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Commercial temptation: Cross-border radio and the comparative transformation of public service broadcast policy in Britain, South Africa and India, 1930–67

ABSTRACT

Britain pioneered the idea of broadcasting as a commercial-free and culturally uplifting monopoly, which its imperial progeny in South Africa and India adopted. But all three soon found themselves vulnerable to entrepreneurs broadcasting commercials and pop culture from accommodating locations just across national frontiers. Listeners in all three countries tuned in by the millions and advertisers rushed to sponsor shows and buy commercials. Radio Luxembourg outdrew the British Broadcasting Corporation on Sundays in the 1930s, Radio Ceylon easily bested All India Radio in the 1950s, and Lourenço Marques Radio dominated the white South African youth market in the 1960s. Governments tried to fight the cross-border broadcasters through diplomacy, economic pressure and petty harassment, but in all cases popular 'light' culture and, eventually, advertising prevailed. This article

KEYWORDS

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Corporation
John Reith
Radio Ceylon
Radio Luxembourg
Lourenço Marques
Radio

details the common experiences and connections among these broadcasters, and points the way for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the first national broadcasting systems in the 1920s there have been radio entrepreneurs who refuse to accept programming and advertising rules and standards. Around the world these broadcasters set up powerful stations just across national frontiers and broadcast an aural cornucopia of music, religion, quiz shows and plenty of commercials to their home, target markets. The idea of cross-border radio was not particularly novel; radio waves effortlessly crossed borders, and news about these operations also spread quickly. These radio entrepreneurs learnt from each other, and some hop-scotched continents to bring their knowledge and experience to new markets.

The major, consistent indicator of a cross-border broadcaster's success was a consumer market and restrictions on radio advertising freedom in the target market. When a national system accommodated most consumer advertising, as the American system did, cross-border radio was limited to fringe advertisers and niche markets, and only rose to the level of an annoyance to the state. When national systems banned advertising, as with the British Broadcasting Corporation, and sought to strictly limit entertainment options, commercial cross-border radio quickly became a lucrative and highly competitive broadcaster to the home market. This forced hard decisions for democratic, capitalist countries that wanted to sustain commercial-free broadcast monopolies. Dictatorships could and did punish unauthorized listening and jam unwanted signals, though even that often failed (Roth-Ey 2011). Democracies were left with tools of harassment – mainly currency exchange controls and diplomatic pressure on the broadcasters' host countries. Eventually, most caved in and opened themselves to the popular culture they disdained and the advertising that they feared, thus demonstrating the vulnerabilities of national communication sovereignty long before anyone had coined the term globalization.

There are plenty of examples throughout the twentieth century – from 1930s' 'Border Blasters' targeting rural American listeners with country music and tent-revival preaching from just over the Mexican border to micro-states such as Monte Carlo and Andorra using outsized transmitters to target the French market with commercials and pop culture (Crawford and Fowler 2002; Head 1985). This article, though, focuses on broadcasters to three countries – Britain, South Africa and India – where the broadcasting institutions were shaped by the British Broadcasting Corporation and its founder, Lord John Reith. The power and influence of the British Empire made the BBC model attractive to administrators and politicians in South Africa and India and ensured that key elements remained – despite markedly different societies, cultures and audiences – long after the Union Jack had been lowered there.

Reith built the BBC as a model of a monopoly, advertising-free, public service broadcaster that would give the public what he was sure the public needed, in deliberate contrast to the American model of privately owned, commercial and advertising-supported broadcasting that would give the people what they wanted. The BBC was a powerful influence throughout the British Empire, both through its global network and through its model of a

resolutely non-commercial broadcast system (Potter 2012). In India, Reith had long pressed the colonial government for radio on the BBC model, and in 1935 sent Lionel Fielden to set up All India Radio, which – unlike the BBC – operated under direct state control. The combination of BBC ideology, Fielden’s own high aesthetic standards, and the political desire for tight central control (first imperial, then nationalist) made the AIR a particularly inflexible progeny of the BBC (Briggs 1965; Lelyveld 1995; Zivin 1999). Reith himself actually designed the South African Broadcasting Corporation during a 1936 visit, modifying the BBC model to accommodate English and Afrikaans speakers, and largely to muffle or manipulate indigenous African voices (Potter 2012: 82–83).

The administrators of these radio systems felt a common paternalistic need to protect their listeners against certain cultural forms, mainly popular music, whether it was in the name of cultural uplift, nation-building or racist ideology. But listeners wanted those forbidden tunes, and advertisers wanted those listeners. In 1930s’ Britain, listeners wanted light dance music, especially on Sundays. In the 1940s white South African listeners wanted big bands and quiz shows. And in 1950s’ India, listeners wanted ‘culturally hybrid’ Hindi film music. In all three cases new systems emerged just across the national frontiers – from France, Radio Normandy (and later Radio Luxembourg) broadcast to Great Britain; Mozambique-based Radio Lourenço Marques broadcast to apartheid South Africa; and Radio Ceylon broadcast to Nehru’s socialist India.¹ They gave both audiences and advertisers what they wanted, and eventually forced substantial change on national broadcasting policy.

