

## Radio broadcasting for blacks during the Second World War: “It could be dangerous ...”<sup>1</sup>

*Nicole Wiederroth\**

### Introduction

On 6 September 1939, the government of the Union of South Africa took a decision to support Great Britain in its war against Germany. This decision was based on a small majority in parliament and split it into pro-war and pro-neutrality members. Following this, the new prime minister, J.C. Smuts of the United Party (UP), built his war cabinet, while the former prime minister, J.B.M. Hertzog, was then in the opposition along with other pro-neutrality members who had left the UP with Hertzog for the Purified National Party (GNP) of D.F. Malan. Together with other right-oriented and/or pro-German parties, they represented a noticeable, although heterogeneous, opposition during the war.

On the extra-parliamentary level, the government was also increasingly confronted with opposition to its war policy. Here different factions of the nationalist movement, for example, the pro-national socialist Greyshirts and the pro-fascist Ossewa Brandwag, gained growing acceptance in South African white society.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the government received ongoing reports of so-called subversive activities amongst blacks although these were not necessarily linked to the war. Due to increased urbanisation and politicisation of the

---

\* Nicole Wiederroth studied African Studies and Gender Studies at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. Her main field of research is propaganda in the Union of South Africa during the Second World War.

1. National Archives of South Africa (hereafter NASA), Public Records of Central Government since 1910 (hereafter SAB), NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, R. Erasmus – D.L. Smit, 28 September 1943.
2. P.J. Furlong, *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era* (University Press of New England, Hanover, 1991), pp 119–137; C. Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel: Radical Afrikaner Nationalism and the History of the Ossewabrandwag* (LIT Verlag, Münster, 2008).

black population, they were, for example, related to the repressive policy of segregation.<sup>3</sup> Independent of existing political diversity in the country, South Africa was officially fighting for freedom and democracy. Over the next years propaganda loyal to the government relieved tensions and gained support for the government's political direction.

In 1939, the definition of propaganda was quite vague and staff in the South African administration used the term in distinct ways. Sometimes propaganda was utilised synonymously with information, publicity or advertisement, while sometimes it suggested a more political connotation.<sup>4</sup> The British historians Asa Briggs and Peter Burke propose that propaganda can be clarified as the “conscious mobilization of the media in order to change attitudes”.<sup>5</sup> Although there were different conceptions of propaganda in the South African context, Briggs' and Burke's definition represents some kind of consensus and should therefore be mentioned here.<sup>6</sup>

On the basis of the categories in South African society, there were several institutions and organisations responsible for propaganda

- 
3. P. Bonner, “African Urbanisation on the Rand between the 1930s and 1960s: Its Social Character and Political Consequences”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21, 1, 1995, pp 115–129; and P. Bonner, “Eluding Capture, African Grassroot Struggles in the 1940s: Benoni”, in: S. Dubow and A. Jeeves (eds), *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities* (Cape Town, Double Storey, 2005), pp 170–191.
  4. NASA SAB, BNS 1/1/266 315/73, Sub-Committee on State Publicity, SAIRR, Report of the Committee, 24 April 1944. On activities of the Bureau of Information see T. Bussemer, “Psychologie der Propaganda”, *ApuZ*, 11, 2007, pp 23–25.
  5. A. Briggs and P. Burke, *The Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet* (Polity Press, Malden, 2010), p 87.
  6. For example D.L. Smit, saw news as useful in propaganda, whereas A.I. Richards defined news as being objective. NASA SAB, 9634 520/400(3), War News, Shangaan and Shivenda, vol. 2, 2, D.L. Smit – A.L. Barrett, 3 September 1940; and NASA SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, A.I. Richards – D.L. Smit, 17 August 1940, including report, Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, pp 4–6.

aligned to each particular group.<sup>7</sup> The “link between Government and the various media of public information”<sup>8</sup> was the Bureau of Information (BoI), which functioned to some extent as a centre for propaganda in the country. Although the BoI had a small, so-called “Native Section”, it mainly focused on propaganda for whites. Instead, the Department of Native Affairs (DNA) took charge of propaganda for the black population, or rather of what they constructed as a black target group.

After the South African War (Anglo-Boer War) of 1899–1902 the population began to experience propaganda as another “weapon” of warfare.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, to this day, there is no scientific publication on radio propaganda in the 1940s in South Africa, nor is there any analysis of the early history of radio broadcasting specifically implemented for broadcasting to an exclusively black audience. Although radio was an important medium, scholars have focused mainly on the development of broadcasting for a white audience, either by discussing the pre-history of the SABC until 1936,<sup>10</sup> or by outlining the general history of broadcasting.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, a few scholars have concentrated on radio broadcasting for black people

- 
7. South African society at the time comprised Whites (including all Europeans); and Blacks (including Africans, Coloureds and Indians). The definition of these categories was never static. For a detailed description of the different definitions, depending on the perspective of the speaker, which discourse he or she was reproducing and in which period of time the definition was made see A.J. Norval, *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse* (Verso, London, 1996). In this article the term black refers mainly to Africans, due to the DNA focus on disseminating propaganda to this group.
  8. NASA SAB, A1 153, Smuts Papers, Public Papers, Minister of Interior – Prime Minister, re activities of the BOI, “Notes on Bureau of Information”, 5 April 1943, p 1.
  9. K.O. Morgan, “The Boer War and the Media, 1899–1902“, *Twentieth Century British History*, 13, 1, 2002, pp 1–16.
  10. E. Rosenthal, *You have been Listening ... The Early History of Radio in South Africa* (Purnell, Cape Town, 1974).
  11. For example, R. Tomaselli and K. Tomaselli, *Currents of Power: State Broadcasting in South Africa* (Anthropos, Bellville, 1989); and A. Hadland and E. Louw (eds), *Power, Politics and Identity in South African Media* (HSRC Press, Cape Town, 2008).

during the apartheid years.<sup>12</sup> In this article, it is hoped to offer another insight into this relatively neglected field of media history in South Africa.

Below, a discussion is provided on the institutional formation and the organisation of the broadcasting service in the Union of South Africa. Thereafter the focus turns to the distinct conception and implementation of propaganda for blacks. It will illustrate the specific ways the DNA constructed a history for a black target group; the way it dealt with the present in its propaganda material; and its ideas on the future for this group.<sup>13</sup> The third part of the article, on the basis of the listener's research conducted in the 1940s, examines the response of the audience at that time.

Thus, the article does not merely demonstrate how the white hegemonic minority tried to legitimise and maintain the colonial order in South African society. Rather, it also attempts to describe the reaction to DNA propaganda, and therefore to suggest certain effects that it had. As the British sociologist and co-founder of cultural studies, Stuart Hall, remarked, it is of course impossible to determine and to control the real effect or interpretation of a message: "... there is no necessary correspondence between encoding and decoding, the former can attempt to 'pre-fer' but cannot prescribe or guarantee the latter, which has its own conditions of existence."<sup>14</sup> But what can be clarified are the topics of discussion in particular groups of society. To a certain extent topics are introduced by the

- 
12. C. Hamm, "The Constant Companion of Man?: Separate Development, Radio Bantu and Music", *Popular Music*, 10, 2, 1991, pp 147–173; L. Gunner, "Wrestling With the Present, Beckoning to the Past: Contemporary Zulu Radio Drama", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 2, 2000, pp 223–237; S.P. Lekgoathi, "You are Listening to Radio Lebowa of the South African Broadcasting Corporation?: Vernacular Radio, Bantustan Identity and Listenership, 1960–1994", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35, 3, 2009, pp 575–594.
  13. On a denied history from the perspective of the coloniser, see A. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Earthscan, London, 2003), pp 135–136.
  14. S. Hall and D. Hobson (eds), *Culture, Media, Language* (Routledge, Abingdon, 1992), p 135.

media and therefore by propaganda, too.<sup>15</sup> Following Hall again, who also put an emphasis on the limitation of the decoding process with an analysis of propaganda production and the listener's response to that propaganda, it is suggested that this reflects the socio-political relations in South African society at that time.<sup>16</sup>

*From landlines to wireless broadcasting service*

The DNA justified its propaganda, that is, the distribution of its selective information by alleging (as mentioned above) that there were widespread subversive activities in the country. From the government's perspective, subversive activities were linked to pro-national socialist or pro-fascist leanings, but also, prior to the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, to the activities of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA).<sup>17</sup>

To distribute the propaganda material to all areas of the Union, the DNA used a variety of media. A few weeks after the declaration of war, the department published a fortnightly, but soon weekly, *News of the War* bulletin in several local languages, including Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, and Shangaan. The bulletin, which was published until October 1945, served a similar purpose to the more or less regular meetings of the native commissioners. The DNA's idea was that in these meetings, as in *News of the War*, the people should receive "the truth about the happenings in the world through official channels".<sup>18</sup> Due to ongoing reports about subversive activities, the secretary for

---

15. F. Bösch, "Katalysator der Domokratisierung? Presse, Politik und Gesellschaft vor 1914", in F. Bösch and N. Frei (eds), *Medialisierung und Demokratie im 20 Jahrhundert* (Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen, 2006), pp 27–28.

16. Hall and Hobson (eds), *Culture, Media, Language*, pp 135–136.

17. For example, NASA SAB, TES, 11, FS1/9, Dept Defence. Subversive Propaganda; NASA SAB, TES, 716, F4/116, Reporting of Subversive, Disloyal or Suspicious Activities; NASA SAB, JUS, 1485, 1/49/39, Enemy subjects, Internment and Control of Subversive Propaganda. See also D. Fortescue, "The Communist Party of South Africa and the African Working Class in the 1940s", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 24, 3, 1991, pp 486–491.

18. NASA SAB, NTS 9637, 520/400/3/1, Translation of War News Bulletins, Accounts Portion, D. L. Smit to secretary for Finance, re Dissemination of War News in Native Areas, 23 October 1939.

