

Acoustic space: the role of radio in Israeli collective history

TAMAR LIEBES

The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel

E-mail: mstamarl@mscc.huji.ac.il; tamar.plesner-liebes@huji.ac.il

Television in the land of the People of the Book made its debut only in 1968, two decades after the founding of the Jewish state.¹ During the first, crucial, twenty years of Israel's existence, the dominant electronic medium was radio. And it was to radio that the task of inventing the new Jew who would build the Utopian *Altneuland* prescribed by Zionist ideology was assigned. Fortunately, *Kol Yisrael*, the station that was founded following the establishment of the new state, did not have to start from scratch. The infrastructure of Hebrew radio was already laid out, thanks to the policy of the Mandatory British government of allowing the Arab and Jewish communities in Palestine air space of their own, in which (according to government expectations) the two would let off steam; they would talk rather than conspire against the authorities.² Thus, the process of reconstituting national and cultural identity for the Zionist entity preceded the birth of the state. Within the framework of the "Hebrew Hour" of *The Voice of Jerusalem*,³ the medium's most effective characteristics came to the fore, perhaps most importantly, its ability deeply to etch the experience of certain *kinds of event* onto the collective memory.

In hindsight, looking over the three decades (1936–1968) in which radio had a monopoly over electronic mass communication and the next decades in which television replaced radio as the medium around which the nation united at historic moments, one may suggest that television has been associated with live spectacle, festive or ceremonial event (Sadat's visit, Rabin and Arafat's handshake, pre-election debates, the Eurovision Song Contest, football). Television has been there for celebratory moments; radio has transmitted – and, so, "mediated" – threatening and confrontational events, for example, the uncertain voting on the partition of Palestine at the United Nations (1947); Prime Minister David Ben Gurion's defiant declaration the following year of the State of Israel (*de facto* this also meant announcing a state of war); the national revenge against Nazism represented by the Eichmann trial

(1961); Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's famous slip of the tongue in the "waiting period" prior to the Six-Day War (etched into the collective Israeli memory as a "stutter"), which delivered a blow to public morale and increased public anxiety (1967); the announcement of the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War (1973), and the sounding of Scud missile alarms during the Gulf war (1991). The salience of these events and their documented memory are not easily separated from the modes of their transmission. The special distinction of audio versus visual transmission may be seen with great clarity by studying both particular events that occurred during the period when radio was the exclusive electronic medium and have remained in the public memory, and also the kind of events most associated with radio even after television came onto the scene.

Radio and nation-building

Despite its potential contribution to the formation of a collective identity and the extent to which, ironically, it responds to the need for enhanced compatibility between medium and culture, radio is regularly ignored as a source of national integration. This may be seen in the wider context of media research, in which the study of media's role in the formation of national identities focuses principally on television and generally omits the period during which radio was dominant.⁴ The ephemeral quality of the medium and, in the Israeli case, the gradual disappearance of records and recordings, and the consequent reliance of historians on printed matter, contribute to an incorrect recollection of the importance of radio in molding a uniform public outlook.

Television may have been the dominant national medium from the outset⁵ in the Third World nations established in the 1960s and 70s, but in Israel, radio's crucial historical role may not be ignored.⁶ Enjoying a virtual monopoly on non-written public communication during the state's first two decades, in the absence of television, and facing as its chief competitor a politically segmented press, radio had the power to set a collective public agenda. Its near exclusivity as a national medium was particularly significant. This was a fluid, liminal period, one in which the trappings of the nation's identity were laid out, and Zionist ideology had to find ways of reaching the masses of new immigrants composed of Holocaust survivors and refugees from Arab countries, most of whom had no Zionist background or motivation.⁷ During just such periods, as British cultural historian Raymond Williams⁸ argues, the media are relatively free to experiment with the adaptation of old

genres, the formation of new ones, and the use of various symbolic strategies to give expression to the spirit of the times.

The impact of radio in Israel also derives from its compatibility (as a communications technology) with the style of Israeli political culture. It has been suggested that the Israeli leadership's choice of radio, and the long postponement of television, came from seeing the former as less threatening to Jewish-Israeli culture and, perhaps, to the leaders themselves. As a medium, television was considered to be an enemy of reading; as a carrier, in particular, of American popular culture, television threatened the fragile revival of the Hebrew language and its literature.⁹ The worst fears about television, however, originated in its perceived capacity to "disintermediate," that is, to talk to the people over the heads of the traditional institutions through which democracy operates. Bringing politicians into the living-rooms of Israeli families was perceived as dissuading people from the urge to leave their houses in order to listen to their leaders at party headquarters or in town squares. Through television, (vicarious) eye contact from the comfort of the sofa might be deemed enough. A leader's "compatibility with the medium" might also become – as it indeed has¹⁰ – a crucial element in "electability," privileging personality over ideology.

Unlike television, radio was not regarded as a threat to the collective. In addition to the perception that it demands more active participation on the listeners side than that required by television, radio could offer its (unofficial) credentials as the voice of the Zionist movement. At this naïvely enthusiastic stage in Israel's history, the belief in the power of radio to mold a collective consciousness was regarded mostly with admiration. Thus, for example, following a press conference with the radio's top management, a *Davar* columnist (M.N. Neiman, October 10, 1948) reminds readers of the crucial importance of radio as a: "tremendously powerful instrument [*kabir*, T.L.], which, to a great extent, determines the soul of the nation." Similar admiration is expressed in *HaYom* (November 12, 1948), which, in an item that criticizes what is missing in radio, describes the medium admiringly as "a world conqueror, with unlimited effect and power."

The heated debates in the press about what radio was and should be and the participation of academics, intellectuals and policy makers in this debate demonstrate that radio was regarded as the central public arena to determine the nature of the nascent collective culture. In this spirit, sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt warned that the secular, liberal character of the state would be threatened by caving in to Orthodox demands that only Orthodox Bible scholars appear on the daily

program of Biblical commentary. Others debated the schedules, the pronunciation, style and register of broadcast Hebrew and the radio's social and cultural agenda. The point was how best to mobilize radio for collective cultural needs.