These cases demonstrate the power of a borderless medium like radio to force change against the stated desires of a sovereign government if enough people are receptive to that change. In some ways it resembles Monroe Price’s idea that a state-brokered ‘market for loyalties’ allows dominant forces to jockey for power via media regulation (2002: 31–41). In these cases, certain powerful elements stepped out of the national regulatory framework to continue influencing the market, and eventually forced a change in programming, financing and ultimately control.

LITERATURE REVIEW

No one has looked at the phenomenon of cross-border radio in a global, comparative perspective, but historians have examined individual stations and broadcasters and explored imperial connections. The stations also have inspired amateur historians and fans to write nostalgic love notes to the stations and radio personalities of their youth, and inspired song-writers and movie-makers to celebrate these stations.

Most recently, Simon Potter explored the global influence and connections of the BBC in *Broadcasting Empire* (2012), providing valuable insights on the empire-wide struggle between public service and commercial broadcast models. Earlier biographical work on John Reith, such as Ian McIntyre’s *The Expense of Glory* (1993), and Reith’s edited diaries, *The Reith Diaries* (Charles Stuart, 1975), gives more detail. Michele Hilmes’ *Network Nations* explored the often-reciprocal influences between the British and American broadcasting models (2012). The early, encyclopaedic BBC history, Asa Briggs’s multi-volume *A History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (1965, 1979), and Scannell and Cardiff’s *A Social History of British Broadcasting* (1991) provide sound context. For India, H. R. Luthra’s *Indian Broadcasting* (1986) gives

1. Throughout the article I will refer to place names current at the time: Lourenço Marques instead of Maputo, Ceylon instead of Sri Lanka, and Bombay instead of Mumbai.

an official, book-length account of broadcasting, while the South African Broadcasting Corporation is covered by the multi-authored *Currents of Power* (Ruth Tomaselli et al., 2001).

The leading work on continental European stations aimed at Britain in the 1930s is Sean Street's *Crossing the Ether* (2006), which goes into great detail on the pre-war stations and their adversarial relationship with the BBC. Jennifer Spohrer's doctoral dissertation, 'Ruling the airwaves', Suzanne Lommers' *Europe On-Air: Interwar Projects for Radio Broadcasting* (2012), and Richard Nicholls' *Radio Luxembourg* (1983) go into depth on Radio Luxembourg's early years as a pan-European broadcaster. A biography of pioneer commercial broadcaster Capt. Leonard Plugge, as well as a related BBC Radio-4 documentary, has fascinating details. Asa Briggs' definitive history of British radio devotes a few pages to the continental stations, but leaves most of its five volumes to the BBC and Independent Broadcasting Corporation (Briggs 1965, 1979; Lommers 2012; Street 2006; Wallis 2008).

South Asian cross-border radio has not attracted any book-length academic treatment, but Radio Ceylon often surfaces briefly in cultural histories of Indian music and film, the travails of All India Radio and Sri Lankan broadcasting (Kaunanayake 1990; Lelyveld 1995; Punathambekar 2010a, 2010b, 2013). Radio Goa is almost invisible, except for some reminiscences from an announcer (Dias 2011). Historical work on Mozambique-based Lourenço Marques Radio is limited largely to a fan website, and brief mentions in histories of South African broadcasting and Portuguese colonial broadcasting policy (LM Radio and Sound Archive n.d.; Ribeiro 2014; Tomaselli et al. 2001).

CONTINENTAL INTERLOPERS: THE BRITISH CASE

Britain's official policy from nearly the beginning of broadcasting was monopolistic public service, cultural upliftment, and funding through licence fees – no commercials (Johns 2010: 30–34; Street 2006: 56–76). A few stations in continental Europe broadcast occasionally in English, with commercially sponsored programmes, but throughout much of the 1920s the BBC ruled the airwaves with a condescending tone and a serious mission. In 1928 the BBC straightforwardly acknowledged its goal: 'Give the public something slightly better than it now thinks it likes' (Briggs 1965: 53). This was especially the case on Sunday, when founding director John Reith, a minister's son, insisted on religious programming of sermons, Bible readings and solemn religious music – plus breaks of dead air when the listeners were expected to be in church. Reith thought it was proper; many listeners did not (Street 2006: 138–46).