Native Affairs, Douglas L. Smit, appealed in May 1940 to his staff for counteraction:

*Information reaching this Department indicates that enemy propaganda is being actively disseminated among the Natives throughout the Union and officers are earnestly requested to exercise the utmost vigilance and to use every endeavour to overcome this danger.<sup>19</sup>*

Two months later, in June, the DNA held a meeting to debate possible strategies to counter this unrest. Under the name Bantu News Service Committee (BNSC) of the Witwatersrand, the group discussed potential proceedings against subversive activities in general.<sup>20</sup> But soon the BNSC singled out the introduction of a broadcasting service for blacks as their first, and in the end, their last official project.<sup>21</sup> By July 1940, the BNSC had conceptualised, organised and launched, together with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the Department for Post and Telegraphs, the first broadcasting service via telephone lines for a black audience in Johannesburg.<sup>22</sup> Although the BNSC suggested a testing period for the new service to enhance the obviously deficient initial programme, the government was adamant on the expansion to other urban centres in the Union.<sup>23</sup>

19. NASA, Public Records of former Transvaal (hereafter TAB), KJB 497 N9/13/3, Johannesburg, Dissemination of Information, D.L. Smit, Enemy Propaganda, General Circular No. 20 of 1940, 27 May 1940.
20. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3 Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, undated; Anonymous, Report of conference on enemy propaganda etc. held at office of the director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, 5 June 1940; NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3 Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, undated; Report by H.S. Cooke, Notes of Meeting of Provisional Committee re Native News Services and Enemy Propaganda, 11 June, 1940. The first meetings were held in the office of H.S. Cooke, chief native commissioner of the Witwatersrand. Attendees included Graham Ballenden (of municipal NAD Johannesburg), H. Wellbeloved (of Chamber of Mines) and Audrey I. Richards (from the Bantu Studies Department of the University of the Witwatersrand). Therefore people with different perspectives were also present.
21. NASA TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, undated, Report by H.S. Cooke, Notes of Meeting of Provisional Committee, 11 June, 1940.
22. SABC Annual Report, 1940, p 8; "Natives Hear Radio News at 200 posts", *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 July 1940.
23. For example NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, J.M. Brink – C.P. Alport, 18 July 1940; NASA, SAB,

As a result of this pressure, the landline broadcast was introduced by the end of July in the Durban/Pietermaritzburg area and within the next weeks in Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, Kingwilliamstown, East London, Bloemfontein, and finally, in Cape Town/Salt River.<sup>24</sup>

The government preferred the landline rather than the wireless broadcast, mainly because it was easier to control the content of the programme as well as the audience. The first targets of the DNA landline transmission were the inhabitants of (mining) compounds, hostels and black townships. An advantage was that sometimes the equipment to receive the broadcasts through loudspeakers at public meeting points was already available there. Importantly, the landline was also less sensitive to interference from enemy broadcasts. According to the government this was a constant threat, especially in the border areas of former Portuguese East Africa (now Mozambique).<sup>25</sup> In addition, with the landline the government thought it could prevent this part of the population from listening to the national socialist shortwave broadcasts from Zeesen in Germany, with its negative propaganda against the South African government.<sup>26</sup>

Immediately after the “successful” launch of the landline system, the BNSC discovered that its field of activity had been drastically reduced. The DNA prepared the news in Pretoria, which meant

- 
- NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, D.L. Smit – E.H. Brookes re Broadcasting of News for the Natives, 24 June 1940.
24. NASA ,SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, D.L. Smit – H.J. van der Bijl, re Broadcasting to Natives, 23 July 1940; NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, D.L. Smit – Native Commissioner, re Broadcasting to Natives, 3 August 1940; “Special Broadcasts for Natives to be Started on Monday”, *Cape Argus*, 7 December 1940.
25. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, D.L. Smit – R. Erasmus, 24 March 1943; NASA SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, A.N. Wilson – D.L. Smit, 19 July 1940. On the intelligence services in South Africa at the time see K. Fedorowich, “German Espionage and British Counter-Intelligence in South Africa and Mozambique, 1939–1944”, *Historia*, 48, 1, 2005, pp 209–230.
26. C. Marx, “‘Dear Listeners in South Africa’: German Propaganda Broadcasts to South Africa, 1940-1941”, *The South African Historical Journal*, 27, 1992, pp 148–172.

that the BNSC in Johannesburg was based in the wrong city. More importantly, the government had not officially declared the BNSC an authority on propaganda for the black population,<sup>27</sup> and it was excluded from further preparation of the broadcasting service. The SABC and the DNA took over the previous work of the BNSC, while the BNSC concentrated, although informally, on the response of the black population to the service.<sup>28</sup>

Two years later, on 29 September 1942, the SABC was on air with its first Union-wide wireless broadcast for blacks.<sup>29</sup> With this transmission, the SABC introduced its new service in five languages. The announcers welcomed their listeners in English and Afrikaans, followed by the linguist Carl Faye and two other announcers, Walter Mangcipu<sup>30</sup> and Charles Matloporo,<sup>31</sup> in Zulu, Xhosa, and Sotho.<sup>32</sup> From then on, the black population could listen to the landline broadcast every evening (apart from weekends and public holidays) and to the wireless on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday from 9.45 until 10.15 in the morning.<sup>33</sup>

- 
27. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, undated, H.S. Cooke, Minutes of Meeting of the Bantu News Service Committee, 11 July 1940.
  28. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, E.W. Lowe – D.L. Smit re Broadcasting, 11 September 1940.
  29. SABC Sound Archive (hereafter SABC SA), Audio-clip 1/63(42)CD, Black Broadcasting 29 September 1942; NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from Studios of the SABC, vol. I, Anonymous, Transcript: National Broadcast for Natives, undated.
  30. W. Mangcipu worked from July 1940 as an announcer and translator for the DNA Broadcasting Service.
  31. C. Matloporo succeeded Bennet Ngwabini (sometimes Gwabini) in January 1941 as announcer and translator. He worked for the DNA until October 1945.
  32. SABC SA, Audio-clip 1/63(42)CD, Black Broadcasting, 29 September 1942; NASA SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Anonymous, Transcript: National Broadcast for Natives, undated.
  33. NASA SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Memorandum by C. Faye – C. B. Young, re Broadcasts to Natives, 7 December 1942.



*“Content” and style of the broadcasts*

The landline and wireless broadcasts were either in Zulu, Xhosa, or Sotho, depending on the area of transmission. The landline broadcast in the evening focused mainly on news about the war and contributed less entertainment. The morning wireless broadcast, which was split into national and regional parts, transmitted primarily entertainment, like music, comedies and talks.<sup>34</sup> The entertainment part of the programme depended mostly on the staff of the SABC studios and finally on the branch manager of the studio. For news and certain talks, the responsible person was usually Carl Faye from the DNA. During these years, the South African Press Association (SAPA) supported the DNA every day with new information.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the BoI assisted Faye with propaganda material. From September 1943 onwards, Rudolph Erasmus of the BoI was in charge of the news service together with Faye.<sup>36</sup>

Soon after the DNA introduced the landline broadcast, it noticed a growing disinterest in the service amongst their potential target group. To make the programme more appealing to the listeners, the DNA responded with the extension of musical items and talks.<sup>37</sup> The type of innovation implemented depended on the staff of the SABC. The anthem *Nkosi Sikelel’i Afrika* was commonly used at the end of the programme in every branch of the corporation. As for the music used in the broadcasts, the SABC staff tried to choose popular songs and choruses in local languages, but the available material did not cover the actual demand. The problem at that time was the small

- 
34. A talk was a broadcast that addressed a particular topic, similar to a documentary.
  35. NASA ,TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, Anonymous, Notes of Meeting on Enemy Propaganda, Johannesburg, 27 June 1940.
  36. NASA, SAB, NTS 9654 520/400/9, News of the War, Broadcasting to Natives, Landline, vol. 3, D.L. Smit – P. Beukes, re Native Broadcasts, 15 September 1943.
  37. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, G. Ballenden – J.M. Brink, re Subversive propaganda amongst natives, 8 August 1940.

sample of records in languages of the target group.<sup>38</sup> To fill the gap, the staff used British and US musical productions. Broadly speaking, the SABC offered a multifaceted music and entertainment programme, with a selection ranging from military marches to comedies.<sup>39</sup>

With regard to the news presentations, in mid-June 1943 the programme compilers were given permission to widen the range of topics. They added South African themes, including reports on the Native Brass Band Competition; the Mine Wages Commission; or meetings of the African Bunga.<sup>40</sup> Apart from the news, the DNA and the SABC transmitted talks three times per week via landline and wireless to provide background information about the war. Furthermore, the broadcasting service informed the audience about subjects which, according to the DNA, would be of interest to them or provide useful information such as agricultural methods or information on how to keep fit or improve one's health.<sup>41</sup>

To what extent the target group was interested in the programming, will be discussed below, but there were other factors which had an impact on the number of listeners and the character of the audience. Decisive for the potential target group for example, was the time

38. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, H.C. Lugg – D.L. Smit, 20 September 1940, H. Tracey's report attached: "Landline Broadcasting for Natives". This was similar to the less available recordings in Afrikaans, see SABC Annual Report, 1942, p 10.
39. SABC Annual Report, 1944, p 11; P.R. Kirby, "The Use of European Musical Techniques by the Non-European Peoples of Southern Africa", *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 11, 1959, p 39; NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from Studios of the SABC, vol. I, Anonymous, Transcript: National Broadcast for Natives, undated.
40. The African Bunga was re-introduced by the government as a form of segregated administration. It restricted the autonomy of the black population and enhanced the control of the white government. See I. Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997), pp 166–167 and 184–186; and S. Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa* (Macmillan, Houndsmill, 1989), pp 107–111. See also NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, D.L. Smit – R. Erasmus, 16 June 1943.
41. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, C. Faye – C.B. Young, re Broadcasts to Natives, 7 December 1942; SABC Annual Report, 1940, p 13.

of the broadcasts and the technical and financial situation of the individual. The landline was extremely restricted to specific places such as compounds, hostels and black townships. Furthermore, the reception of the wireless broadcast required special equipment, a connection for the power supply and/or the money for batteries, in addition to the licence fee.<sup>42</sup>

The DNA received quite a positive response for its activities from other state departments. An affirmative reaction, for example, came from the Non-European Army Service (NEAS). For the NEAS, the medium was especially useful for its recruiting campaigns, which were intensified in 1942 due to the negative news on the progress of the Allies in North Africa.<sup>43</sup> Hence, it was no surprise that the NEAS offered to co-operate with the DNA “in arranging talks dealing with various phases of the Native Military Corps, and such subjects as would prove of interest to dependants, relatives, and friends of native soldiers”.<sup>44</sup> In addition, other organisations, such as the National Anti-Waste Organisation (NAWO), shaped the character of the broadcasts.<sup>45</sup>

Between 1939 and 1945, the DNA did not elaborate on an official directive as far as the format or content of the programmes was concerned. Instead, it was mainly Faye who decided (within limits) on the content of the broadcasts.<sup>46</sup> However there were exceptions

42. “Broadcast to Natives Tomorrow”, *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 September 1942; H. Kuper, “The Broadcasts to Natives: Impressions and Opinions of Some of the Listeners”, *The Star*, 15 December 1943.
43. L. Grundlingh, “The Recruitment of South African Blacks for Participation in the Second World War”, in D. Killingray and R. Rathbone (eds), *Africa and the Second World War* (Macmillan, Houndmills, 1986), pp 182–184.
44. NASA, SAB, NTS 9654 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 2, p.p. Director NEAS – D.L. Smit, re Broadcasts to Natives, 25 September 1942.
45. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, B. Joel – C. Faye, 19 January 1943, report attached; and B. Joel – J.H. Dobson, re Johannesburg Anti-Waste Broadcasts to Natives, 4 November 1942.
46. Apart from Fayes, who had the main responsibility for compiling the programmes, other DNA members and native commissioners determined the content. The staff of the SABC could only suggest certain tasks, but had to have DNA permission. See NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg

in the case of controversial or political topics. In practice, such topics were to be avoided unless the secretary of Native Affairs, D.L. Smit, or his under-secretary, W.J. Gordon Mears, gave their consent for these broadcasts.<sup>47</sup>

Propaganda is used by governments in attempts to legitimise their policies by promoting specific ideas about their own society and those of other countries. Discussions of contemporary situations were often embedded in those about the past and future. The next section of this article analyses examples of broadcasts that had a political agenda and were prepared and broadcast by the DNA and the SABC during the war. The examples show how the DNA used propaganda by presenting an interpretation of the past to depict future prospects. A study of these examples will answer questions on the motivation of the producers; what they intended to put across to the audience; and their views on the black population and/or the black target group.