The rejection of television and the enthusiasm about radio suggests the notion of compatibility between medium and culture. This in turn raises the question of the direction of the influence: to what extent do the attributes of a medium influence society as opposed to the extent to which a medium appropriates, builds on, or "rebroadcasts" the attributes of the resident culture. To my mind, the medium has to be looked at *in situ*, as something that interacts with the resident culture. In Israel's case, the "hot," unambiguous, medium¹¹ entered a "mixed" culture, based on print, a tradition of ceremonial reading aloud, the writing of spoken (Talmudic) texts, and a heavy tendency for argumentation, together with the ideological intensity of the Zionist revolution and nation-building.¹² The interaction between communication technology and the at once ancient yet effectively nascent (Jewish-Israeli-Hebrew) culture shaped local broadcast genres and the style of delivery. It also determined the perception of the medium's potential and what communication scholars label "the situation of contact," that is, the social context in which it was received. For daily life, radio in its heyday acted mostly as a medium of "one thing at a time-ness," following a packed schedule of serving a variety of societal needs (of surveillance, correlation, acculturation and entertainment¹³) and catering to different social and cultural sectors. At critical and or ceremonial moments in the nation's history it exercised "its power to turn the psyche and society into a single echo chamber,"¹⁴ becoming a medium of "all at one-ness," bringing together the various ethnic, cultural and ideological and groups around a collective experience.

Radio, the construction of daily life, breakthroughs and collective crises

One way of looking at radio's construction of collective identity is by observing the daily tasks undertaken by the various broadcast genres. Here, radio contributed to the different aspects of the Zionist project, alternating between programs and genres that address everybody and others that were tailored to the needs of particular groups, whether ethnic, professional or national. Waking up Israelis with the station signal, featuring the familiar Biblical cantillation of Genesis and the traditional psalm *Mah Tovvu Ohaleikha Ya"akov*, broadcasting continued

on its tightly packed agenda, serving alternately as a public Bulletin Board, a Hebrew teacher to newcomers and a news announcer and phonograph player to supply information and entertainment to all. As the Voice of Zionism it balanced Jewish heritage with what was perceived as democratizing access to the treasures of high culture,¹⁵ moving from brisk gymnastic lessons to seasonal advice to farmers, to current affairs, popular Hebrew songs, Bach and Mozart and news in multiple (diasporic) languages. It was also in charge of presenting the cultural heritage of various “tribes” (that is, Jewish immigrants mostly from Arab countries) to the whole society, reconnecting families by searching for relatives lost in the Second World War¹⁶ and providing daily broadcasts to Israeli Arabs in Arabic (the signal was a tune from *Sampson and Delilah*, Saint-Saen’s Orientalist fantasy).

Another way of assessing the role radio played in forming a collective identity is to look at radio’s contribution to the social experience in moments of crisis, mostly at the outbreak of war or following a massive terrorist attack. During Israel’s first two decades, when radio alone was present, it served as the instrument to insert such events into the public memory. Radio also starred in what may be termed pre-planned rituals, such as Independence Day parades, or marathon marches. It was associated with – and, in turn, associated its listeners with “– being there.” At the same time, listening to the radio broadcast “from the field” did not satisfy. As much as we can evaluate the results, the awkward live reporting, the bad quality of the transmission and the forced spontaneity apparent in the “*vox pops*” interviews of pilgrims who made it to the site, did not capture the flavor of the celebration. Television, when it entered in 1968, did precisely that and it took radio’s place as the medium people turned to for “witnessing” national ceremonial events (whose pictures they later recalled). This difference in effectiveness between the two media can be understood in terms of the difference between audio and visual technologies. Ceremonial events do not promise anything new. Carefully planned in advance, their appeal relies heavily on pictures. The power of events such as Anwar Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem, or Yitzhak Rabin’s funeral, lies in their emotional capacity to engulf viewers by making eye contact with the characters on stage and through the awareness that everyone else is (also) watching. Empathy, a sense of sharing, occurs when seeing a smile on Sadat’s lips, a tear in Golda Meir’s eye.

Radio’s strength, on the other hand, lies in surprises. It is the medium more associated with national traumas, unexpected tragedies, tough confrontational events (not entirely under control) and looming

threats in the nation's tumultuous history. Those are the events with which radio is central and even today, despite television, it has ceded little place. In the decades when it reigned alone, radio was truly the point of focus. It acted as a virtual town hall in crisis, gathering Israelis (at home, often the streets and town squares) to live through the collective experience in real time. It was the first to publicly announce that war had been declared, to inform the home-front on what was happening in the field, and it even played a role in activating the process itself by announcing the call-up of the reserves. It also provided these moments of chaos and existential anxiety with coherence and a sense of control, not only by reporting the news, but also by hosting national commentators. At moments of crisis (when some are mobilized, others volunteering, others still carrying on normal lives, but all of whom need important information) radio's speed, accessibility, and sometimes its (telephoned in) interactivity make it vital.

In the absence of television, it may be argued that radio's presence at the time of the tough and often painful transition into statehood provided listeners, whether individuals or groups, with a "transitional object." Roger Silverstone has ascribed to television the role of being the symbolic equivalent for adults of the teddy bear or old blanket toddlers drag around.¹⁷ However, I would venture that radio, with its portability (especially the small transistor glued to peoples' ears during such moments as the Eichmann trial), fits the bill more effectively. Unlike the fixed-in-place television, radio can easily accompany listeners, assisting them in containing chaos, mediating threatening reality, and providing a sense of belonging by connecting the individual with the collective.

