

“We certainly got about the world” – BBC Radio Programming  
and Britain’s Diminishing Empire, 1945-1951

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## Abbreviations

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

CBC – Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

CoE – Council of Europe

ECSC – European Coal and Steel Community

EIC – East India Company

MP – Member of Parliament

USA – United States of America

USSR – Soviet Union

UK – United Kingdom

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## Introduction

Through close analysis of the content of imperial themed radio broadcasts produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) between 1945-1951, this dissertation questions whether the BBC merely relayed the view of the British imperial establishment, or if it provided audiences with an independent and impartial perspective. In this dissertation the term 'imperial establishment' refers to those in positions of authority within the British imperial system. It was these individuals, such as politicians like the first postwar Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin (1945-1951) and Britain's military Chiefs of Staff, that lobbied for the continuation of Britain's imperial aspirations, particularly in Asia and the Middle East, during a time of rising nationalist sentiment around the empire and the beginning of large-scale decolonisation.<sup>1</sup>

The period this research has focussed on was chosen for three major reasons. Firstly, the early postwar period marked a substantial political shift in Britain, with the Conservative party under the leadership of Winston Churchill losing the 1945 general election. The result of this saw Clement Attlee's Labour government winning, ushering in a government which had campaigned against Britain's imperialistic attitudes. Secondly, this period consisted of the beginning of the era of decolonisation for Britain, marked particularly by several large-scale imperial withdrawals which radically reduced Britain's global influence in an incredibly short amount of time. Amid Clement Attlee's attempts to reform Britain's imperial system and a postwar world which increasingly questioned the pre-war justifications for imperial rule, tensions in this period escalated between those that wished to reform Britain's foreign policy and the conventional pre-war imperialist views of Britain's imperial establishment. Thirdly, retaining its monopoly over British broadcasting and after attaining a high level of popularity during the Second World War, the BBC relished a postwar reputation

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, R., & Zametica, J. (1985). The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee Reconsidered, 1945-7. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 61(2), 237-252. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2617482> p.245

of being a trusted media source and an admired entertainment provider. This specific period was a unique and significant era for the BBC, with the Corporation coming under the leadership of Director-General Sir William Haley (1944-1952). Under Haley's leadership the BBC experienced swift significant change institutionally as Haley's attitudes both looked to the future, promising the development of a broad-based BBC, whilst at the same time remaining loyal to ideals from the organisation's past.

By analysing the content of BBC radio programmes, this study argues that in response to the beginning of the decolonisation era, Britain's imperial establishment encouraged a buoyant imperial narrative that aimed to maintain a largely fictitious, if optimistic, depiction of postwar British imperial power on the BBC. Utilising the BBC's domestic broadcasting outreach to its own benefit, Britain's imperial establishment used the BBC to promote its imperialistic narratives which encouraged attitudes of paternalism, British exceptionalism, and supremacism. The close ties that existed between the British state and the BBC saw the corporations' output predominantly conform and promote imperial narratives, which sought to influence the British public's knowledge, opinion, and collective memory of the legacy of British rule and that gave the impression that the British Empire remained strong and united.

In contrast, however, with this buoyant postwar imperial narrative which purveyed optimistic ideas of the British Empire, this dissertation argues that there was also an ill-defined tension evident in the BBC's imperial themed programmes. On one hand, the BBC's loyalty to the principles of its first Director-General Sir John Reith encouraged impartiality; on the other, its close position to the imperial establishment meant that it promoted an imperial narrative. By examining programming choices and content across the immediate postwar period, this thesis demonstrates that the BBC exhibited a consistent ambiguity towards its broadcasting of imperial themes. Consequently, it is possible to argue that the BBC was not simply a mouthpiece for Britain's imperial establishment, although it was heavily dominated

by it and its imperialistic narrative; the BBC also attempted to also stand by its own values which stemmed from its formative Reithian years.

## Research questions

In order to approach the question of whether the BBC was merely a mouthpiece for a British imperial establishment, this dissertation is divided into four chapters. The first sets out the context which surrounds the extensive changes that were experienced by both the BBC and the imperial establishment in the aftermath of the Second World War. The second investigates the attitudes that were aired towards the legacy of British rule in India at the time of Indian independence in 1947. The third explores the ways in which the BBC was used to encourage the imperialistic ambition of increased emigration from Britain to the dominions. In the fourth and final chapter, the awareness of the imperial establishment's own demise is explored through analysis of BBC broadcasts which debated Britain's place within an early developing united community in continental Europe.

The first chapter looks at the continuity and change which occurred both within the BBC, but also on a wider scale, addressing Britain's shifting global position since the end of the Second World War. Two main research questions are the focus in this chapter. The first asks: how did Haley's commitment to Reithian ideologies both maintain and alter the BBC's approaches to domestic broadcasting? The second considers how Britain's altered international position influenced the attitude of Britain's imperial establishment in the postwar period. This chapter takes more of a contextual approach, assessing the BBC's domestic broadcasting changes devised by Haley, highlighting how Haley's personal beliefs in Reithian philosophies resulted in the corporation often looking to the past for inspiration for the future. Additionally, this chapter details the demise of Britain's global power and its significant impact on the perspective of Britain's imperial establishment, particularly causing



it to become fearful for its own survival post-war and subsequently using the BBC as its domestic lifeline.

The aftermath of the Second World War gave way to the beginning of the era of decolonisation for European powers and the British Empire was not immune to this. Specifically focusing on Indian independence which took place in August 1947, the second chapter investigates how imperialistic narratives influenced the BBC's depiction of the legacy of British rule in India, boasting an idealised image of it having been a wholly positive influence on the Indian subcontinent. However, certain tensions between the establishment's imperial narrative and the BBC's commitment to its own broadcasting principles are evident. It is argued that there is a level of ambiguity expressed by the BBC's programming decisions which could not help but recognise some of the negative aspects of British imperial rule.

The third chapter of this dissertation explores how as the global power of the British Empire diminished, fears over Britain's declining international influence resulted in Britain's imperial establishment working to identify methods of safeguarding Britain's ties with former dependent nations. One of these ideas was to encourage British nationals to emigrate to the Commonwealth, specifically to the 'white' dominions, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Commonwealth emigration had been a topic of great public interest before the war; however, the war resulted in all emigration halting. At the war's end, demand for reinstating pre-war emigration policies grew as public interest in emigrating rapidly increased. This chapter therefore explores how, by promoting a buoyant imperial narrative based on notions of white supremacy, the BBC encouraged emigration to the dominions often by targeting its extensive white female audience. The tension between impartiality and partiality is also reiterated here as the BBC assiduously broadcast opinions both for and against mass emigration.

Concentrating on the latter half of the period in focus, in the fourth and final chapter, it is reaffirmed that the BBC's imperial programmes were at times ambiguous and sometimes struggled to put forward the buoyant postwar imperial narrative that the

establishment needed. Investigating the BBC's reporting of political changes ensuing in Europe, namely the development of joint European institutions, it will be argued that the BBC staunchly contradicted this buoyant imperial narrative which discouraged portraying the British Empire as being in decline, by broadcasting attitudes that depicted the empire as being in a weakened state and Europe being the alternative Britain needed to remain an influential world power.

### Literature review – Empire focused secondary sources

The British Empire has been studied extensively by historians, however, their attitudes and focusses towards the subject have developed over time. With the rise in popularity towards the study of social history and the impact of an old imperial narrative diminishing, by the twenty-first century imperial studies changed with research around power and agency, portrayals of colonised people, and true critical analysis of the negative impacts of British imperial rule taking hold.

Nevertheless, older studies remain crucial to our ability to understand the historical context of the British Empire and are themselves sources of how an imperial narrative has had an impact on Britain. Ronald Robinson, for example, with his essay *Andrew Cohen and the Transfer of Power in Tropical Africa*, provides an understanding of Britain's African colonies from before the Second World War through to the latter half of the twentieth century. Robinson's study takes a heavy Anglo-centric view towards the decolonisation of Britain's African colonies, evident when he expresses a paternalistic attitude when he argues that "[Britain] did more, wittingly or unwittingly, to bring about the dismantling of British colonial rule and the rise of nationalism in tropical Africa than most African politicians".<sup>2</sup> Yet, works such as Robinsons have been vital to this research. Although not making any

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<sup>2</sup> Robinson, R. (1980). Andrew Cohen and the Transfer of Power in Tropical Africa. In Morris-Jones, W. H. & Fisher, G. (Eds), *Decolonisation & After the British and French Experience*. (p. 50-72). Cass. p.59

connections with broadcasting history, as most imperial studies at the time viewed the subjects as distinctly separate, Robinson's exploration of Britain's justifications of its empire were relevant. He explains how Britain used moral reasoning to argue in favour of the empire for centuries, changing the definitions of them to deflect anti-imperialists arguments back towards them.<sup>3</sup> Using Robinson's revelations of Britain's paternalistic attitude towards its rule, this thesis has established the presence of these paternalistic attitudes being present in the BBC postwar. Therefore, establishing there is a definitive link between broadcasting and imperial history by using analysis of programme content.

Coining the phrase 'imperialist nostalgia', Renato Rosaldo is an example of the rise of critical analysis taking place in imperial studies by the late twentieth century. Studying the start of the empires demise, Rosaldo described how the destruction of Britain's superpower identity fuelled a yearning for when the empire was powerful. He argues that the beliefs that came out of this post-colonial attitude (in line with nostalgia as a whole), ignored the negatives that occurred during imperial rule and instead there developed a fixation on the notions of the supposed 'good-will' of Britain's motives.<sup>4</sup> The very narrative that Rosaldo explained has been influential to this thesis, as it allowed expression of the paternalism seen from analysis of BBC content to go further and link with a post-colonial mindset that no other scholar had yet acknowledged.

Historians such as John Darwin have produced several vital studies on Britain's imperial history and in his 1991 book *The End of the British Empire*, the decisive change towards imperial studies taking place at the time were made clear. Darwin points out that at the time of his writing historians began to gain access to greater archival records that shed light on the British Empire, removing the limitation that held back previous historians.<sup>5</sup> Darwin is one of the earliest examples of scholars beginning to make the connection

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<sup>3</sup> Robinson (1980). p.57

<sup>4</sup> Rosaldo, R. (1989). Imperialist Nostalgia. *Representations*, 26, 107–122. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928525> p.110

<sup>5</sup> Darwin, J. (1991). *The End of the British Empire: the historical debate*. Basil Blackwell. p.2

between broadcasting and imperial history. He claims that there was a lack of such studies saying, “it would be extremely helpful to have a study of how colonial and imperial issues were treated in the Daily Press, as well as on radio and in the weeklies”.<sup>6</sup> This thesis therefore represents an example of the very studies Darwin hoped for in and has used his work to make the connection. Darwin’s particular argument, that during the postwar period the British ruling class created and encouraged an imperial narrative based on British exceptionalism was significant.<sup>7</sup> The buoyant imperial narrative that has been shown to be present in the BBC’s broadcasts typically had its basis in the promotion of British exceptionalism and Darwin provides the source of that narrative.