Entrepreneur Leonard Plugge disliked the BBC monopoly and sensed a financial opportunity. He had contacts with many European broadcasters and thought that he could make some money broadcasting English-language programming, sponsored by British advertisers, to British listeners (*The First Pirate* 2014; Wallis 2008). Most of his broadcasts would be carried by privately owned stations in France, where the constantly changing governments of the Third Republic had failed to come up with a coherent or consistent broadcasting policy (Briggs 1965: 365). In 1930 Plugge founded International Broadcasting Company (IBC) and began buying time for English broadcasts on continental stations. In 1931 he came across an amateur broadcaster on the Normandy coast whose location was perfect for broadcasting into prosperous and densely packed south-east England. He quickly struck a deal, and Radio Normandy began broadcasting at 500 watts in September 1931, initially

just spinning records. The broadcasts were a success, and he soon was able to increase the power first to 5000, then to 10,000 and finally to 20,000 watts by 1933 (Wallis 2008: 70–75). To prove to potential advertisers that the station had the listeners, Normandy advertised cosmetics available only through mail order, and tracked a cascade of orders. IBC soon created a listeners' club, and gained 50,000 members on its first day, which the company also trumpeted to advertisers (Wallis 2008: 80–82). By this time another London-based operation, Universal Radio Publicity, was also selling airtime to British advertisers – in this case on powerful Radio Paris (Briggs 1965: 352). Others followed. As historian Adrian Johns has noted: 'The shenanigans, needless to say, were rather involved. What was never in doubt was the profit to be made' (2010: 51).

The promise of profit attracted a new player – 200,000 watt Radio Luxembourg, which had expanded to become a pan-European broadcaster in 1933. Advertising came naturally to the new station – its owners were French capitalists interested in profit and liberal ideology. Its location made plausible its initial plan to portion out broadcasts in English, French, German and Italian, but billings from British advertisers quickly formed two-thirds of all revenue, and programming followed accordingly (Spohrer 2008: 95). Britain not only had the habit of foreign listening from Radio Normandy, and popular demand for Luxembourg's programming, but also had national mass consumption marketing infrastructure, and advertising help from American agencies such as J. Walter Thompson (Spohrer 2008: 207–10).

Initially, record companies sponsored disc jockey shows, but the repertoire quickly expanded to include 'live' music (actually recorded via transcription in England), quiz shows, dramas and even children's shows. For example, the manufacturers of Ovaltine built brand loyalty by sponsoring a Radio Luxembourg Sunday evening children's show, the League of Ovaltineys. Joining the league gave children special badges and trinkets, and earned the manufacturer dogged loyalty from five million Ovaltineys (Street 2006: 112–13). The IBC and big advertising agencies, the London Press Exchange and J. Walter Thompson, had their own studios in London to produce the shows, which were recorded and flown to Luxembourg.

As commercial listenership shot up in the mid-1930s, the BBC felt it had no choice but to launch an Audience Research Section. What it found was not surprising; two thirds of the 'light entertainment' audience on Sundays was listening to continental programming (Briggs 1965: 364). The stations' own research gave even starker results. The American Crossley research agency surveyed more than 5000 listeners for the IBC in 1938 and found that on Sunday mornings 82.1% of those listening were tuned to continental radio, not to BBC's religious programming. Other peak times for continental radio were Sunday afternoons (70.3%) and early weekday mornings (64%) (Street 2006: 164–66). Radio advertising expenditures reflected that success, jumping from virtually nothing in 1931 to £400,000 in 1935 to £1.7 million in 1938, while spending on other media remained stagnant (Street 2006: 99).

The British government tried to use diplomacy at a series of radio conferences to stop the commercial competition, but largely failed (Briggs 1965: 354–56; Johns 2010: 49–52). At home the government and their allies tried other methods to lower the volume.

- The Post Office refused to allow telephone relays of programmes from Britain to the continental stations, forcing them to rely on transcriptions (Briggs 1965: 362–63).

- The BBC published information on other foreign stations in its *World Radio* magazine, but refused to publish information on the continental competitors (Briggs 1965: 362–63).
- British newspapers refused for 22 years to print schedules or cover news about the stations' programmes, fearing commercial radio's impact on their own advertising revenues (Street 2006: 106–07).

Officialdom dug in deeper. The commission that re-chartered the BBC in 1935 backed the monopoly and non-commercial policy, but suggested that the Sunday programme could be lightened up – by 1938 the BBC relented and broadcast its first dance band on a Sunday (Chapman 1992: 9). Ultimately, however, it was World War II that saved the BBC from itself. During the 'phoney war' in late 1939 and early 1940 the commercial stations had been silenced, and there was an entertainment void for the British troops in France – except, ominously, German and Italian stations (Hilmes 2012: 94–95). But in January 1940 the BBC set up the Forces Programme with popular, continental-style programming later supplemented by Canadian and American programmes. Although the initial purpose was to maintain soldiers' morale, the programme was immensely popular among British civilians. That popularity, and the fear of renewed European competition after the war, led to the creation of the Forces-style BBC Light Programme in July 1945 (Street 2006: 192–95).

