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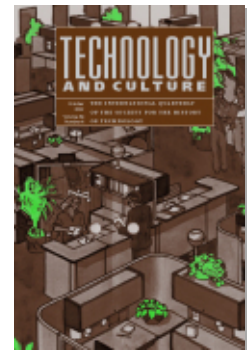
*Powerful Frequencies: Radio, State Power, and the Cold War  
in Angola, 1931–2002* by Marissa J. Moorman (review)

Vincent Kuitenbrouwer

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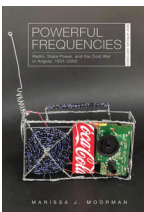
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**Powerful Frequencies: Radio, State Power,  
and the Cold War in Angola, 1931–2002**

By Marissa J. Moorman. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019. Pp. 240.



The cover of Marissa Moorman's most recent book shows a wire-and-bead-art radio-receiving set she bought in Johannesburg. It illustrates her approach to radio, which she considers to be more than a technology—her study shows that radio is a set of practices that is used to mobilize support for political views. In her study of the history of radio broadcasting in Angola, she discusses different political contexts in which radio was used by different actors to project their respective views on the

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future of the country, which turned from a Portuguese overseas territory into an independent state in 1974 and from then on was dominated by elites originating in the resistance movement *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA). This book convincingly shows that radio was a vital instrument for propaganda, used both by those in power and those challenging the political status quo. Crucially, Moorman argues that throughout this period, the political rulers of Angola were “nervous” about the radio broadcasts of their opponents.

In order to write this history, which spans seventy years, Moorman has uncovered a great variety of sources, many of which have not been used previously by academic researchers. Her main discovery was the documents of *Radio Nacional Angola* (RNA), which she found in the building of the broadcaster. In addition, she visited the archives of the secret police of the autocratic Salazar regime, which contain many files on radio broadcasting in the colonial age and the liberation war (1961–1974). These paper archives, however, have many gaps which Moorman has sought to fill with almost fifty interviews with actors who were directly involved in this history. Moorman also discusses other media sources, such as films, to think about the societal meaning of radio in Angola. With her thoroughly researched study, Moorman makes an important contribution to the field of radio history, which contains few publications on radio broadcasting in sub-Saharan Africa.

Moorman starts her book with the advent of radio broadcasting in Angola in the 1930s, which was then part of the Portuguese empire. At the time radio was seen as an inherently modern medium, and as such mainly suited for the white elites. This notion was challenged during the liberation war, when various resistance movements, including the MPLA, started to use the wireless to make propaganda for their own purposes in the 1960s. As it was too dangerous to do this within the borders of Angola, these anticolonial programs were broadcasted from other countries on the African continent. The MPLA resorted to Congo Brazzaville, where the French had left a powerful transmitter they had used for international broadcasting during World War II. This form of “guerrilla radio” contained glorifications of revolutionary violence, and those who clandestinely listened to it considered that to be an act of resistance in itself. Moorman shows that the Portuguese authorities monitored these broadcasts closely and developed a counterpropaganda strategy. The pinnacle of this attempt was *Voz de Angola*, a station that combined psychological warfare with popular music to sugarcoat its propaganda.

With the collapse of the Salazar regime, Angola became independent and the MPLA rose to power. The new regime took over the existing Portuguese broadcasting infrastructure and used it to cement its own rule through the RNA station, which had a monopoly on radio broadcasting. After a failed coup in 1977, the MPLA became more ideologically outspoken, and as a result RNA propagated a socialist view on the future of Angola. In this period, music also played an important role and RNA banned artists who were critical

of the MPLA regime in an act of “sonic censorship” (p. 113). In addition, RNA was challenged by broadcasters, outside and inside Angola, which led to various radio wars. Externally, the main opponent of the Angolan regime was the Apartheid regime in South Africa, and RNA presented itself as a bulwark against white supremacist rule in the region. Internally, the MPLA was challenged by the radio station of União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA), a former ally in the liberation struggle that started a civil war that lasted into the late 1990s. In her epilogue, Moorman shows that in the last two decades the media landscape in Angola on paper has become more pluriform, as RNA lost its broadcasting monopoly. In reality, however, elites with close ties to the MPLA still control most of the mass media and dissidents are still repressed. Considering the history of radio in Angola, this is hardly surprising.

VINCENT KUITENBROUWER

Vincent Kuitenbrouwer is senior lecturer in the History Department at the University of Amsterdam. He specializes in the history of Dutch international broadcasting. His publications include “Radio as a Tool of Empire: Intercontinental Broadcasting from the Netherlands to the Dutch East Indies in the 1920s and 1930s” (*Itinerario*, 2016).

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