

Alexander Badenoch. *Voices in Ruins: West German Radio across the 1945 Divide.* Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 289 pp. \$69.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-230-00903-5.



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Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

Why do we listen to the radio? Is it for the original, edgy content, like fresh insights into the financial crisis, or the beauty of an unknown song? Or do we tune in to maintain daily routines and a sense of belonging, shaped by the stable structure of programs, the familiar voices with the news on the hour, the comfort of a familiar jingle, the certainty with which the time is announced, and the assurance that millions of other listeners are with us? Alexander Badenoch's excellent study leads us to consider the latter possibility—at least with regard to the situation of West Germany immediately after the Second World War. Connecting radio to the broader perspectives of cultural history, gender, and media studies, this book analyzes how radio broadcasting addressed and maintained practices of everyday life within the western occupation zones. Focusing on the postwar period, but with tendrils reaching back to before 1933, Badenoch's work points to radio's crucial, yet underestimated role in constructing a sense of routine and normality, of *Heimat* and national identity after the unconditional surrender.

Badenoch begins with the simple observation that in the years following World War II, radio was the most popular medium of mass communication. If Germany, which had ceased to exist as a sovereign state, could still be "imagined" as a nation following Benedict Anderson's definition, then the airwaves performed an important function in facilitating such notions. While the bonds and boundaries of nation and region, of public and private had been broken up and reconfigured by defeat, a medium that "both transgresses and helps to define such boundaries had profound implications for the way Germans came to imagine themselves and the nation(s) that would emerge" (p. 1). Based on a sophisticated theoretical framework, the four major chapters between the introduction and conclusion function as autonomous essays. Each explores a different aspect of radio broadcasting in regard to everyday life: temporal structures of radio programs (chapter 2); the (dis)continuity of radio voices (chapter 3); the construction of gender, private, and public spaces, as

well as markers of space (chapter 4); and *Heimat* and regional and national identity (chapter 5).

In his introduction, Badenoch outlines the book's claims and arguments before summarizing the institutional and cultural history of German radio from its inception until the end of the occupation. His argument that the "presence of radio" in modern Germany "has been invisible or fragmented in history" (p. 4) may give rise to questions from scholars who have likewise turned to radio and explored not only its institutional development, but also its place within broader narratives of social, cultural, and political history.[1] However, Badenoch's approach ("both stepping back and stepping closer," as he puts it [p. 5]) is still urgently needed. The catchphrase "stepping back" contains a plea not to treat radio as a separate field of inquiry, but to examine through its prism larger questions, such as national belonging, collective fantasies of space and time, gender roles, daily life, and public-private entanglements. But in order to tackle these questions, one has also to "step closer" than historians conventionally do.

Much to his credit, Badenoch does not limit his analysis to only one radio genre. In fact, he explores a broad variety of programs and analyzes how they were positioned "with regard to their listeners' lives and experiences" (p. 8). Furthermore, he shifts attention from their content to "presentational and performative issues such as voice, gender, accent, mode of address" (p. 8). For example, in order to explain how radio broadcasting constructed a sense of *Heimat*, Badenoch does not begin with programs that were produced strictly under this rubric. Rather, he refers to quotidian references of time, space, voice, and sound in many different programs.

This approach calls for an integration of auditory material with other sources—a seemingly obvious undertaking that even prominent studies in media history ignore. Because Badenoch does take this approach, his study is based on a variety

of sources that range from newspaper clippings and letters written to local radio stations up to broadcasting manuscripts and oral records from an array of mostly German archives. Unfortunately, the introduction does not explain in detail which archival holdings Badenoch consulted, or which research strategies he used. Occasionally, one is left to wonder how comprehensive his archival research was. But this minor weakness cannot detract from this impressive study. As the following chapters show, Badenoch's work steps back and steps closer, at different points, and does so with a clear, elegant writing style and with keen analytical perception.

