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The Return of the Local: Community Radio as Dialogic and Participatory

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Introduction

*XK FM*, a unique community radio station for the !Xô and Khwe communities of Platfontein, in Kimberley was established in August 2000 as a protégé of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Its broadcasting licence, issued by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) and renewable after every five years states that !Xôntali, Khwedam and Afrikaans are the languages of broadcasting (Mhlanga 2009a, 2010b). The first two languages belong to the 12th group of languages that are identified by the Pan-South African Language Board (PANSLAB) as the languages of the San people. However, for the San people only one radio station was established – *XK FM*, a community radio station for the !Xô and Khwe. When compared to all the other public radio stations that are owned and controlled by the SABC this radio station is strikingly unique. And in terms of its remit it is limited to serving the !Xô and Khwe communities; thus implying that this radio station remains fully answerable to a public broadcaster, SABC, while doubling as a community radio station (Mhlanga 2009, 2010a, 2010b). The Group Executive News and Current Affairs, Dr Snuki Zikalala emphasised its uniqueness by stressing that ‘when studying public radio stations in South Africa it is advisable to grant considerable attention to *XK FM* in order to understand factors that led to its formation’. He added that its uniqueness is not only in its remit and general mandate but is also embedded in the histories of the two communities.

As will be presented in this chapter, the establishment of *XK FM* as a development project under the auspices of the SABC was informed by the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act (IBA) (1993/4). It is unusual for a community radio station to be managed as an independent...
entity connected to a national public broadcaster. However, the IBA Act stated that community broadcasting should cater either for a geographic community or a community of interest. In a geographic community the station should attend to a community whose ‘commonality is determined principally by their residing in a particular geographic area’ (Teer-Tomaseslli 2001: 234). A community of interest means that the community being served must exude an ascertainable common interest. So the notion of a common interest becomes the most important feature of community radio. XK FM’s footprint covers a radius of between 30km and 50km and reaches 4500 !Xõntali and 2000 Khwedam speakers. The history of the two communities, in particular that of marginalisation, low literacy levels, high prevalence of health-related problems and existing in isolation as migrant communities following their migration to South Africa with the help of South African Defence Forces from Angola and Namibia in the late 1980s (Douglas 1996) presents a feature of common interest, which necessitated the establishment of a community radio station for them. The majority of !Xõntali and Khwedam speakers who did not migrate to South Africa continue to live in southern Angola, western Zambia and along the Namibian–Botswana border of the Caprivi Strip.

This chapter attempts to provoke a kind of ethos and theoretical engagement on community radio as the medium of articulation for different communities. XK FM as a case study will be used to present the locus of enunciation for the theory of articulation presented by Enesto Laclau (2011 [1979]) and Stuart Hall (1986). Community radio as the alternative third developmental voice with the features of independence, equality, community participation and representation will be discussed. This chapter provides an exploration of the role played by radio in a rural setting, such as the one of Platfontein (where the !Xõ and Khwe are located) in Kimberley with the aim of further engaging forms of social intrigue and inclusion elicited by the community radio station as the technology of empowerment. It will also be argued that the conversational approach used by XK FM of mixing music and talk creates a form of ‘we’ feeling, which translates into notions of belonging as a form of sociological natal affiliation.

The emergence of community radio as a new paradigm in South Africa

The history of community radio in South Africa dates back to the politics of the struggle against apartheid in the 1980s. Community media at the time acted as the ‘voice of the oppressed’ and played a significant role in mobilising and informing communities against apartheid (Teer-Tomaseslli 2001: 233). However, the history of community radio is not peculiar to that of exclusion and discrimination against one group by the other (Olorunmisola 1995). Anthony Olorunmisola adds that the evolution of community radio in South Africa can be traced back to Radio Vryheid, Radio Donkerhoek, Radio Koppies, Radio Volksstem, Radio Pretoria and beyond. These radio stations were established in 1994 by the Pretoria Boerekommando and the Afrikaans Volksfront (AVF). They operated without licences and were labelled by the new South African government as ‘pirate stations’, set to oppose the government. Using 500 FM transmitters linked by Intelsat satellite, the SABC controlled almost 30 radio stations by the early 1990s (Hachten and Gifford 1984). Amongst these were Radio South Africa, Radio 5, Afrikaans Stereo, Radio Metro and other regional stations such as Highveld Stereo, Radio Oranje, Radio Port Natal and Radio Algoa (cf. De Villiers 1993; Olorunmisola 1995). These included stations that broadcast in local African languages – for example, Radio Sesotho, Radio Venda, Radio Swazi and Zulu Stereo (cf. De Villiers 1993) – and had traits of representing communities of interest.