### *Constructing the past*

As D.L. Smit illustrated in his letter to the secretary for Education, the staff of the DNA saw themselves as being “experts” on black people. Consequently, they also appeared to regard themselves as experts on compiling and disseminating propaganda for them.<sup>48</sup>

Clearly, it is vital that the specific target group understands the message of propaganda. To fulfil this imperative, the linguist Carl Faye implemented certain stylistic elements into the broadcasts. For instance, he assumed that the best method was to imitate the rhetoric

---

Broadcast Service to Natives, E.W. Lowe – Native Commissioner, Johannesburg, 2 June 1941.

47. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol 1, Col. Martin – D.L. Smit, re Wireless Broadcasts in Zulu, 18 February 1943; NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, D.L. Smit – R. Erasmus, 16 June 1943.

48. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, D.L. Smit – Secretary for Education re Anti-Waste Broadcast to Natives, 1 December 1942.

of the target group.<sup>49</sup> The DNA considered figurative language to be a typical element, so this was used extensively in DNA propaganda. Additionally, C. Faye used a simple style of language. This was meant either to ease the translation of the original English manuscripts, or because of a less complex syntax due to the medium. The following examples suggest that at least partly, the DNA's motive was based on the stereotype of an uneducated black audience who would be incapable of understanding anything other than straightforward sentence structure and simple argumentation.

At the end of July 1940, the chief native commissioner in Pietermaritzburg, H.C. Lugg, gave an address on the landline in Zulu for local listeners. A few days later, he forwarded the manuscript to his superior, D.L. Smit.<sup>50</sup> A description of this address is worthwhile quoting, because Lugg made use of typical stylistic elements and common characteristics of DNA propaganda material.<sup>51</sup>

Lugg's speech called for the Zulu people to give their loyalty to the South African government – but neglected to mention that the government did not return such loyalty by integrating the Zulu into the South African nation state. As the South African historian Louis Grundlingh puts it, in Lugg's orientation to the past, he presented an “anachronistic depiction” of blacks to serve the recruiting campaigns

of the Native Military Corps (NMC).<sup>52</sup> Lugg focused on the military past of the Zulu, emphasising their monarchic tradition as a society of warriors. Based on a shared type of government, Lugg constructed mutual principles between the Zulu and the British. Despite these

49. This type of propaganda was not only used by Faye, but also by F. Brownlee who was characterised in the *Rand Daily Mail* as “one of the country's foremost authorities on native life and psychology”. He was in charge of the DNA *News of the War* bulletin. See also “Natives Told about Nazi White Ants”, *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 June 1940.

50. NASA SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, H.C. Lugg – D.L. Smit, 1 August 1940, Attachment re Broadcast by chief native commissioner, Natal, to the natives of Pietermaritzburg and Durban, 27 July 1940.

51. The manuscript analysed here is in English, and there are certainly aspects of the Zulu version that are missing.

52. Grundlingh, “The Recruitment of South African Blacks”, p 183.

shared values and norms, he presented the Zulu as a society with inherent deficits, which ultimately would prove the superiority of Great Britain.

In his introduction, Lugg promoted the landline broadcast as a “great achievement” thanks to the “great undertaking” of the government. To counter any scepticism regarding this extra service, Lugg pointed out that “the ordinary way [for broadcasting was] beset with many difficulties”.<sup>53</sup> Thereafter, he informed the audience of their alleged weaknesses and their credulousness: “... you Natives are handicapped because you are uneducated ... you are troubled by wild rumours and lies which are broadcast by people who work underground like a mole.”<sup>54</sup> In accordance with the interests of “the enemy”, these fears would pave the way to a certain irrationality: “... some who have fled to their homes and who have left their clothing behind. Fleeing, in fact, as if they were unclothed shouting ‘It is upon us’ and yet it is merely the snort of a rhino (a false alarm).”<sup>55</sup> Such behaviour, Lugg suggested, would help the enemy to sabotage the South African industry and would negatively influence the achievements of the South African troops.<sup>56</sup> He immediately went on to explain the way out of this supposed ignorant and emotional attitude. Previously, the Zulu people had only had the opportunity to read black newspapers such as *Ilanga Lase Natal* and to attend meetings held by the native commissioners. Now the government had introduced another medium that would tell the truth to a loyal and traditional audience:

- 
53. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Lugg – Smit, 1 August 1940, and the attachment re Lugg’s broadcast on 27 July 1940.
  54. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Lugg – Smit, 1 August 1940, and the attachment re Lugg’s broadcast on 27 July 1940.
  55. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Lugg – Smit, 1 August 1940, and the attachment re Lugg’s broadcast on 27 July 1940.
  56. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Lugg – Smit, 1 August 1940, and the attachment re Lugg’s broadcast on 27 July 1940.

*If you insist that you are still loyal to your old house, brush aside rumour and cling to the truth, the truth which you are about to hear from Mpanza; the statement by the way, which comes from our head house of the Native Affairs Department in Pretoria.*<sup>57</sup>

Lugg's explicit reference to the DNA corresponded with another stereotype: the image of an obedient black population that would place its trust in official statements. Furthermore, Lugg emphasised the pretension of the DNA's dominance over black people by using the words "head house" instead of the official term "head office" or "general office".

In the second part of his address, Lugg compared the political systems of the British and the Zulu societies. Putting great emphasis on similarities, he neglected two important facts in his statement. First, that the British monarchy, unlike the Zulu one, was a constitutional monarchy. Second, it was primarily British imperial policy that had destroyed the political system of the Zulu. In addition, Lugg selected particular historical events which were useful to shore up his argument. For instance, that a monarchy generally legitimises its superiority. According to Lugg, the durability of the monarchic system was important, but he carefully avoided any explanation of the British royal lineage – apart from saying that it "dates back to very ancient times".<sup>58</sup> Instead he used a local praise poetry technique by referring to the past to represent the present and predict the future and by introducing other characteristic features of southern African praise poetry.<sup>59</sup>

---

57. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Lugg – Smit, 1 August 1940, and the attachment re Lugg's broadcast on 27 July 1940. Charles J. Mpanza was secretary and treasurer of the Zulu-Society. From 1940 onwards he worked as translator and announcer for the Zulu broadcasts at the SABC studio in Durban/Pietermaritzburg.

58. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Lugg – Smit, 1 August 1940, and the attachment re Lugg's broadcast on 27 July 1940.

59. R. Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford University Press, London, 1970), p 142. On praise poetry and its specific function in the political context, see L. Vail, and L. White, *Power and the Praise Poem; Southern African Voices in History* (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1991), pp 98–102.

In the final part of his speech, Lugg compared the reverence the Zulu felt for Shaka with the emotional ties the British felt towards King George VI. The praise poem for Shaka seemed comparatively unimpressive to the poem for the British King afterwards. Although Shaka was characterised as a strong leading figure, his power was limited in so far as his influence “reached [only] beyond the mountains”. This realm was restricted to the earthly landscape; it did not compare favourably to the godlike description of King George VI. Lugg began with a praise poem dedicated to Shaka:

*Shaka the invulnerable one  
The consuming flame that leapt over the other flames  
The towering sceptre that reached beyond the mountains  
and in doing so, consumed the bodies of men.*<sup>60</sup>

In comparison, Lugg depicted the British king as a more divine power who ruled not only one country, but all countries, and whose power was extended over the oceans and the skies:

*The mighty eagle that thrashed its wings,  
And the heavens reverberated with his thunder,  
The lightning flash that routed the armies of men,  
The sinews of the oceans,  
The all powerful bull that mediated for all countries,  
The leopard which licked its black and white spots.*<sup>61</sup>

As Lugg did not expect D.L. Smit to understand the stylistic elements, he, the Mbongi,<sup>62</sup> provided Smit with some explanations in an enclosed letter. The eagle and the lightning symbolised the British air power and the sinews of the ocean to their naval superiority. The

---

60. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Lugg – Smit, 1 August 1940, and the attachment re Lugg’s broadcast on 27 July 1940.

61. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Lugg – Smit, 1 August 1940, and the attachment re Lugg’s broadcast on 27 July 1940.

62. Lugg had introduced himself as “Mbongi” in his letter to Smit of 1 August 1940. A mbongi is a poet who works for the ruler. His other duties include the conservation of historical records. See Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, pp 82–83.



mediating bull was synonymous for King George as the policeman of the world and the leopard referred to him as an impartial ruler.<sup>63</sup> Once again, Lugg adopted characteristics of Zulu praise poetry in using allusions and figurations, such as the “powerful bull” and the particular structure of the stanza.

Independent of the poem’s quality, it should be mentioned that in the 1940s, the common opinion was that oral poetry would be more primitive than written lyrics, even amongst scholars.<sup>64</sup> Whether Lugg was inspired by other sources or whether he felt Zulu praise poetry would serve the purpose, is impossible to know. Certainly he represented Britain as the centre of the world, a world that included the Zulu. This centre had to be protected, because “when that house falls, the sun will fall with it”.<sup>65</sup> For the black people of South Africa, it was certainly not Britain which they had to “protect” in 1940, but rather places of military interest in the Union. It was in this year that the government began recruiting blacks for this service.<sup>66</sup>

#### *Ideas about the future*

An overt characteristic of Lugg’s address, as with other talks, was its dualistic conception; a dichotomy that also existed in the categorisation of South African society. Particular propaganda for blacks and for whites reproduced and legitimised these categories and the associated hierarchies.<sup>67</sup> Whereas the topics were the same, the conception and implementation differed considerably. DNA propaganda reproduced a dualistic and at the same time polarising description in constructing

---

63. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Lugg – Smit, 1 August 1940, and the attachment re Lugg’s broadcast on 27 July 1940.

