carried a photograph on its front page of South African police officers beating demonstrators with batons, seemingly from Soweto but actually taken at Sharpeville in 1960. The edition ran with the headline 'SA Explodes: 50 Dead in Johannesburg Massacre', and the leading article opened with the accurate observation that the clash in Soweto was South Africa's 'worst ever massacre'.³⁸

Zambians tuning in to broadcasts from neighbouring independent states would have heard a similar line. Tanzanian radio reported that 'brutal force has been unleashed with all its ferocity on unarmed and defenseless people in the condemned illegal hell of fascism and neonazism in racist South Africa ... children, women and men have been ruthlessly gunned down by the bloodthirsty hounds of the imperialist-backed Pretoria regime'.³⁹ Had any Zambian listeners managed to pick up more distant African stations, they would have heard similar anti-colonial critiques from Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia and Sudan, among others.⁴⁰ International broadcasts from Communist stations also laid the blame entirely at the feet of the police. North Korea, for example, condemned the 'Vorster racist clique' as 'fascist hangmen and human butchers engrossed in massacres'.⁴¹

There was, however, a contradictory element to the Soweto story in the Zambian press and on ZBS. While, on the one hand, the police were vehemently denounced in headlines and editorials, the body of reports focused on the damage and deaths caused by black rioters and even implied in places that the actions of the police might have been justified. The leaders that broke the story in the *Times* and the *Mail* (and presumably therefore ZBS news

33 Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, pp. 31–2; E. Brink (ed.), *Soweto, 16 June 1976* (Cape Town, Kwela, 2001), pp. 60–91.

34 S. Ndlovu, 'Soweto', in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa: Volume 2 (1970–1980)* (Cape Town, Zebra, 2004), p. 347.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 347–9.

36 Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, p. 29.

37 Editorial, *Zambia Daily Mail*, Lusaka, 18 June 1976, p. 6; WAC, ZBS in English 0525 GMT 18 June 1976, SWB II, ME/5239, 21 June.

38 'For a Racist Policeman Reasoning is Unknown and Force is the Only Language'; 'SA Explodes', *Times of Zambia*, 18 June 1976.

39 United States Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: Foreign Radio Broadcasts* (Washington DC, Government Publishing Office, 1976), Sub-Saharan Africa (FBIS SSA), Dar Es Salaam Radio in English to East Africa 1600 GMT 19 June 1976.

40 WAC, See SWB II, ME/5236–5243, June 1976.

41 WAC, Korean Central News Agency (Pyongyang) radio in English 0341 GMT 21 June 1976, SWB II, FE/5240/A5/2, 22 June 1976.

bulletins) made uncritical use of a South African police source that reported that, while ‘some of those killed had been shot by police’, others had been ‘hacked to death’ by the mob. The *Times* also suggested inaccurately that the police had given the crowds considerable warning, first throwing a tear-gas canister into the crowd, then, when ‘chanting had turned to stone-throwing and cries of abuse’, officers had ‘fired warning shots into the air’ before finally shooting into the demonstration.⁴² The *Mail* went further, uncritically quoting a police statement that when the crowd ‘began advancing ... it became necessary to fire on the rioters’.⁴³

This confusion about who should be held responsible for the violence in Soweto and the differences in tone between editorials and leaders can simply explained. As discussed in the previous section, ZANA relied heavily on Reuters for foreign news. For this reason, Zambian coverage of Soweto on 18 June and over the following days was almost entirely based on Reuters news wires, which downplayed police culpability, confusingly framed by brief editorials or headlines that offered vehement criticism of the police and the whole system of apartheid. On 19 June, for instance, the front page of the *Times* and the *Mail* carried side articles that quoted the Zambian foreign minister, Siteke Mwale, condemning the ‘massacre of unarmed and innocent Africans’. But, on the same page, the *Times* leader downplayed the role of the police, carrying the headline ‘Militants Defy Guns as Race Riots Spread’ and using a lengthy Reuters report verbatim that detailed how ‘racial violence’ was taking hold across the Rand. The *Mail*’s leader used the same Reuters report verbatim although, unlike in the *Times*, Reuters was not credited. Both newspapers left it unclear how far the police were to blame for casualties, sharing emotive references to ‘gangland feuding’.⁴⁴