Furthermore, the ‘Fabular!n! Freedom of the Airwaves’ Conference held in Netherlands in 1991, organised by Radio Freedom (the ANC radio in exile), contributed significantly to discussions, which resulted in the IBA Act (Teer-Tomaseslli 2001: 234). The IBA removed the responsibility for broadcast policy away from the direct control of the state and the SABC. As a result the IBA Act (153), in particular, was promulgated in 1993, by the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), charged with powers to: (a) formulate broadcasting policy; (b) create licensing procedures; (c) regulate and monitor broadcasting activities; and (d) limit cross-media ownership and the enforcement of local content quotas. The IBA Act made provisions for three kinds of broadcasters: (i) public service broadcasting; (ii) community broadcasting; and (iii) commercial broadcasting. Then, under the ambit of community broadcasting, the Act provides for three types of community of interest radio stations: institutional communities; religious communities; and cultural communities. A community radio station that serves cultural communities is designed to meet the cultural needs of a defined community (Teer-Tomaseslli 2001: 235). XK FM therefore serves two cultural communities: the !Xõ and Khwe.

In 1995 and 1996 the IBA Act was amended. This led to the formation of the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA),
which was finally promulgated in 2000 and was a merger of the IBA and the South Africa Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA) (Berger 2001: 162; Teen-Tomaselli 2001). Dumisani Moyo and Siphiwe Hlongwane (2009: 279) also suggest that this merger was necessitated by the ‘global hype around convergence of technologies’, thus confirming the need for robust communication systems, a point that was raised by one of my respondents at ICASA. ICASA was mandated to incorporate the functions of the IBA and those published in the Telecommunications Act (1996) and the Broadcasting Act (1999) (Berger 2001). ICASA functions by way of a council, which is constituted through a board that runs the affairs of the body, with the help of the secretariat, which issues five-year licences to all broadcasters including community radio stations. Responses obtained from other radio stations regarding the application process for obtaining a broadcasting licence stated that the process is usually too laborious, but XK FM’s station management stated that the process is not usually difficult for them as the licence is often obtained for them by SABC. However, questions have been raised over the years about the independence of the ICASA council, starting from its appointment, the involvement of politicians and its financing mechanisms.

In 1993 the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) was formed with the aim of addressing the imbalances many communities had in relation to access to media (Teen-Tomaselli 2001: 234). Registered as a section 21 not-for-profit company, the forum had more than 120 community radio stations as part of its membership by 2005. The normative engagement of the rise of community radio in South Africa shows that it developed out of a complex configuration of audience demographics, which attempted to cater for age, language, locality, aesthetic and musical taste. Community radio is therefore seen as anchoring itself as the expression of the target communities. However, these idealistic positions fail to explain the obvious ideology of power, which is often embedded in these structures and as part of the process of state formation as seen in South Africa. A closer analysis of XK FM’s programming, for example, showed that more time is allocated towards news and current affairs. On enquiring, it also emerged that news and current affairs programmes are managed from SABC studios in Kimberley.

Defining community radio

Community radio is a station built by the community or for the community and is used by that particular community to serve its own interests. Emphasis is on community ownership, autonomy, participation and representation. As opposed to public broadcasting, community radio programming is supposed to be community oriented, and in most cases is produced by the community (MISA 2000: 56). The definition of community refers to a geographically defined group, or people with a specific and equally ascertainable common interest (IBA 1997). These interests can include linguistic orientation and geographical location in terms of proximity with others to the extent of sharing in a communal associational life. The interests can also include ones that are developmental in nature and many more. Furthermore, Anthony Cohen (1985) defines a community as the expression of a commonality – acknowledging the functionality of associational life through which social reproduction and the creation of a common identity take place.

A community radio seen from the perspective of Cohen’s definition functions as the structure on which human agency within a community pivots in the articulation of a shared identity and collective solidarity, as seen in the case of the !Xό and Khwe communities of Platfontein. In South Africa, community radio encompasses four categories: (a) it is fully controlled by a non-profit entity and has non-profitable purposes; (b) it serves a particular community; (c) it encourages members of the community it serves to participate in the selection and provision of programmes to be broadcast; and (d) it may be funded by donations, grants, sponsorships and membership fees, or by a combination of the above (Teen-Tomaselli 2001).

Descriptions of what a community radio station is remain ambiguous, slippery and tautologous. Further, they fail to answer the question of what constitutes a community (Teen-Tomaselli 2001). But in the case of South Africa the IBA Act further provides for community broadcasting to cater for either a geographic community or a community of interest. In the case of a geographic community definition, it caters for a community whose commonality can be traced to a particular location as an area of residence. A community of interest is a community with specific ascertainable common interests (Teen-Tomaselli 2001). As a result, in the case of South Africa four types of community radio stations have emerged over the years: (a) those serving a geographical area; (b) campus-based radio stations – operating in colleges and university campuses; (c) religious radio stations; and (d) cultural and ethnic community radio stations (IBA 1997; Teen-Tomaselli 2001). The case study of XK FM, as will be shown, falls under the category of cultural and ethnic community radio stations.

Another celebrated feature of community radio is the aspect of independence and community representation. Similarly, Lisa Taylor and
Andrew Willis (1999: 136) observe that the notion of independence remains the driving force behind the development of the community radio movement in particular as a form of community representation and empowerment. To them, independence entails not depending on the authority of another, be it the state or other external agency. This means avoiding subordination and external control. However, they acknowledge the ambivalence of the concept of independence in media. Francis Kasoma (1995) argues that the question of independence when relating to media has to be qualified by attempting to answer the question: independent from whom and what? The notion of independence in community media can be understood through Stuart Hall’s (1986) cultural concept of articulation in which he says it represents enunciated autonomy of a participating community outside the parameters of the public service broadcaster (PSB) and state influence. The independence of a community radio station represents a reclamation of the ‘local’ from the public broadcaster (Taylor and Willis 1999: 136) or a return of the local. The returned local in the case of the Xhosa and Khwe represent the silent masses whose community radio helps them to present their historical presence through different programmes.