64. B.W. Vilakazi, “The Conception and Development of Poetry in Zulu”, in R.H. Kaschula (ed.), *Foundations in Southern African Oral Literature* (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1993), pp 60–61.

65. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Lugg – Smit, 1 August 1940, and the attachment re Lugg’s broadcast on 27 July 1940.

66. M. Roth, “‘If You Give Us Rights We Will Fight’: Black Involvement in the Second World War”, *South African Historical Journal*, 15, 1983, pp 91–92.

67. A. Memmi, *Rassismus* (Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Hamburg, 1992), p 103.

a superior white linked to progress, health and so on, in contrast to an inferior black linked to backwardness, sickness, etc. While this directly consolidated dualism, it was also possible to foster it indirectly using certain stereotypes associated with this dualistic polarisation. S. Hall described this unconscious and apparently naturalised representation of events with reference to race as “implicit racism”.<sup>68</sup> This racism finds its expression, according to Hall, in the problematisation of the relations between black people and white people. Hall exemplifies this sort of representation with particular British TV broadcasts, which reproduced the underlying assumption that the source of all problems was the black population.<sup>69</sup> This approach was not restricted to British society, as there are numerous examples in the South African context. Within the scope of this article, only one example of this can be analysed in detail.

In 1941, the studio in Grahamstown transmitted a talk-series by Dr Oscar D. Wollheim,<sup>70</sup> under the headline “Education for the Bantu”. Wollheim focused on an already popular subject and except for his final talk of six, the series was very factual in tone. He emphasised the importance of education; explained the current educational system for children and adults; and outlined the professional opportunities that were available thereafter. Finally, he discussed his vision for the future from a liberal perspective.<sup>71</sup> Despite his comparatively objective descriptions, the structure of Wollheim’s series was similar to Lugg’s address in Durban. Although black people were not presented as purely irrational and emotionally determined, they were, according to Wollheim, “ignorant”. The lack of education – which more correctly should have been defined as a lack of a specific knowledge – was

68. S. Hall, “Die Konstruktion von ‘Rasse’ in den Medien”, in N. Räthzel (ed.), *Ausgewählte Schriften* (Argument, Hamburg, 1989), pp 150–171.

69. Hall, “Die Konstruktion von ‘Rasse’”, p 157.

70. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, G. Dickson – J.M. Brink, re Education for the Bantu, Transcripts of the Talk-Series attached, 8 August, 1941. Oscar David da Fonseca Wollheim was a member of the SAIRR. He was also involved in the Joint Council of Europeans and Africans, the Legal Aid Bureau and the Civil Rights League.

71. The talks in the series were: 1) Why we should educate ourselves and our children; 2) What is education?; 3) How to learn; 4) The different kinds of schools; 5) What shall I do with my children? and, 6) A vision of the future.

in his view the reason why the black population was excluded from political participation:

*It is also quite correct that such [ignorant] people should not be given the right to elect representatives directly on to the bodies which govern them, because ignorant people cannot be expected to choose the right representatives in a civilised community ... A democracy is the sort [of governance] in which the people themselves choose their rulers, but if the people themselves do not understand the government and understand very little about its laws, how can they then expect to be allowed to choose the ruler for such a government?<sup>72</sup>*

To follow this line of argumentation, the black people themselves were supposedly responsible for the racial discrimination and for their political powerlessness because of their ignorance of their duties and rights in society.<sup>73</sup> In his talk Wollheim reiterated alleged deficiencies of black South Africans. With reference to the ideology of trusteeship, the solution Wollheim proposed would only be possible under the guidance of the white government. According to him, education could help the “backward” blacks to overcome the “old tribal days” and help them move ahead to the “civilised community” as exemplified by whites.<sup>74</sup> Although Wollheim was vague about the timeframe of this future momentum he did not envisage a mutual understanding between blacks and whites. Instead, the problem would be one that the black population had to solve. The duty of “the African” was to understand “the European”, and to aspire to his values, not vice versa.<sup>75</sup> After providing further explanations on education facilities and professional opportunities, he referred in his last talk, “A Vision for the Future”, to the limitation of these

---

72. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, Dickson – Brink, 8 August 1941, Education for the Bantu, transcript of talk 1.

73. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, Dickson – Brink, 8 August 1941, Education for the Bantu, transcript of talk 1.

74. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, Dickson – Brink, 8 August 1941, Education for the Bantu, transcript of talk 1.

75. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, Dickson – Brink, 8 August 1941, Education for the Bantu, transcript of talk 2.

possibilities.<sup>76</sup> Wollheim's ideal future society illustrates his acceptance of South Africa's segregation policy. In his "ideal state" there would be an entirely literate population, with blacks as lawyers, doctors and so on, who would work solely in the reserves. Furthermore, there would be a separate African bunga and a European parliament working together, rather than a government that represented blacks and whites equally.<sup>77</sup>

O.D. Wollheim's ideas were not exceptional amongst liberals at the time.<sup>78</sup> What emerged in the apartheid era under the slogan "separate development",<sup>79</sup> was already a mindset in earlier decades. One popular example of this attitude was that of the prime minister, J.C. Smuts, who had described his ideas about a segregated society in a lecture at Oxford in 1929. According to Smuts, segregation would be promoted on the cultural, institutional and territorial levels.<sup>80</sup> In view of rapid urbanisation and the growing political organisation of blacks in the 1940s, ideas like this seemed to be completely unrealistic. Indeed, Smuts gave the address at the end of the 1920s, but published it in 1942 with international distribution. Moreover, parts of the speech were reprinted in the booklet *Investing in Friendship*, published the same year, which included Smuts' most famous speeches.<sup>81</sup> The aim of the publication was to provide "a vision of this great statesman's plan for a better world and his firm belief in the future of the British Commonwealth of Nations".<sup>82</sup> In the light of subsequent developments in the apartheid era, Smuts's ideas were anything but unrealistic.

- 
76. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, Dickson – Brink, 8 August 1941, Education for the Bantu, transcript of talk 6.
77. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, Dickson – Brink, 8 August 1941, Education for the Bantu, transcript of talk 6.
78. Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, pp 43–45.
79. Norval, *Deconstructing Apartheid*, pp 182–189.
80. J.C. Smuts, *Plans for a Better World: Speeches* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1942), pp 70–71; Norval, *Deconstructing Apartheid*, p 33.
81. J. C. Smuts, *Investing in Friendship* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1942).
82. Smuts, *Investing in Friendship*, p 1. On his so-called Native Policy, see pp 6–7.

*Dealing with the present*

To demonstrate the DNA's perception of the socio-economic and political status of blacks in South African society and the specific ways the DNA dealt with the contemporary situation in terms of propaganda, it is informative to consider what was transmitted over the radio as well as what was not transmitted. Political or controversial topics were to be avoided, so the information to be included was censored explicitly for the black target group. Incidents of a political nature, specific subjects or events such as labour disputes, trade unionism or international agreements such as the Atlantic Charter, were ignored in the broadcasts. Below, the discussion on the Atlantic Charter will illustrate the motivation behind the South African administration in its propaganda for black people.

In mid-August 1941, the Atlantic Charter was signed by the US president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the British prime minister, Winston Churchill. The declaration evoked worldwide hopes for a new world order after the war.<sup>83</sup> For black people in South Africa, along with indigenous peoples in former colonies, it was specifically the third paragraph that raised high expectations. This paragraph declared the democratic right for all citizens of any state to choose their own form of government<sup>84</sup> Without doubt, the realisation of this principle was intended neither by the DNA, nor by the BoI. R. Erasmus of the BoI referred to the Atlantic Charter in a letter to D.L. Smit about political topics being aired on the radio:

*I think we should be careful. It might have dangerous repercussions to start talking to Africans on the radio about the Atlantic Charter and politics. It would seem that the writers are anxious to claim a task which at present is the delicate privilege of the*

- 
83. E. Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Belknap Press, Cambridge, 2005), pp 1–11 and 29–30.
84. T. Karis and G. M. Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882–1964, Volume 2, Hope and Challenge. 1935–1952* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1987), Document 29b, "Africans' Claims in South Africa", pp 214–215.

*Department and the Government (emphasis original).*<sup>85</sup>

Erasmus considered the distribution of political ideas through the medium of radio to be the privilege of the white minority government and its administration. But his view by no means included the already proceeding discourse in society. Among the organisations which discussed the Atlantic Charter intensively was the African National Congress (ANC). In December 1942, the ANC established an Atlantic Charter Committee “to go into the question of the Atlantic Charter and to draft a Bill of Rights to be presented to the Peace Conference at the end of the Present War”.<sup>86</sup> Twelve months later, Alfred B. Xuma, president-general of the ANC and secretary-organiser of the Atlantic Charter Committee, emphasised the justification of the charter’s claims in his introduction to the committee’s memorandum:

*We [the ANC] urge that fascism and fascist tendencies are to be uprooted from the face of the earth, and to open way for peace, prosperity and racial good-will, the “Atlantic Charter” must apply to the whole British Empire, the United States of America and to all the nations of the world and their subject peoples. And we urge that South Africa as a prelude to her participation at the Peace Conference in the final destruction of Nazism and Fascism in Europe, must grant the just claims of her non-European peoples to freedom, democracy and human decency, as contained in the following document since charity must begin at home, and if to quote the BBC. Radio News Reel: “We Fight for World Democracy.”<sup>87</sup>*

South Africa was a signatory to the Atlantic Charter but the political direction of the government was rather in the opposition to it, and liberalisation during the war was only temporary. For example, the relaxation of influx control allowed more black people to move into the cities, but the underlying intention was to reduce the labour

---

85. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, R. Erasmus – DL. Smit, 28 September 1943.

86. Karis and Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 2*, Document 28, “Resolutions of the ANC Annual Conference, 20–22 December 1942”, p 199.