Waking up devils: Levi Eshkol vs. Orson Wells

A comparison between two traumatic events, one in Israel, the other on the other side of the ocean, in which radio played an indispensable role – mysterious, unpredictable, threatening – seems useful to demonstrate how the impact of the medium cannot be separated from its social and historical context, and from the (not unrelated) institutional structure of broadcasting. In spite of their very different characteristics, both events share the fact of their salience in the collective memory of their respective societies, and both demonstrate the public's absolute trust in the integrity and authenticity of radio and in the ominous power of the medium.

Choosing the long route to get to the Israeli case, let us look first at Orson Wells' broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* (fall 1938) as it appears in Woody Allen's nostalgic film-memoir *Radio Days*. The episode starts with the storyteller's unmarried aunt Bea on her way home from a date with her current suitor, when he stops the car on a rainy road, turns on the romantic music on the radio, telling her: "You're not going to believe this but we are out of gas." Aunt Bea hardly has time to protest ("Sidney, oh Sidney, this is our first date together,") when the music is suddenly interrupted "for a special news bulletin" by a grim newscaster, announcing that "a state of emergency has been declared by the President of the United States. We are switching live from Wilson's Glenn, New Jersey, where the landing of unidentified spacecraft has been officially confirmed as a full-scale invasion to the Earth by Martians." The reporter in the field does not believe his eyes. People trying to escape are crushed; there are power outages everywhere. Listening to the reports of the interplanetary invasion, Aunt Bea's boyfriend panics, bolts out of the car and runs off, leaving poor Aunt Bea to contend with the monsters. She walked home 6 miles and when he called her for a date the next week, she told him that she couldn't see him any more; she had married a Martian.

The live, misinterpreted, traumatic broadcast I propose as an Israeli (non) parallel is what became known as Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's historic "stutter." It occurred in the midst of a live reading of a written speech to the nation on May 28, 1967. Egypt had just closed the straits of Tiran and moved its forces into the Sinai Peninsula, and as the "period of waiting" for war stretched on, public morale eroded and anxiety mounted. Eshkol's address to the nation was supposed to counteract the general belief that his indecision about going to war was a sign of weakness and to strengthen the public's faith in his leadership. Reading from a typed text on a live broadcast delivered from the Tel Aviv radio studio, Eshkol came to the critical phrase:

(We have) also determined the lines to which the [Egyptians, T.L.] armed forces must withdraw from Israel's southern border and the actions [that need to be taken] to protect our sovereign rights . . .

כמו כן נקבעו קווים להסגת הריכוזים הצבאיים מגבולה הדרומי של ישראל ולפעולה לשמירת זכויותינו הריבוניות.

Unfortunately for Eshkol (perhaps for Israel's future), 10 minutes prior to the broadcast, his political secretary had substituted the orig-

inal, more colloquial “*lif’ol le-hazzazat*,” effectively, to seek a realignment (of the Egyptian forces), with the more ultimative higher register word “*le-hassagat*,” preceded by *niqb’u –qav-im*, “[we have] set lines of retreat.”¹⁸ Stumbling over the handwritten, quite illegible, correction and possibly unaware of being broadcast live, Eshkol stopped to ask his secretary “What does this mean?” The listeners only heard an unclear mutter as radio anchor Hagai Pinsker jumped to disconnect the microphone. Seconds later, the microphone was turned on and Eshkol resumed his speech. Israelis were dumbstruck. The attempt to repair the damage by replaying the speech on the 10 o’clock news, with the stutter cut out, was a failure. It should be noted that the significance of the stutter should be seen in the context of days of tense waiting for a decision and the expectation that Eshkol’s speech would signal action. Within this framing his stuttering was interpreted as a confirmation of the Prime Minister’s perceived weakness. Nathan Cohen, the radio’s legal adviser (2004) describes Eshkol’s stutter as the worst failure in *Kol Yisrael’s* history, noting that it had far-reaching political repercussions.¹⁹

Whereas it is difficult to evaluate the actual effect of the stutter on the public at the time, the press of the next day brought it as evidence for Eshkol’s failure as Minister of Defense and urged for the immediate appointment of Moshe Dayan for the job. In public memory, the story of the stutter gathered mythic momentum, echoing years later in stories such as one about soldiers and officers bursting into tears while listening to Eshkol’s confused words on their radios.²⁰ *Tekuma*, television’s version of Israel’s history, broadcast in 1998, tells a story about an army general tearing off the insignia of his rank from his epaulet and thrusting it at the Prime Minister (then also Minister of Defense). In hindsight, it is also seen as a crossroads, which carries historical implications for Israel’s post Six Day War policy, leading to the inevitable speculation on whether Eshkol, were he in charge, would have retreated from the West Bank following the victory.

To return to live radio, why are these two events interesting? What is paradigmatic in the invasion from Mars and, *mutatis mutandis*, in the Eshkol stutter? First, *the two broadcasts are “live”*. They connect listeners simultaneously to the event as it unfolds in real time, and they connect individual listeners to the larger community through their awareness that everyone else is also listening. The impact is particularly effective in a media environment with only one electronic medium. Second, *the two events are believed to occur in the “reality” outside*, that is, to be initiated by institutions outside broadcasting, not concocted

in the production studio. Third, *both were experienced only through sound, and*, therefore, their reception was characterized by an intense one-dimensionality endowed with the mystery of a linear transmission of words that connect directly to the imagination without visual clues mediating or interfering. As such, radio is more similar to print, in which decoding demands more projective imagination than television.²¹ The impact of messages on television is diffused by images that distract viewers from the message (transmitted by the words), or, alternately, fixate the meaning on one particular visual image, thereby diminishing the more active mental concentration required when listening to words only. Unlike the analogous “reality” of images, the shades and undercurrents of the grain of the voice are an inspiration, not a constraint, to the imagination.