For a decade after the war the situation was stable. The Light Programme gave listeners much of what they had been getting on the pre-war continental stations, without commercials. France had nationalized private stations and did not resume English-language commercial broadcasts, leaving Radio Luxembourg as the lone continental broadcasting to Britain (Spohrer 2008: 421–23). Despite some initial talk about the British leasing the station, or blocking foreign exchange of sterling ad revenue, or even jamming its signal, the government eventually tolerated the station for obvious political reasons. The Anglo-American Cold War emphasis on the free flow of information, and their widespread flouting of frequency allocations for propaganda broadcasts to the Communist bloc, made rigorous national control of radio listening seem hypocritical, at best (Spohrer 2008: 366, 372–73, 382–94).

Although post-war austerity and rationing made advertising difficult, Radio Luxembourg's less scripted style soon attracted British listeners: some four million listeners on average weekday nights by the early 1950s (Anon. 1953b; Nichols 1983: 61). But Britain's embrace of commercial television in 1955 led to an exodus of talent, shows and advertisers from Radio Luxembourg to new independent television. Much like its American radio counterparts in the 1950s, Luxembourg became a record-driven station, with tight relations with the major labels and strong English-language listenership, estimated at 8 million by 1960 (Briggs 1979: 1018; Street 2006: 99; Wilson 1961: 27).

Commercial radio found a new opportunity in the dynamic youth culture of the 1960s and the taste for new music and consumer goods. This time entrepreneurs took to the sea with a new type of station – the 'pirate' broadcasters based on ships anchored just outside territorial waters. One of the pioneers was American Gordon McLendon, who by 1961 was broadcasting to Stockholm from a fishing boat in the Baltic, at the same time he was operating XTRA, a 'Border Blaster' broadcasting across the US Mexican border into Los Angeles (Garay 1992: 103–05, 129–36). British broadcasters took the idea and set up pirate broadcasting ships stations around Britain, and gained millions

of listeners (Chapman 1992; Johns 2010). But unlike Radio Luxembourg and other continental stations, these broadcasters were stateless and literal outlaws – with all the freedom and vulnerability that entailed – and thus fall outside the scope of this article.

SOUTH AFRICA: ‘HAPPY LISTENING’ (TO LOURENÇO MARQUES)

Post-World War II South Africa was a fragmented and repressive society, but with a public service radio model bequeathed by BBC pioneer John Reith after a 1936 visit. The new South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) ignored the non-white majority, and sought to broadcast non-commercial programmes in the two main white languages – English and Afrikaans (Tomaselli et al. 2001).

In neighbouring Mozambique the Portuguese colonial authorities gave free rein to private interests, such as the Radio Club of Mozambique, which quickly arranged small-scale broadcasts to South Africa. After the war, high-powered radio men John Davenport and Richard L. Meyer revitalized and amped up the station to reach prosperous and urbanized English-speaking South Africans. Meyer had been Plugge’s managing director at the International Broadcasting Corporation, which ran English programmes on Radio Normandy and Radio Luxembourg in the 1930s (he would later return to England to work in commercial radio and television) (Johns 2010: 143). Davenport had worked in the advertising business and as an audience researcher – for the BBC – before the war. They set up Davenport & Meyer in Johannesburg in 1947 to manage the English and Afrikaans ad sales and programming on Lourenço Marques Radio (henceforward LM Radio). The two then brought in Radio Normandy’s chief announcer, David Davies, and a plan for a-political, light music programming they dubbed ‘Happy Listening’. They clearly saw the parallels with pre-war continental stations. In a 1947 memo they wrote:

The position of Radio Mozambique in relation to the South African market is similar in almost every way to that of the pre-war Radio Luxembourg to the British market. In fact, since the SABC programmes contain an even greater proportion of serious programmes than did the BBC at that time, the opportunity for creating a mass audience for Radio Mozambique is, if anything, even more favourable.

(Davenport and Meyer 1947)

They were right.

The next year a J. Walter Thompson survey showed that 63% of South African respondents were listening to LM Radio, and on any given day 38% of the Johannesburg radio listeners tuned in to the station. On Sundays it was in a statistical tie – 49–50% – going head to head with SABC’s English-language ‘A’ service. (It was clear they did not ask black South Africans, or even many Afrikaners.) By 1949 LM Radio was broadcasting simultaneously on three 7.5 kw shortwave transmitters twelve hours a day – fourteen hours on Sundays – and had 82 regular sponsors, mainly American companies (Anon. 1949c).