However, Reuters’ dominance of Zambia’s foreign news was not absolute. The terms of Reuters’ contracts with African governments left local news editors free to adapt its content, and the coverage of Soweto shows some evidence of editorial influence. On 23 June, for instance, a *Times* report that used Reuters content verbatim inserted ironic quotation marks to undermine the authority of a statement from ‘South Africa’s justice and police “minister”, James Kruger’.⁴⁵ Such additions were rare at the *Times*, though, and it was ZANA’s editors who tended to be more interventionist, often cutting passages from Reuters reports and sometimes making additions. A good example is provided by ZANA’s coverage of the casualty figures on the morning of 18 June, carried by ZBS and the *Mail*. Whereas the latest Reuters news wire had estimated the fatalities to be 29, ZANA reported that ‘the number of dead is reported to have risen above thirty and the actual figure may well be more than one hundred, if past events are anything to go by’.⁴⁶ ZANA was right to inflate the Reuters figure, as the actual death toll was 110.⁴⁷ However, in general it appears that Zambian editors lacked the appetite or perhaps the time to make significant changes to Reuters’ content. This was particularly noticeable at the *Times*, which, as discussed in the previous section, was still trying to resist a ZANA takeover in this period. By way of comparison, the Tanzania News Agency’s (TANA) coverage of Soweto on 19 June, carried by the state-owned Tanzanian *Daily News*, used the same Reuters article as the Zambian press but

42 ‘Horror in Soweto’, *Zambia Daily Mail*, 18 June 1976; ‘SA Explodes’, ‘Opinion’, *Times of Zambia*, 18 June 1976.

43 ‘We Want Justice, We Want Change’ *Zambia Daily Mail*, 18 June 1976.

44 ‘Militants Defy Guns as Race Riots Spread’; ‘KK Orders Protest Rallies Against Massacre’; ‘Days of Sharpevilles Are Over – Siteke’, *Times of Zambia*, 19 June 1976; ‘Soweto Horror: Death Toll Soars to 60 as Violence Spreads’, *Zambia Daily Mail*, 19 June 1976.

45 ‘Rioters Burn Down Clinic’, *Times of Zambia*, 23 June 1976.

46 RA, Reuters news wire (Johannesburg), 1625, 17 June 1976; WAC, ZBS in English 0525 GMT 18 June 1976, SWB II, ME/5239, 21 June 1976.

47 Ndlovu, ‘Soweto’, p. 347.

peppered it with editorial adjustments, adding, for instance, that the demonstrations had been 'triggered by the fascist police shootings' which 'made the Sharpville massacre [seem by contrast] a relatively minor and isolated incident'.⁴⁸ Such editorial insertions were typical practice at TANA, in marked contrast to the more deferential approach in Zambia.⁴⁹

Zambians tuning in to the BBC World Service would have heard a similar line to the Reuters content and, if anything, an even greater reluctance to condemn the police. News bulletins admitted that Africans had been shot by police but fought shy of ascribing blame and avoided using the words 'massacre' or 'shootings'. The reports were at pains to point out that it was unclear what proportion of the casualties had been directly caused by police action, that white people had been killed as well as black people and that many of the injuries were not bullet-related. The World Service repeatedly claimed that the police were 'forced to fire into the crowd when their lives were threatened', following Reuters' practice of making uncritical use of police statements.⁵⁰ The overall effect was a tacit defence of the South African authorities.

RSA's house-style was an urbane blend of lies and half-truths that was intended to compete directly with the BBC. Like the BBC, its coverage of Soweto conceded that the police had fired into the crowds, while stressing that they had acted in self-defence.⁵¹ However, RSA also claimed that much of the violence had been 'black on black', that 'as many black-owned shops and businesses' had been burnt down as government buildings, and 'an examination of the bodies of people killed in the riots showed that some 30 were killed by .22 bullets, a type not used by the police'.⁵² Surprisingly, the most comprehensive whitewash came from the Malawian media, reflecting the awkwardness of the country's pro-South African stance.⁵³ The Malawi News Agency coverage that was carried by the state-owned *Malawi Daily Times* and, presumably, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, made no mention of police violence at any point. The uprising received passing reference on only three occasions and was reported simply as 'several days of race riots ... which left more than 100 people dead'.⁵⁴

Political Demonstration or Anarchy?

Histories of the uprising suggest that it was predominantly a political demonstration by school students using limited violence against symbols of the state. A subsidiary element involving other teenagers, adults and gangs used more indiscriminate violence and was anarchic or criminal in motivation.⁵⁵ The news coverage available in Zambia offered various interpretations of the mass action. ZBS bulletins quoted reports in the *Mail* that described the victims as 'God-fearing kids who were demonstrating peacefully', not only against the 'teaching of the Boer language at school' but also the whole system of apartheid: 'when a people begin to show visible signs that they are fed up with their oppressors and even take to the streets to emphasise their point, there is no going back'.⁵⁶ Other African and

48 'Blacks in S. Africa Rise Up', *Tanzania Daily News*, Dar es Salaam, 19 June 1976.

49 Brennan, 'The Cold War Battle over Global News', p. 349.

50 For example, WAC, BBC World Service news bulletin transcript (hereafter BBC WS), S.3, 1245, 16 June 1976.

51 WAC, RSA in English, 1100 GMT, 16 June 1976, SWB II, ME/5237, 18 June 1976.

52 WAC, RSA in English, 0400 GMT, 22 June 1976, SWB II, ME/5241, 23 June 1976.

53 W. Mackie, 'Malawi', in S. Head (ed.), *Broadcasting in Africa* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1974), p. 137.