Twenty-first century studies on Britain’s imperial past continued exploring the trends that historians in the previous century began to explore. In their 2021 book *Empireland*, Sathnam Sanghera argues that Britain’s collective memory of its imperial past developed a ‘selective amnesia’ in response to Britain’s declining imperial power postwar.<sup>8</sup> Investigating how twenty-first century British media continued to display this attitude, Sanghera employs content analysis of present-day media output to explore the development of that imperial narrative. Similarly, to Sanghera’s approach, this thesis has used media output to show the endurance of a paternalistic attitude. Sanghera’s work has been important to this study, by providing the ability to compare how the same narrative can be seen to endure in today’s media.

### Literature review – Broadcasting focused secondary sources

Historiography which explores the BBC during the immediate postwar years is limited, with many historians such as Siân Nicholas and Mark Pegg, focussing their studies on the BBC during the Second World War or interwar period. The historiography typically tends to jump ahead almost a decade, with historians such as renowned BBC historian Asa

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<sup>6</sup> Darwin (1991). p.12

<sup>7</sup> Darwin (1991). p.14

<sup>8</sup> Sanghera, S. (2021). *Empireland How Imperialism has shaped modern Britain*. Penguin Books. p.192

Briggs, Su Holmes, and Burton Paulu producing works which explore the BBC during the 1950s and onwards. Although BBC historians do acknowledge the imperial changes that occurred in the years immediately after the war, the period continues to be one which is glossed over and has not been given the attention it deserves in understanding the development and influence of the BBC during the immediate postwar era.

As used for the study of scholarly works regarding the British Empire during the postwar era, a number of older works have too been crucial for research concerning British broadcasting during this period. For example, American broadcasting historian Burton Paulu's work, *British Broadcasting: Radio and Television in the United Kingdom*, which is the oldest scholarly source used in this research, as it was published in 1956. Although being an older source, Paulu's comparison of the BBC's public service approach to broadcasting, to America's commercial attitude provides a detailed examination of the BBC's inner workings up to 1956. Paulu examines the BBC from 1922; however, on reaching the postwar era, he argues that the BBC's history up to 1956 can be split into three stages. He categorises the postwar years as being a time of "readjustment and expansion", exploring the BBC's new postwar radio services and their individual programming focuses.<sup>9</sup> Paulu's close analysis of the BBC's postwar services and his argument that they marked a unique era for the BBC, one of drastic expansion, allows for a greater understanding of what was happening within the BBC during the immediate postwar period. Paulu predominantly centres on discussing the administration of the BBC and its institutional workings, he does not provide a great deal of analysis regarding specific BBC broadcasts, especially those containing imperial themes, which can be credited to his time of writing and the contemporary view that the history of broadcasting and empire were two distinctive and nonoverlapping themes. His work does, however, provide some analysis of the BBC's broadcasting of news, talks, and school programmes, which he argues were used to ensure listeners remained well informed of

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<sup>9</sup> Paulu, B. (1956). *British Broadcasting: Radio and Television in the United Kingdom*. University of Minnesota Press. p.144

current affairs as this remained a priority for the BBC in the postwar era. Again, he does not provide detailed analysis of actual broadcasts, he focuses more on wider programming changes and administrative decisions, for example, the BBC's huge expansion of "resident reporters...[which were] assigned to the United Nations, the United States, France" and many other nations around the world.<sup>10</sup> Although not specifically referring to particular programmes or the fact that empire played a key role in these broadcasts, his work does show us that the BBC's determination to inform its listeners of global affairs indicated that imperial developments would have been an integral part of these programmes and for these programmes to be found, further research via the BBC's programme listings was required.

Historiography relating to broadcasting history continued to be confined to the same type of research approaches that Paulu took for his work, concentrating heavily on the institutional changes within the BBC, with greater detail placed on the story behind those involved and how the BBC as a whole changed. These same influences can be observed even in the work of renowned BBC historian Asa Briggs in his five-volume history which explores the birth and development of broadcasting in Britain. In his fourth instalment, titled *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume IV: Sound and Vision*, Briggs specifically focusses on the 10-year period after the Second World War, 1945-1955, which he describes as being a period of "transformation... [for] the BBC from an institution primarily dealing in Sound to one dealing predominantly in Television" which leads him to focus less on the BBC's domestic radio services.<sup>11</sup> Briggs makes clear that during his research for his fourth volume, he had begun to modernise his research approach by using documents and methods that were newly available to researchers at the time. For instance, he refers to his use of "oral history"...[which] has been an increasingly important element in the approach", thus marking a significant change for Briggs's research method since previously he relied heavily on available BBC correspondences and the personal papers of influential people

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<sup>10</sup> Paulu, B. (1956). p.158

<sup>11</sup> Briggs, A. (1979). *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom / Vol.4, Sound and Vision*. Oxford University Press. P.9

such as Sir John Reith.<sup>12</sup> Although having greater access to records and new research methods, Briggs time of writing meant that, like Paulu's research, the records available to him were predominantly internal correspondence that only allowed for any analysis of institutional decisions and changes. Due to this there is little to no reference of actual BBC programme output nor the significance of imperial changes Britain experienced postwar, which were highly influential to the development of British broadcasting and society. Briggs's work does briefly refer to the Commonwealth when discussing the BBC's External Services, however, his discussion here centres more on the service's uncertain future and financial cuts after the Drogheda Committee report (1953) rather than anything relating to BBC programming. Briggs's work, published in 1979, was a product of its time, with limited archival records available and contemporary views regarding the division between broadcasting history and empire studies enduring.

During the final years of decolonisation in the remaining two decades of the twentieth century, studies on imperial history began to change and so too did the understanding of the significance between broadcasting and imperial history. This led to historians' beginning to question whether there were links between broadcasting and Britain's imperial past. With increasingly more available archival records and contemporary views changing, there have been in recent decades more studies of the BBC's connection with the empire. Many historians, such as Simon Potter in his book *Broadcasting Empire: The BBC and the British World, 1922-1970*, explore the BBC's imperial broadcasting specifically to the empire and less so to domestic audiences. Potter begins his study from a period when the British Empire had reached the height of its territorial expansion in the interwar years, continuing throughout the postwar war years of decolonisation until 1970. He explores in detail the BBC's relationship with Commonwealth Public Broadcasters and argues that in the late 1940s and especially by the early 1950s, both BBC and Commonwealth broadcasters were increasingly sharing reciprocal broadcasts. Potter's study provides a unique insight into the

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<sup>12</sup> Briggs, A. (1979). No page number.

scope of influence of the BBC via the use of its reciprocal programming deals that it made with a number of Commonwealth broadcasters. However, his work offers no direct programme content analysis, the influence and significance of programme content was overlooked by Potter, only the mere fact that reciprocal programmes were sent and received by the BBC and other Commonwealth broadcasters, with some discussion of their varying programme types were focused on. Potter's focus shifts to such an extent on this subject that his discussion of the postwar years becomes more an institutional history of Commonwealth Public Broadcasting rather than a study of the BBC's impact via its imperial output. This can be argued to represent a return to the contemporary research focuses used by past broadcasting historians, even though Potter is examining an area that was in the past ignored. Part of his institutional study, Potter discusses in depth the BBC's postwar Director-General, William Haley. Potter centres on Haley's ideals, specifically on the postwar resurgence of pre-war Reithian ideals which resulted in a strengthening of the BBC's ideal of being Britain's cultural guardian extending into the postwar years.<sup>13</sup> This resurgence he suggests was in part a result of the BBC and Haley's self-imposed fear of Americanisation and therefore was a major part in their attempt to "curb American influences on British programmes".<sup>14</sup>

As studies in imperial and broadcasting history developed throughout the twenty-first century, there marked a new area of study. Instead of the two subject areas being viewed as distinct themes that had no commonality, historians began to question how the rise of broadcasting in Britain intertwined with the developing twentieth century world. Works such as Thomas Hajkowski's, *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922-53*, aims to demonstrate how between the BBC's creation in 1922 until the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 the BBC played a critical role in the development of Britain's national identity. Hajkowski takes a mixed approach in his book, studying both institutional policy

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<sup>13</sup> Potter, S. J. (2012). *Broadcasting Empire: The BBC and the British world, 1922-1970*. Oxford University Press. p.147

<sup>14</sup> Potter, S. J. (2012).144



changes and the influence of specific BBC programmes, to help argue that the early BBC had a significant impact on British national identity, by promoting the monarchy and the British Empire as staples of identity. Hajkowski's research in relation to the postwar BBC and its approach to the British Empire are valuable not least because of his tripartite categorisation of the BBC's "projection of Empire", from the beginning of the Second World War to 1953.<sup>15</sup> First, he argues that the BBC continuously endeavoured to portray the monarchy as what bonded Commonwealth nations to Britain during and after the war. Second, he notes that the social changes experienced in Britain during the war saw the BBC acknowledge the need of representing not only Britain but the entire British Empire as "more egalitarian".<sup>16</sup> Third, using a number of specific BBC programmes, Hajkowski shows how although producing programmes which presented the British Empire as a united multi-racial and multi-racial community, it also for a brief time in the late 1940s produced a number of programmes which represented nineteenth century imperial and racist stereotypes towards the British Empire.<sup>17</sup> Although providing some insight into imperial themed programmes on the BBC, showing that there was an increase in attention given to educating and informing listeners of global and imperial affairs. Hajkowski's work does not provide as comprehensive analysis as this dissertation regarding the BBC's domestic programming portrayal of imperial events, such as the impact of the first wave of mass decolonisation in the late 1940s, or the influence of an increasingly unified Europe on Britain's view of its own global position and future. This dissertation has gone further than Hajkowski by utilizing BBC programme files as evidence of the BBC's representation of varying aspects of the British Empire postwar.