The SABC had been wrestling with the possibility of commercial broadcasting since 1945, and it became one of the key issues for a commission of enquiry on the SABC – the Schoch Commission. Despite most evidence coming in against commercial broadcasting, the commission in 1948

recommended that the SABC launch a commercial service. Not only would it forestall any possibility of private interests within South Africa getting broadcasting licences, it would deal with cross-border broadcasters like LM Radio. As the commission warned:

... sooner or later powerful and well-equipped commercial broadcasting stations would be established in Southern Africa outside the Union which would (as Radio Lourenço Marques is already doing) aim their advertisements at European consumers in the Union who constitute the only considerable European market in Southern Africa.

(Commission of Enquiry into Broadcasting Services 1948: 40)

A well-funded commercial service would be less likely to be outbid for talent by LM Radio and other interlopers, and could also subsidize SABC's non-commercial broadcasts, especially the Afrikaans service. Ultimately, the commission decided, commercial broadcasting was inevitable; it was better to start on a small, controlled, experimental basis. The hybrid Radio Springbok – SABC controlled but commercially financed – began around Johannesburg in 1950, nationally in 1951, and aimed mainly at the English-speaking white audience. In fact, some Afrikaners complained that it was a 'foreign' station (Head 1976: 143). But Springbok had its limits, such as restricting the nature and extent of advertising and programming on Sundays and religious holidays (Tomaselli et al. 2001). And those limitations helped LM Radio maintain and grow its audience into the 1950s. By 1954 it was broadcasting seventeen hours daily of popular music to South Africa with large South African and Rhodesian companies taking most of the ads. It had good reception and a high 'listener rating' throughout southern Africa (HMSO 1955). In fact, audience surveys showed that in the early 1950s nearly half of adult Europeans who listened to commercial radio in South Africa listened to LM. It also claimed a substantial audience in northern and southern Rhodesia and South West Africa (now Zambia, Zimbabwe and Namibia, respectively) (Anon. 1954). Programming included more than a dozen American radio shows, such as General Foods' 'Hardy Family' (Anon. 1952b). The money was good too. By 1956 the station was selling \$1.5 million in South African advertising (Anon. 1957).

While the apartheid apparatchiks who ran the SABC could accept advertising and early 1950s' pop music, they had problems with the new rock music of the late 1950s and 1960s – especially music that undermined their racist ideology and questioned authority, conformity and the status quo (Tomaselli et al. 2001: 69). Initially, the SABC refused to play rock, but LM Radio did. Eventually the SABC relented somewhat and began to play middle of the road, white musicians – generally British ones (Hamm 1985: 160, 162). Springbok's actions basically gave up a youth market niche that LM seized tightly. Apparently the embrace was mutual. Audience research showed that in the mid-1960s up to 45 per cent of the white South African youth market listened to LM Radio, which was broadcasting 24 hours a day by the 1960s. A historian of South African radio wrote, clearly tongue in cheek:

It is clear that as long as LM was able freely to continue to stimulate and exploit the craving for enslaving beat music, the programme services of the SABC had to wage an uphill struggle in their endeavours to interest young listeners in programmes of better quality.

(Tomaselli et al. 2001: 68–69)

The SABC had tolerated Lourenço Marques Radio, but in 1972 it covered its bets and gained control over that station 'to ensure that the South African government would prevail should any dispute over programming policies arise' (Toogood 1972). In any case, the successful 1974 revolution in Mozambique spelled the end of rock 'n' roll from Mozambique (Anderson 1981: 88–89).

MESSAGE TO INDIA, VIA GOA AND CEYLON

The British had brought radio to the Indian subcontinent and set it up as a state, non-commercial monopoly. With independence in 1947 the new government planned to keep radio under state control and design programming for education, information, development and national uplift (Kumar 2003). Commercials were considered not only distasteful but also counterproductive as India moved towards a planned economy with little room for consumer goods. But not everyone in the neighbourhood agreed.

Portugal had a foothold in India just 500 kilometres from Bombay – the coastal enclave of Goa. In the late 1940s the Portuguese authorities had noted the success of Lourenço Marques Radio in their African colony and thought that they could use Goa for something similar (Anon. 1949b). They quickly formed a partnership with American entrepreneur Dan Molina, who had experience with cross-border radio in North America, and a taste for risky business. Starting in the mid-1930s Molina had worked for his uncle, Francisco 'Fred' Ferrera, who owned Tijuana, Mexico station XEMO, and broadcast country and popular music – and commercials – into the rapidly expanding southern California market. Although Molina mainly sold ads in California, he learnt about programming, technology and all other aspects of commercial cross-border radio from his uncle. As his son, Paul Molina, later recalled: '(XEMO) is where he learned how commercial radio worked... Fred taught him all of this' (2016a). During the war Molina signed on with Douglas Aviation, which sent him first to Africa, and then to India, where he stayed after the war to sell technical and scientific books. But he still had the commercial radio bug, and knew how successful it could be. His son recalled him lobbying the Indian government for commercial radio and playing demo tapes of XEMO commercials for Indian businesses. They were not impressed, Paul Molina recalls: 'There was just a tremendous yawn' (2016a).