54 'Vorster and Kissinger Meeting in Bavaria'; 22nd June; 'Vorster Warned of Race War in Southern Africa'; 'South Africans Pray for their Future', *Malawi Daily Times*, Blantyre, 22 June 1976.

55 Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, pp. 237–8.

56 WAC, ZBS in English, 1800 GMT, 22 June 1976; ZBS in English, 0525 GMT, 18 June 1976, SWB II, ME/5239, 21 June 1976.

international Communist broadcasters took a similar angle, suggesting that the language issue was merely a trigger for demonstrations ‘against the racial discrimination and the apartheid regime in general’, as Soviet radio put it.⁵⁷ To Tanzanian commentators, Soweto was the start of the ‘final showdown with the racists’.⁵⁸ Perceiving the end of apartheid to be in sight, many broadcasters urged solidarity with what they hoped would become an internal war of liberation. Idi Amin even offered interventionist help and foresaw ‘the true sons of Africa marching down to liberate Cape Town’ in a Ugandan broadcast.⁵⁹

But, again, Zambia’s national news gave mixed messages. Unlike the *Mail* and ZBS, the *Times* played down the demonstrators’ political motives and highlighted irrational violence instead. As night fell on the first day of the uprising, it was reported that the ‘crowds went on looting liquor stores’ and ‘rioters attacked vehicles indiscriminately’. The report also highlighted that, of the two white people killed by the rioters on the first day, one was a Soweto official who had ‘published a book entitled “What do Africans Think” and among his findings was that Africans prefer to be taught in English’. No reason was offered for this apparently irrational attack. The *Times* decision to draw heavily on a Reuters report by Brian Timms lent a gloomy, fatalistic tone to the story: ‘[i]t finally happened. The teeming black township of Soweto, murder-prone home of a million Africans, has erupted into the violence often predicted and feared by whites’. According to Timms, the riots were inevitable in a township where ‘teenage gangs roam the streets of Soweto at night with little else to do but fight’.⁶⁰ Two days later, another Reuters-based article described the uprising as an ‘orgy of burning, looting and shooting’.⁶¹ The tone here and elsewhere gave the impression of directionless, even animal-like irrationality in a lexicon that was uncomfortably reminiscent of the colonial language of savagery. Although the tone of the *Mail* was more neutral, phrases such as ‘groups of black youths ... still roamed Soweto’ echoed the language of Reuters reports.⁶²

Zambians tuning in to RSA would have heard the uprising described as ‘senseless looting, murdering and disruption of property by the hysterical masses who had lost control of themselves’, while ‘the legitimate educational grievances were exploited by outsiders for political ends’.⁶³ As the story developed, broadcasts began to promote a conspiracy theory that ANC activists had fomented the riots to derail Vorster’s summit with Kissinger.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, ‘the overwhelming mass of the people continued with their normal peaceable activities despite the confusion, violence and intimidation’. On several occasions, ‘blacks came to the rescue of threatened whites’ and they even brought ‘food and refreshment to the hard-pressed security forces’.⁶⁵ RSA reported that black community leaders and the ‘homeland’ governments were calling for an end to the violence.⁶⁶

The BBC took a similar line to Reuters in its World Service news bulletins, unlike its Home Service, which, as will be seen, was more balanced. The corporation’s southern Africa correspondent, Clive Small, reported on 17 June that ‘the rioters – who were originally protesting about the use of the Afrikaans language in schools – are now being led

57 WAC, USSR radio in English for Africa, 1330 and 1630 GMT, 17 June 1976, SWB SU/5238, 19 June 1976.

58 FBIS SSA, Tanzanian radio in English to East Africa 1600 GMT, 17 June 1976.

59 FBIS SSA, Kampala in English 1900 GMT, 22 June 1976.

60 ‘SA Explodes: 50 Feared Dead in Johannesburg Massacre’, *Times of Zambia*, 18 June 1976.

61 ‘Racists Bid to “Soothe” Blacks’, *Times of Zambia*, 20 June 1976.

62 ‘Soweto Horror’, *Zambia Daily Mail*, 19 June 1976.

63 WAC, RSA in English, 0400 GMT, 22 June 1976, SWB II, ME/5241, 23 June 1976; 1600 GMT, 17 June 1976, SWB II, ME/5238, 19 June 1976.

64 WAC, RSA in English, 0400 GMT, 22 June 1976, SWB II, ME/5241, 23 June 1976. SWB II, ME/5238, 0400 GMT, 22 June 1976; SWB II, ME/5241, 23 June 1976.