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<sup>15</sup> Hajkowski, T. (2010). *From the war to Westminster abbey: The BBC and the empire, 1939–53*. Manchester University Press. p.52

<sup>16</sup> Hajkowski, T. (2010). *From the war to Westminster abbey: The BBC and the empire*. p.53

<sup>17</sup> Hajkowski, T. (2010). *From the war to Westminster abbey: The BBC and the empire*. p.53

## Methodology

This research has primarily focused on using the scripts of BBC radio programmes and *Radio Times* radio listings to facilitate a study of the imperialistic attitudes expressed in the content of the BBC's imperial themed broadcasts. The initial research process made extensive use of the *Radio Times* as an invaluable primary source that sheds light on the overall scope of the BBC's radio programming. The *Radio Times* was first published in September 1923 with the main purpose of providing information and detailed programme listings for BBC broadcasts. The rationale for the creation of the *Radio Times* was the reluctance of British newspapers to print BBC radio listings, as a result of a rising fear that radio would make printed press obsolete.<sup>18</sup> The popularity of the *Radio Times* rapidly grew alongside the BBC's own increasing popularity throughout the interwar period and into the postwar era, with weekly sales of the magazine approaching a million copies in 1928 and selling almost eight million copies by 1955.<sup>19</sup> Although having access to all *Radio Times* issues for this period via the BBC archives online source programme index, this analysis did not pursue a study of all publications between 1945-1951.<sup>20</sup> The research method used, instead centred on using the keyword search tool available on the programme index, to search for specific words and phrases, such as empire, commonwealth, India, Dominion, colony, Europe, and many more variations and keywords that related to the themes of the dissertation. Using this tool allowed for a quantitative study of the representational extent of certain themes in BBC programming, as well as the ability to plot scheduling choices, broadcast times, and patterns of programming to better understand the intended target audience and possible influence of specific programmes. Although being a valuable source, using the *Radio Times* presented some difficulties. The first was that the analytical method used to study programming trends, via the keyword search tool, may have potentially missed

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<sup>18</sup> Paulu, B. (1956). p.147

<sup>19</sup> Paulu, B. (1956). p.149

<sup>20</sup> BBC Genome. (n.d.). Retrieved September 09, 2021, from <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/> The BBC Programme Index, formerly known as the BBC Genome Project, has digested decades of *Radio Times* issues and provided online access to BBC programme listings from 1923 to the present day.

things as a result of shifts in language throughout the period. As well as language changes, the keyword search could also not identify text within *Radio Times* articles, resulting in manual searches being required for analysis of articles that discussed either programming or international events, therefore it may be that some articles were missed. With the publisher of the *Radio Times* being the BBC, it can be argued that as a source it does not give a critical perspective regarding BBC programming, as it was used to encourage readers to listen to the different programmes and did so by generating interest through its articles. Nevertheless, without the *Radio Times*, the process of identifying programmes for deeper content analysis would not have been possible.

BBC Programme files are the main primary source for this study. These are the scripts that BBC announcers and speakers read from to provide radio broadcasts. The BBC of this period did not, however, keep all of its records. The programming patterns discovered using the *Radio Times* were used to produce lists of programmes of interest that could be sent to the BBC Written Archive Centre (WAC) at Caversham, to identify which programme files had survived. The programme files that were selected from the *Radio Times* were chosen because they focussed on the three main themes of this dissertation: Indian independence, dominion emigration, and Europe. When the existing programme files were identified, it was important to ensure that a broad range of different programme types could be analysed, therefore a variety of programmes such as news reports, debates, and talks were selected to be case studies.

By analysing various types of programme, this study has been able to show how in the immediate postwar years, discussions of the empire and its changes were happening across British society with politicians, journalists, academics, members of the armed services, and the general public all being used in imperial themed programmes. The intention of providing a broader array of speaker representation was that it would enable imperial themes to be broadcast to specific audiences, such as via the series *Woman's Hour* which was aimed at the BBC's rising popularity amongst female listeners postwar.

Some examples of the programmes chosen for this research are *Some Impressions of India*, which was a 15-minute talk given by the prominent imperial figure Lord Radcliffe that broadcast on 28 September 1947, one month after India officially became an independent nation. This programme was selected as it was one of the BBC's major broadcasts that gave a British perspective on Indian independence, which has been found to have promoted a paternalistic attitude that encouraged notions of British exceptionalism towards the legacy of British rule in India. Another series of programme files that were selected were from the series *The Council of Europe*, which broadcast for the first time after the Council of Europe's first meeting in August-September 1949. This series broadcast several programmes that discussed the concept of the Council and its significance. More specifically, this series can be used to trace the tension between Britain's imperial establishment which developed a reluctance towards a uniting Europe and the BBC's more ambiguous position on the subject.

Table 1 lists all the programmes that have been analysed for this dissertation.

Table 1

Programme title	Date of broadcast	Service broadcast on
<i>Woman's Hour: Do You Want to Emigrate?</i>	23 January 1947	Light Programme
<i>Some Impressions of India</i>	28 September 1947	Home Service
<i>Woman's Hour: Women and Emigration – Canada</i>	21 October 1947	Light Programme
<i>The British in India – The Nabobs</i>	21 October 1947	Third Programme
<i>The British in India – The Imperial Idea</i>	1 November 1947	Third Programme
<i>The British in India – An Indian View</i>	8 December 1947	Third Programme
<i>Is Mass Emigration the Answer?</i>	21 July 1948	Home Service
<i>Should We Leave Britain Now?</i>	10 August 1948	Home Service
<i>Prospect of the Council of Europe</i>	09 August 1949	Third Programme
<i>Taking Stock: Britain and Europe</i>	7 April 1950	Home Service
<i>Can the Council of Europe Survive?</i>	7 October 1950	Third Programme
<i>Taking Stock: Britain and the Commonwealth – An Anglo-Australian discussion</i>	4 January 1951	Home Service
<i>The World Today</i>	28 December 1951	Home Service

Whilst programme files have allowed for this research to go beyond mere descriptions of broadcasts, the inability to hear the broadcasts came with certain drawbacks. For example, although most of the scripts had gone through BBC vetting procedures, being unable to hear the actual broadcast, it may be that some changes could have occurred at the eleventh hour, such as additional content or redactions of existing programme files content. Additionally, as is shown in the analysis of *Is Mass Migration the Answer?* there are examples of broadcasts containing sections of live discussion that were not scripted and were therefore not available for analysis.

Using the *Radio Times* and BBC Programme files has permitted the creation of analytical frameworks regarding both BBC programming trends and perspectives towards postwar current affairs. Although there are extensive studies on Britain's imperial past, its connection with broadcasting history has typically been associated with global broadcasting and little direct study has been made relating to this period. The content of the broadcasts analysed here suggests a certain tension in relation to the British imperial narrative that remained buoyant throughout the immediate postwar years. The sources on which this study is based have unique historical properties which in part create its originality. This part of the BBC's history is often overlooked by studies that draw on internal institutional sources such as personal correspondence between broadcasters and leaders, or Listener Research Data. While the former type of source can tell us a great deal about decision-making processes within the corporation, the present study gives us access to the results of those decisions in the form of BBC programme output. Similarly, while Listener Research Data provides invaluable information on audience numbers and listener opinions, it cannot give us the detail on programme content that the Programme Files can. By looking at the way the BBC expressed certain perspectives in its programmes, tells us something different to whether the programme was popular or not: it suggests the varied ways in which the corporation exercised power over public opinion through its broadcasting monopoly on a range of imperial themes.

## 1. 'Continuity and change'

Both the BBC and Britain experienced significant changes during the postwar war period. However, to understand how these changes came to pass, this chapter highlights how the narrative of Britain's imperial establishment developed since the conclusion of the First World War. As political changes ensued in the British Empire, such as the granting of greater autonomy to the dominions, there developed a view that the British media needed to do more to promote attitudes of imperial unity. Consequently, with the creation of the BBC in 1922, the potential of radio to promote an imperial narrative set by Britain's imperial establishment was increasingly realised as the broadcaster grew in popularity and influence. By the arrival of peacetime and the rapid international changes that followed, which included a diminishing empire, Britain's imperial establishment sought to continue its use of the BBC to disseminate its own narrative. However, the BBC came out of the war with a rejuvenation of its own principles, which although were founded in expressing support for imperialism, saw the BBC distance itself from such an alignment.

### The BBC's Reithian years (1922-1938) & the impact of the Second World War

The British Broadcasting Company was created in October 1922, operating as a commercial business headed by the Post Office.<sup>21</sup> The company was created as a result of the increasing influence of Britain's largest radio manufacturers, known as the 'Big Six', which included the companies Marconi, Western Electric, General Electric Company, Radio Communication Company, Metropolitan-Vickers, and British Thomson-Houston. Whilst the BBC was a company, the 'Big Six' particularly focused on profits rather than pursuing radio's

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<sup>21</sup> Briggs, A. (1961). *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom / Vol.1, The birth of broadcasting*. Oxford University Press. p.123

full potential.<sup>22</sup> The company's first general manager, John Reith, along with many others at the BBC became increasingly frustrated with how the BBC was being run, with Asa Briggs claiming Reith believed "that the BBC should be both a public institution and an independent institution" rather than a private enterprise.<sup>23</sup> The negative opinions towards the commercial running of the BBC were surprisingly mutual, with the Post Office sharing Reith's hopes for a publicly owned BBC.<sup>24</sup> In 1925 the Crawford Committee was set up to examine the possibility of placing the BBC under public control and in 1926 it concluded in favour of public ownership of the company.<sup>25</sup> On becoming a corporation in 1927, John Reith became the corporation's first Director-General, bringing with him his own strong beliefs, regarding what the BBC was responsible for, which Barnard tells us was:

Educating the listener...[and] encouraging him or her to discriminate, to develop the art of selective and attentive listening, to gradually wean him or herself off the more lightweight elements in programming.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to his attitudes regarding the potential of broadcasting in Britain, Reith was also highly influential in developing the BBC's early relationship with the British government. Historian Tom Mills explores this in his 2020 publication, *The BBC myth of a public service*, which argues that during the 1926 General Strike Reith made a decision that would influence the core principle of BBC impartiality. Facing a government which Mills argues was considering using its "power to commandeer the BBC", as fears of national disorder due to the General Strike grew, a government takeover of the BBC appeared imminent.<sup>27</sup> By the conclusion of the short lived General Strike, Reith ensured that the BBC maintained its 'independence', however, the price of this saw the BBC become a mouthpiece for the government as it broadcast a narrative that went against the strikers and supported

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<sup>22</sup> Pegg, M. (1983). *Broadcasting and society 1918-1939*. Croom Helm. p.49

<sup>23</sup> Briggs, A. (1961). p.328

<sup>24</sup> Briggs, A. (1961). p.328

<sup>25</sup> Paulu, B. (1981). *Television and radio in the United Kingdom*. University of Minnesota Press. p.28

<sup>26</sup> Barnard, S. (1989). *On the radio: music radio in Britain*. Open University Press. p.4

<sup>27</sup> Mills, T. (2020). *The BBC: Myth of a public service*. Verso. p.13



the government.<sup>28</sup> The close ties that Reith had forged WITH cabinet ministers to safeguard the BBC gave rise to a precarious relationship with the British government which restricted BBC impartiality developing, as government narratives could easily influence programming choices..<sup>29</sup> Reith's ideals and decisions remained powerful influences on BBC programming for decades after his departure from the corporation in 1938, with future BBC leaders admiring and replicating his approaches in their leadership methods.