The existence of a definitive radius as a sphere of influence for a community radio also marks the relationship between community in community and the ‘spherical construction of a community’ (Howley 2010: 64). XK FM, for example, enjoys a radius of around 30km to 50km within Kimberley, with Potchefstroom as the epicentre. Given the constitution of the XK FM structure, research shows that community radio serves the interests of a smaller population (Lewis 1993a: 201; McCain and Lowe 1990) and has the ability to correct the distortions inherent in the majority-controlled media. Another key definition describes community radio as neither the expression of political power, nor of capital (Derlomo 1990: 3). Peer-Tomasselli (2001: 233) supports this view by suggesting that a community radio is the expression of the population, and is a third voice between the state and private commercial radio.

**Significant features of community radio: an overview**

Community radio redefines the communication realm as a way of re-invigorating relations between the informed and the informed. The use of simple technology enhances the possibilities that people have of intervening in the production of programmes (Council for the Development of Community Media 1977: 397). For Nongeza Masilela (1996: 107), focus is on the community radio’s potential as alternative media to alter the conditions of possibility in redefining various schema that distinguish alternative community media from the public and commercial media. Alternative media can be distinguished through ownership and management structures, financing, regulation, programming, and policy stance on issues of access and participation (Masilela 1996: 108). Community radio as alternative media is commonly managed through elected representatives (a board) or directly with voluntary community participation as another factor. The major feature of alternative media is ‘independence’ from the mainstream media, such as the state-controlled media. The view that community radio acts as an alternative media is usually associated with the media’s potential to challenge the establishment, and in giving people an independent voice, which is often perceived as alternative and free speech. In terms of programming, community radio tends to broadcast community-oriented programmes produced by community members for community members. In view of their policy stance on issues of access and participation, Majid Tehranian (1990: 108), suggests that community radio is generally responsive to targeted audiences and often uses highly targeted interactive methods.

Community radio from a critical perspective entails the delineation between two different forms of media: The first is state-run media concerned with institutional politics. This form of media struggles over the power to govern and regards receivers of messages as potential side-takers. Second, a community radio such as XK FM is concerned with cultural politics (the functions of which are widely disseminated symbolic forms), struggles over meaning (ideology, hegemony, encoding and decoding). The latter also regards the audience as meaning makers (Riggin 1992: 13). Masilela (1996: 107) adds that these two traditions are replicated in conceptions of the significance of alternative media for political change. The overarching broader problem therefore becomes deciphering the ‘community’ whose interests are being served in a community radio station. The rationale for most community radio is that deep-seated participation by beneficiaries gives impetus to the station as the mouthpiece of the local community (Teer-Tomasselli 2001). Programmes are aimed at satisfying community aspirations, thereby identifying with the interests of the local population (Boeren 1994: 144).

As seen in the case of XK FM, another important feature of community radio is the use of local languages to ensure effective communication. Jackson Banda (2004: 138) adds that community radio should be perceived in the following ways: (a) run and managed by the local
people with financial support from the local businesses; (b) existing for the local people; (c) located in the community; and (d) not-for-profit. While these four features may apply in some situations, not all of them can be applied to our case study XK FM. For example, the radio station XK FM is owned by the SABC. Therefore, all its finances, recruitment of staff and payment of salaries is the preserve of the SABC. However, it is located within a given area, Platfontein, and functions as a non-profit organisation. According to Banda (2004: 139), three typologies of community radio further emerge: (a) community radio as a geographic imperative; (b) community radio as a socio-cultural phenomenon; (c) community radio as a developmental initiative.

Community radio as a geographic imperative deals with issues of access by members of the community and proximity to the community of interest. XK FM as our case study is well located within Platfontein. Access to it remains possible due to its central location. Members of the community are allowed to visit and to share their views on different issues relating to programming. Physical proximity in this instance constitutes an important element for the ‘community’. Ad Boeren (1994: 144) states that the formation of local radio is based on the notion that people are encouraged to visit the studio and that the community participates in the management of the station. A radio station that is within the reach of the community ensures effective participation by the community in its management and programming.

Community radio as a socio-cultural phenomenon allows for mediation and representation of territorially bounded identities. This form of representation takes place by way of mediated social experiences. Among the IXu and Khwe, like in most African societies, the radio station has further cemented the existence of ‘virtual’ or ‘imagined communities’ through the use of language. As a result, communities based on ‘natal affiliation’ emerge. XK FM’s central location in Platfontein; in-between the two communities and next to the school, casts a symbolic gesture of institutionalised acculturation. Michael Laflen (1989: 6) warns that the legitimisation of local languages and identities through the formation of community radio stations is sometimes destructive to national unity and integration. This view was supported by SABC’s Head of News and Current Affairs, who stressed that the histories of the IXu and Khwe necessitated the establishment of a community-centred radio station. He added that XK FM as their radio station continues to play the role of reinforcing their sense of identity and belonging to South Africa. This to him is managed through different current affairs programmes. XK FM is, therefore, a product of a conscious policy to promote the expression of local opinion and to mobilise local communities, as part of social transformation.