65 WAC, RSA in English, 0300 GMT, 23 June 1976; SWB II, ME/5242, 24 June 1976.

66 WAC, RSA in English, 1600 GMT, 17 June 1976, SWB II, ME/5238, 19 June 1976.

by black gangsters and hooligans' in wanton 'looting, arson and attacks on cars' and even in an attempt to 'storm the white-run hospital where most of the injured people have been taken'.⁶⁷ The BBC reports gave detailed coverage of the torching of municipal property and the looting of liquor stores and beer halls, but there was no discussion of why these buildings had been chosen as targets, implying that the destruction was either anarchic or nefarious in intent. Oral histories of the uprising have subsequently demonstrated that alcohol was perceived by many of the demonstrators to be a pernicious tool of state repression thanks to the ready availability of cheap beer from government-run outlets.⁶⁸ Any analysis of the causes of the uprising was perfunctory at best, in the form of passing references to the language issue or non-committal comments to the effect that the 'protest is being seen by some as a major eruption of black frustration against what they see as white authoritarianism'.⁶⁹ Following RSA's lead, it was emphasised that black and white victims had been 'hacked to death' by gangsters or 'tsotsis'.⁷⁰

Sources and the Flow of News: Reuters in Southern Africa

If Reuters dominated the flow of news, whence did its reports originate? Reuters' Johannesburg bureau was mostly staffed by white South Africans, with a few British correspondents.⁷¹ In theory, this team should have been well-placed to provide detailed coverage of the Soweto story in person, but the situation at the time highlighted a structural problem. As soon as the violence broke out, the police closed Soweto to white journalists. This restriction was extended as the uprising spread to other townships on the Rand. The obvious solution was to use black 'stringers' inside Soweto on a temporary basis, but this appears to have been the case for only one Reuters report and for Agence France Presse reports on 16 June.⁷²

If Reuters was unwilling to get direct news reports from black journalists, where did it source its news from? White correspondents from western newspapers and agencies were little use, as they were also banned from the townships. The BBC alone employed a black South African stringer in Soweto, but Nat Serache's reports were omitted from World Service news bulletins and carried only by the feature programme 'Focus on Africa' and the BBC home news.⁷³ Serache was also ignored by Reuters. Other insider voices were on offer from *The World*, Johannesburg's only black newspaper, which provided critical eye-witness coverage of the uprising until it was shut down in 1977.⁷⁴ *The World* was the first newspaper to print Sam Nzima's iconic photograph of Hector Pieterse, hours after his death on 16 June. But Reuters and the BBC preferred to rely on SAPA-issued statements from the South African police or government ministers.

Part of the problem were the constraints on journalistic freedom in South Africa. Under the terms of the Public Safety Act of 1953, journalists were harassed and sometimes

67 WAC, BBC WS, C.65, 1630 GMT, 17 June 1976.

68 See, for instance, Sam Khoza's testimony in Brink, *Soweto*, p. 68.

69 WAC, BBC WS, C.83, 1830 GMT, 17 June 1976.

70 WAC, RSA in English, 2100, 16 June 1976, SWB II, ME 5237, 18 June 1976; BBC WS, C.15, 0400, 17 June 1976; A46, 2244 GMT, 22 June 1976.

71 Sanders, *South Africa*, p. 39.

72 'SA Explodes', *Times of Zambia*, 18 June 1976, col. 4; FBIS SSA, AFP reports, 16 June 1976.

73 Sanders, *South Africa*, p. 44; BBC Radio 4 (UK), 'The World in Focus', 17 June 1976, available at www.bbc.co.uk/archive/the-world-in-focus-soweto/zh8hd6f, retrieved 3 October 2019. Under the editorship of the Ugandan Israel Wamala, 'Focus on Africa' consciously and controversially sought to offset the dominance of British correspondents by using local stringers across the continent from 1975 onwards: G. Mytton, 'The BBC and its Cultural, Social and Political Framework', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 28, 4 (2008), p. 576.

74 W. Hachten, 'Black Journalists under Apartheid', *Index on Censorship*, 3/1979, p. 44.

imprisoned or deported, including Reuters correspondents on occasion.⁷⁵ But a Reuters internal enquiry in July 1976 elicited a different explanation for the misleading coverage. Facing criticism from London, the Johannesburg bureau chief, Peter Mosley, argued that the problem was not the South African state but the inferiority of black reporters, explaining that the 'great danger' with using them was that they 'tend to be under-trained and therefore unreliable'. Mosley explained that 'some time back, we did have a stringer who lived in Soweto and provided occasional feature material' but 'he vanished a year ago'. In a passing reference to state controls, he recalled that 'it was reliance on information from a black that led to the expulsion of UPI [United Press International] ... shortly after the Sharpeville killings, for a totally erroneous report saying that police were beating blacks with sjamboks in the streets'. Mosley claimed to have made 'ad hoc arrangements during the rioting to use material from *World* reporters', but only when details had been 'checked out with police and other sources'.⁷⁶ Although head office was of the opinion that it was time to start using black stringers, Mosley was told that his 'point about black reporters is noted and we leave it to you to decide'. It would be another 11 years before Reuters would engage a black journalist in South Africa.⁷⁷ The police decision to close townships to white journalists in June 1976 revealed that the greatest problem for western reporters was not their fear of state reprisals but their own unwillingness to trust eye-witness accounts from black South Africans. This was symptomatic of a long-term weakness in Reuters' news-gathering operation, which, for instance, had also downplayed police culpability at the time of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960.⁷⁸