The Second World War had a significant impact on the BBC, just as it had on Britain's global position. The corporation itself grew rapidly during the war, for example between 1939 and 1945, the BBC's staff increased from 4,233 to 11,417 and went from having 23 transmitters to 38.<sup>30</sup> As the dominant medium of communication during the interwar period, radio was instrumental during the war, being used to its full potential of uniting people and maintaining national morale.<sup>31</sup> As the BBC's monopoly over British broadcasting continued, it had to be prepared for every eventuality and ensure that the nation's trust in it was not misplaced. The BBC had prepared a wartime plan in the event hostilities in Europe began; the most noticeable of changes within this plan involved the interwar year choice of programmes, National and Regional, being reduced to one single programme, the Home Service.<sup>32</sup> Unexpectedly, from September 1939 until May 1940, Western Europe experienced the 'phoney war'. Nazi Germany focused its efforts on its invasion of Poland to the East and Scandinavia in the North, leaving the Western Front at a standstill.<sup>33</sup> After several weeks the public began to become weary of wartime conditions which had been imposed across Britain due to the expectation of heavy bombardment. Attention was especially focused on the BBC's wartime changes that were increasingly viewed as being too aggressive.

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<sup>28</sup> Mills, T. (2020). p.17

<sup>29</sup> Mills, T. (2020). p.17

<sup>30</sup> Walvin, J. (1978). *Leisure and society, 1830-1950*. Longman. p.145

<sup>31</sup> Baade, C. L. (2012). *Victory through harmony: The BBC and popular music in World War II*. Oxford University Press. p.36

<sup>32</sup> Briggs, A. (1970). p.85

<sup>33</sup> Baade, C. L. (2012). p.35

Due to the morale of the public significantly declining during the phoney war, frustrations towards what were becoming regarded as unnecessary wartime conditions grew, and the issue became viewed as a national security crisis. On 28 September 1939, the issue was debated in the House of Commons, which as Baade details, particularly focussed on the BBC's "extensive use of gramophone records in a medium that had featured live performance almost exclusively".<sup>34</sup> The BBC realised that it needed to change its approach to wartime broadcasting and as Robbins argues, the BBC's wartime programming shows that it began to develop an "increased self-confidence of populist broadcasting".<sup>35</sup> This can be seen by an influx of American styled programmes that had gained significant popularity during the war, such as *Bing Time* (1940-1949) and the *Bob Hope Programme* (1941-1945) being broadcast on the BBC. New lighter themed programmes, such as *Music While You Work* (1940-1967), were also created to specifically cater for factory workers, broadcasting a variety of popular light music. In June 1942 however, the BBC's Variety Department Dance Music Policy Committee began what the British press called the 'anti-slush war'. As a response to the rising popularity of American programme made the decision that it would the aim of the war was to remove, as Siân Nicholas writes, "[the] allegedly debilitating influence on servicemen's morale of songs and singers (that is, the American-style 'crooners') considered [...] slushy in sentiment".<sup>36</sup> The BBC continued to fight its own self-induced fear of what it believed was the 'Americanisation' of the BBC and of British culture for the remainder of the war, which significantly influenced many BBC wartime decisions. Most notably it was an important factor in the increase in imperial-themed programmes postwar, which emphasised the ideals of British exceptionalism through the promotion of imperial unity and enduring British power.

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<sup>34</sup> Baade, C. L. (2012). p.39

<sup>35</sup> Robbins, K. (2002). *The British Isles, 1901-1951: edited by Keith Robbins*. Oxford University Press. p.132

<sup>36</sup> Nicholas, S. (1999). *The People's Radio: The BBC and its Audience, 1939–1945*. In Hayes N. & Hill J. (Eds.), *Millions like us?: British Culture in the Second World War* (pp. 62-92). Liverpool University Press. p.82

## BBC programming changes postwar

William Haley was the BBC's first postwar Director-General and just as John Reith brought his own ideals to his leadership of the BBC, so did Haley. Prior to his appointment in 1944, Haley had held high ranking positions at a number of British press outlets, such as being joint Managing Director of the *Manchester Guardian* and *Evening News*, as well as Director for Reuters and the Press Association.<sup>37</sup> Haley was the fifth Director-General of the BBC, his predecessors being Sir John Reith (1922-1938), Sir Fredrick Ogilvie (1938-1942), Sir Cecil Graves (1942-1943), and Robert Foot (1942-1944). As can be seen, the leadership of the BBC experienced extensive uncertainty after Reith left and the war began.

Ogilvie's leadership was plagued with dissatisfaction towards his apparent indecisiveness and inability to follow through with any decisions that were made.<sup>38</sup> In 1942 Ogilvie was asked to voluntarily retire from his position, of which he agreed to and rather than a new single Director-General being appointed, Sir Cecil Graves (Ogilvie's deputy) and R. W. Foot became the BBC's first and only ever joint Director-Generals.<sup>39</sup> Foot's and Grave's leadership of the BBC brought some leadership stability, at least for a brief time, with Foot focussing his efforts on the corporation's financial structure and Graves concentrating on the programming side.<sup>40</sup> In 1942 Foot and Graves oversaw the beginning of the BBC's anti-slush war, as they both felt that BBC content had become too sentimental. On 24 June 1943 Graves announced that he would be resigning from his role at the BBC due to health reasons, resulting in Foot becoming sole Director-General.<sup>41</sup> There were concerns after Graves left the BBC regarding Foot's ability to run the corporation efficiently. Concerns

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<sup>37</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation. (1943). *The BBC Year Book 1944*. Jarrold & Sons LTD. Retrieved from <https://worldradiohistory.com/UK/BBC-Annual/BBC-Year-Book-1944.pdf> p.6

<sup>38</sup> Carpenter, H., & Doctor, J. (1997). *The envy of the world: Fifty years of the BBC third programme and radio three*. Phoenix Giant. p.7

<sup>39</sup> Carpenter, H., & Doctor, J. (1997). p.7

<sup>40</sup> Baade, C. L. (2012). p.134

<sup>41</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation. (1943). *The BBC Year Book 1944*. Jarrold & Sons LTD. Retrieved from <https://worldradiohistory.com/UK/BBC-Annual/BBC-Year-Book-1944.pdf> p.6

specifically came from high-ranking war cabinet officials such as “Brendan Bracken, the Minister of Information...[who] told the BBC that the War Cabinet insisted that Foot should not be put in sole charge of the Corporation”.<sup>42</sup> Although it appeared that Foot now had sole leadership of the BBC, it can be seen that the corporation heeded external concerns when William Haley joined the BBC in an entirely new role in 1943, the corporation's first Editor-in-Chief.<sup>43</sup> Haley's role as described by the BBC itself was a “post of wide scope”, which although not by title, practically placed him in a position of joint leadership with Foot.<sup>44</sup> Leadership changes occurred again for the final time during the war, when in April 1944 Foot left the BBC and Haley became sole Director-General.

As a result of both Foot's and Graves's short terms, Haley was thrown into the position at a turbulent time, with allied victory in Europe practically assured and extensive reorganisation needed for the eventual return to peacetime broadcasting.<sup>45</sup> During Foot's leadership in 1943 peacetime broadcasting plans had begun to be discussed.<sup>46</sup> Foot understood the importance of preparing the BBC for the inevitable changes that would be needed for the BBC to continue to survive in a postwar world. In the BBC's 1944 Year Book, Foot wrote about the importance of postwar planning, arguing that “it would be wrong at this stage if the BBC were not also planning for the future”.<sup>47</sup> At the time Foot revealed very little information regarding the BBC's ideas for postwar programming. He did bring to light that there would be a return of regional broadcasting, which ceased at the start of the war. Foot strongly believing that radio should not remain solely in London, further claimed that there “will be no scheme based on a metropolitan concentration of resources in London [...] our plan for the future will give greater emphasis still to regional resources”.<sup>48</sup> The BBC's

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<sup>42</sup> Carpenter, H., & Doctor, J. (1997). p.7

<sup>43</sup> Hajkowski, T. (2010). *From the war to Westminster abbey: The BBC and the empire*. p.69

<sup>44</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation. (1943). *The BBC Year Book 1944*. p.6

<sup>45</sup> Cain, J. (1992). *The BBC: 70 years of broadcasting*. British Broadcasting Corporation. p.59

<sup>46</sup> Barnard, S. (1989). p.23

<sup>47</sup> Foot, R. F. (1943). Looking Forward. In. British Broadcasting Corporation (Ed.), *BBC Year Book 1944*. (pp. 37-39). Jarrold & Sons LTD. <https://worldradiohistory.com/UK/BBC-Annual/BBC-Year-Book-1944.pdf> p.37

<sup>48</sup> Foot, R. F. (1943). Looking Forward. In. British Broadcasting Corporation (Ed.), *BBC Year Book 1944*. p.38

postwar broadcasting plans continued to develop throughout the war and when Haley joined the BBC in 1943 both Haley and Foot worked together and prepared a statement for the BBC's Board of Governors in 1944 which detailed their plan.<sup>49</sup> Their plan involved the creation of three distinct BBC radio services, the first consisting of predominantly highbrow entertainment, the second a continuation of the BBC's wartime Home Service, and thirdly a return of the BBC's regional services.<sup>50</sup> The BBC's Board of Governors showed some concerns regarding the extent of highbrow focus that was present in Foot and Haley's initial plan, Foot's resignation from the BBC in April 1944, however, gave Haley the power to proceed with the three programme idea that Foot had started, but forge it using his own ideals.<sup>51</sup>

Haley was a great believer in Reithian ideals regarding the function and purpose of public broadcasting in Britain, particularly believing that the BBC was an integral part of British society. Evidence of such beliefs can be seen via the BBC describing broadcasting in 1944 as being "interwoven with every thread of national life".<sup>52</sup> Haley believed that by using the BBC's broadcasting superiority and high popularity, postwar radio could be used to educate listeners and raise their overall cultural level. Reith had a similar belief, believing that British listeners were open to accepting high culture, but that it needed to be offered to them and by using the BBC's broadcasting dominance Reith aimed to do just that.<sup>53</sup> Whilst Reith was in control, the BBC's radio services consisted of the National Programme and a number of regionalised services that would broadcast the National Programme's output as well as their own programmes. Reith's belief was that the BBC should provide all forms of culture to the British public through its single nationwide service, taking a greater focus on

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<sup>49</sup> Briggs, A. (1970). p.647

<sup>50</sup> Briggs, A. (1970). p.647

<sup>51</sup> Briggs, A. (1970). p.651

<sup>52</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation. (1944). *The BBC Year Book 1945*. Jarrold & Sons LTD. Retrieved from <https://worldradiohistory.com/UK/BBC-Annual/BBC-Year-Book-1945.pdf> p.7

<sup>53</sup> Pugh, M. (2009). *"We danced all night": a social history of Britain between the wars*. Vintage. p.341

higher culture genres such as classical music and opera, whilst offering a much smaller output of lighter themed programmes such as dance and other popular music genres.<sup>54</sup>