The structural difference between the two events arises exactly from their being anchored in two very different societies. *First, both feed on existing anxieties in the two cultures* (there is no way in which they could be switched around). The threatening performance of the Martian attack breaking into American living-rooms and reverberating in the fictional world of comics and science fiction was thought to have arisen out of the alienation of modern living in anonymous cities, which was marked by new incomprehensible technologies and by Hitler’s looming shadow.²² The threat in Israel originated from the real world of politics and war. *Second, although both turned out to be virtual flukes (their effect based on a faulty perception of reality), etched in the collective memory as traumatic at the time, the heroes of the two events came from different worlds* – the realm of mass entertainment and of life-and-death politics, respectively. On the producer’s side, *The War of the Worlds* turned out to be a carefully planned “reality show;” the stutter a technical failure in the delivery (rather than the reflection of deep psychological truth). In the US, the hero of the event came out the other end as an acclaimed film actor and director; Israel’s tragic hero came out a loser. The stutter worked to reinforce Eshkol’s non-macho image, (possibly) of a “Diaspora Jew;” who, unlike Ben Gurion’s publicly expressed hatred of Yiddish, felt at home with the emotional richness of the language, as shown in the context of the crisis. In a murmured reply to Hanna Zemer, *Davar*’s editor, who came to lobby for a preemptive attack, he said: סווערט זיך גיטן בלוט ווי וואסער (Blood will flow here like water). *Third, the potential threat of the event cannot be separated from the culture, also in terms of the particular rhetorical conventions.* In Israel’s case, the connotations attached to stuttering are negative. In Britain, as David Lazar pointed out in *Maariv* the following

day (the 29th), stuttering is a necessary ingredient for a successful speech; pausing, looking at your papers, and finally coming up with the message is considered an effective rhetorical strategy. The pathos, inflated rhetoric, and grand gestures typical of Israeli public expression are only laughable.

Taking part in historic moments through and with radio

My focus here is on the kind of rare media events Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, in their study of events and broadcasting, call “transformative.”²³ No mere ceremonies, events like the United Nations voting on the decision for the partition of Palestine or Ben Gurion’s “performative” declaration of the state of Israel transform the social and political structure. Such events occur at liminal moments, in which the social structure is less rigid, allowing for changes previously perceived as impossible to be realized. Etched in public memory, these events were experienced collectively as a watershed, in which the individual and national future was hanging in the balance and the outcome was uncertain. Far from merely ceremonial, these (to various degrees) preplanned events were eventually impressed onto the public consciousness. Nonetheless, although the initiators were public figures acting through public institutions, the imprinting was achieved by broadcasters through live audio transmission. Their impact was inseparable from the experience of listening to the radio in real time and in the company of others, and it derives from the fact that their outcome was considered in advance as bearing crucial importance for the future of individual and national existence. The uncertain context carried with it a looming anxiety, a question “what if we fail?” (if the UN votes against the partition, if Ben Gurion does not declare a state). This category is distinguished from that of the preplanned, mostly live, broadcasting of civic ceremonies, such as the Memorial Day for the Shoah, the Memorial Day for soldiers, the Day of Independence. The invention of ceremonial routines and the molding of the “right” contents and genres for these newly established holidays, which were largely the province of public radio, deserves separate examination.

Pinpointing transformative events that were mediated by radio, we may focus on the UN General Assembly’s vote on the partition of Palestine, Ben Gurion’s declaration of the establishment of the state of Israel and the Eichmann trial, in addition to Eshkol’s stutter – events partially known in advance, their public impact deriving from the fact

that they contain a strong open element of surprise and arouse deep-set anxieties.

“We have a state”: Listening to radio’s transmission of the UN vote on partition

The vote on the partition of Palestine (November 29, 1947), broadcast live from New York, was experienced by the members of the *Yishuv* not as passive observers but as defendants on trial, waiting for their collective sentence, in this case, truly one of life or death. With listeners jotting down the verdict of each “jury member” as the vote proceeded and, calculating the chances as they went along, this was the most nerve-wrecking, perhaps the most involving collective experience of the *Yishuv*. It was a collective experience not only because everybody knew that the whole imagined community was listening but also (thanks to a scarcity of radios, but, more so, to the wish to go it together) because the people walked out into the streets to await the decision during this long night of discussions in the UN as one of the crowd.

Initiated and performed, from afar, with the outcome depending on a number of small erratic states the broadcast, created an almost unbearable suspense and a relief at the happy end, which was lived as a symbolic victory over the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jewish people. These elements combined to make this perhaps the most powerful radio event Israelis have ever experienced. Accounts of intense public radio-listening years later reverberate with the anxiety that listeners felt both before and during this event: “will we win?”, coupled to the grave knowledge that winning portended more war and much death in the not too distant future. Sadness and foreboding framed the joy.²⁴

The radio features as the focus of the preparation for participating in the event and of living through it. Amos Oz tells how the only radio in the neighborhood was dragged out to an apartment balcony, connected to the cord of a sewing machine so that the whole street (collected in the courts and road and balconies) could hear “what is our verdict and what the future holds for us (if there would be any future at all after this Saturday).” Gathering at midnight, the crowd listened in total silence, as if turned into shadows. When the deep jolly voice coming from the radio set completed reading out the count, there was “a terrified, disastrous, quiet, stillness of masses of people who stopped breathing, the kind I have heard only once in my life . . .” The first reaction to the announcement of the results, according to Amos Oz, was not one of joy but of a terrible, blood-freezing scream, “as if all the killed (people) in the past and all the ones who were going

to be killed received at that moment a window for an outcry, shut off in the next minute.” Only then did the shouts of joy and the singing start. Oz’s description shows that listening to the silences between the words can be no less meaningful than listening to the words and that the crowd’s silent reaction, expressing the collective anxiety, was as telling as the shouting that followed. Whereas Oz’s premonition of war is that of the storyteller looking back, witnesses who were older at the time recount how their joy was overshadowed by their knowledge of the approaching war.