Goa was his breakthrough. As Paul Molina recalled, 'He went to them, lugging his Ferrograph tape recorder and said, "Look what I've got," and played demo tapes' (2016a). Molina set up Radio Advertising Services in Bombay and contracted with Pan American Broadcasting, a New York-based ad broker specializing in Latin American and Asian markets. At that point Radio Goa hoped that 'light American, British and Australian programs' could lure Indian listeners (Chaudhuri 2007: 227–28). Molina borrowed 100 records from US information officers in Bombay, lined up sponsors – the first was Lever Brothers – and started broadcasting sixteen hours a day. The 7.5 kilowatt signal was strong enough to reach Bombay and parts of western India, but not the rest of the country (Anon. 1953c). Radio Goa broadcast a wide variety of programming in Portuguese, Konkani, Marathi, Hindi and English – American jazz, country western, Portuguese and Brazilian music, Goan folksongs, and paid American religious programming. But the prime times every morning and evening were devoted to Hindi film music. That was a breakthrough for middle-class radio-set owners, as a Bombay newspaper noted:

Many sections of listeners in Bombay have taken to Radio Goa like fish to water. It gives two full hours of India film music in the important evening hours between 4 and 6 p.m. when All India Radio is at its dullest.

(Dias 2011: 18)

Although Goa was reasonably successful in reaching western India, Molina soon found a much more powerful partner to the south in the island nation of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). During World War II, Britain's Southeast Asian Command had installed a 100-kilowatt shortwave transmitter in Ceylon to broadcast to the soldiers and sailors throughout South and South East Asia. After independence in 1948 the Ceylonese government took it over and planned to use it as the foundation for a commercial service that would target its neighbours in India and Pakistan. The motives were strictly financial. The government counted on making enough money selling commercials for the Indian market to subsidize its non-commercial domestic service. As part of the Colombo Plan aid package, the Australian government provided technical help and sent radio veteran Clifford R. Dodd to Ceylon to set up the commercial service (Kaunanayake 1990: 132–34). For ten years he ran the service with almost no oversight, and brought an aggressive, efficient and 'rumbustious' management style (Commission on Broadcast and Information 1966: 46–7). Radio Ceylon started with music and entertainment programmes in English, Hindi and Tamil and promoted the services in Indian newspapers. It quickly began attracting both Indian and western advertisers. In 1952 a British trade representative pointed out that Ceylon, with its 'lively' commercial programmes, already had 100 different advertisers, with more on the way. 'Commercial radio has come to stay and should grow considerably in the immediate future', he reported (Owen 1953).

Radio Ceylon immediately attracted Indian listeners who were bored with All India Radio's programmes of educational and cultural uplift, but the jackpot came in 1952 thanks to the rigid tastes of AIR's boss, Information Minister B. V. Keskar. Keskar was a musical purist who disliked the western influences in much of the popular film music, calling it 'vulgar' and 'hybrid'. He preferred to use classical Indian music, which was more identified with Hindu identity, to help build up a national culture. When Keskar took over he made it harder and then nearly impossible for film producers to get their music on AIR (Lelyveld 1995). Molina lived in Bombay's celebrity-studded Juhu Beach area, and knew Bollywood personalities such as the legendary Dev Anand, who convinced him that Hindi film music would make him money. Ironically, Molina was no fan of the music, as his son recalled: 'He couldn't stand it. It was traumatically jarring noise as far as he was concerned' (2016b). But he knew it was a great opportunity to make money. So, Radio Ceylon made it easier to broadcast film music, with powerful and immediate results (Lelyveld 1995). By 1953 it was estimated that Radio Ceylon had 8 million listeners in India and Pakistan, while Radio Goa brought in an even 1 million (Anon. 1953a). Molina worked with brothers Ameen and Hamid Sayani to make Radio Ceylon a sensation. The weekly *Binaca Geet Mala* show of hit songs became a national obsession in the mid-1950s; streets in India cities reportedly were deserted when the programme aired every Wednesday as people stayed glued to their radios (Punathambekar 2010b). AIR surveyed radio listening habits but found the results too disheartening to release. They stayed in the files. As a historian of Indian radio later wrote:

A listeners' research conducted in order to assess the popularity of AIR broadcasts revealed that nine out of ten houses in every street were found invariably to be tuned to Ceylon, and the receiver in the tenth house, was either out of order or out of commission. These findings were unpleasant enough to get the authorities thinking.