87. Karis and Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge, Volume 2*, Document 29b, “Africans’ Claims in South Africa”, pp 214 and 209–210.

shortage in the manufacturing sector.<sup>88</sup> Besides, political decisions in previous decades had already tightened segregation legislation. About two weeks before the ANC launched its Atlantic Charter Committee in December 1942, the Minister of Native Affairs, Deneys Reitz, addressed the members of the Native Representative Council in Pretoria.<sup>89</sup> In this its sixth session, Reitz talked about the “cardinal points” in the Atlantic Charter that he hoped would one day be “secure[d]” for blacks. Ultimately, however, Reitz’s rhetorical acknowledgement of the participation of blacks in the political sphere by describing it in grammatical passive sentences, conformed with the ideology of trusteeship which he had previously defined.<sup>90</sup> Whereas Reitz reduced the importance of the Charter with an emphasis on the alleged backwardness of blacks and the need for guidance from whites, other voices were clearer. In its quarterly *Race Relations*, the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) published an article about the US report on the Atlantic Charter and its impact on African countries. For the authors, it was beyond question that black South Africans were incapable of self-government either then or in the immediate future.<sup>91</sup>

Due to the potential of broadcasting to reach the broader population at least theoretically, radio seemed to have dangerous implications. It was still a new medium and because of the lack of listener research, the effects on the audience were largely unknown although they were estimated to be quite strong. This view is apparent in R. Erasmus’ warning about the possible consequences of airing political topics on the radio, as well as in the DNA’s policy on avoiding topics that might incite resistance against racial discrimination or

---

88. N. Nattrass, “Economic Growth and Transformation in the 1940s”, in Dubow and Jeeves, *South Africa’s 1940s*, pp 20–44.

89. NASA, SAB, HEN 2187 432/1/12, Publicity and Propaganda, vol. 2, *Weekly Newsletter*, no. 160, 13 December 1942, pp 2–3. The council had to advise the government on legislation and other matters regarding the black population.

90. NASA, SAB, HEN 2187 432/1/12, Publicity and Propaganda, vol. 2, *Weekly Newsletter*, no. 160, 13 December 1942, pp 2–3.

91. H.A. Reyburn and M. Webb, “The Atlantic Charter and Africa”, *Race Relations*, 10, 3/ 4, 1943, pp 61–68.

“controversial” subject matter. Additionally, broadcasting advocated adherence to the colonial order in society.<sup>92</sup> The privilege, which Erasmus took for granted, was not the ability or the permission to discuss certain topics, but the possibility that the discussion would influence political decisions and be recognised by the South African administration.

By omitting political and controversial topics in propaganda for blacks, the administration attempted to exclude this part of the society from political participation. This demonstrates what the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano labelled as “coloniality”.<sup>93</sup> It showed the necessity to be a part of the colonisers in order to participate in hegemonic discourse. The staff of the BoI and the DNA used the exclusion of the black population from the(ir) political discourse, to legitimise and ensure a powerful position. From this perspective, the members of the ANC were ignored not because the ANC was (at that time) a very small organisation which did not represent the majority of the black population, but because they were not part of the hegemonic group.

The silence on the Atlantic Charter in DNA propaganda exemplifies the department’s handling of unpopular ideas or topics.<sup>94</sup> In DNA propaganda, the target group usually received only a fraction of the information about a topic. Even non-political talks,

---

92. P.B. Rich, “Race, Science, and the Legitimization of White Supremacy in South Africa, 1902–1940”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 23, 4, 1990, p 666.

93. According to A. Quijano, coloniality is the continuity of the colonial order although political colonialism has been overpowered. See A. Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality”, *Cultural Studies*, 21, 2/3, 2007, pp 168–178.

94. For instance, E.W. Lowe rejected a request from the SABC about talks on music for blacks. His reason was that “such art will come into conflict with the ideals of our Western civilisation”. See NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, E.W. Lowe to native commissioner, Johannesburg, 2 June 1941.



like Fayer's talk about happiness,<sup>95</sup> which will be discussed below, were sometimes so fragmented and disconnected from the target group that it seems doubtful if there was an interested audience at all. The following section of this article demonstrates the opinions of the black people on the broadcasting service that was delivered to them.

### **The response of the audience**

During the war, the SABC itself undertook no systematic listener research. In fact, the corporation commented only roughly on the opinion of white listeners in its annual reports.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, the SABC also had an interest in the response of its black audience. Apart from the information it received from the DNA,<sup>97</sup> the SABC asked the SAIRR for general support and for an evaluation of listeners' response to the services offered.

All in all, the most important enquiries about audience response were those by the DNA; the Broadcast Sub-Committee of the SAIRR; and the BNSC. The results of these research and evaluation attempts differed greatly and illustrated a heterogeneous and critical audience. The conclusions of the internal DNA enquiries were in most cases positive. However, D.L. Smit had not held any interviews with listeners. Instead, the native commissioners and compound managers gave their estimation of the success of the service.<sup>98</sup> As

95. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 2, Talk no. 63, 1 November 1943. To be broadcast 11 November 1943 by radio in the morning and by landline in the evening.

96. SABC Annual Report, 1946, p 11; SABC Annual Report, 1942, p 7.

97. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, R.S. Caprara – D.L. Smit re Telephone Broadcasting to Natives, 8 August 1940.

98. NASA, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, E.W. Lowe – D.L. Smit, re Broadcasting, 11 September 1940; NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, H.C. Lugg – D.L. Smit, re Broadcasting, 11 September 1942. For the reports of the native commissioner on the two internal DNA evaluations of August and December 1942, see NASA, SAB, NTS 9654 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 2; and NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Circular by W.J.G. Mears, re Broadcasts for Natives, Short Report, 18 Decem-

this form of enquiry did not necessarily coincide with the opinion of the target group, the next section of this paper will focus on the scientific inquiries undertaken by the BNSC and the sub-committee of the SAIRR.

*Response to the landline broadcasting service*

From Johannesburg came the first reaction to the broadcasting service and also the initial results of the listener research. A few weeks after the launch of the landline, the local native commissioner, J.M. Brink, declared that the entire DNA propaganda initiative was proving ineffective and had completely failed in its objective of being a measure of counteraction.<sup>99</sup> Both Brink and the anthropologist, A.I. Richards,<sup>100</sup> admitted that the number of people who turned up to listen to the programmes being broadcast over the loudspeakers was disappointingly low.<sup>101</sup> Richards observed this reluctance amongst the target group while undertaking informal research with other members of the BNSC in the Witwatersrand area.<sup>102</sup> Her report of August 1940 was the first scientific and differentiated contribution on how the black people responded.

Between 16 and 27 July 1940, the BNSC conducted an inquiry in three municipal compounds: the Wemmer Hostel; the Van Beek Street Compound; and the City Deep Compound. The compound-

---

ber 1942; and Summary of replies received from native commissioners to same minute, 28 December 1942.

99. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, J.M. Brink – E.W. Lowe, 27 July 1940.
100. Audrey Isabel Richards, an anthropologist, worked in Zambia, Uganda and Northern Transvaal. She lectured at the London School of Economics and then at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 1940, she left for the UK where she worked at the Colonial Office in London. From 1942 to 1944 the Colonial Office was under her direction. See R. Firth, "Audrey Richards 1899–1984", *Man*, News Series, 20, 2, 1985, pp 341–344.
101. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, A.I. Richards – D.L. Smit, including report re Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August 1940.
102. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, Richards – Smit, incl. report on Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August 1940.

dwellers were heterogeneous in education and age but despite that they did not represent the much more diverse (sub-) groups of the black population at large, particularly as all the participants lived in municipal single-sex compounds. Accordingly, Richards emphasised in her report that the results of the BNSC research would merely make a limited contribution as the basis for further surveys.<sup>103</sup> Regarding the interpretation of the collected material, she emphasised the relevance of certain facts as a matter of principle, such as the social and cultural background, gender, age, education, and place of residence, e. g. a mining or municipal compound, an informal settlement, or a township. Although the BNSC interrogation of July 1940 did not meet all these criteria, Richards' report is one of a few existing documents which point out certain aspects of the landline broadcast and different reactions from the target group.

The BNSC research concentrated on the quality of the broadcasts; the rate of speech and their length; the reaction and interest of the black listeners; the extent of comprehension; and finally, the opinion and ideas expressed by the audience. Whereas the first three items were all adjudged to be satisfactory, the interest shown in the content of the various programmes was more difficult for the researchers to gauge. For example, the BNSC noticed that the number of listeners was not nearly as high as was expected. At Wemmer Hostel, for instance, only between 100 and 150 listeners (of the 3 000 hostel dwellers) gathered to listen to the landline broadcast. Moreover, many of them were apparently not interested in other programmes and only arrived to listen to the news.<sup>104</sup> This reaction was in sharp contrast to the affirmative response to the entire programme in the Durban/Pietermaritzburg area, and it suggested that the entertainment part

---

103. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, Richards – Smit, incl. report on Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August 1940.

104. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, Richards – Smit, incl. report on Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August 1940, p 3.

of the programme in Johannesburg was not attractive enough.<sup>105</sup> There was also another possible reason for the small audience: the inappropriate time of the transmission. Graham Ballenden, a member of the BNSC, remarked that in compounds where the inhabitants received a prepared dinner after the day's work, they would have more leisure time in the evenings and the majority would listen regularly to the broadcasts if they were presented at this time. As there was no such broadcasting service at Wemmer Hostel, the DNA felt that time constraints, rather than a lack of interest, might well be the reason for the poor attendance.<sup>106</sup>

For her part, Richards stressed the interest of the audience, particularly in the news inserts. Although she observed that the questions from the listeners were mostly linked to their own community, she emphasised that the target group had no difficulty in understanding the content of the programmes. Problematic, and thus part of the BNSC criticism, was the use of certain terms, like "empire" or the names of countries of the world, without any explanation. During the inquiry the BNSC used also "Listener diaries"<sup>107</sup> as a source of feedback on the broadcasting service. With the information from these diaries and from the interviews conducted, the BNSC concluded that the main problem for the audience was a lack of background knowledge in terms of political and historical events. Richards recommended the introduction of regular meetings so that discussions could be held and questions answered.<sup>108</sup> Finally, the BNSC concluded that the broadcasting service did not meet the

105. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, H.C. Lugg – D.L. Smit, incl. report by Tracey on Broadcasting for Natives, and Extracts from other Reports received on Native Broadcasts, 20 September 1940. Also Native Commissioner, Durban – H.C. Lugg, re Broadcasts to Natives, 26 September 1940.
106. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, G. Ballenden – D. Jenner, re Daily Broadcasts of War News, 1 September 1942.
107. The BCNS selected some black residents to keep diaries on their impressions, ideas, etc. on the broadcasting service during the interrogation period.
108. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, Richards – Smit, incl. report on Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August 1940, p 3.

needs of the population. Independent of the political situation in the Union, the committee emphasised the importance of providing interesting programmes. It was felt that it would be contradictory to avoid political and controversial topics; these were essential if there was to be wider acceptance of the broadcasting service.<sup>109</sup> In this context, it is important to keep in mind that the audience was often quite suspicious about this new service:

*Several uneducated natives said in private that they knew the Government would not be giving the people news without some ulterior motive. Educated ones were reported to have stayed away because they believed the institution of the service was designed to prevent natives from getting the full truth.*<sup>110</sup>

Richards interpreted the negative response to the broadcasting service as the result of the poor promotion of the new service in Johannesburg before its introduction.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, the launch of the landline in Durban was given much more publicity with in the *Natal Mercury* and in *Ilanga Lase Natal*. This meant that the audience in that area had been adequately informed about the conception of the programme.<sup>112</sup> In Johannesburg, according to Richards, the acceptance of the service was also compromised because it lacked a “personal note” such as an address by a government official to welcome the new audience.<sup>113</sup> What Richards, or rather the BNSC, neglected to mention in their report was that perhaps the political

- 
109. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, Richards – Smit, incl. report on Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August 1940, p 5.
  110. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, Richards – Smit, incl. report on Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August 1940, p 5.
  111. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, Richards – Smit, incl. report on Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August 1940, p 6.
  112. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, H. Kuper, W.B. Vilakazi and E.O.J. Westphal, Preliminary Report on Broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, 2 March 1943, p 4.
  113. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, Richards – Smit, incl. report on Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August 1940, p 6.

situation in the Union of South Africa might have been the greater obstacle and enough to stay distrustful.