However, Charles Husband (2000: 201) argues that within the development of democratic media theory there is a discussion on how and through what means the ruled communicate their views and wishes to the ruler. Community radio therefore plays a central role in mobilising the people, especially in light of the social complexities and need for social mobility, as seen in the case of XK FM. In a bid to understand the feasibility of public access and deliberation, the question of whether it is possible to create democratic practices whereby people are able to participate in community ideation as equals has to be posed. Attempting to address this question is seen as a panacea to national unity (Skogerbo 1996: 105).

Community radio is often viewed by way of the role it plays as an agent and medium of development. Boeren (1994: 140) says that many development practitioners and communications specialists have tended to consider radio as the most useful medium for development, the reason being that, compared to television, radio can be accessed by a large section of the population. This argument when assessed through the IXu and Khwe communities enjoys prima-facie plausibility. XK FM has become an important source of information for the two communities owing to their low literacy levels. Further, Boeren (1994: 141) observes:

Radio [...] is an excellent medium to inform people with, to make people aware, to stimulate interest and to influence opinions [...] discuss development issues, acquire relevant information and learn new techniques. The main source of information is the radio programme to which they listen collectively.

Radio remains a prestigious asset to the target communities and is quite accessible than television and newspapers in that the target groups are able to listen to the different radio programmes. XK FM as a community radio provides impetus for mobilising local development initiatives and projects.

Repositioning the theory of articulation and the chosen research trajectories

A combination of the case study method and southern participant action research was used. This was informed by a qualitative research paradigm and linked with the works of Robert Yin (2003) and Kurt
Lewin (1946) on case study method and action research, respectively. A more grounded form of action research emerged in the form of southern participant-action research. Two components emerge here: the fact of a type of methodology that is influenced by the tenets of action-research (Elden and Chisholm 1993), followed by the notion of qualitatively engaging with participants in their situated arrangement as a form of participation (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). These two were then located within a particular ideological context—that of belonging to the ‘global south’, in which the research is located; i.e., conducted in Africa, specifically, South Africa. Members of the !Xu and Khwe communities together with the station’s presenters, other members of staff at XK FM, and some officials from SABC Headquarters at Auckland Park and in Kimberley were interviewed. The researcher was able to grasp the participants’ constructions and interpretations of their world, and situated meanings thereof as forms of articulation. A total of 22 respondents were interviewed.

The use of a case study method allowed me to establish the validity of XK FM being studied as a radio station. Thus, XK FM as a chosen case study helped in providing a detailed understanding of community radio as a phenomenon in South Africa (Mhlanga 2006, 2010a). As Yin (2003: 14) suggests, a case study research strategy is an all-embracing method; southern participant-action research, a form of action research, was also used. Carr and Kemmis (1986: 162) described action research as simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations, aimed at improving the rationality of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and of the situations in which these practices are carried out. Similarly, Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (2001) posit that action research can be defined as follows:

A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (2001: 1).

Action research when linked with the case study method enabled me to explore and gain a detailed understanding of a situated research problem: XK FM as a community radio. A qualitative engagement of social reality was aided through the use of interviews and by participating in a number of social activities, such as being involved in a football tournament organised by the social community league representing the !Xu and Khwe (Mhlanga 2006, 2010a). A qualitative approach that analyses a ‘bounded context’, such as a community radio, rejects a ‘value-free’ scientific approach to research. As a qualitative study, southern participant-action research entails engaging with the respondents’ beliefs, values and categories embodying fundamental ideological positions. This type of research enacts, confirms, legitimates and engages relations of power and domination in society. By presenting XK FM as a case study of a community radio station with its establishment deeply embedded in the discursive nature of the social structure of a newly resettled community in 2000, then an emancipatory project emerges within the broader project of social transformation as part of the on-going process of state formation. Max Weber’s concept of Verstehen (i.e., understanding facts by interpreting their meanings in the light of relevant social modes of reproduction, social goals and values) was applied (Fischer 2003: 50).

Further, Enesio Laclau (2011 [1979]: 10) adds that the challenges facing the theory of articulation are that theoretical practice and the engagement of research have been greatly hindered by two obstacles: the ‘comitative articulation of concepts at the level of common sense and their rationalist articulation into essentialist paradigms’. This research embraced the influence of social structure and existing forms of social interaction through community radio. Thus, the relationship between scholarship and society in action research is often marked by bold lines of convergence, acknowledging the socio-politically situated nature of discourses and social reflections. With a hermeneutical assessment of XK FM as a community radio in South Africa, a form of social action that relates its goals and purposes to a situated interpretivist position of the !Xu and Khwe communities emerges.