News Culture and Audiences in Zambia

Having considered the content and sources of the Soweto story, we come to the trickier questions of how Zambian audiences heard about the uprising and what impact it had. At government level, news of the massacre coincided with and contributed to a hardening of attitudes towards South Africa and a shift away from the earlier policy of détente from mid 1976.⁷⁹ But the popular reaction was more limited: four days after the start of the uprising, Lusaka residents turned out to support a government-organised rally in memory of the Sowetan victims, and a group of students went on to smash windows at the French embassy, following recent news that France had signed a nuclear power deal with South Africa.⁸⁰ Otherwise there is no record of further demonstrations or a general outcry. Was this muted response reflective of the confusing way in which the story was reported in Zambian and foreign media and, more broadly, the ways in which Zambians chose to get their news? It is difficult to offer a direct answer, but it is possible to make some deductions in the light of contemporary research into audience habits and discussion of the issue in the National Assembly.

The decolonisation period coincided with the emergence of market research across the global south, including media audiences. One of the most extensive surveys was undertaken by the Institute for African Studies at the University of Zambia between 1970 and 1973. The National Mass Media Survey (NMMS) was led by a British social scientist, Graham Mytton, who went on to head the BBC World Service audience research department. In other respects, the project was home-grown, conducted by nine Zambian researchers who

75 RA, 1/8812601, 'Reuters' Links with Africa', pp. 51–2.

76 RA, Central Registry Files: 149E, Letter from Reuters Bureau Chief, Johannesburg to Reuters Managing Director, 14 July 1976.

77 RA, 1/8812601, 'Reuters Links with Africa', p. 52. Rich Mkhondo joined the Johannesburg Bureau in 1987.

78 Read, *Power of News*, pp. 390–91.

79 Larmer *Rethinking African Politics*, pp. 208–11.

80 'Lusaka Student Protesters Stone French Embassy, *Times of Zambia*, 21 June 1976.

interviewed a representative national sample of 4,780 people across the country. The study was not without its weaknesses: the survey included a small number of European and south Asian settlers but did not quantify the groups, and some interviewees were guarded in their responses, suspecting that interviewers might report their views to the government.⁸¹ None the less, the NMMS was one of the largest, most detailed surveys to be conducted in Africa at the time, and much of what follows is drawn from this unique research project.

The NMMS found that radio was by far the most popular mass medium, with 47 per cent of Zambians listening at least occasionally. Although there was an urban bias, the audience was otherwise fairly representative of Zambian society. All listeners claimed to hear ZBS.⁸² The audience for Zambian newspapers was smaller (23 per cent of interviewees), more educated, male and youthful than radio listeners, and almost entirely urban. Sales of the *Times* and the *Mail* were roughly equal.⁸³ Television audience numbers were low, at 9 per cent nationally, and to be found solely near to the three transmitters at Kitwe, Kabwe and Lusaka.⁸⁴

One of the most significant findings of the NMMS was that 51 per cent of Zambian radio listeners habitually tuned in to foreign stations as well as ZBS, totalling 24 per cent of all interviewees. Later research shows that this was an established and growing trend: in 1986, another survey found that 43 per cent of Zambians were listening to foreign stations at least weekly.⁸⁵ Nor was it peculiar to Zambia, as audience figures for foreign short-wave broadcasts were higher across the African continent than in any other region of the world.⁸⁶ For some, this was a matter of choice, either for different music or out of frustration with the quality of ZBS news bulletins.⁸⁷ A repeated complaint from back benches of the National Assembly in this period was that ‘the standard of our news is horrible ... Either we do not know perhaps how to select news or else we do not know the issues of the moment’, as one member put it in 1977.⁸⁸

For others, foreign listening was a matter of practical necessity. In urban areas, only 56 per cent of radio listeners claimed to have ‘good reception’ of ZBS; the average figure of 30 per cent was much lower in rural areas, where it was difficult if not impossible to hear the national station.⁸⁹ This meant that, for many Zambians, the only satisfactory listening experience was to be had from foreign broadcasters. The other practical consideration was language. Zambia’s 72 languages and dialects posed a major problem for ZBS.⁹⁰ For political reasons, it chose to broadcast mainly in English, Chibemba, Chinyanja, Chitonga or Silozi, meaning that a significant minority of Zambians found ZBS hard or impossible to understand, especially when reception was poor.⁹¹ Therefore listeners often found that the best combination of good signal and a familiar language was to be found on stations broadcasting from neighbouring countries.