In her report, Richards demanded regular analysis of audience response and recommended launching a committee to prepare the programme. She proposed that the committee consist of representatives from different institutions and organisations such as compound managers, the welfare department, the Gamma Sigma Clubs,<sup>114</sup> and other educational agencies and interested individuals, including educated black people.<sup>115</sup>

D.L. Smit, in contrast, held the general opinion that most black people would be disinterested in news of the ongoing war. Hence, his reaction to Richards' report was somewhat reluctant. Although he thanked her for her efforts, he stated that further endeavours for the black population as a propaganda target group would be useless:

*One difficulty about the whole business [the dissemination of war news] is that the Natives generally are apathetic in so far as the war is concerned, and this particularly applies to the uncivilized Native. We have, as you know, made every effort to meet the position ... but I am told that generally throughout the Reserves the tribal Natives do not bother much about the war and that the stories of enemy propaganda among them have been exaggerated ... I feel that my Department really cannot do more than we are doing.<sup>116</sup>*

Richards tried to strengthen her argument in the ensuing correspondence with Smit, but he remained sceptical about the broadcasting service.<sup>117</sup>

114. In the 1920s, Dr F.B. Bridgman and Rev. Ray E. Phillips founded the Gamma Sigma Clubs, where black intellectuals could meet for discussions. See B. Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality* (ABC Press, Cape Town, 2000), p 123.
115. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, Richards – Smit, incl. report on Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August 1940, pp 6–7.
116. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, D.L. Smit – A.I. Richards, re War News for the Natives, 21 August 1940.
117. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, A.I. Richards – D.L. Smit re War News for the Natives, 23 September 1940.

Contrary to critical statements and positions in Johannesburg, the chief native commissioner in Pietermaritzburg, H.C. Lugg, was very optimistic about the broadcasting service and its acceptance in the region.<sup>118</sup> For Lugg, this success was due to the efforts of Hugh Tracey, branch manager at the SABC studio in Durban.<sup>119</sup> Tracey, one of the most renowned musicologists in southern Africa at that time, noted, similar to the BNSC, that there should be an interesting and diverse programme which would “apply the psychological aspects of broadcasting to natives as seriously as to Europeans”.<sup>120</sup> Richards’ request to bear in mind the interests of the audience and their socio-political background, was something Tracey had apparently been aware of in Durban/Pietermaritzburg. In a memorandum about the broadcasting service for blacks, he declared the situation of the black people in South Africa and their attitudes as follows:

*They cannot be expected to associate themselves enthusiastically with the conflict between democracy and authoritarianism, as in all other departments the policy of the ruling bodies in South Africa is to refuse democracy to the native races (while giving lip service to its ideals) and to rule them under authoritarian principles. The outcome of the world war, therefore, for the native people must resolve merely into the probability of a more or a less benevolent authority over them.*<sup>121</sup>

Accordingly, Tracey implemented a more open and integrative conception of the service in Durban.<sup>122</sup> Aside from the assistance of the studio staff, he also had the support of the Zulu Society, primarily

- 
118. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, H.C. Lugg – D.L. Smit, re Broadcasting, 11 September 1940.
  119. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, E.W. Lowe – D.L. Smit, re Broadcasting, 11 September 1940.
  120. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, H.C. Lugg – D.L. Smit, incl. report by Tracey on Landline Broadcasting for Natives, 20 September 1940.
  121. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Lugg – Smit, incl. report by Tracey on Landline Broadcasting, 20 September 1940.
  122. For the initial positive responses, see NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Lugg – Smit, incl. report by Tracey on Landline Broadcasting, 20 September 1940; and Extracts from Reports received on Native Broadcasts, native commissioner, Durban to Lugg, 26 September 1940.

through the former treasurer and secretary of the society, Charles J. Mpanza. From July 1940 Mpanza was in charge of translation and made the announcement of the Zulu broadcast.<sup>123</sup> Over the next years, King Edward Masinga, a former teacher, also helped to shape the Durban programme to a substantial extent.<sup>124</sup>

Altogether, the DNA ignored most of Tracey's and the BNSC's recommendations and merely made a few minor alterations, adding more music to news and talks, for instance.

*The (inconvertible) producers of propaganda and the (critical) target group*

Early in 1943, the anthropologist Dr Hilda Kuper<sup>125</sup> together with B. Wallet Vilakazi<sup>126</sup> and Ernst O. J. Westphal,<sup>127</sup> both lecturers at the Bantu Studies Department at the University of the Witwatersrand, implemented a second investigation of the reception of the broadcasting service.<sup>128</sup> Once again, the research focused on the transmission area of Johannesburg.<sup>129</sup> The inquiry was in the name of the Broadcast Sub-Committee of the SAIRR, integrated in the local advisory council of the SABC.

- 
123. NASA, SAB, NTS 9637 520/400/3/1, Translation of War News Bulletins, Accounts Portion, H.C. Lugg – D.L. Smit, re War News, 6 June 1940.
  124. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, B.W. Martin – D.L. Smit, re Wireless Broadcasts in Zulu, 18 February 1943; <http://www.ukhozifm.co.za/portal/site/ukhozifm/aboutus/> (Accessed 28 July 2011); SABC Annual Report, 1944, p 18; and Gunner, "Wrestling With the Present", pp 223–224.
  125. For further bibliographical notes, see W.D. Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect Interpreters. South Africa's Anthropologists 1920–1990* (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1987), pp 89–90 and 121–123.
  126. Benedict Wallet Vilakazi was a lecturer, author and poet. See Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals*, pp 87–112.
  127. For further bibliographical notes, see D. Rycroft, "Professor Ernst Oswald Johannes Westphal, 1919–1990", *African Languages and Cultures*, 5, 1, 2007, pp 91–95.
  128. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Kuper, Vilakazi and Westphal, Preliminary Report on Broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, 2 March 1943, p 4.
  129. In the other transmission areas, only the DNA made some enquiries.



The three members of the Sub-Committee of the SAIRR completed their report in March 1943.<sup>130</sup> In September, the daily newspaper *The Star* asked the DNA for comment on the report because they intended to publish a summary written by H. Kuper.<sup>131</sup> The requested statement was compiled by R. Erasmus of the BoI, who assisted C. Faye of the DNA with the broadcasting service at that time.<sup>132</sup> One month later, the editor of *The Star* approached the DNA for a second commentary, this time on its impressions of Kuper's manuscript for the article, which had already debated some of the comments made by Erasmus.<sup>133</sup> This statement was given by Faye.<sup>134</sup> Kuper's article "The Broadcasts to Natives: Impressions and Opinions of some of the Listeners",<sup>135</sup> was published without further alteration in *The Star* in December 1943. Although Kuper had considered some of Erasmus' remarks, her article was by no means an example of rigid self-censorship to make it suitable for the BoI or the DNA. The following section will focus on these documents and demonstrates the response to the broadcasting service in 1943. Furthermore, this section suggests the intentions and motivations of the institutions involved and the responsible individuals in the Sub-Committee of the SAIRR, the SABC, the BoI, and the DNA. In the scope of this article, only a few aspects will be singled out for discussion, namely the target group; the content of the broadcasts; and the response of the audience.

- 
130. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Kuper, Vilakazi and Westphal, Preliminary Report on Broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, 2 March 1943.
  131. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, B. Bennett of *The Star* – D.L. Smit, 25 September 1943.
  132. NASA SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, R. Erasmus – D.L. Smit, 23 September 1943.
  133. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 2, F.R. Paver – D.L. Smit, 15 November 1943.
  134. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 2, C. Faye, "The Native Broadcasts, by Dr Hilda Kuper", 29 November 1943.
  135. Kuper, "Broadcasts to Natives" in: *The Star*, 15. December 1943.

One important point in several discussions was the definition of the target group. Although differing in detail, the SAIRR report and Kuper's commentary raised this question too. Both documents stated that the majority of educated blacks refused to listen to the broadcasts in the vernacular languages and that they saw the service as "segregation in the air"<sup>136</sup> and therefore preferred to listen to the news presentations for whites.<sup>137</sup> As a consequence of this attitude, the defined target group would be the "African masses"; the "semi-literate and illiterate African adult".<sup>138</sup> Independent of the target group, the BNSC and Tracey had pointed out from the beginning that the programming had to be interesting for the audience.<sup>139</sup> And even in the third year of the service, the Sub-Committee of the SAIRR criticised it for its inappropriate content:

*Music and folklore appeal to the people – but the aim of the present broadcast, introduced at the present crisis in world history – is not to repeat tribal culture, but rather to extend it. Political events, war news, labour movements, the Atlantic Charter for Africa, these are the events that concern the African. The African masses have not yet been blunted by the use of slogans and isms. They are eager to understand, not merely to follow!*<sup>140</sup>

Like Richards in August 1940, the Sub-Committee of the SAIRR demanded the inclusion of political topics in the programming<sup>141</sup>

- 
136. Kuper, "Broadcasts to Natives" in: *The Star*, 15. December 1943.. The phrase was only quoted in the article.
  137. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Kuper, Vilakazi and Westphal, Preliminary Report on Broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, 2 March 1943, p 4.
  138. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Kuper, Vilakazi and Westphal, Preliminary Report on Broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, 2 March 1943, p 3.
  139. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Richards – Smit, incl. report, Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August 1940, p 5.
  140. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Kuper, Vilakazi and Westphal, Preliminary Report on Broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, 2 March 1943, p 4. This statement was not in the article.
  141. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Richards – Smit, incl. report, Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August 1940, p 5.

which was exactly what the BoI and the DNA was trying to avoid.<sup>142</sup>

As already mentioned in the context of the Atlantic Charter, R. Erasmus felt that there might well be “dangerous implications” if political topics were aired. Considering the repeated criticism, Erasmus’ response questioned whether the BOI and the DNA wanted to offer an interesting programme at all. In the DNA, it was C. Faye who replied to the committee’s statements. His reaction differed in so far as he referred to Kuper’s article and not to the original report. Kuper did not argue directly for political topics but provided some examples of what the listeners wanted, criticising the use of the broadcasting service as a propaganda instrument for military recruitment, as well as its inappropriate and uninteresting presentation.<sup>143</sup> Altogether Faye responded more to certain points made in the article rather than to the main arguments. For him, neither the opinion of one listener that the broadcasting service amounted to “segregation in the air”, nor Kuper’s introductory phrase that the response of the audience varied “from a mild enthusiasm to positive hostility” seemed to be justified.<sup>144</sup> Ignoring the actual criticism, Faye felt that there was a “spirit of ingratitude for what is being done for the Natives”, and merely listed different aspects of the programming to prove Kuper wrong.<sup>145</sup> Notable was his definition of the main target group. For Faye, the broadcasting service was intended primarily for the “rural Native”, while the “Natives who are in large compounds, whose work is in towns and industries”<sup>146</sup> would be the second target

---

142. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, R. Erasmus – D.L. Smit, 23 September 1943.