Enesio Laclau (2011 [1979]) is the major proponent of the theory of articulation. His engagement of it stems from philosophy, in which he says articulation entails that a, ‘discourse or doxa’ may or may not be represented by a system of misleading concepts that do not appear linked by inherent logical relations, but are bound together simply by denotative or evocative links which custom and opinion have established between them’ (Laclau 2011 [1979]: 07). In Enesio Laclau’s philosophical work, articulation is represented through Plato’s allegory of slaves being kept in a dark cave whose darkness they end up being accustomed to; but when one slave manages to break free and is
exposed to light, another process of being accustomed to the sunlight takes place. Through this newly discovered moment of being accustomed, or moment of realisation, a kind of rupture between the knowledge of the past and the present takes place. As a result, a new form of knowledge emerges. To Laclau this realisation, which manifests itself in a form of knowledge, presupposes, then, an operation of rupture. The latter can also be further understood as a disarticulation of ideas from those connotative domains to which they appear linked in the form of a misleading necessity, which enables us subsequently to reconstruct their true articulations (Laclau 2011 [1979]: 88); that is, making a clear connection between the past and the present. So a new form of articulation emerges. It is this form of articulation that in this chapter is referred to as the ‘return’ of the local or the process by which the IXu and Khwe realise their humanity and peoplehood as they bond into a community championed by their community radio station (XK FM).

Stuart Hall’s appropriation of the theory of articulation into cultural studies takes a political route. It emerges at the critical juncture when the silent majorities who are often assumed not to think finally realise the moment of being the ‘subject-authors’ of their narratives, through community radio. This too is a moment of enunciation, i.e., the point at which the historical presence of the masses interrupts history. It marks the beginning of community participation and empowerment of those considered to be the silent majorities. However, it remains noteworthy to avoid taking a reductionist position. Stuart Hall says the theory of articulation is:

the form of connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage, which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? So the so-called ‘unity’ of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be re-articulated in different ways because they have no necessary ‘belongingness.’ The ‘unity’ which matters is a linkage between articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected. (Hall 1986: 53)

From the perspective given above, we note that the ‘theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse […] at specific conjectures to certain political subjects’ (Hall 1986: 53). So the theory of articulation according to Hall ‘asks how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how the subject thinks the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it’ by enabling us to think about how an ideology empowers people. It is here that community radio as new technology within a bounded context and given its proximity to a particular community acts as the fulcrum on which members of a community re-narrate their history and empower themselves (Mhlanga 2012). Laclau perceives this development as marking the existence of a community with locally materialised conditions of recapturing their past and linking it with the present and future. A form of articulation also emerges when members of these two communities are empowered through XK FM, which helps them to shape their future; thus a form of linkage now exists between the past, present and the future.

The establishment of XK FM as a community radio has brought a marked sense of social organisation among the IXu and Khwe. Observations showed that the station has six presenters, of which three are IXu and the other three are Khwe. The Acting station manager (Regina Beregho) is Khwe and the deputy station manager (Malton) is IXu. This arrangement was agreed on by the Communal Property Association (CPA) in an effort to balance ethnic representation in all their activities so as to avoid conflict.

Furthermore, it emerged that this social arrangement was informed by the violent ethnic conflicts that marred these two communities following their settlement in South Africa in 1989. Most respondents stated that ethnic clashes were a common feature in their community up to around 2003/4. They also added that the establishment of XK FM as a community radio station and the continuous churning out of different programmes and information about their social problems had led to the two communities working together. One community leader from the Khwe community acknowledged:

for the first time in our history we have managed to work together and even share solutions to our problems even if we are two different communities.12

He added that the presenters as role models have taught them lessons on how feasible it is for the two communities to work together and shape their future. Given that these are two different communities with mutually unintelligible languages, the establishment of XK FM has caused the emergence of a third community; by bringing these two communities together, different radio programmes allow for dialogue
on different issues, such as their ethnic differences, intermarriages and how they have toiled together ever since their days in Angola, Namibia and now in South Africa. Community radio, therefore, is part of the discursive formation, in which relations of power structure, the interdiscursivity, or the intertextuality, of the field of knowledge ‘takes place’ (Hall 1986). These two communities have a history of not interacting in their countries of origin. Observations revealed that the Khwe tend to despise the ɆXù. Hence the use of derogative names like ‘nîhâ’ used by the ɆXù when referring to the Khwe, while the Khwe call the ɆXù, ‘nîhâe’.13 The crisis of ethnic relations was also exacerbated by the selective treatment they received from the South African Defence Forces (SADF), which favoured the Khwe at the expense of the ɆXù. The SADF always offered more educational opportunities to the Khwe than the ɆXù (cf. Douglas 1996).14 ɆXù FM as a case study can therefore be conceptualised as the transformation of ‘different regimes of truth in the social formation’ (Hall 1986). Through different radio programmes, histories of the ɆXù and Khwe are narrated, thereby enhancing the memories of their peoplehood and causing a convergence of their narratives of marginalisation and suffering.