Which were the most popular foreign stations? Malawi radio had a total (regular and occasional) audience of 21 per cent of radio listeners, Tanzania 19 per cent, South Africa 18

81 Mytton estimates that settlers numbered less than 1 per cent of the total: correspondence with Graham Mytton, 9 July 2020. The second problem was common to many surveys in Africa; see S. Head, ‘Research’, in Head, *Broadcasting in Africa*, p. 331.

82 Mytton, *Listening, Looking and Learning*, p. 93.

83 *Ibid.*, pp. 39–43; Kasoma, *The Press in Zambia*, p. 110.

84 Mytton, *Listening, Looking and Learning*, pp. 33–6.

85 WAC, E3/1308/1, figures from Research Bureau Ltd, quoted in BBC International Broadcasting and Audience Research Department (IBAR), ‘Listening to the BBC in Zambia, July 1986’ (May 1987), p. 3.

86 Bourgault, *Mass Media in Sub-Saharan Africa*, p. 90.

87 Mytton, *Listening, Looking and Learning*, p. 97.

88 Simon Ngombo (Liuwa) in *Parliamentary Debates*, 44, 22 February 1977, col. 2285.

89 Mytton, *Listening, Looking and Learning*, p. 78.

90 For a study of this issue, see Heinze, ‘“The African Listener”’, pp. 96–100.

91 Mytton, *Listening, Looking and Learning*, p. 10; Hachten, *Muffled Drums*, p. 232.

per cent and Rhodesia 8 per cent. Zairean radio had a large audience (32 per cent), but this was predominantly for music: only 9 per cent of radio listeners claimed to understand its talk programmes, which were mostly in French. International broadcasters performed poorly compared with these regional stations. The Voice of America attracted only 2 per cent of listeners, the BBC 1 per cent, and Soviet, Chinese and Indian radio less than 1 per cent.⁹²

Two of these figures need qualification. Although the BBC's audience was surprisingly small, anecdotal evidence suggests that it may have had a disproportionate impact on English-speaking Zambian listeners thanks to its post-colonial prestige.⁹³ The BBC's status was also enhanced by ZBS's practice of importing BBC programmes, mostly on culture or sport. Although the number of programmes declined over the 1970s, ZBS was still rebroadcasting one or two BBC programmes per day in 1973.⁹⁴ The other striking figure was the large audience for Radio South Africa, which was well-known to be the external propaganda wing of a hostile government.⁹⁵ Indeed, because RSA was so widely criticised by the Zambian authorities the NMMS researchers judged that the actual number listening to RSA was 'certainly higher'.⁹⁶ Later audience surveys found that RSA went on to become even more popular, leading the field in 1986 with a regular audience of 16.8 per cent of the population, rising to 22 per cent by 1991.⁹⁷ The influence of RSA was not peculiar to Zambia as the station attracted a significant listenership across southern and central Africa.⁹⁸ An audience survey carried out by the BBC in Zaire in 1967, for instance, found that 38 per cent of the residents of Lubumbashi stated that RSA had the clearest foreign signal, and 18 per cent believed that RSA's news bulletins were trustworthy.⁹⁹

RSA's success in Zambia can be attributed to a number of factors. Some listeners were attracted by its high-budget programming and popular music. RSA's external news bulletins were generally more detailed, up to date and better presented than the news on ZBS, and they were more moderate in tone and subtle in their politics than the South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) home news.¹⁰⁰ The seemingly balanced reporting of Soweto discussed in my second section above was a case in point. Listening figures for urban areas indicate that a significant number of Zambians listened to RSA by choice. Although ZBS could be easily heard in towns and cities, RSA was the leading foreign station for non-music programmes, with an audience of 27 per cent of urban radio listeners.¹⁰¹ The government faced repeated criticism for tolerating this situation. As a backbench critic observed in 1977, 'when news is interfered with by the Government, the general public tends to prefer foreign news to local news': 'today ... most Zambians are now listening to Radio RSA as a result of this sort of thing'.¹⁰² This was true not only for foreign news – as was the case at the time of Soweto – but sometimes even news about

92 Figures calculated from Mytton, *Listening, Looking and Learning*, pp. 93–5.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

94 WAC, E3/783/1, *Programmes: Zambia Broadcasting Service*, pamphlet (April 1973).

95 K. Somerville, 'Broadcasting Ambivalence: South Africa's Radio RSA on African Independence and UDI in Rhodesia', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 38, 2 (2018), pp. 365–6, 372–3.

96 Mytton, *Listening, Looking and Learning*, p. 91.

97 WAC, E3/1308/1, BBC IBAR, 'Listening to the BBC in Zambia, July 1986' (May 1987), p. 23; BBC IBAR, 'The BBC in Zambia: August–October 1991' (January 1992), p. 6.

98 F. Ugboajah, 'Mind Management: An Analysis of South African Broadcasts into Neighbouring African States', *Current Research on Peace and Violence*, 4, 4 (1981), p. 291.