143. Kuper, “Broadcasts to Natives” in: *The Star*, 15. December 1943.

144. Kuper, “Broadcasts to Natives” in: *The Star*, 15. December 1943; NASA SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13 National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 2, C. Faye, “The Native Broadcasts, by Dr Hilda Kuper”, 29 November 1943.

145. NASA SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13 National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 2, C. Faye, “The Native Broadcasts, by Dr Hilda Kuper”, 29 November 1943, p 2.

146. NASA SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13 National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 2, C. Faye, “The Native Broadcasts, by Dr Hilda Kuper”, 29 November 1943, p 2.

group. Contrary to Fayes' priority for listeners in the countryside, the landline was unfortunately restricted to the urban areas. Besides, the DNA's evaluation was that the quality of the wireless reception in the rural areas was often too poor to be effective. As for wage workers, most employers did not give their employees permission to listen to the service.<sup>147</sup> The issue of technical problems, and the lack of effort in solving these issues when it came to the service offered to black listeners, were again raised by the Sub-Committee of the SAIRR.<sup>148</sup>

The Broadcast Sub-Committee also articulated some new demands. An example was the call for the broader integration of black people in the preparation of programmes and in the general organisation of the broadcasting service.<sup>149</sup> This suggestion was rejected by the SABC but instead it recommended setting up a special committee to organise the broadcast service for blacks,<sup>150</sup> which was exactly what the BNSC had called for three years earlier.<sup>151</sup> However, the SABC's recommendation did not materialise. The question remains: What did the listeners think about the programme which, according to Faye, addressed a rural audience, especially in view of the fact that it was mainly the urban population who were able to access this broadcasting service?

- 
147. Reports from the native commissioner in reply to W.J.G. Mears' circular of 18 December 1942 for an internal evaluation. See NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. I.
  148. Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand (hereafter UWL), AD 843B/61.3, Records of the SAIRR, vol. 1, Broadcasting and Films, Minutes of a meeting held at the SABC on 15 March 1943; NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Kuper, Vilakazi and Westphal, Preliminary Report on Broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, 2 March 1943. Suggestions arising from the report, item 1.
  149. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Kuper, Vilakazi and Westphal, Preliminary Report on Broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, 2 March 1943. Suggestions arising from the report, items 6, 7, 9.
  150. UWL, AD 843B/61.3, Records of the SAIRR, vol. 1, Broadcasting and Films, Minutes of a meeting held at the SABC on 15 March 1943.
  151. NASA, SAB, NTS 9653 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 1, Richards – Smit, incl. report Preliminary Inquiry into Reception of Government War News Service, 17 August, pp 6–7.

The audience's response, according to the Sub-Committee's inquiry, was similar to the comments provided soon after the introduction of the landline. The listeners remained critical of the fact that information provided in the news was out of date. On the day of Madagascar's capitulation, for example, this information was not transmitted on the service for blacks. One of the listeners remarked:

*Unimportant matters are spoken while big things seem to be forgotten or hidden – why do they only tell us these things when Europeans see them in the papers; what is the truth?*<sup>152</sup>

The broadcasting service was introduced because the DNA *News of the War* bulletin was for the most part out of date,<sup>153</sup> so the problem was not only the date of transmission, but the reduced amount of information in the broadcasts. This was again criticised by the interviewees. In their opinion, the government introduced the broadcasting service mainly to have another propaganda instrument for recruiting, instead of giving access, for example to more information on education, or for entertainment.<sup>154</sup> The difference in content and presentation of the news for black and white target groups meant that black people remained suspicious. Moreover, the audience complained about the moralising and dismissive nature of the news and talks, as well as about paternalistic, immature content in the broadcasts which showed anything but respect for the target group. In this context, lullabies, drums and the roar of lions were just a few of the pejorative examples given.<sup>155</sup> The Sub-Committee's report cited one listener who criticised the Sotho broadcast for its

---

152. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Kuper, Vilakazi and Westphal, Preliminary report on broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, 2 March 1943, p 5.

153. NASA, TAB, KJB 496 N9/13/3, Johannesburg Broadcast Service to Natives, Report of conference on enemy propaganda etc. Johannesburg, 5 June 1940, pp 1–2.

154. The DNA ended its transmission of recruiting appeals in 1943, but still broadcast recruiting material as an "occasional news item", NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, R. Erasmus – D.L. Smit, 23 September 1943.

155. SABC SA, Black Broadcasting, Audio-clip, 1/63(42)CD, 29 September 1942.

poor presentation, weak argumentation and emphasis on military recruitment:

*A number of Africans commented on the patronising tone of the broadcasts. This was naturally voiced most clearly by the more educated. One of those who wrote on the Sesotho broadcast of the 24th October said: "Item 2: Broadcast by two soldiers giving their reasons for joining. If propaganda, which seems to be the thing aimed at here, is to be effective something less childish and unconvincing will have to be provided e.g. One speaker said that he had been taught from his childhood to hate the devil and when he heard that Hitler was like the devil he decided to enlist".<sup>156</sup>*

This kind of criticism was not only presented by the SubCommittee of the SAIRR. Similar examples were noted by the National Anti-Waste Organisation (NAWO) in its report on the Johannesburg programme.<sup>157</sup> The NAWO remarked that the audience complained about the different content in the news presented for blacks and that for whites, along with the "stupid fashion" and "dull" presentation.<sup>158</sup> NAWO also mentioned that the audience felt that "parables and 'word pictures' and the allegorical approach [was] unnecessary and boring".<sup>159</sup> This misconception of the broadcasts was also in relation to talks. Here, the Sub-Committee's report noticed that "[i]n all the talks the moral note seems to be strong. Sometimes the moral misses

- 
156. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Kuper, Vilakazi and Westphal, Preliminary report on broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, 2 March 1943, p 5.
  157. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, B. Joel – C. Faye, incl. report (of 4 November 1942 B. Joel to J. H. Dobson, re Anti-Waste Broadcasts to Natives), 19 January 1943.
  158. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, B. Joel – C. Faye, incl. report (of 4 November 1942 B. Joel to J. H. Dobson, re Anti-Waste Broadcasts to Natives), 19 January 1943, p 2; NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Kuper, Vilakazi and Westphal, Preliminary report on broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, 2 March 1943, pp 5–6.
  159. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, B. Joel – C. Faye, incl. report (of 4 November 1942 B. Joel to J. H. Dobson, re Anti-Waste Broadcasts to Natives), 19 January 1943, p 2.

its mark.”<sup>160</sup> The listeners criticised “that the announcer ‘talked down’ and used crude propaganda”.<sup>161</sup>

The talk C. Faye wrote for transmission on 11 November 1943, exemplifies this moral indoctrination of the broadcasts.<sup>162</sup> In contrast to war-related topics, the subject Faye had chosen for the talk was happiness. After a short introduction, the listeners received the information that:

*Happiness is a blessing bestowed upon mankind. Other boons bestowed upon mankind there are too, of course. A prudent person will recognise that each blessing, whatever it may be, has its own purpose in human living. Noticeable about Happiness is that it is truly good only when it is free from evildoing or self-seeking (selfishness); for true Happiness cannot be gained from mere greediness or from the bringing of pain (Zulu, ubublungu) to others.*<sup>163</sup>

In addition to his instructive explanation, Faye used poems and proverbs from various sources to give descriptions about this “true” and “enduring” happiness. To quote lyrics or proverbs would not have been problematic, but the way he introduced and interpreted them reflected the idea of the superiority of the speaker/author and an alleged ignorant audience. This became very transparent because Faye did not mention the authors’ names. Richard Chenevix Trench, a poet born in Dublin, was simply introduced as “a Briton” and the American essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson became

- 
160. NASA SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13 National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, Vol. I, 2. March 1943, H. Kuper, W. B. Vilakazi and E. O. J. Westphal: Preliminary report on broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, p 5.
  161. NASA SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13 National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, Vol. I, 2. March 1943, H. Kuper, W. B. Vilakazi and E. O. J. Westphal: Preliminary report on broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, p 4.
  162. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, Vol. 2, Talk no. 63, 1 November 1943, to be broadcast on 11 November 1943, in the morning by radio and by landline in the evening.
  163. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, Vol. 2, Talk no. 63, 1 November 1943, to be broadcast on 11 November 1943, in the morning by radio and by landline in the evening.

an “American seer”.<sup>164</sup> Of course Faye did not represent the DNA as an institution, and the political opinions of DNA officials were not necessarily homogenous.<sup>165</sup> Indeed, Faye received quite a critical response to his talk. The secretary for Native Affairs, D.L. Smit, wrote with reference to Faye’s talk:

*[W]hile I have no objection at all to the sentiments he [Faye] explores, it was never the intention that our broadcasts should develop into Sunday school lessons. The object was to give short, lucid talks on the war and any other items relating to our administration that might be considered to be of sufficient importance ... Colonel Martin [acting chief native commissioner, Natal] tells me there have been a number of instances in which they have felt that the broadcasts were not serving the purpose for which they were intended. He went so far as to say that he thought we were making ourselves look ridiculous in the eyes of the people.*<sup>166</sup>

Despite the fact that there was clearly a range of different opinions on the broadcasts among individual staff members of the DNA, it was mainly Carl Faye and Rudolph Erasmus who were responsible for the preparation of the programmes that were presented to black audiences, not D.L. Smit or Colonel Martin. Indeed, there were only a few people involved during the war, so these few had the opportunity to transmit their ideas via the broadcasting service. The inquiries, comments, and suggestions from outside organisations or individuals, not to mention the statements from black people themselves, show that there were alternative opinions. Unfortunately, people with a more innovative concepts were for the most part not in the position to implement their ideas. In general, the DNA had no interest in differentiated listener research, and was not prepared to entertain the idea of drawing black people into the conception and implementation of the service to a greater extent and giving them equal responsibilities.