The return of the local: The ɆXù and Khwe, and ɆXù FM as the case study

In this section, two key concepts will be raised: the first captured by the word ‘return’ and the second captured by the word ‘local’. However, it stands to reason that a closer analysis of these two concepts shows that they are closely linked. However, it would be ideal to put the concept of ‘return’ into its proper historical context from African philosophy – in particular as a form of sociological reproduction and representation of knowledge about Black Africa, nationalist discourse and those in diaspora (cf. Césaire 1939). Its usage here follows a deconstructivist perspective, which derives its roots from the subaltern’s quest for control of their identity and destiny. As Aimé Césaire (1939) trenchantly contends, this quest by the subaltern marks a ‘return to the native land’. In the invention of his neologue on negritude, Césaire linked the concept of ‘return’ with the retention, re-articulation and representation of ‘dignity, the personhood or humanity, of black people’ (Masolo 1994: 1). To Dismas Masolo (1994) the idea of ‘return’ is tightly imbued with meanings of a particular group of people’s historicity; that ‘turns it into a consciousness or awareness, as a form of management of power relations and a “historical commitment” to a “movement”’. Similarly, the NCRF adds:

Community media emerged as the voice of the oppressed and played a significant role in informing and mobilising communities, at grassroots level, against apartheid (1999: 2).

From the observation above, two meanings of the concept of ‘return’ emerge; first, one relating to ‘repatriation to a geographical or perceptual space’, as seen in the case of the relocation of the Angolan-based ɆXù and Khwe, who had been recruited into the SADF to Schmidtsdrift in South Africa at the end of the war (1976–1990) (cf. Douglas 1996; Lee and Hitchcock 2001: 13; Chamberlain 2003;). This is closely tied to the establishment of ɆXù FM as the realisation and ultimate articulation of the two communities’ sense of belonging, identity and peoplehood. Therefore, the radio station as a perceptual space stands as a direct symbolic representation of the two ethnic groups’ connection with their past. The second meaning of the idea of ‘return’ relates to metaphorical regaining of the ‘conceptual space in which culture is both field and process’ (Masolo 1994: 2) – this points to the moment of articulation or connection for the ɆXù and Khwe. ɆXù FM as a community radio station occupies this conceptual space in which a sense of unified commonality emerges through different programmes that offer a re-narration of their history and sense of origin and identity in a transformed South Africa.

ɆXù FM functions as a space for self-redefining for the two ethnic groups. As Kevin Howley (2010: 65) suggests, ɆXù FM shows the ‘pivotal role human action plays in articulating, and [...] rearticulating, any social formation’. To the ɆXù and Khwe ɆXù FM as a community radio station also stands as a space for resistance and protest against their perceived alienation and domination within the broader South African society in Kimberley. The ɆXù and Khwe consider their settlement at Platfontein as a sign of victory by the ɆXù and Khwe Trust (Lee and Hitchcock 2001), which was established by the two communities in 1993, and was instrumental in obtaining land for their displaced communities. Most interviewees from these two ethnic groups highlighted the abuse they often receive from government officials who deny them access to social services because they consider them as migrants and outsiders. They cited incidents where the youngs and elders are denied national identity cards and passports by government officials at the registry offices in Kimberley. The ɆXù and Khwe argue that historically they originated from South Africa and only migrated to Angola and Namibia during the Nfecoane period.16

The ɆXù and Kwe migrants were caught between the old regime and the new government in South Africa. Their linguistic and cultural
distinctiveness worsened their situation in that neither of the two dominant groups, black or white, was prepared to absorb them. This forced them to remain in Schmiltdrift, where they lived in temporary military bivouacs until 1999 (Lee and Hitchcock 2001). While stationed at the Schmiltdrift tent camp, they were divided into separate residential sections (cf. Voster 1994). They lived in tents and were promised proper housing by the SADF and the National Party (NP) government after 1990. Their move to South Africa fulfilled two major objectives: (a) the promise by the SADF of safeguarding the two communities in a country governed by their previous enemies; and (b) protection from liberation governments in Angola and Namibia. The two communities were immediately granted citizenship on arrival in South Africa (Douglas 1996: 8). However, in 1999 the base was returned to its legal owners (the Tswana and Griqua people) following a successful land restitution case, leading to the relocation of the IXu and Khwe to Platfontein, 10km out of Kimberley.

The Khwe are socially mobile and are better educated than their IXu counterparts, a stratification that aggravates inter-group conflict (Archer 1995; Douglas 1996). Khwedam is a Khoi dialect and is related to a cluster of languages that include Naro and Khoekhoegowap (Voster 1994: 70). IXu belongs to the Zhu language family. These languages are not mutually intelligible and are mainly spoken in military bases outside Kimberley, Platfontein and some parts of the Northern Cape (Voster 1994). A sizable number of IXu-speaking homes also use Khwedam as a second language. However, this relationship is not reciprocal, since Khwedam is linguistically dominant. Most Khwedam speakers are multilingual: they speak Afrikaans, English, Portuguese, Mbukushu, Otjiwambo and Silozi, but not IXu (cf. Archer 1995).