99 WAC, E3/1307/1, BBC External Broadcasting Audience Research, 'Surveys in the Congo Democratic Republic, May–June 1967, Summary of Main Results' (July 1968), pp. 6–7.

100 J. Hale, *Radio Power: Propaganda and International Broadcasting* (London, Paul Elek, 1975), p. 87.

101 Papers of the University of Zambia (hereafter PUZ), Senate House Library, London, G. Mytton, 'Report on the National Mass Media Audience Survey: Listenership to Foreign Radio Stations', Institute for African Studies, University of Zambia, October 1972, pp. 6–7.

102 Valentine Kayope (Bahati), in *Parliamentary Debates*, 44, 22 February 1977, col. 2249–50 (Lusaka, Government Printers, 1977).

Zambia as well. As another parliamentarian put it to Unia Mwila, the minister for information in 1976, 'I wonder whether the hon. Minister could investigate why South Africa broadcasts our news before we broadcast it ourselves. What is happening?'.¹⁰³

The answer was largely to do with signal strength. When it was launched by SABC in 1966, RSA quickly developed the most powerful short-wave capability on the continent, comprising two 100-kilowatt and four 250-kilowatt transmitters, broadcasting on several frequencies.¹⁰⁴ By contrast, in 1976 ZBS could boast only 1- and 2-kilowatt short-wave transmitters located in Lusaka.¹⁰⁵ For this reason, the NMMS found that 'reception everywhere in the country was very good, and in most places is considerably better than the reception of either of the ZBS networks'. It also broadcast not only in English but also in Chinyanja, which was spoken by 42 per cent of the population. For these reasons, RSA's audience was fairly evenly spread across most of the country, unlike Radio Tanzania, for instance, the audience for which was to be found mostly near the Tanzanian border. The NMMS judged that when 'reception conditions made it difficult to hear ZBS bulletins ... many tuned to Malawi and South Africa for news'.¹⁰⁶

The influence of foreign radio was particularly pronounced at a local level. In four border regions, ZBS found itself equalled or even eclipsed by foreign broadcasters, mainly thanks to the poor quality of its signal in rural areas. The seriousness of the challenge that faced ZBS is shown clearly if we adjust the local audience figures to allow a like-for-like comparison of radio stations that were reported by the NMMS interviewees to have good signal strength, discounting listeners that experienced a variable or poor quality of signal. In Northern province, near the Tanzanian border, the NMMS found that Tanzanian radio had good reception and led the field with an audience of 40 per cent of listeners. ZBS lagged far behind, with only 23 per cent listeners claiming to have good reception. Although its signal was strong, RSA's popularity was relatively low in the province and attracted just 13 per cent of listeners. Meanwhile, in Eastern province, which borders Malawi, the NMMS found that the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) had a powerful signal and dominated the region, with an audience of 53 per cent of listeners. The survey judged that 'MBC programmes are listened to more than those of the ZBS' and found that only 39 per cent of ZBS listeners had good reception. RSA had a smaller but significant audience of 19 per cent of listeners.¹⁰⁷

Even more worrying for the Zambian government was the situation in the front-line provinces to the south, which were the target of frequent South African and Rhodesian military raids. This was also the region where UNIP experienced some of its worst electoral performances.¹⁰⁸ In the rural areas of Southern province, which bordered Rhodesia and the Caprivi Strip, only 25 per cent of listeners had good reception of ZBS. This audience was almost equalled by the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation (RBC), which had good reception and attracted 24 per cent of listeners, followed by RSA at 17 per cent. The position was even worse for ZBS in Western province, bordering Angola and Caprivi, where only 15 per cent of radio listeners had good reception of ZBS. RSA had a similar audience of at least 14 per cent of listeners and probably more, with good reception across the province. Other stations trailed behind. These local figures reveal that Zambia's national media were barely

103 Francis Chembe, in *Parliamentary Debates*, 41, 19 February 1976, col. 1739.

104 R. Tomaselli, K. Tomaselli and J. Muller, *Broadcasting in South Africa* (London, James Currey, 1987), p. 68.

105 *Zambia Broadcasting Services*, pp. 12–13; Powell, 'Zambia', p. 128.

106 Mytton, *Listening, Looking and Learning*, pp. 15, 95, 97.

107 ZBS listenership calculated from Mytton, *Listening, Looking and Learning*, pp. 30, 78; PUZ, Mytton, 'Listenership to Foreign Radio Stations', pp. 4, 7, 6.