Fifty years later, the daily *Maariv* (*Sof Shavua*, November 26, 1997) chose twenty-nine Israelis and asked them where they were and what they did on November 29, 1947 (the classic question about historical moments). Almost all remembered being attached to the radio, many with a pencil and paper, jotting down the scores. Listening to the broadcast was a collective experience, not only by connecting to an imagined community but also by joining the crowds in the streets. Meretz party founder Shulamit Aloni listened with her boyfriend, who was killed a few months later in the 1948 war. She recounts sitting together all night, by the radio: “We listened and listened and listened, and suddenly together we burst out with (cries of) joy, and, together with everybody else, we went out to the streets . . . the dancing continued so many hours and there were so many friends. We continued and continued until we heard the echoes of the first shots.”

Many of Tel Aviv’s residents gathered in the central squares to listen together to loudspeakers broadcasting the debates of the UN assembly. The ones who preferred going to the *Camari* theatre (to watch the American comedy *You can’t take it with you*) received the news from actor Yossi Yadin, who himself heard the crowds roaring in the square from his dressing room windows. After the show, Yadin recalls announcing “Ladies and Gentleman, we have a state,” to which the audience responded with screams of joy and hurried out to join the dancing.

The striking characteristics of the reception of this transmission are associated with the events’ extreme liminality, characterized by the spirit of *communitas*.²⁵ Dayan and Katz have argued that such high moments may also be experienced vicariously, via television.²⁶ In such cases, viewing becomes a social event, in which participation is active and involved. Experiencing the UN voting on radio in the streets incorporates the mediated experience of listening-in to an event occurring on the other side of the globe with the carnivalesque elements of the very real mass celebration in the streets. The incompatibility between

the public character of the event as a mass fair and the character of radio as a domestic intimate medium was overcome by technical and symbolic amplification of the broadcast. Fitting the broadcast to *the situation of contact* was achieved by gathering around radio sets (with the attachment of loudspeakers) in the squares, engulfed by a spirit of the equalization of class, ethnicity and veteran status. Moreover, *the distance and separation between the event and its transmission and its directly affected audience*, listening from the other side of the globe, united the community in the shared anxiety derived from realizing that the fate of the would-be state lay in the far-off hands of those over whom residents of the *Yishuv* themselves had no control whatsoever. And *the knowledge that this would be a final verdict and that a possible failure in the vote could not be amended* intensified the emotional experience.

Prime Minister David Ben Gurion's live reading of the Declaration of Independence was a far less successful media event. This was so, even though Ben Gurion was announcing the establishment of the new state, as well as giving it its name, the State of Israel. Adding to the event's importance, the declaration of the state, unlike the UN vote, was unilateral, and it also carried a heavy symbolic weight, signaling not only a new phase in the history of the Jewish people, but the start of a bloody struggle. Nonetheless, the transmission was a dud. To begin with, behind the scenes there was a certain half-heartedness and indecision. The announcement took place after the war of independence had begun, and the declaration itself was made quasi-conspiratorially. Uncertainty loomed over the ceremony until the last moment; the problem was its timing. There were also technical issues. Reception was poor, preparations hasty, and the transmission itself weak. And people did not know the announcement was coming. Nor did it help that in Amos Oz's Jerusalem neighborhood – this is only one example among many – the noise of shooting drowned out Ben Gurion's voice. Moreover, substantively, the declaration was less dramatic for Israelis for real historical reasons than the UN vote for partition: after the partition plan was accepted, the question outstanding was “when” the state would be established, no longer the more crucial “whether.”

Years later (March, 1961), reporters of the Voice of Israel's radio magazine asked people where were they when they heard the news. Many responded that they never heard it at all. With the leadership's hesitation about the timing and attention riveted on war, the “perfor-

mative act”²⁷ of the creation of the state was at most, in Dayan and Katz’s terms a “media event manqué.”

Live broadcasting of the Eichmann trial: Radio and the transformation of Israeli identity

Unlike the Declaration of Independence, whose potential broadcast value was not realized, the effects produced by the live broadcast of the Eichmann trial exceeded everyone’s expectations. The evidence suggests that the experience of listening to the trial caused a dramatic change in the way Israelis (especially those who were locally-born and second generation) saw their/our own history and experienced collective identity. As such, the trial, lived through in real time through radio, became perhaps the ultimate example of the transformative power of the live broadcasting of historic ceremonial events. The dramatic impact on the way Israelis related to their past through perceptions of the Holocaust may be seen in press reports at the time and individual accounts years later.

Influenced by the dominant ideological climate in the young state, indigenous Israelis were in many ways alienated from the immediate past of “Diaspora Jews,” who were universally believed to have gone “like sheep to the slaughter,” and they tended to associate the survivors with the evil of which they had been the victims. The trial’s public impact was enormous, which in very large part is attributable to radio. The voices of witnesses, victims, and prosecutors were heard everywhere, and the omnipresent radio focused the cumulative emotional effect.

The trial’s first day, April 11, 1961, was experienced via live radio throughout the country, with all home transmitters turned on, and loudspeakers broadcasting in schoolyards, factories, and offices. According to a survey conducted by the Central Statistics Bureau, 60% of the population over fourteen listened to the broadcast on the first day.²⁸ Radio’s huge and somewhat unanticipated impact can be dramatically witnessed in the Israeli press on the day following the opening session. The headlines reported the spontaneous ceasing of all workday routine to rally round the trial. *HaBoker* announced, “Israel from Dan to Eilat listened to the trial; In Gush Dan all workplaces were deserted, and people listened to the transmission of the trial.” The report describes how

The streets of Petach Tikva and Ramat Gan never looked more deserted – not even in the small hours of the night – as they looked when Kol Yisrael started transmitting from Bet

Ha'am in Jerusalem. Everyone was hooked to the transmitters. [...] dozens collected around a parked car next to the municipality building in Ramat Gan to listen; others crowded in cafes and many walked in the streets with transistor radios to their ears. Classes in schools ceased and teachers devoted long hours to discussing the trial... Children brought mobile radios, and the whole class stopped studying and listened to the trial. (HaBoker, April 12, 1961).