Haley, although a strong supporter of Reithian ideals, applied them to develop his own approach whilst planning the BBC's new three services for the postwar era. Instead of viewing listeners as a single audience, one which could simply be offered all forms of entertainment and seamlessly listen and form an interest into whatever they heard. Haley acknowledged that broadcasting was more complex and that there were a multitude of audiences with different tastes.<sup>55</sup> Haley developed the idea of a cultural pyramid, which separated the public's cultural tastes into three distinct sections, the bottom being for lowbrow culture, the centre for middlebrow, and the top of the pyramid for highbrow culture. What remained of Reithian ideals was Haley's view of the BBC's audience, which as Potter argues was, that given the chance listeners "would work their way up through the hierarchy over time, and cultural standards would improve overall".<sup>56</sup> Haley developed his new postwar programming plan using his cultural pyramid ideal. At the bottom of the pyramid would be the new Light Music Programme, offering lighter entertainment which had gained greater popularity throughout the war.<sup>57</sup> The centre would include the continuation of the Home Service, which would see a return of some regional services and would focus on broadcasting a "broad middle group of different types of programmes".<sup>58</sup> At the top of the cultural pyramid was Haley's third programme, which represented highbrow entertainment such as theatre, operas, and talks on current affairs.<sup>59</sup> By developing a programming plan on his cultural pyramid, Haley wanted listeners to rise above their current cultural status, moving from listening to lowbrow entertainment in the Light Programme, onto middlebrow in the Home Service, and finally realising their formerly unknown interest of highbrow culture. Surprisingly, Haley was hopeful that the process would continue beyond that, wanting

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<sup>54</sup> Nicholas, S. (1999). p.64

<sup>55</sup> Potter, S. J. (2012). p.147

<sup>56</sup> Potter, S. J. (2012). p.147

<sup>57</sup> Potter, S. J. (2012). p.148

<sup>58</sup> Potter, S. J. (2012). p.148

<sup>59</sup> Potter, S. J. (2012). p.148

audiences to realise that they eventually no longer needed radio and then the lower the audience numbers got, “the more successful the BBC could claim to be, since... it led people to the theatre and the concert hall”.<sup>60</sup>

Haley’s postwar programming plan based around his cultural pyramid ideal was accepted by the BBC’s Board of Governors. When the end of war in Europe approached, Haley announced publicly a ninety-day deadline, for the BBC to establish its peacetime broadcasting conditions. Writing in July 1945, Haley wrote in the *Radio Times* confirming that:

On Sunday, July 29, VE + 82, the BBC will make good that promise. From then on listeners in the United Kingdom will have at their service ten wavelengths, against the twelve they had before the war.<sup>61</sup>

Only two of Haley’s desired radio services came into existence on 29 July 1945, with the BBC’s wartime radio service, the General Forces Programme, ceasing operations and being replaced with the BBC’s new Light Music Programme. In accordance with Haley’s ideals, the Light Programme offered BBC audiences an alternative to the middlebrow focused Home Service, by continuing the trend of the General Forces Programmes of broadcasting programmes of a lighter tone. The new service can be seen to have been a success for the BBC, with historian Paulu describing the service as an example of the BBC’s “realistic understanding of how the audience is constituted, and what it likes and dislikes”.<sup>62</sup> The second of Haley’s planned postwar programmes was a return to the regional broadcasts that the BBC had offered before the war. This was achieved by making the wartime Home Service into a permanent BBC fixture, broadcasting both national programmes but also unique regional broadcasts with the introduction of six regional broadcasting channels, these being “London, Midland, West of England, Welsh, Scottish and a combined... [service]

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<sup>60</sup> Tracey, M. (1998). *The decline and fall of public service broadcasting*. Oxford University Press. p.67

<sup>61</sup> Haley, W. J. (1945, July 27). The two new programmes. *Radio Times*, 88 (1139), p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Paulu, B. (1956). p.231

...serving the North of England and Northern Ireland”.<sup>63</sup> In terms of the Haley’s cultural pyramid, the Home Service was deemed the steppingstone to the highbrow culture that would in future be offered by the BBC’s Third Programme, with the Home Services broadcasting “the widest program range of all the BBC’s domestic services... [including] variety and other entertainment; features and drama”, as well as current affairs talks and serious music to encourage listeners to move up the pyramid.<sup>64</sup> The Third Programme, was designed by Haley for audiences with an interest in highbrow culture and to be the end goal for all listeners working their way up the cultural pyramid.<sup>65</sup> After delays to its initially planned opening in May 1946, the BBC’s third and final postwar radio service, opened in September 1946, officially ushering in the BBC’s new peacetime broadcasting era.<sup>66</sup> The Third Programme marked a decisive change for the BBC, however as Judt argues, to broadcasters in Europe a programme solely focussed on broadcasting highbrow entertainment “would be thought of as the ‘intelligentsia’” and was commonplace, but for the BBC it was new and highly experimental.<sup>67</sup> On its opening Haley had written a statement which was printed in the *Radio Times*, where he discussed the new service and what it meant to British broadcasting. He especially emphasised that “its whole content will be directed to an audience that is not of one class but that is perceptive and intelligent”.<sup>68</sup> There were concerns from within and out the corporation that Haley’s programming plans would result in deepening class divides in Britain. Although this was not Haley’s intention, the result was in reality that audiences became further entrenched within their own tastes and the minority which originally the Third Programme represented grew smaller and smaller over time.

In conjunction with the BBC’s belief that British cultural standards were declining, which was a significant factor in the BBC’s postwar programming changes, imperial themed

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<sup>63</sup> Currie, T. (2001). *The Radio Times Story*. Kelly Publishing. p.60

<sup>64</sup> Paulu, B. (1956). p.149-150

<sup>65</sup> Nicholas, S. (1999). p.91

<sup>66</sup> Paulu, B. (1956). p.146

<sup>67</sup> Judt, T. (2007). p.206

<sup>68</sup> Haley, W. J. (1946, September 27). The third programme. *Radio Times*, 92 (1200), p. 1.



programmes received a boost after the war. The BBC realised that imperial broadcasts could be used as a backdrop for a number of the new lighter programmes that it had begun to broadcast to appease listeners, whilst also acting as a counter measure to programmes which could not be altered using imperial themes.<sup>69</sup> Using the BBC's regained freedoms after the war, Haley reinstated the BBC's pre-war imperial mentality which reaffirmed Reithian era attitudes that British broadcasting had a duty to promote the narratives of an imperial establishment, rather than taking an impartial approach.<sup>70</sup> The three new postwar programmes allowed for a new era of BBC imperial broadcasting, that did not focus solely on promoting imperialism. Imperial themes became prominent across all three cultural levels, from adaptations of imperial novels on the Light Programme, school broadcasts teaching imperial history on the Home Service, to in-depth discussions and debates about imperial issues on the Third Programme.<sup>71</sup>

The BBC itself acknowledged that it was entering a new era of imperial broadcasting in its 1946 year book, where it was argued that the BBC had "already passed two distinct phases".<sup>72</sup> The first phase was called "the period of 'short-wave' listening" and referred to the BBC's early 1930s broadcasts to scattered parts of the empire, which were designed specifically for those who spoke English to bring a sense of 'home'. The second, "was 'rebroadcasting', that is to say, the relay by the broadcasting organisations of the dominions and elsewhere of programmes which they picked up direct from London" and covered the late 1930s and war years. Finally, the postwar period was argued to be an alteration of the wartime phase of 'rebroadcasting' and "must be the stage of 'exchange'". The idea that imperial broadcasting was entering a new era resulted in the calling of the 1945 Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference which focussed not only on BBC broadcasts being shared with the Empire and Commonwealth broadcasters, but with reciprocal programmes

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<sup>69</sup> Hajkowski, T. (2010). *From the war to Westminster abbey: The BBC and the empire*. p.51

<sup>70</sup> Potter, S. J. (2012). p.144

<sup>71</sup> Hajkowski, T. (2010). *From the war to Westminster abbey: The BBC and the empire*. p.52

<sup>72</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation. (1945). *The BBC Year Book 1946*. Jarrold & Sons LTD. Retrieved from <https://worldradiohistory.com/UK/BBC-Annual/BBC-Year-Book-1946.pdf> p.96

being sent from the imperial broadcasters to the BBC.<sup>73</sup> A significant change to the BBC's imperial broadcasting mentality can be seen from the BBC's 1946 Year Book, with the BBC showing great interest in obtaining for "British listeners more frequent and more varied programmes from the Dominions".<sup>74</sup>

### Britain's reduced postwar position

The aftermath of the Second World War brought far reaching changes for Britain, both domestically and internationally, on an unexpected scale.<sup>75</sup> Throughout the interwar period the sense of imperial unity strengthened further, at least in Britain, with the general belief being that in the event of any future conflict between Britain and another power, the British Empire, as it had done in 1914 would come to Britain's aid.<sup>76</sup> The interwar period, however, saw British dominions (former British dependencies) obtain greater autonomy, resulting in an increase of dominion nationalism. To maintain close ties with the independent dominions, the British monarchy was used to deploy a concept of a unified but "decentralised imperial system".<sup>77</sup> For example, in May 1939, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth undertook a Royal Tour of Canada, becoming the first reigning British monarchs to visit Canada.<sup>78</sup> The 1939 Royal Tour was seen as a success as it helped fraying imperial relations almost resemble what they were in 1914. However, by 1939 the dominions were differently positioned to how they had been twenty-five years before; they each had their own international aims, greater autonomous political experience, and were far less dependent on Britain industrially and economically.<sup>79</sup> Imperial relations had not deteriorated

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<sup>73</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation. (1945). *The BBC Year Book 1946*. p.97

<sup>74</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation. (1945). *The BBC Year Book 1946*. p.98

<sup>75</sup> Reynolds, E., & Brasher, N. (1966). *Britain in the twentieth century, 1900-1964*. Cambridge University Press. p.316

<sup>76</sup> Darwin, J. (1988). *Britain and decolonisation: The retreat from empire in the post-war world*. Macmillan Education. p.146

<sup>77</sup> Darwin, J. (1988). p.150

<sup>78</sup> Webster, W. (2005). *Englishness and empire, 1939-1965*. Oxford University Press. p.79

<sup>79</sup> Boyce, D. G. (1999). *Decolonisation and the British Empire, 1775-1997*. Macmillan Press LTD. p.108

so far for the dominions to leave Britain alone, and, as in 1914, rallied around Britain. Yet as D. George Boyce argues, imperial unity now lacked “the deep sense of kith and kin that characterised August 1914”.<sup>80</sup> Although attitudes towards imperial unity had changed, in Britain throughout the Second World War there continued to be a robust belief that the idea of imperial kith and kin remained the foundation of imperial unity.