---

164. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, Vol. 2, Talk no. 63, 1 November 1943, to be broadcast on 11 November 1943, in the morning by radio and by landline in the evening.

165. Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience*, pp 64–65.

166. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 2, D.L. Smit re Broadcasts, 9 November 1943.



Instead, the DNA constructed propaganda for its own target group. Generally speaking, the process of propaganda production, distribution, and reception reflects the structure of a society.<sup>167</sup> In the period under discussion this was explicit, for instance, in the position of the employees in the DNA and the SABC as well as, more generally, the access to media and the use of media. Certainly, access to media neither implies interest from the addressee nor a specific use of this media. Furthermore, a relatively subordinate position at the workplace does not necessarily mean that there is no possibility of influencing the process of production, distribution, or reception. Regarding the position of the employee, the DNA hired blacks for translation purposes and the announcement of the broadcasts. Even so, the audience claimed that the language “lacks [the] animation of true African speech. [Besides,] the announcer [has not] the fluency of an African orator – as one man said, ‘He sounds like an interpreter.’”<sup>168</sup> Possibly the translators and announcers wanted to clarify to the audience that the information they offered did not represent their own view and that they had not written the scripts themselves.<sup>169</sup> If so, this would have been subversive from the government’s perspective, but it is impossible to verify this today. The ethnologist Nicholas J. van Warmelo<sup>170</sup> informed the DNA in May 1945 that on the Xhosa broadcast, before reading the news, the announcer said: “You will never hear the truth about the war over the radio.”<sup>171</sup> Indeed, there

---

167. Hall and Hobson (eds), *Culture, Media, Language*, pp 129–130.

168. NASA, SAB, NTS 9655 520/400/13, National Broadcast for Natives from the Studios of the SABC, vol. 1, Kuper, Vilakazi and Westphal, Preliminary report on broadcasting for Africans in the Transvaal, 2 March 1943, p 5.

169. The South African Historian P.S. Lekgoathi describes for example in his article on North Sotho radio that some announcers subverted the control system on radio by using particular words, expressions, etc. See Lekgoathi, “Vernacular Radio”, pp 584–588.

170. Van Warmelo was the chief ethnologist in the DNA from 1930 to 1969; S.P. Lekgoathi, “Colonial? Experts, Local Interlocutors, Informants and the Making of an Archive on the Transvaal Ndebele”, *Journal of African History*, 50, 2009, p 62.

171. NASA, SAB, NTS 9718 829/400, Native Broadcast, N.J. van Warmelo – D.L. Smit, re Appointment of Translators and Announcers, Grahamstown, 16 April 1945.

had never been a regular control over radio transmission.<sup>172</sup> However, in May 1945, D.L. Smit could respond to the ongoing discussion in the DNA about censorship: “In the present circumstances we need not worry about this.”<sup>173</sup>

Right from the start, the DNA had scheduled the broadcasting service as a war measure,<sup>174</sup> and after the war it announced that there would be no further need for the service. Instead the DNA remarked that it would develop a “much more comprehensive and efficient scheme for giving Africans a radio service.”<sup>175</sup>

Not even officially did the DNA intend to provide objective information to educate or entertain the black audience. Its objective was to counteract so-called subversive activities, while offering a minimum of information about the war. On 13 October 1945, the DNA and the SABC cooperated on air in their final broadcast for the time being. Thereafter, the SABC continued the broadcasting service for blacks in a reduced version three times a week in the morning.<sup>176</sup> During the Second World War, the DNA, the BoI, and the SABC had used the opportunity to gain experience and to improve their skills in this new medium. These experiences grew substantially, as the collection, definition and production of supposedly adequate broadcasting material for a black target group.

## Conclusion

The DNA used propaganda for constructing a glorified past of warriors, an image which suited the interests of the government and

---

172. NASA, SAB, NTS 9654 520/400/9, War News, Broadcasting to Natives, Landline, Acting Divisional Engineer – Divisional Engineer, SABC, 12 October 1944.

173. NASA, SAB, NTS 9718 829/400, Native Broadcast, Internal Notice, DNA, Appointment of Translators and Announcers, Grahamstown, 21 May 1945.

174. NASA, SAB, NTS 9654 520/400/9, War News, Telephone Broadcasting to Natives, vol. 2, D.L. Smit – H.J. Lenton, 28 April 1941.

175. SABC Annual Report, 1945, p 10.

176. NASA, SAB, NTS 9654 520/400/9, War News. Broadcasting to Natives. Landline, vol. 3, p.p. W.J.G. Mears – L.C. Burke, re Equipment, 12 November 1945.

the military during the war. They emphasised progress – but only under the guidance tutelage and continued hegemony of the white population. Independent of different views within the DNA, the department helped to maintain the colonial order in society.

Of course, some listeners' responses to the broadcasting service were affirmative, like some reactions to the Rediffusion System in the 1950s or Radio Bantu in the 1960s.<sup>177</sup> In this context, Hall's remark should be mentioned again regarding the process of encoding and decoding, and his description of the “negotiated version” of decoding, which contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements:

*it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions ... while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule.*<sup>178</sup>

Following Hall, there should be various ways to decode a message, although this process would be also part of a “dominant [but not determined] cultural order”.<sup>179</sup> Thus, the listener could decode the message more or less in his or her preferred manner. Aside from this process, the introduction of the broadcasting service created new job opportunities for some people (at that time, only for black men) to improve their media skills, although this was only in lowly jobs.

In general, there were alternative ideas regarding the broadcasting service, but the DNA did not change its conception and implementation to a substantial extent. The department remained largely disconnected from its audience, and it failed in two important ways. First, it did not reach the “African masses” with radio, the new mass media. Second, it did not succeed in its attempts to exclude the black population from political participation.

---

177. “30 000 Listen to Location Radio Service“, *The Star*, 4 August 1943; Hamm, “The Constant Companion of Man”; Lekgoathi, “Vernacular Radio”, p 538.

178. Hall and Hobson (eds), *Culture, Media, Language*, p 137.

179. Hall and Hobson (eds), *Culture, Media, Language*, pp 134–137.

As shown, the enquiries that were launched on the success of the broadcasting service indicated that there was a rather critical audience. The reports compiled demonstrated that the target audience were discussing the service amongst themselves. If political participation is not limited to the field of party politics, but also seen in everyday conversation, these debates, as well as the interviews conducted, represent a different form of political participation.<sup>180</sup> Although the majority of black people had no access to the broadcasting service, or remained suspicious of it, the introduction of the service raised societal discussion. It is suggested here that even if it was definitively not intended by the government, the transmission of separate broadcasting services to blacks and to whites had an effect on the population at large and their approach to political participation. To illustrate this, it would be interesting to analyse everyday conversations, along with discussions in other organisations; these would certainly give a more differentiated idea about the link between media and politicisation in South Africa of the 1940s.

### **Abstract**

One year after the Union of South Africa declared war on Germany in 1939, the South African government began to use radio broadcasting to a black target group as a medium for propaganda. In the winter of 1940, the Department of Native Affairs (DNA), responsible for transmitting propaganda to blacks, together with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the Department for Post and Telegraphs, launched the first broadcasting service for blacks in Johannesburg. The broadcast, which was initially only transmitted via telephone lines, differed considerably from the broadcast for whites. Based on extensive archival research, this article describes the conception and implementation of that broadcasting service along

---

180. In his analysis on mass media and democracy, the German historian F. Bösch suggests that the media plays a role in stimulating democratisation when people engage in discussions about politics. See Bösch, "Katalysator der Demokratisierung?", in Bösch and Frei, *Medialisierung und Demokratie*, p 31.

with the specific programming the DNA and the SABC introduced for black listeners. Because it includes enquiries on the reception of the service at that time, this article offers new insights into South African media history.

The broadcasting service for blacks during the Second World War clearly reflected the white producers' stereotypical conception of blacks. It was designed to assert the hegemonic position of the white minority and legitimise and help to maintain the colonial order. However, the black audience did not prove to be the passive, grateful recipients of carefully selected information that producers expected them to be. Instead, several independent enquiries on audience response to the broadcasting service, for example from the Bantu News Service Committee of the Witwatersrand and the Sub-Committee of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), suggested a rather critical response from the target audience.

**Keywords:** Second World War; Department of Native Affairs; South African Broadcasting Corporation; radio; propaganda; segregation; colonial order; racism; media history.

### Opsomming

Een jaar nadat die Unie van Suid-Afrika oorlog teen Duitsland verklaar het, het Suid-Afrika se regering begin om radio-uitsending as 'n medium vir propaganda na 'n swart teikengroet aan te wend. In die winter van 1940 het die Departement van Naturelle Sake (DNS), wat in beheer was van propaganda vir die swart bevolking, gepaard met die Suid-Afrikaanse Uitsaaikorporasie (SAUK) en die Departement Pos- en Telegraafdienste die eerste uitsaaidiens vir die Swart bevolking in Johannesburg van stapel gestuur. Die program, wat aanvanklik slegs via telefoonlyn versend is, het aansienlike van die programme vir witmense verskil. Gebaseer op uitvoerige argiefnavorsing, beskryf hierdie artikel die stigting en implementering van daardie uitsaaidiens

gepaard met die spesifieke program die DNS en die SAUK wat vir swart luisteraars ingestel is. Insluitend navrae oor die ontvangs van die diens destyds, bied die artikel nuwe insigte in die Suid-Afrikaanse mediageskiedenis.

Die uitsaaidiens vir swartmense tydens die Tweede Wêreldoorlog weerspieël duidelik die wit aanbieders se stereotipe begrip van swartmense. Gevolglik het die diens die hegemonesiese posisie van die wit minderheid onderhou en dus die koloniale orde in die gemeenskap geregverdig en meegehelp om dit te onderhou. Die swart luisteraars was egter nie die soort passiewe dankbare ontvangers van die geselekteerde inligting soos sommige aanbieders verwag het hulle sou wees nie. Intendeel, etlike navra oor die ontvang van die uitsendingsdiens, byvoorbeeld by die Bantoe Nuusdienskomitee van die Witwatersrand of die Onderkomitee van die Suid-Afrikaanse Instituut van Rasseverhoudings (SAIRV), het op 'n heel kritiese respons van die luisteraars gedui.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Tweede Wêreldoorlog; Departement Naturelle Sake; Suid-Afrikaanse Uitsaaikorporasie; radio; propaganda; werwing; segregasie; koloniale orde; rasisme; mediageskiedenis.