A crucial question in the story of the nation's celebration of the trial is the participation of (what was then called) *Yisrael Ha-sheniyah* ("the second Israel"). To what extent did Jewish immigrants from Arab countries identify with the (mostly) European Holocaust victims? Did they take part in the collective memory of the historical experience of European Jewry? According to surveys of the Central Bureau of Statistics, whereas in the overall population 60% of Israelis listened to the broadcasts of the trial's first day, the number among the immigrants from Arab states was as high as 40%.²⁹ The immigrants from Arab states who did listen expressed strong empathy. The newspaper *Ha-Boker*, referring to a survey it had organized of Israeli responses to the trial, wrote "We felt it also," said the residents of the second Israel. The newspaper went on:

"Immigrants from Yemen, Cochin and North Africa listened to the transmission of the trial in their houses and work places ... listened and shed a tear, listened and ground a tooth." (HaBoker, April 12, 1961).

The extensive reporting included people such as a Yemenite in *Kfar Darom*, who while working in his vineyard, listening to his transistor radio and weeping, told the reporter "I was ashamed. I have never cried like this. I have a wife and children – *baruch hashem* it's good that I was in the field and they didn't see me." A Tunisian immigrant in a moshav close to Ashkelon reported that all the moshav's members turned their radios on, and that he and his wife decided they would not eat on that day. A shoemaker from Casablanca, now living in Eilat, an immigrant from Cochin in Metula and Moroccan Jews in Wadi Salib all listened and were deeply moved. A Persian *oleh* working in a winery in Netanya listened to the trial in his car; on the return trip to Afula, he heard the voices from the radio in all the settlements he passed through. "In the sugar factory in Afula everybody listened; nobody spoke, they only listened. A number of times (on the way back) I was so angry with

the words of Servatius that I found myself speeding unknowingly to more than 100 km/h. A sugar expert [to whom the interviewee gave a lift] said he didn't want to hear; he sat next to me and showed me a blue number on his arm. But I didn't turn off the radio, because I understood that he didn't really mean it."

Throughout the trial's duration, Kol Yisrael broadcast an Evening Diary of the trial, switching to live broadcasting only at key moments (on twelve days altogether between April 11 and mid-August) and had to face listeners' protests as well as few thanks from survivors who wanted to hear the news but could not bear to hear the reports from the trial.³⁰

Surprisingly, in the memory of Israelis, half a century later, the whole trial was broadcast live. Just as in the case of the crash of the space shuttle *Challenger*, which many Americans "remembered" watching live, even though very few really did, a sample of about twenty Israelis whom we interviewed about the trial recall "listening to the live broadcasts every day." For example, Professor Menachem Blondheim, a scholar of media and history, an elementary school student at the time, remembers listening with the rest of the family to the trial "every day at lunchtime, after school."

A radio program on *Galei Tsahal*, produced for the Holocaust Memorial day in 2002, edited by Ido Tamari and entitled, "When Eichmann entered my home," provides evidence of the dramatic impact of the trial on the generation born after the state's founding. Interviewing prominent Israelis who were children or teenagers at the time, forty years later, it records the vivid memories of people who, prior to the trial, had no knowledge of the Holocaust and felt little or no empathy with the victims. All describe the experience of listening to the trial on radio as a shock and a revelation. The place in which the radio was heard is a major element in all of the accounts. For the politician Yossi Beilin, who in his youth had been a *Galei Tsahal* (Israel Army Radio) announcer and journalist, listening to the trial meant a transformation of the image of the Holocaust he had as a child. Before the trial it meant "sad people with numbers on their arms and people whom we regarded as crazy – a tailor, a woman who chased us with a stick . . ." Popular singer Shlomo Artzi, whose mother was herself a survivor, had heard nothing recalling her own past before hearing the broadcasts of the trial. Following her experience of the trial, Nili Keren became a historian, with a goal to study the Holocaust, "I was a pupil in Yud-Alef, the eleventh grade, a major in History and we did not learn anything about the Holocaust," she recalls. David Ben Gurion's announcement

of Eichmann's arrest, which she heard on a bus in Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Street, was critical in shaping her life. Listening to Prosecutor Gideon Hausner, she was shocked. Drawn into his story, she felt that enormous happenings had been hidden from her throughout her youth. She remembers thinking: "I am going to graduate from school soon and I still don't know anything."

David Ohana, the son of Moroccan Jewish immigrants with no direct links with the Holocaust describes listening to the Eichmann trial throughout the day on various radio receivers as a major childhood experience. He recalls the children in his home town of Kiryat Gat following the trial with transistor radios at school and listening during the intermissions between classes. In the evening, at home with his parents, the family sat in front of the radio in the living room, staring at the radio, and listening to the voices coming out. "Through the trial and the transistor radio," he recalls, "the Holocaust entered our home." In Yossi Beilin's school in Tel Aviv, a loudspeaker-system broadcast the trial into the classrooms, where "we sat listening to the trial for long hours."

Later, the prosecutor, Gidon Hausner said that there was enough documented material to prosecute Eichmann without bringing one witness, but he decided to summon as many witnesses as possible to ensure that the story be heard. His tactic was far more effective than he could have imagined. In 1962, Haim Guri, an Israeli poet and Palmach fighter who covered the trial for the Israeli paper *La-merchav*, ascribed the trial's transformative impact to its "giving voice" to the Holocaust for the first time. The documentation, had been there all along, lying in archives. Now, the trial "broke the silence of the archives, as if they were speaking for the first time . . ." This process released an incredible energy of "now I understand and perceive." Guri concludes that "the Holocaust has happened now and not on any date between those years and the beginning of the trial."³¹ This immediacy of the experience poured out of the radio transmitters everywhere. On paper the words had been there before, but only the need generated by the trial, to speak up publicly, made them break through the prevailing and embarrassed silence. Radio was crucial in bringing home the voices, complete with grain and texture, without pictures to distract listeners' attention.