Analysis of the BBC’s *Radio Times* programme listings from the early war years show, that the representation of the empire’s response to Britain’s call to arms was one of great admiration and appreciation for this ideal of great imperial unity. Programmes such as *In It Together*, a talk series aimed at informing listeners that Britain was not alone. *In It Together* was described by the *Radio Times* as consisting of interviews between “members of the Dominion Forces in this country...[and] visitors from various parts of the British Colonial Empire”, which intended to give listeners a sense that the empire was working together.<sup>81</sup> In October 1940 the BBC broadcast a new series titled *Empire Forces Here*. This programme again emphasised themes of imperial unity by interviewing soldiers from around the empire. The programme listing for *Empire Forces Here* clearly detailed how the BBC wanted to portray an idealised sense of imperial unity, stating:

They come from the great 'out back', from the prairies, and even from the Arctic Circle, or from Dominion towns. Their will is the same as that of the Motherland - to cherish freedom.<sup>82</sup>

Therefore, an imperial narrative which focused on the importance of emphasising notions of imperial unity became crucial to the BBC’s war efforts.

Politically there remained a great desire to improve upon the imperial unity that had been achieved during the Second World War into peacetime. In April 1944 for example during the House of Commons debate on Empire and Commonwealth Unity, Labour MP Manny

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<sup>80</sup> Boyce, D. G. (1999). p.108

<sup>81</sup> Home service [listing]. (1940, August 2). *Radio Times*, 68 (879), p. 14.

<sup>82</sup> Home service [listing]. (1940, September 27). *Radio Times*, 69 (887), p. 20.

Shinwell argued that he was in favour of all nations within the British Empire improving and increasing their co-operation with one another in peacetime. Shinwell is representative of the imperial narrative that developed in the postwar era which heavily promoted attitudes of British exceptionalism. Shinwell asserted that the power of the British Empire was a necessity to “enduring world peace... [by creating] appropriate means of defence against possible aggression”.<sup>83</sup> As significant as the war was on notions of imperial unity, peace brought with it unexpected changes and challenges, which pushed the ideal of greater imperial unity aside, as the empire itself began to break down.

Shortly after the war ended in Europe in May 1945, Britain held its first general election since 1935. Held on 5 July 1945, large numbers of votes were cast from overseas and so the results were not known until 26 July 1945.<sup>84</sup> Britain and the world eagerly awaited the results of the election, as it would represent what sort of path peacetime would be taking. As people listened to the result over the radio, they heard the shocking news of Labour’s victory and Churchill’s Conservative party’s defeat.<sup>85</sup> The result of the election was a surprise to people around the world: the mere idea of Churchill losing was unimaginable. The day after the election British newspapers reported on the reactions of other nations. The *Yorkshire Post* wrote about the United States response and how in Washington “officials and politicians had regarded Mr. Churchill’s loss of the Premiership as “inconceivable” and the result has come as a shock”.<sup>86</sup> The French too were interested in the result with reports of “big crowds assembled outside newspaper offices in the centre of Paris where the election results were posted hourly”, showing the global importance of the 1945 general election.<sup>87</sup>

The new Labour government represented a change in mood across Britain; the British public made it clear that it wanted extensive social and economic change. The British

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<sup>83</sup> Shinwell, M. (1944, April 20). "Empire and Commonwealth Unity." United Kingdom Parliament House of Commons. *Hansard*, 339. Retrieved from <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1944-04-20/debates/64bd5c62-1eea-4121-b1af-706b2b38ce7b/EmpireAndCommonwealthUnity>

<sup>84</sup> Childs, D. (2006). *Britain since 1945: A political history* (6th ed.). Routledge. p.2

<sup>85</sup> Childs, D. (2006). p.2

<sup>86</sup> A shock for the United States. (1945, July 27). *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> French Sympathy for Mr. Churchill. (1945, July 27). *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, p. 1.

people wanted the reconstruction years to mark the end of the inequality, “poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, ignorance and fear”, which for too long had been mismanaged or ignored by Conservative governments.<sup>88</sup> Once elected, Labour quickly began passing numerous welfare laws to bring an end to Britain’s poverty-stricken society that had characterised the pre-war years. Most notable of these laws were, the National Insurance Act, and the National Health Act, which both amounted to the creation of the National Health Service in July 1948.<sup>89</sup> Labour’s welfare reforms for Britain were a huge relief, especially for the working class of Britain which suffered most from the failures of Britain’s pre-war welfare systems. Labour’s postwar welfare legislation similarly caused ripples around the British Empire, with the forming of the ideal, as Webster calls it, of a “people’s peace”, which echoed wartime attitudes of a ‘people’s war’.<sup>90</sup>

The rising nationalist sentiment across the empire and the economic toll of maintaining Britain’s overseas commitments also saw Prime Minister Clement Attlee increasingly believe that Britain could no longer defend itself or its overseas obligations without being a part of a wider international organisation such as the forming United Nations, the immediate difficulty however was that these were institutionally anti-imperialist.<sup>91</sup> Public opinion appeared to be on Attlee’s side, since Labour had been an avid opposer of Britain’s imperial system for many years, therefore their election win was also seen as a vital change in Britain’s public opinion towards British imperialism.<sup>92</sup> Attlee’s imperial policies, however, were not entirely supported by his Chiefs of Staff and cabinet members, that argued in favour of continuing Britain’s presence in deemed strategically important areas in the Middle East, whilst Attlee pushed for Britain to pull out.<sup>93</sup> Opposition to his policies continued to grow, with members of his own cabinet, such as Ernest Bevin, believing that Attlee’s

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<sup>88</sup> Childs, D. (2006). p.4

<sup>89</sup> Smith, R., & Zametica, J. (1985) p.239

<sup>90</sup> Webster, W. (2005). p.68

<sup>91</sup> Darwin, J. (1988). *Britain and decolonisation: The retreat from empire in the post-war world.* Macmillan Education. p.76

<sup>92</sup> Darwin, J. (1988). *Britain and decolonisation: The retreat from empire in the post-war world.* Macmillan Education. P.70

<sup>93</sup> Darwin, J. (1988). p.77

judgement was based on an imperfect perspective of the postwar world.<sup>94</sup> The extensive opposition led by the imperial establishment against Attlee's reforms resulted in Attlee's attitudes towards foreign policy and the empire changing, as Darwin describes, towards a "more conservative position".<sup>95</sup>

Under Attlee's premiership the British Empire experienced several major withdrawals, marking the beginning of Britain's era of decolonisation. India and Pakistan became independent in 1947 and the British mandate in Palestine ended in 1948 which also marked the creation of Israel. At first Attlee approached the empire in a new way, aiming to reform Britain's pre-war imperial system in what he viewed as a progressive and direct manner, however, it cannot be ignored that substantial mistakes were made. The mismanagement of Indian independence, for example, which partitioned the sub-continent into India and Pakistan, resulted in the needless death of millions of people. Later attempts to use offerings of British capital as incentives for Britain's remaining colonial territories in Africa to remain loyal also failed, which has been argued by Childs to be largely because Labour "underestimated the development of political consciousness among the Africans". Thus by the early 1950s Britain's imperial establishment was faced with a significantly smaller empire, a weakened domestic economy, and increasing doubts about its global power status.<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusion

Enduring as the dominant British broadcaster postwar, the BBC continued to be instrumental in ensuring that imperial affairs were taught, discussed, and used to entertain, as it had been during the interwar period. However, the three new postwar radio services saw the shape of imperial broadcasting change to work as part of Haley's cultural pyramid

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<sup>94</sup> Smith, R., & Zametica, J. (1985)

<sup>95</sup> Darwin, J. (1988). p.77

<sup>96</sup> Childs, D. (2006). p.36

ideal, with each service broadcasting its own designated cultural form of imperial themed programmes. As a new era of British imperialism had begun, so too had a new era of imperial broadcasting, one which deemed there was a need for greater exchange between the BBC and other empire/Commonwealth broadcasters. Through closer cooperation between Commonwealth broadcasters and the production and use of reciprocal programmes, the potential of broadcasting to create a new postwar sense of imperial unity between Britain and the dominions was pursued. However, the deeply entrenched focus on promoting interwar and wartime notions of imperial unity resulted in the BBC being used by Britain's diminishing imperial establishment to promote their new own narratives. Moving beyond concepts of imperial unity, a postwar imperial narrative that would remain buoyant throughout the late 1940s concentrated on the promotion of British exceptionalism, paternalism, and feelings of imperial nostalgia towards a past when the empire was dependent on Britain.

The unexpected electoral win for the Labour Party in 1945 further fuelled the belief that the peacetime world was changing. Although Labour's initial focusses were on improving Britain's failing welfare systems, it quickly pursued an imperial policy based on modernisation, with the aim of improving imperial relations and decreasing Britain's high overseas expenditures. At first appearing to be a new era of a 'people's peace' and ideals of a 'people's empire' growing, Britain's evident and ever decreasing global power status saw an eventual return of pre-war conservative imperialistic ideals. Even with large scale decolonisation events occurring, such as Indian independence in 1947, an imperial narrative based on attitudes of British exceptionalism that promoted ideals of Britain's global influence enduring, gained a greater foothold as Britain's imperial establishment increasingly became fearful of its survival.

## 2. Representation of Indian Independence

The BBC of the postwar era remained faithful to the Reithian aims to entertain, educate, and inform the public. The latter two aims were of particular importance when Britain experienced its first large scale imperial withdrawal in peacetime in August 1947, when India obtained independence from the British Empire. India's independence directly challenged the BBC's unwavering depictions of a united empire, which had dominated its broadcasting throughout the interwar and wartime periods. Ensuring that listeners were informed about the dramatic events remained vital to the BBC, and throughout 1947, both before and after the transfer of power, the BBC broadcast a range of educational, debate, and discussion programmes on Indian independence.

The historian Wendy Webster has suggested that in the postwar era, press representations of the empire began to distance themselves from the use of supremacist and paternalistic attitudes, which had been used to promote a kind of positive colonial rhetoric in the pre-war years.<sup>97</sup> However, through a close analysis of BBC radio programmes broadcast in the immediate aftermath of Indian independence, this chapter will argue that this kind of distancing was not consistently expressed by the BBC in relation to Indian independence. It is argued that throughout the directorship of William Haley the BBC remained faithful to Reithian principles and a vision of itself as Britain's impartial cultural guardian. Yet these principles were severely undermined by the BBC's ongoing promotion of imperial ideologies of British paternalism and white supremacy, which supported an idealisation of Britain's rule in India and bolstered an image of British exceptionalism towards white British imperialists. Thus, a certain ambiguity of position was created, perhaps reflecting the nation's uncertain future.

Additionally, this chapter explores how, at the time of India's first democratic election in 1951, the BBC continued to emphasise notions of British paternalism, and did so in

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<sup>97</sup> Webster, W. (2005). p.56



conjunction the imperial establishment's newly developed sense of imperial nostalgia. These imperialistic ideologies – white supremacy and British paternalism – were the foundations of Britain's pre-war identity. Yet as Britain moved into the postwar era, there was widespread questioning of them following the rise of attitudes in favour of egalitarianism, which therefore challenged Britain's sense of itself in the world.<sup>98</sup> As Britain's global position weakened post war, a revival of imperialistic beliefs served to counter the reality of Britain's diminishing international status.