Chapter 2 ("Echoes of the Day: Finding Everyday Between Exception and Routine") examines temporal program structures. Regarding general time structures, postwar radio in the western occupation zones often picked up where it had left off in the Weimar or National Socialist eras. NWDR's morning program, for example, even included morning gymnastics, a format that German radio stations had introduced in the mid-1920s, one that had grown increasingly popular during the Nazi years. Although this format no longer met any objective needs or propaganda goals during the immediate postwar period, plagued by utter poverty and starvation as it was, listeners demanded its return. It helped them, Badenoch concludes, to maintain a sense of normality.

The next chapter ("Familiar Voices: Representations of Personalities and Pasts") explores how continuity was created through the projection of personalities—and their voices—on the radio. Numerous voices on the radio had been familiar to listeners for many years, and their return suggested continuity. Nonetheless, by also introducing fresh voices and innovative ways of addressing audiences, postwar radio stations advertised the features of a democratic "new person." This tendency was, among others, embodied by Peter von Zahn, head of spoken word broadcasting at the

NWDR. As a control officer pointed out, Zahn did not seem to "speak like a German," because he did not "command" (pp. 92). The fourth chapter ("Time Consuming: Addressing a Nation of Women") addresses the constantly recurring issue of gender. As Badenoch shows, the ambiguities in women's roles in postwar Germany were negotiated at the level of women's time, which was structured by radio programs that addressed a female audience exclusively or comprehensively.

In chapter 5 ("Replacing the Nation: Between Home Service and Heimat"), Badenoch asks how constructions of private spaces and seemingly normal times through the radio--analyzed in the previous chapters--were connected to markers of space. During the Weimar Republic, German public radio was organized regionally. Despite the centralization of the Nazi era, connections between different radio stations and their local audiences developed renewed local meaning(s) in postwar times. The author emphasizes how strongly many radio stations addressed the regions they served by using dialect or transmitting the sound of local church bells. Not despite, but because the people now living in the western zones of occupation had often left their former homes--and because large parts of Germany were destroyed--the idea of *Heimat* became crucial in everyday life. Not by traveling through rural towns and landscapes but rather by listening to radio, Germans could long for (and encounter) their new *Heimat*. The *Heimatfilm* of the 1950s merely reenacted in a visual format this originally aural experience.

Drawing on Alon Confino's notion of "the normal" as an appraisal of certain values instead of an actual reality, Badenoch points out, in his concluding remarks, how different radio usages allowed Germans "to construct images of normal times, normal people, normal places and indeed a normal nation" (p. 220). Indeed, having read this compact and elegantly written book it seems risky to follow Anderson's account of nations as mod-

ern spatio-temporal experiences, in particular with reference to the twentieth century, without taking radio into account. The study naturally prompts comparisons with the development of East German radio after 1945 and also across time: who, for instance, sought sounds of normality around and after the ruptures of 1989? And what is the function of radio broadcasts in more stable times? These and many other ramifications of Badenoch's work might inspire historians to connect the history of radio broadcasting more systematically with the history of modern "soundscapes" from a broader perspective and, more importantly, to think about radio not as a mass delivery of information and music, but as aural wallpaper for everyday life in the twentieth century.[2]

Notes

[1]. Badenoch draws on most of these studies: Inge Marßolek and Adelheid von Saldern, eds., *Radiozeiten: Herrschaft, Alltag, Gesellschaft 1924-1960* (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 1999); Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio and the Public Sphere 1923-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Axel Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten: Freizeit, Massenmedien und "Zeitgeist" in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre* (Hamburg: Christians, 1995); Konrad Dussel, *Hörfunk in Deutschland: Politik, Programm, Publikum (1923-1960)* (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2002). Yet, he fails to engage the results of some recent studies on the media in West Germany such as Christina von Hodenberg, *Konsens und Krise: Eine Geschichte der westdeutschen Medienöffentlichkeit 1945-1973* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006); and Monika Boll, *Nachtprogramm: Intellektuelle Gründungsdebatten in der frühen Bundesrepublik* (Münster: LIT, 2004).

[2]. Yaron Jean, "Follow the Sounds: On Sound and Auditory Perception in Germany 1914-1945," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für Deutsche Geschichte* 36 (2008): 379-382.

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