Interestingly, the governmental committee in charge of publicity for the trial was concerned about facilitating the work of foreign correspondents, but it took no pains to determine how the trial should be broadcast to the Israeli public. It gave no instructions to *Kol Yisrael* and suggested no special format. Nor did it call for interruptions in the

regular schedule by live broadcasts at important moments.³² Radio's producers, too, originally regarded the trial as marginal, which may be seen in the little attention given to it on Kol Yisrael's *Radio* magazine in the weeks prior to its start. One extended report (23.3.1961) describes a program dedicated to the police unit in charge of the trial, whereas on another page there is extensive coverage of preparations to broadcast live – not the trial – but the ceremony at Mount Herzl on Independence Day.

The lack of concern with addressing the Israeli public in the planning committee and inside kol Yisrael may have expressed the general feeling that “we” (Israelis, Jews) know it all, that our present mission is to teach it to the world. Radio's producers were more excited about finding evidence of ancient Jewish life in the Judean desert than with broadcasting the voices of survivors. The recent (unhappy) past lost in the competition with the glamour of the ancient connection to the land. However, underlying this underestimation of the trial's potential impact was the prior disconnection of most Israelis from the Holocaust and the embarrassment so many felt about survivors, in some cases, reinforced by the survivors' own reluctance to talk.

Giving voice to truth, ringing a false alarm

Other milestones in Israel's history, inseparable from their mediation by radio, have characteristics similar to the transformative events described above. They were broadcast live and, whereas most were pre-planned, involved an unexpected surprising disclosure, touching on some kind of an existential threat, or fear, or on a deep truth.

One prominent case in point is the eulogy delivered by Moshe Dayan, then Chief of Staff (April 29, 1956), over the grave of Ro'i Rothberg, a young security officer killed by Palestinians in Kibbutz *Nahal Oz*, on the border with the Gaza Strip. The eulogy, replayed and quoted many times since, remained in the collective memory. Its impact can be understood by Dayan's rough, identifiable, authentic voice and delivery, and by the dissonance between the ceremonial context of the event and the content of his unconventional speech. Dayan chose the occasion to express understanding of the Arabs' hatred towards Israelis, empathy for their suffering, and to forecast a grim future for Israelis and Palestinians, the two societies locked in a tragic struggle to the death.³³ The lesson to be drawn was harsh and pessimistic. If Israel would not be “ready, armed, strong, and tough” then “our lives will

be forfeit.” Dayan’s empathy for the other side offered no hope. It also rang true.

Another memorable event that played on the existential anxieties of Israelis and in which radio played a crucial role occurred on April 1, 1959, and was later to be known as: “The Night of the Ducks.” The event was an alarm a group of army officers had rashly sounded. Failing to consider the power of radio to create panic, senior intelligence officers instructed the radio to announce the mobilization of a number of reserve units, one of whom was named “the water ducks.” The broadcast was , repeated a number of times, and it raised a scare not only in Israel, but in neighboring countries, with the result that reservists were mobilized in Syria, a state of emergency declared in Jordan, and anger expressed by the United States and Britain. The army officers responsible were removed from their posts.

Radio was too good at its job. The generals were playing with fire, putting the Arab enemy to the test without calculating the possible repercussions. The radio announcer’s grave, measured, authoritative voice created anxiety not only among Arabs, but also Israel’s Jews. When listeners’ nerves are always on edge and catastrophe ever looming, the unleashed power of radio can have untoward consequences.

The role of radio in imprinting history

To sum up, I have discussed the power of radio in influencing the Israeli public in the live broadcasting of preplanned historic events. Whether with respect to the broadcast of the United Nations partition resolution, the Eichmann trial, Levi Eshkol’s “stutter,” or “The Night of the Ducks,” radio, as discussed here, played a crucial role in determining listeners’ responses. Yet the effects were not always predictable. Preplanned broadcasts were subject to technical problems like the quality of the transmission and the physical setting in which they were heard. Yet all that listeners heard remained fixed in the public memory. These were signs along the road of the state’s history. The midnight broadcast of the UN resolution began as an existential threat, yet ended as the first collective celebration of independence, and the cumulative broadcasting of the Eichmann trial transformed the way in which Israelis see their history. Eskol’s stutter highlighted the fear for national survival in the confrontation with Egypt.

In addition, radio is commonly regarded as an intimate, individually consumed, medium, in which the distance between the broadcaster and the microphone is as short as that between the transistor and the

listener's ear. Yet, in each of these instances, radio was broadcasting to the broad public, not individuals, albeit the modalities were not always the same. The UN resolution and the Eichmann trial were listened to in public rather than at home; the broadcasts of Eshkol's "stutter" and "The Night of the Ducks" were heard at home but created panic among the public and aroused heated discussion immediately afterward and throughout the country. In considering the impact of communications media, the nature of the media's technology and the context in which that technology is received must be taken into account. Moreover, following McLuhan's distinction between "hot" and "cool" media, it may be argued that the power of radio as a "hot" medium is more intense than that of (the cooler) television. The television picture can make the verbal message "cooler," for pictures have the power to distract attention, and they may also lessen radio's purely verbal impact and diffuse its effects. In turn, the words spoken by those appearing in the sometimes repetitious television picture fixate the meanings of the pictures themselves³⁴ rather than conveying an independent message of their own. The consequences of Eshkol's stutter might have been less grave had he been speaking on television, and seeing the witnesses in the Eichmann trial may have softened what they said.