### Britain's postwar moral guardian

The BBC emerged from the Second World War with a higher sense of moral duty, owing to the increased responsibility it attained for the maintenance of national morale.<sup>99</sup> Its immense popularity also worked to cement the BBC's own complacent attitude of it being, as Robbins describes, "the preserver of national culture" in Britain.<sup>100</sup> In keeping with its Reithian aims and enduring close ties with the imperial establishment, the BBC had placed a great deal of importance on educating the public on imperial affairs, which by the later years of the war had also become a concern for British policymakers. For example, on 31 January 1945 Lord Godfrey Elton asked the government whether it had any plans to ensure that the work done by the Ministry of Information, which had transmitted knowledge of the empire across Britain, would be transferred to another organisation.<sup>101</sup> Lord Elton viewed the BBC as an example of the kind of national institution that could be used to build public understanding of the empire, saying that his "own preference would rather be for something nearer the analogy perhaps of the B.B.C."<sup>102</sup> The BBC supported the idea that it could be responsible for the improvement of public knowledge of the empire. The motivation for its enthusiasm derived from paternalistic attitudes formed during the war: the empire needed

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<sup>98</sup> Webster, W. (2005). p.56

<sup>99</sup> Seymour-Ure, C. (1996). *The British press and broadcasting since 1945* (2nd ed.). Blackwell. p.73

<sup>100</sup> Robbins, K. (2002). p.132

<sup>101</sup> Elton, G. (1945, January 31). "Knowledge of the Empire." United Kingdom Parliament House of Lords. *Hansard*, 134. Retrieved from <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1945-01-31/debates/0747e7a9-aceb-400a-a801-865a2d71f849/KnowledgeOfTheEmpire>

<sup>102</sup> Elton, G. (1945, January 31).

the BBC. For example, Overseas Talks Manager Tahu Hole, writing in the BBC's 1945 Year Book, argued that "the BBC is capable of doing for the Dominions' good that which they cannot do themselves to act as a world-wide disseminator of information of inter-Dominion interest".<sup>103</sup>

## The death of the British Raj

Representing his party as one that stood against imperialism (and ignoring its past imperial failures), Clement Attlee formed the first Labour peacetime government in 1945.<sup>104</sup> From the beginning Attlee's government encountered pressure from anti-imperialists in the US, across the empire, and within Britain.<sup>105</sup> By 1946, Attlee's government was faced with its first postwar decolonisation dilemma: India. Attlee knew Britain had one of two options: either remain in India, and likely become entangled in an armed conflict with nationalists or grant India independence.<sup>106</sup> Announcing to the House of Commons on February 1946, Attlee laid out the following plan to; "send out to India a special mission composed of Cabinet Ministers to seek in association with the Viceroy an agreement" to grant India independence.<sup>107</sup> Although initial talks failed, in February 1947 Attlee further announced that the deadline for the transfer of power in India would go no further than June 1948. However, on Lord Mountbatten's advice the deadline was hastened to 15 August 1947.<sup>108</sup> Talks between the two main political parties in India failed, resulting in the hopes of a united independent India disappearing. Lord Mountbatten therefore announced the plan for the partition of India into two states, India and Pakistan.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Hole, T. (1944). Indispensable Girdle of the Commonwealth. In. British Broadcasting Corporation (Ed.), *BBC Year Book 1945*. (pp. 84-88). Jarrold & Sons LTD. Retrieved from <https://worldradiohistory.com/UK/BBC-Annual/BBC-Year-Book-1945.pdf> p.85

<sup>104</sup> Newsinger, J. N. (2018). War, Empire and the Attlee government 1945–1951. *Race & Class*, 60(1), 61-76. <https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/racb/60/1> p.68

<sup>105</sup> Robinson, R. (1980). p. 56

<sup>106</sup> Darwin, J. (1988). p.70

<sup>107</sup> House of Commons debate. (1946, February 19). *India (Cabinet Minister's Mission)*. Hansard, 419. Retrieved from [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1946-02-19/debates/92005aa0-23b2-4ad4-ae30657677ee/India\(CabinetMinistersMission\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1946-02-19/debates/92005aa0-23b2-4ad4-ae30657677ee/India(CabinetMinistersMission))

<sup>108</sup> Arnold, D. (2001). *Gandhi*. Harlow: Longman. p.221

<sup>109</sup> Arnold, D. (2001). p.221

Once the government's deadline for Indian independence had been announced, the BBC's broadcasting focus shifted onto topics recognising Indian independence. As argued by Hajkowski, Indian independence revealed the magnitude of Haley's own imperialistic beliefs. He notes that Haley believed that the BBC should portray the "transfer of Power and the British legacy in India... [as] British achievements".<sup>110</sup> In order to achieve this, the BBC continued to emphasise imperial unity, whether a nation was a part of, or was once a part of, the British Empire. The programme listing for a series titled *Two Civilisations* in September 1946, for example, indicates that the idea was being promoted that there was a "the need for cultural links between Britain and India", particularly in a post-colonial setting.<sup>111</sup> The BBC's output of India-themed broadcasts in 1947 was considerably higher than in the previous year, with many programmes targeting schools. From February 1947 until independence on 15 August the BBC's India-themed programming was exclusively broadcast on the series *For the Schools*. The importance the BBC placed on educating children about India prior to the transfer of power was particularly apparent with the *For the Schools* series, "*HISTORY II. A series on India*".<sup>112</sup> This series broadcast seven programmes, between 22 May and 3 July 1947, covered a variety of subjects such as Hinduism and Buddhism in India, the history of the Moguls, the East Indian Company, the Punjab, Mahatma Gandhi, and modern India. Scripts for these programmes were not made available for analysis in this project; however, the *Radio Times* listings for them express how the BBC's principle to educate, and Haley's support of imperialistic ideals had influenced early coverage of the topic.

The BBC's main coverage of the transfer of power came in the form of a weekly programme called *Report on India*, which broadcast for the first time 10 August 1947 and was described as setting "the scene for the transfer of power".<sup>113</sup> The series as a whole aimed to provide listeners with an insight into the mind of an array of Indian people in India,

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<sup>110</sup> Hajkowski, T. (2010). *From the war to Westminster abbey: The BBC and the empire*. p.70

<sup>111</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1946, September 6). *Radio Times*, 92 (1197), p. 10.

<sup>112</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1947, March 14). *Radio Times*, 94 (1222), p. 26.

<sup>113</sup> The transfer of power in India. (1947, August 15). *Radio Times*, 96 (1244), p. 13.

ranging from “soldiers and statesmen, refugees, farmers, and the ordinary man in the street”.<sup>114</sup> *Report on India* was deemed a success by the BBC, which wrote in its listing for the series final broadcast that the series had “fulfilled its function, which was to give listeners an account of the scene in India during and immediately after the transfer of power”.<sup>115</sup>

### *Some impressions of India 28-09-1947*

The BBC’s coverage of the transfer persisted through 1947, notably in a one-off programme called *Some Impressions of India* broadcast on the BBC’s Home Service a month after the transfer. A striking factor of this programme is that it was hosted by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who as the programmes listing explains was the “Chairman of the Boundary Commissions that were charged with the task of partitioning... [the] two new Dominions of India and Pakistan”.<sup>116</sup> Radcliffe had never been to the Indian sub-continent prior to his appointment of Chairman of the Boundary Commissions but was sent to India in July 1947 with five weeks to complete the task of creating the boundaries between the new nations.<sup>117</sup> In his programme, Radcliffe aimed to provide listeners with his view of the legacy of British rule and its impact on “Indian life as he saw it”.<sup>118</sup>

Symbolism played a vital role throughout Radcliffe’s talk, as illustrated via Radcliffe’s decision to focus on describing his visit to an “old British cemetery [...] in Calcutta”.<sup>119</sup> Radcliffe further described the cemetery, focussing on how each grave was “a stone monument”, aiming to emphasise the stature of not only the Anglo-Indians buried there but also of the legacy of the British Raj.<sup>120</sup> Attempts to depict colonists and other imperialist

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<sup>114</sup> Thomas, W. V. (1947). Report On India. In. British Broadcasting Corporation (Ed.), *BBC Year Book 1947*. (pp. 30-32). Jarrold & Sons LTD. p.30

<sup>115</sup> Radio times. (1947, October 3). *Radio Times*, 97 (1251), p. 1.

<sup>116</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1947, September 26). *Radio Times*, 96 (1250), p. 8.

<sup>117</sup> Bharadwaj, P. & Quirolo, K. (2015). The Partition and its Aftermath. In Chaudhary, L., Bishnupriya, G., Tirthankar, R. & Swamy, V. (Eds), *A New Economic History of Colonial India*. (p. 233-256). Routledge. P.235

<sup>118</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1947, September 26). *Radio Times*, 96 (1250), p. 8.

<sup>119</sup> *Some Impressions of India*. BBC Written Archives Centre, Radio Talks Scripts, 28 Sep 1947. p.1

<sup>120</sup> *Some Impressions of India*. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 28 Sep 1947. p.1

figures as heroic was heavily practised in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century on film and radio. On the BBC this was evident from the development of radio adaptations of nineteenth century literature such as *King Solomons Mines*.<sup>121</sup> These works promoted attitudes of British exceptionalism and white supremacy, either by creating heroic imperialist characters or depicting real imperialists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century as courageous figures that traversed the empire. In Radcliffe's programme we can see how in the postwar era the promotion of such attitudes endured, particularly when he nostalgically declared that "we certainly got about the world", depicting the British Empire as merely being a successful excursion for Britain.<sup>122</sup> Further promoting supremacist attitudes, Radcliffe sought to invoke listeners' admiration towards the Anglo-Indians buried in the cemetery, aiming to uphold notions of British superiority and the monumental status of the imperial past in an independent India. His final comments in the programme accentuate this further as he described imperialists as being "adventurous, ingenious, courageous and enduring".<sup>123</sup> The staging of the talk's opening in this cemetery is significant because it was used both as a symbol of the past – and indeed of the death of the British Raj – but also as an illustration of the eternal legacy of the people buried there in the form of the monuments that remained. Radcliffe's involvement in the transfer of power was pivotal to what transpired. Therefore, as with many within the British government at the time, Radcliffe expressed a great deal of concern towards the questions of how history would judge what happened and those involved, specifically believing that:

Someday the long history book of the people of this country will be closed and future historians of the world will try to assess what they stood for and what they did.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Hajkowski, T. (2010). *From the war to Westminster abbey: The BBC and the empire*. p.52

<sup>122</sup> *Some Impressions of India*. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 28 Sep 1947. p.7

<sup>123</sup> *Some Impressions of India*. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 28 Sep 1947. p.7

<sup>124</sup> *Some Impressions of India*. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 28 Sep 1947. p.7

As the historian John Darwin argues, British politicians went to “great lengths to avoid or conceal any open reverse of British world power”.<sup>125</sup> Radcliffe’s broadcast exemplifies how the British imperial establishment began, from the moment of Indian partition, to present a version of events in ways that created feelings of nostalgia and promoted paternalistic and supremacist attitudes.