The location of XFM as a cultural community radio station for the IXu and Khwe sought to capture and articulate the history of these two ethnic groups. Its policy requires two simultaneous presenters for each language as a balancing act.17 Broadcasting begins at six o’clock in the morning and ends at nine in the evening, and is characterised by a myriad of programmes. Where only one presenter is available, Afrikaans becomes the language of broadcasting. During weekdays, from Monday to Friday, programmes are divided into five segments: (a) Ū Xam Òam (Breakfast Show) – 06:00am to 10:00am; (b) Late Drive Show – 10:00am to 12noon; (c) A java òam (What the San Must Know) – 12noon to 1:00pm; (d) Ngewo òam (Youth Programme) – 2:00pm to 3:00pm; (e) Storytime for the Children – 4:00pm to 6:00pm. Other unaccounted for programmes in-between those stated above emerge as very key programmes that seek to address specific issues, such as the programme called So Onthou Òam (In the Past – What We Can Remember). This is a programme in which story tellers, historians and community elders are invited to present on the history of the two communities. Then there are other programmes that are normally broadcast on different days, such as the one on Mondays between 11:00am and 12noon, which touches on HIV/AIDS and other health-related issues, Gxakhwe/dame Journal (On Women’s Empowerment), etc. On Thursdays, for example, from 11:00am to 12noon there is a programme on ‘Uplifting of the San people’. Through these programmes, discourses of cultural/linguistic survival and development are articulated. These discourses are linked with the objectives of the National Khoisan Consultative Council’s (NKCC) work across the San communities. As a social movement, the Council’s work deals with shared activities and beliefs directed towards the demand for change in some aspects of the social order.

On participation and empowerment – community radio as the rediscovery of the oppressed

Development as a process of change set in motion principles whose objective is to eradicate poverty, injustice and exploitation. Its pursuit, together with the participation of various players, therefore becomes the central pillar upon which policies are anchored. But the concept of participatory communication as a development initiative lacks a definition capable of enabling understanding of the processes and outcomes involved. As Dagron Gunuclo (2001: 01) observes, the most interesting work of a participatory nature often defies the written word. Similarly, Shirley White (1994: 08) adds that the word participation is ‘kaleidoscopic’; it changes its colour and shape at the will of the hands in which it is held. Neither the absence of an accurate means of capturing the essence of participatory communication nor the fluid nature of participation has reduced the realisation that its differing forms appear to have gained usefulness in given contexts in tandem with histories of exclusion and discrimination. But to Olorunisola (1995), participation and communication are often bedfellows in the movement towards engaging the previously disenfranchised populations in social dialogue. As will be presented in this section, community radio plays a big role in giving voice to the previously disenfranchised. Its emergence in South Africa marks a new era of community empowerment as part of the state’s emancipatory projects. But Last Moyo (2012: 484) cautions:
Participation is not always positive, as it can be top-down, mediated, regulated, and therefore exclusive and undemocratic. It can serve as a regime of endorsement and disapproval for political, economic and cultural power. (2012: 484)

As a result, what remains to be seen is how community radio as part of a broader developmental paradigm aids the course of democratisation. However, two fundamental questions appear in this notion of participatory communication as it relates to community radio. First, in what ways do the roles and association between political actors, the mass media and the public change in a participatory communication environment? Second, what are the notable dividends of participatory communication? McKee (1996: 218) observes:

Community participation is a very vague and open concept and is used to mean very different things. It often subsumes other concepts and approaches (such as ‘self-help’, ‘self-reliance’, ‘user-choice’, ‘community involvement’ and ‘participatory planning and development’, which are themselves ill defined. In connection with community participation people will often talk of ‘felt needs’, ‘local perceptions’, ‘bottom-up planning’, ‘motivation’, ‘latent development potential’, ‘catalytic development inputs’, ‘integrated development at the village level’ [...] Yet all these concepts are highly complex and diffuse and their meaning in any particular context is often obscure.

Scholarly consensus on the nature and extent of community participation and the participatory environment on community radio is lacking. The role played by community radio as a service to society but within a given context presents another feature of alternative communication. To Chris Atton (2002: 25) alternative media’s purpose is to ‘enable wider social participation in the creation, production, and dissemination of content’. Bailey et al. (2008: 11) add that ‘participation in the media and through the media sees the communicative process not as a series of practices that are often restrictively controlled by media professionals, but as a human right that cuts across societies’. Community radio further compounds the fact that genuine dialogue with locals can be compatible with extending to them technical expertise. But it is imperative to further explore the cohesive nature and consensual realities created by this development project in bringing two often conflicting communities together, as seen in the case of the !Xu and Khwe.

There may be different approaches towards understanding community radio and, in particular, the notion of community participation as a central feature. Also of importance to scholarship now should not be the confines of epistemological location of the donors but its ontological imaginations, in particular, its sociological positioning in a country like South Africa; i.e., a country riddled with inequalities inherited and, to some extent, newly generated forms of inequalities. Views by Moyo (2012) and Bailey et al. (2008) that participation is highly interwoven with the right to communicate are plausible. In emphasising the role played by community radio in empowering communities and as part of the politics of inclusion, Moyo adds that ‘scholars have variously defined alternative media as “participatory media”, “grassroots media”, or “small-scale media”’.