To be sure, this discussion has not exhausted the variety of radio broadcasting, nor the variety of radio's force, which has come to the fore in various modes. Radio has been portrayed here as a mediator of live events. But radio and its producers have also initiated and broadcast Hebrew song festivals, quiz shows, satire, and much more; "breaking news" was, and to some extent remains, radio's domain. These and other types of program, even programs taped in advance like controversial documentaries, investigative reports, and radio dramas, have enormous potential. Each has the power to leave a mark on Israel's national and cultural identity – as this identity evolves, and as it negotiates its sometimes perilous way.

Notes

1. Elihu Katz, "Television Comes to the People of the Book," in I.L. Horowitz, ed., *The Use and Abuse of Social Science* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1971).
2. Edwin Samuel, *A Lifetime in Jerusalem: The Memoirs of the Second Viscount Samuel* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1970), Chap. 11.
3. The compromise name agreed on following the British suggestion of "The Broadcasting Service of Palestine," and the Jewish leadership's "The Broadcasting Service of the Land of Israel."

4. This applies also to the cases of the two German states established following the Second World War and to new nations in Europe and other parts of the world.
5. Elihu Katz and George Weddell, G., *Broadcasting in the Third World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).
6. More on this era of Israeli radio in Tamar Liebes, "Performing a dream and its dissolution: A social history of broadcasting in Israel," in J. Curran and M. Myung-Jin Park, eds., *De-Westernizing Media Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).
7. More generally, an argument that hegemony is "softer" during the post-revolutionary stage in a nation's history was made by British cultural historian Raymond Williams.
8. Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Shocken Books, 1974).
9. See Katz, 1971, endnote I, and Tasha Oren, "Living Room Levantine: Immigration, ethnicity, and the border in early Israeli television," *The Velvet Light Trap* 44 (1990), 20.
10. On the correctness of these anxieties, see Katz, Elihu, Gurevitch, Michael and Hadassa Haas, "20 years of television in Israel: are there long-run effects on values, social connectedness, and cultural practices?" *Journal of Communication* 47 (1997), 3–20. Their study shows that whereas, during the first two decades of the monopoly of public broadcasting, television acted to reinforce collective dominant values, with the outburst of a multiplicity of commercial channels television reinforced de-collectivization and individualized consumer culture.
11. According to McLuhan's definition of acting on only one of the senses in high definition. See Marshal McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Routledge and Kegan Kegan Paul, 1964).
12. Menahem Blondheim and Shoshana Blum Kulka, "Literacy, Orality, and Television: Mediation and Authenticity in Jewish Conversational Arguing. 1-2000 c.e.," *The Communication Review* 4 (2000), 511–542.
13. Charles Wright, "Functional Analysis and Mass Communication," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 24: (1960), 605–621.
14. Paul Levinson, *Digital McLuhan* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 190.
15. David Cardiff and Paddy Scannell, "Broadcasting and national unity," in J. Curran, A. Smith and P. Wingate, eds., *Impacts and Influences* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987).
16. Radio (Kol Yirael's Second Channel) has lately resumed its role of mediating between people looking for lost relatives and friends.
17. Roger Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 1–23.
18. Eytan Haber, *HaYom Tifrotz Milchama* [*War Will Break Out Today*, Hebrew]. (Tel Aviv: Idanim, Yediot Aharonot Books, 1987), 190–198.
19. Nathan Cohen, "The Influence of the British Model of Broadcasting on the Formation and the Institutionalization of Broadcasting in Israel" (Diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2004).
20. Tamar Brosh, *Ne"um Le-Khol Et* [*A Speech for Every Occasion* [Hebrew]]. (Tel Aviv: The Open University Press; Raffi Mann, *It's Inconceivable*. Tel Aviv: Hed Arzi 1993) (1998).

21. Seymour Chatman, "what books can do that films can't and vice versa," in W.J.T. Mitchel, ed., *On Narrative* (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 1981), 117–136; Wayne Booth, "The Company We Keep: Self-Making in Imaginative Art, Old and New," *Daedalus* 111, 33–59.
22. Hadley Cantril, *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic* (N.J. Princeton University Press, 1940).
23. Daniel Dayan and Ellihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992).
24. Amos Oz, *Sippur Ahavah Ve-Hoshekh* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002). In his autobiographical book *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, novelist Amos Oz recounts the event through his child's eyes and from the perspective of an all knowing writer, half a century later it is a narrative moving between a sense of doom and tremendous joy.
25. Victor Turner, "Liminality, Kabbalah and the Media," *Religion* 15 (1985), 201–203.
26. Dayan and Katz, pp. 2–5.
27. John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).
28. Hanna Yablonka, *Medinat Yisrael neged Adolf Eichmann* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2001).
29. *Radio* magazine has a detailed analysis of these surveys (for the first day, see no 28, 11.5.1961). This somewhat lower number should take account of the immigrants' difficulties in understanding Hebrew. Letters from Mizrachi immigrants to Kol Yisrael also complain about the long segments in German.
30. Considering there was only one mainstream radio channel (an additional channel was in the making) and no television, having the trial fill a major part of the day had many consequences.
31. Haim Guri, *Mul Tah Ha-Zekhuhit [Opposite the glass cage]* (Hakibutz HaMeuchad, Lamerchav, 1962).
32. Ora Herman, "Broadcasting from Another Planet: The electronic Media and the Eichmann Trial," (MA thesis, The Institute of Contemporary Jewish Studies, the Hebrew University, 2003).
33. Moshe Dayan, "Eulogy for Ro'i Rotberg," in Brosh, ed., *A Speech for Every Occasion*. (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot & Siphrey Hemed, 1993)
34. Michael Schudson, *The Power of News*, Chapter 4: The Trout and the Hamburger, (London and New York: Routledge).