(Awasthy 1965: 53–54)

The Indian government responded by attacking Ceylon, and by loosening up its own broadcasts for Indian listeners. In a series of diplomatic moves starting in July 1957 the Indian government notified Ceylon that it would block any Indian advertisers' remittances to Radio Ceylon (Kaunanayake 1990: 41). In August, Keskar sent a message to his Ceylonese counterpart arguing that repeated Indian complaints about the commercial service's programming had been ignored. Ceylon was broadcasting music that AIR had rejected, he said, something that was 'highly improper' for a neighbouring country and against the Commonwealth Broadcasting Convention. The Ceylonese refused to bow, and glibly pointed out that '... if the people of India did not like the programmes it was up to them not to listen to them' (Prasad 1973: 335–37). After several diplomatic visits and a flurry of notes, the exchange controls remained in place, eventually becoming an annual remittance limit of 500,000 rupees (Kodikara 1965: 63–64; Commission of Inquiry on the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation 1972). That made advertising more complicated, and cut into some direct Indian advertising. Western advertisers, however, could pay directly in Ceylon for ads (Narasimhan and Chari 1961: 64; Dunn 1964: 576). On the programming front, Keskar capitulated to popular taste in 1957 when AIR set up a popular service – Vividh Bharati – to compete with Radio Ceylon. A 1966 report on broadcasting explicitly spelled out the connection between Ceylon and Vividh Bharati:

This service (Radio Ceylon) became extremely popular and listening to it was increasing rapidly at the expense of programmes of AIR. The situation was no different from that in the U.K., at one time when Radio Luxemburg had made heavy inroads on the listening to BBC programmes. This induced the BBC to adjust its programme pattern. Similarly, AIR conceived Vividh Bharati and put it on the air in October 1957 to counteract the growing popularity of Radio Ceylon. Its attraction was immediate and it succeeded largely in its purpose.

(Committee on Broadcasting & Information Media 1966: 73)

But even though Vividh Bharati had film music, it did not have the swagger and style of Radio Ceylon. Not only did Ceylon's commercial service have celebrity announcers, it also offered other entertainment such as quiz shows and talent competitions, and by 1961 was broadcasting 115 hours a week (Perera 1961). In 1966 the Indian cinema magazine *Filmfare* bemoaned the failure of Vividh Bharati to step up and noted that Radio Ceylon's 'liveliness contrasts strikingly with the oppressive monotony of Vividh Bharati' (Madhu 1966). A March 1964 survey showed that, although Vividh Bharati was doing well, Radio Ceylon was still a major force, especially in Bombay and Madras, where two-thirds of the responders reported listening to Ceylon. High numbers – well over 50 per cent listenership – came from Bangalore, Lucknow and Ahmedabad (Committee on Broadcasting & Information Media 1966: 74).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s Radio Ceylon had a massive influence on Indian culture, with the station and Bombay film producers developing a strong symbiotic relationship. And Ceylon's talented announcers mixed songs carefully and wove an aural tapestry around the records – and became celebrities in their own rights (Punathambekar 2010a, 2010b; Shah 1987). The station also helped boost the idea of commercial advertising and specific consumer goods during a time of scarcity and import restrictions. Much like Radio Luxembourg in the 1930s, Radio Ceylon was dominated by sponsorships and ads for soap, cosmetics, toiletries and over-the-counter medicine. Ovaltine, Colgate and Bournvita were soon the sponsors of shows. The biggest success, by far, was the Indian distributor of the Swiss Binaca toothpaste, which sponsored the Hindi film hit parade *Binaca Geet Mala*. Binaca's distributor reportedly spent 75 per cent of its ad budget on Radio Ceylon (Chaudhuri 2007: 231–35; Anon. 1953c). The big American ad agency in Bombay, J. Walter Thompson, however, largely avoided radio. Ceylon reached many more people, Thompson executives argued, but not many of those people had money to spend (Anon. 1954).

But there were enough of them to make advertising an attractive proposition. By 1962–63 Radio Ceylon was making, officially, a net profit of 2.2 million rupees on income of 4.6 million (Commission on Broadcast and Information 1966). But records make it difficult to tell how much of that money was coming from Indian, western or Ceylonese advertisers, and how much else never made it to the station. Shoddy accounting, questionable business practices and a complete absence of oversight in the commercial service throughout the 1950s and 1960s made the finances extremely murky (Commission of Inquiry on the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation 1972). Perhaps the currency exchange restrictions led to creative accounting. In any case, by 1966 an estimated 1.6 million rupees was simply missing – advertising bills had never been paid, producers gave extra commercial time without charging, and sales staff did not keep adequate records. This created a 'breeding ground for corruption', according to an official report. A commission of enquiry blasted the commercial service's lax bookkeeping and blamed much of it on Dodd's insistence on total autonomy when he was director from 1950 to 1960. These fly-by-night practices were a windfall for many 'mushroom advertising agencies' that would spring up, sell ads and never pay Radio Ceylon (Commission on Broadcast and Information 1966: 16, 47). The sloppy bookkeeping and corruption continued into the 1970s. As a 1972 official report pungently notes: 'By its very nature the advertising mechanism of the Commercial Service provided a fertile ground for the growth of corruption, but with normal accounting safeguards thrown overboard the bad odour of malpractices and shady deals spread far and wide' (Commission of Inquiry on the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation 1972: 6–7).