108 Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics*, pp. 56, 209–11.

able to keep up with hostile broadcasters in the most vulnerable and contested areas of the country.¹⁰⁹

What conclusions can be drawn about the impact of the Soweto story in Zambia from this overview of listener and reader habits? Zambians certainly would have heard vehement criticism of South Africa, most commonly from ZBS but also in the press and from foreign stations such as Radio Tanzania. But, as my third section demonstrated, there was an ambivalent quality to the Zambian coverage thanks to its reliance on Reuters for detailed content. Meanwhile, a significant minority of radio listeners would also have heard bulletins that were openly defensive of the South African government. This was certainly the case for those who listened to RSA. Similarly, the large audience for Malawian radio would have heard a pro-South African line, as did listeners to Rhodesian radio and, on this occasion, the BBC. Even if these audiences overlapped, which, frustratingly, was not established by the NMMS, this amounted to one-fifth of listeners and in reality was probably more. The influence of settler colonialism was even more pronounced in rural border regions. Viewing the coverage of Soweto in the light of local audience figures, it is clear that Zambians in the Eastern, Southern and Western provinces were as likely, if not more likely, to hear reporting that was sympathetic to the South African authorities.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the Zambian government had limited control of the news in the post-independence era, despite its authoritarian aspirations. Coverage of the Soweto uprising offers a stark illustration of what this meant in practice: in June 1976, most news outlets in Zambia were reliant on content that had originated from the South African authorities via Reuters, and some were even supportive of the status quo in South Africa. It is reasonable to surmise that a significant minority of Zambians may have derived a degree of sympathy for the South African government's response to the uprising, particularly in front-line regions. The continuing and growing popularity of RSA in the 1970s and beyond would confirm this conclusion.

This was primarily a result of two transnational dynamics, namely Reuters's historic advantage in anglophone Africa from the 1860s and the growing regional influence of RSA from 1965. Although Reuters' prestige was part of a wider post-colonial landscape of entrenched British economic influence, it also served in practice as a vehicle for South African interests, as it took a sympathetic view of Pretoria's policies for commercial reasons. Since SAPA had provided all Northern Rhodesia's foreign news, South African influence in Zambia's print media and on the airwaves represented a clear continuity with the colonial past as, in an institutional sense, did the Zambian state's attempts to control the national media after the fashion of the colonial state. Taken as a whole, this amounted to a weighty colonial legacy and highlights the protracted nature of economic and cultural decolonisation.

Did foreign influence on the media shape politics within Zambia? The South African government certainly hoped so, justifying the large budget for RSA on the grounds that it was an effective tool of soft power in its regional war against local liberation movements. At the time of Soweto, RSA's success in Zambia's front-line provinces was part and parcel of the South African army's 'hearts and minds' campaign to turn Zambians against the Namibian and Zimbabwean freedom fighters, who were seeking refuge in the region.¹¹⁰ The Zambian government's unwillingness to mount a more robust challenge to external voices was in part a practical decision, as ministers of information maintained that they did not

109 Figures calculated from PUZ, Mytton, 'Listenership to Foreign Radio Stations', pp. 2–4, 6–10, 16; Mytton, *Listening, Looking and Learning*, pp. 30, 78.

110 Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics*, pp. 209–12.

have the funds to improve ZBS radio reception or to find an alternative to Reuters. But, in a sense, it also reflected the ambiguities of Kaunda's ambivalent relationship with the revanchist south. It is tempting to speculate that a government that sought to engage with Pretoria might have found that it was tolerable to allow Zambian voters to hear voices that defended South Africa's position, if risky in front-line areas. This would have been particularly convenient at the time of Soweto, as criticism of Kaunda's policy of détente sharpened after his negotiations with Vorster at Victoria Falls in 1975 and, ominously in mid 1976, from armed members of the southern African liberation movements who were exiled in Zambia.¹¹¹

These conclusions have an element of conjecture. There is, however, a clearer case to be made for the profound impact of foreign media on popular political culture in Zambia, markedly in June 1976 but also more generally. In Zambia, as in much of Africa, competition between the authoritarian tendencies of the one-party state and the soft-power aspirations of outside influences created a dynamic tension after 1964. As a result, media audiences were offered a much wider range of voices than during the colonial period, and many Zambians became cosmopolitan consumers of news from multiple sources. Hearing the news about Soweto was a confusing experience that required a critical ear and healthy scepticism. Like other platforms for dissenting voices, such as the church, the pluralism of Zambian news culture gave the lie to the official myth of national unity and contributed to UNIP's failure to win widespread popularity during the period of one-party rule.¹¹² Although independence did not lead to a meaningful liberalisation of national media until the 1990s, decolonisation marked the end of the state's *de facto* monopoly of information. From 1964, the establishment of ZBS and ZANA pitted radical nationalist voices against the entrenched influence of colonial broadcasters and a former colonial news agency in a continuous and noisy tussle for control of the airwaves and the press. In this sense, Zambia's post-colonial news culture represented a profound, permanent departure from the colonial past.

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¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 198–208; C. Leys and J. Saul, 'Liberation Without Democracy? The SWAPO Crisis of 1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 1 (1994), pp. 123–47.

¹¹² Larmer, *Rethinking African Politics*, pp. 225–39.