Community radio as part of the state’s emancipatory project plays an important role in South Africa’s social transformation process by seeking to involve different communities as key players in programme auditing and production. As seen in the case of XK FM, presenters are also drawn from the two communities. For the !Xu and Khwe communities, radio broadcasts in their languages, thereby enabling them to develop a sociological natality affiliation, which according to most respondents creates a sense of belonging, ownership and empowerment (Mhlanga 2012). This return of the local and the location of XK FM as a community radio station marks the birth of a new approach to nation-building in which different ethnic groups and their languages occupy centre stage, i.e., with Xûntali and Khwedam as the core languages of broadcasting. Language broadcasts help in generating a particular kind of social intrigue, which causes the !Xu and Khwe communities to perceive the radio station as their voice of empowerment. Even their minimal involvement in programme production, as it emerged, is perceived as participation, thus creating a kind of ‘we feeling’. XK FM has become the platform on which social narratives; cultural signifiers and symbols are represented through different radio programmes following the stencil of social conversations. Radio therefore plays an important role in most African societies, in capturing the old traditional mindset and in managing communicative action within the African associational life (Mhlanga 2012).

XK FM in this case stands as a symbol and voice of empowerment for the !Xu and Khwe, and is perceived by mos; presenters and station staff as part of the broader emancipatory project. However, it remains to be seen whether the two communities actually have much say in the affairs of the station, given that its ownership structure and the licence
radio station’s location in Platfontein as a bounded community with its community-centred programmes creates a sense of ‘people sharing a common condition or problem’ (Popple 1995: 4).

Community radio attempts to redefine relations between informer and the informed and to enhance, through the acquisition of simple technology, the feasibility of people intervening in the process of information production (Masilela 1996: 107). The success of XX FM in this regard hinges on ownership, management structures, financing, regulation, programming, and its policy and practice on issues of access and participation.

Conclusion

From the foregoing it can be concluded that there is need for a deep-seated engagement with community radio within African scholarship. There is need for research that attempts to theorise the history of the communitarian nature of African associational life and its different historical community-based communication systems. Community radio offers us a new paradigm, and has been able to receive scholarly attention, albeit with a view to understanding how it impacts on the future and as a progressive shift towards participatory development and empowerment. To this end, there is a need for understanding how communities have been able, at a moment’s notice, to embrace community radio as both new technologies of communication and also how these new technologies have exploited the traditional contours of communication.

The issue of difference, equality, representation, autonomy and independence were highlighted as underlying features of community radio. The discussion of XX FM as a case study, using the theory of articulation and the ‘return of the local’, provided a theoretical locus on which our understanding of community radio stations can be grounded. Key features of community radio were discussed; these included that the station should fulfil the following criteria: be a non-profit organisation; exist for the local people; and be owned, controlled and managed by the local people with the help of a board set up and composed of the local people. However, as seen in the case of XX FM, which is managed and owned by the SABC, these key features remain normative and didactic.

But it was noted that community radio bears the picture and emblem of the community, and becomes the community’s source of identity, with their hopes and aspirations captured through local language broadcasts. It also emerged that community media function as the alternative voice to the communities concerned and celebrate independence as the main feature.
Notes

1. iXhů is the name given to the speakers; the language they speak is called iXhosa. Khwe refers to the speakers, whereas the language is called Khwedam.
2. This follows a series of interviews with Dr. Zikala in March 2010. Another interview was conducted in August of the same year.
4. For more information on these Afrikaans-language stations see: http://www.radionetherlands.nl/features/media/dossiers/hateradioafrikanse.html
7. This follows interviews held with different heads of radio stations at SABC Headquarters in 2010.
8. This information was obtained from one of my interviewees from the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) in 2010.
9. This emerged from the interview I had with Dr Snuki Zikalala at SABC in March 2010. A wide range of issues were raised about the ownership and control of this radio station. However, Dr Zikalala emphasized XK FM's uniqueness as a radio station dealing with a particular group of the San communities.
10. Officials interviewed at Auckland Park, SABC Headquarters in Johannesburg included people such as Mapule Mbalahlwi (the then Head of Radio News and Current Affairs), a Tsonga and the former station manager of Munghana Lonene FM. Mapule Mbalahlwi is also credited with transforming Munghana Lonene FM from the vestiges of apartheid, as Radio Tsonga FM, into the radio station that it is now.
11. Dixa is a Greek word meaning 'common belief' or 'popular opinion'; it can also be translated to mean 'custom' or 'being accustomed to something'.
12. These were the views of one member of the CPA, a community structure created to address issues obtaining in their communities. This structure is blended with members from the two communities and operates like a secretary with offices located 5km into the farms owned by the two communities. The views were expressed during my interaction with the CPA in the offices in August 2006.
13. Information on the use of derogative names was obtained from the interviews I had with Erasmus Matesta, one of my research assistants from the side of the iXhů. He gave this information while emphasizing ethnic differences among the two communities. These terms can be pronounced in the following way: 'nha'et', used by the Khwe to depict the iXhů can be pronounced as 'ngapwe'. It means 'people who come from the bush'. The name 'ntha', given to the Khwe by the iXhů, can be pronounced as 'nca'. When probed on the meaning, they said it has no meaning but depicts the way the Khwe speak.

References