But at All India Radio, programmers noticed the money to be made. In 1967 AIR capitulated on the issue of commercialism and started running ads on *Vividh Bharati*. Transistor radios that could not get Ceylon's short-wave signals became more popular. These cut into Ceylon's influence, but they were only two of many blows over the following years (Shah 1987). Others followed: the cassette revolution, which made music more affordable, the advent of TV, private radio stations and FM broadcasts were other developments that crowded out the station. Slowly, but certainly, Radio Ceylon was pushed to the margins (Sambandan 2006). Ceylon's smaller forerunner, Radio Goa, had disappeared as a commercial force much earlier, when

India invaded Goa in 1961, evicted the Portuguese and carted off the station's new 100,000 watt transmitter (Dias 2011: 28, 45). Molina was already gone by then; he had left India in a hurry in 1960, probably just ahead of angry Indian tax authorities, and never returned (2016a). However, the company he founded, Radio Advertising Services, hung on for another four decades (Chaudhuri 2007: 229).

CONCLUSION

In all three cases examined in this paper, the BBC and its imperial progeny in South Africa and India created systems that were dependent on monopoly and mission that deliberately excluded 'cheap' popular entertainment. In 1950 Reith had written, with approval, about that policy to the Beveridge Committee on Broadcasting:

It was the brute force of monopoly that enabled the BBC to become what it did; and to do what it did; that made possible a policy in which moral responsibility – moral in the broadest way; intellectual and ethical – ranked high. If there is to be competition it will be of cheapness not of goodness.

(quoted in McIntyre 1993: 301)

Reith's champions in South Africa and India had taken that message to heart. There were variations of course. India was a straightforward government monopoly and South Africa was a quasi-commercial white supremacist duopoly. But all three systems deliberately refused to give substantial parts of their listening audiences what they wanted. Hindi film music listeners in India, white rock 'n' roll youth in South Africa and dance music fans in Britain listened in vain to their national radio. This created opportunities for those who could give those audiences what they wanted, and the possibility of advertising to these sizeable and prosperous markets made those opportunities very lucrative indeed.

The entrepreneurs who seized these opportunities were the antithesis of the staid, puritanical high modernism that Reith embodied. Leonard Plugge, Richard Meyer, Gordon McLendon and Dan Molina were in the business for the money and excitement, and apparently didn't much care what they broadcast. Molina's story is especially evocative. He was a small-town American with Mexican connections who had learnt his craft with a Tijuana 'Border Blaster' in the 1930s, and then rode the wave of American power to Asia during World War II. He took American-style commercial programming, a knack for creative adaptation, and his disdain for borders and national regulations to South Asia in the 1950s and made it all pay for a decade before he left, a few steps ahead of the authorities. He didn't even like Hindi film music.

The influence of these stations did not end with their target national markets; they had other, unintended effects and created new listening communities that spilled over national borders and went beyond national markets. Radio Ceylon's broadcasts aimed at India blew back, and substantially influenced Ceylonese movies and music (Amunugama 1980: 69–70). Radio Lourenço Marques ignored the vast majority of South Africans, and instead spoke to a racial and linguistic community of English-speaking whites, not only in South Africa but throughout the southern third of the continent. Radio Ceylon appealed to listeners in Pakistan and throughout the South

Asian diaspora – creating a listening community that spanned the Indian Ocean basin (Punathambekar 2013: 210).

In all three cases the obvious connection between the cross-border broadcasters and their core audiences in the target markets forced those national systems to change. Britain added the Light Programme in response to the continental broadcasters, and Radio One in response to the 1960s-era pirates. India added the Vividh Bharati network in response to Ceylon, and the creators of Radio Springbok were clearly responding to the threat of Lourenço Marques Radio. In all cases, when a national system allowed popular culture and commercials, the cross-border radio that had attracted its substantial audiences became less appealing and largely passed into niche markets and, ultimately, nostalgia. But these and other cross-border broadcasters deserve much more sustained study for their multifaceted roles. They innovated broadcasting styles, created new audiences and listening habits, popularized new genres of music and movies, spurred advertising growth and consumerism, and demonstrated the tension between the state and market that has only intensified in the ensuing decades.

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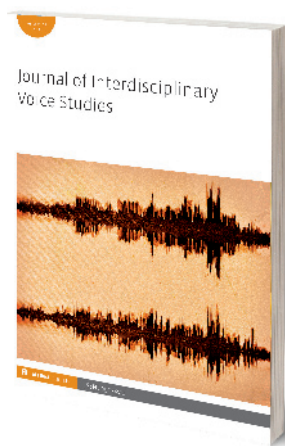
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