The reality of Indian independence could not be ignored and surprisingly Radcliffe expressed that British rule was not entirely faultless, claiming that “somewhere on our course we mistook the means for the end and [...] we failed to penetrate to the heart or soul of India”.<sup>126</sup> As a prominent figure within the imperial establishment, Radcliffe’s admission that British rule was not entirely successful represented a significant shift of the establishment’s imperial rhetoric. The BBC’s broadcasting of this attitude briefly demonstrated the argument made by Webster that the postwar era saw the start of the withdrawal of a positive imperial rhetoric in British media. However, the critique conveyed by Radcliffe remained minor and was swiftly dominated by the enduring buoyance of an imperial narrative that promoted attitudes of British paternalism and exceptionalism. Countering his near admission of British imperial mistakes, Radcliffe attempted to justify the British Raj by comparing it to the Roman Empire. Spouting self-congratulatory arguments based on paternalistic notions, Radcliffe argued that “like the Romans, we built our roads, bridges and canals and we have marked the land as engineers if we have not improved it as architects”.<sup>127</sup> Intending to foster the idea among listeners that India was a chaotic and underdeveloped nation before the arrival of the British, Radcliffe’s description heavily encouraged the paternalistic belief that it was the British who brought unparalleled development to the sub-continent.

Because these attitudes were widely broadcast to the public through the trusted BBC, they became further embedded in national consciousness, and would come to shape

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<sup>125</sup> Darwin, J. (1991). p.35

<sup>126</sup> *Some Impressions of India. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 28 Sep 1947. p.7*

<sup>127</sup> *Some Impressions of India. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 28 Sep 1947. p.6*

British collective memory of its imperial past in lasting ways. Historian Sathnam Sanghera for example, argues that modern day Britain remains faithful to the dysfunctional memories of the empire that were created and promoted throughout postwar decolonisation. As Sanghera describes it, Britain developed an “obsession with India's railways”, with Radcliffe’s talk demonstrating one such origin of Britain’s modern-day fixation towards railways and other forms of infrastructure to endorse concepts of British paternalism to remember the British Raj.<sup>128</sup>

### *The British In India*

Following the BBC’s broadcast of *Some Impressions of India* in September 1947, programmes focussing on providing listeners with information concerning the newly independent nations of India and Pakistan remained prevalent on the BBC. In a new series called *The British in India* the BBC’s programming focus on India continued, broadcasting seven talks in total on the Third Programme from October to December 1947. For most of the seven talks the speaker varied, with each broadcast telling the story of how the British Raj came to be up to India’s attainment of self-government. As is attested by the BBC’s own description of the series, its aim was to be heavily Anglo-centric, by assessing “the influence of the British occupation of India on the life and thought of Britain”.<sup>129</sup> The promotion of ideologies held by the British imperial establishment, namely British exceptionalism, benevolent paternalism, and supremacism remained constant themes throughout the series, all in aid of justifying British rule in India to listeners and portraying its legacy as a success owing to white British imperialists. The discussion which follows has focused on three of the series broadcasts, which has permitted a deeper analysis of the programmes *The Nabobs*, *The Imperial Idea*, and *An Indian View*.

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<sup>128</sup> Sanghera, S. (2021). p.201

<sup>129</sup> Radio times. (1947, October 17). *Radio Times*, 97 (1253), p. 1.

## *The British in India – The Nabobs 21-10-1947*

The first programme of the series was titled *The Nabobs* and was hosted by Professor Rawlinson who was a member of the Indian Education Service and in 1938 published the book *A Concise History of The Indian People*. Owing to Rawlinson's academic background in India studies he would have been viewed as an expert on the subject and therefore perfect to begin the series. The programme listing for Rawlinson's talk shows us that his aim was to profile the first Anglo-Indians and particularly question, "how the British at home... [were] influenced by the experience of those who went out to India".<sup>130</sup> The term 'nabob' refers to a conspicuously wealthy man who had derived his fortune from the East India Company (EIC), during the eighteenth century. Rawlinson begins his talk explaining that he is starting his assessment from the "aftermath of Plassey in 1757".<sup>131</sup> In 1757, the EIC general Robert Clive defeated the forces of the Nawab of Bengal and his French allies which resulted in the EIC becoming the dominant power in India.

For the first half of the programme Rawlinson used extracts from personal records of individuals such as Robert Clive and William Hickey, an English lawyer who was sent to India in 1769, who were each associated as being nabobs.<sup>132</sup> Linking with the victory by Robert Clive and the EIC with his initial representation of the nabobs, Rawlinson promoted concepts of white supremacy in British India, by focussing on the wealth and prestige gained by nabobs in the early period of British rule in India. The following quotation was used by Rawlinson and was taken from a speech by Clive in 1773 where he defended his actions at Plassey and in its aftermath to Parliament, saying:

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<sup>130</sup> Third Programme [listing]. (1947, October 10). *Radio Times*, 97 (1253), p. 12.

<sup>131</sup> *The British in India – The Nabobs*. BBC Written Archives Centre, Radio Talks Scripts, 21 Oct 1947. p.1

<sup>132</sup> *William Hickey (memoirist)*. (n.d.). Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias. Retrieved 1 September 2021, from <https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/2456729>



Consider the position in which the Battle of Plassey had placed me. A great prince was dependant on my pleasure; an opulent city lay at my mercy; its richest bankers bid against each other for my smiles.<sup>133</sup>

The use of this particular quotation by Rawlinson is significant as it was an attempt to accentuate an image of Clive as superior to an Indian prince. Rawlinson's use of this quotation reinforces the arguments made by historians Sarah Longair and Cam Sharp Jones. When discussing Britain's victory over the Mysore Sultan Tipu, Longair and Sharp argue that control of how the victory was portrayed was key as "it was vital that [Sultan Tipu] was seen as a powerful foe in order [...] to justify an expansionist policy in India".<sup>134</sup> Similar methods of justification were therefore present in Rawlinson's talk, as he uses the BBC to disseminate supremacist attitudes to justify British rule in India by fixating on the superior position obtained through militaristic conquest by a British imperialist.

However, the tone of the programme then changed, with the portrayal of the nabobs becoming more negative. Since the eighteenth century a line of popular belief in Britain had taken root: that the nabobs represented, as argued by Tillman Nechtman, "the corruption of Britons, Britain, and the British imperial project in South Asia" due to their focus on the acquisition of wealth and power.<sup>135</sup> The nabobs reputation had not improved by the twentieth century, as can be seen by Rawlinson's description of them at the end of his programme where he suggests that they were "pathetic and solitary figures, flitting like ghosts round their old haunts".<sup>136</sup>

To provide a contrast with the power hungry and greedy representation of the nabobs, Rawlinson then went on to emphasise that there had developed a different type of

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<sup>133</sup> *The British in India – The Nabobs. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 21 Oct 1947. p.1*

<sup>134</sup> Longair, S. & Jones, C. S. (2018). Prize possession: the 'silver' coffer of Tipu Sultan and the Fraser family. In Smith, K. & Finn M. C. (Eds), *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*. (p. 25-38). UCL Press.

<sup>135</sup> Nechtman, T. W. (2010). *Nabobs Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Cambridge University Press. p.79

<sup>136</sup> *The British in India – The Nabobs. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 21 Oct 1947. p.9*

Anglo-Indian: one who possessed stronger morals and had in fact greater powers than the nabob. Intending to reduce the significance of the nabob in his representation of Britons in India, to avoid portraying the foundation of British rule on the negative principles associated with them, Rawlinson stressed that in reality “the political influence of the nabobs was greatly exaggerated”.<sup>137</sup> After initially vilifying early Anglo-Indians, Rawlinson began to portray a positive view of the British in India, stating that in the early eighteenth century there were two groups, Anglicanists and orientalist. Describing the latter as being “the better type... [with] a genuine enthusiasm for oriental culture”, Rawlinson conveyed a sense of British exceptionalism associated with the ‘orientalist’ Anglo-Indians. By portraying them in a highly glorified perception, Rawlinson intended to justify the early period of British rule in India by arguing that the orientalist were more than conquerors, instead they were “much nearer the hearts of the people they ruled”.<sup>138</sup> Comparable with Sir Cyril Radcliffe’s programme *Some Impressions of India* which also made reference to a notion of ‘penetrating’ the heart of the Indian people, the same expression of British exceptionalism endured on the BBC via Professor Rawlinson as a way of justifying British rule.

Rawlinson’s justifications were also prominent in his final comments of the programme. Intending to leave a lasting impression on his audience, Rawlinson claimed paternalistically: “seldom have men exercised absolute power with more understanding gentleness”.<sup>139</sup> Similarly to the way that Radcliffe used the eighteenth-century cemetery in Calcutta to heroically depict early Anglo-Indians, Rawlinson also promoted comparable attitudes of British exceptionalism in conjunction with paternalistic attitudes. In doing so, he was constructing a collective memory of British rule that justified the way early Anglo-Indians had obtained power and how they initially used that power to supposedly better themselves without exploiting native Indians.

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<sup>137</sup> *The British in India – The Nabobs. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 21 Oct 1947. p.4*

<sup>138</sup> *The British in India – The Nabobs. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 21 Oct 1947. p.9*

<sup>139</sup> *The British in India – The Nabobs. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 21 Oct 1947. p.9*

## *The British in India – The Imperial Idea 01-11-1947*

The second talk of the series *British in India* was titled *The Imperial Idea* and was hosted by Brigadier Vinden, who at the time of independence was an influential figure within Britain's imperial establishment as Joint Secretary to the Indian Government. Vinden was described by the BBC as having "spent much of his life in India and the Far East", depicting Vinden to listeners - as Rawlinson was in the previous broadcast - as a trustworthy expert on topics relating to India.<sup>140</sup> As with the programme *The Nabobs*, Vinden concentrated his assessment on the justifications of early Anglo-Indian rule by discussing "the moral and political aspects of... [British] administration of India".<sup>141</sup>

Aiming to characterise the moral justifications of the first Anglo-Indians from the nineteenth century to independence in 1947, four extracts were used "as a prelude to Brigadier Vinden's talk", each taken from prominent British imperialist figures or official imperial policies.<sup>142</sup> These extracts were intended to provide listeners with supposed evidence to support Vinden's paternalistic attitudes expressed later in the programme, which claimed India's successes were only a result of British accomplishments. The first two extracts used were taken from works by scholars James Wheeler and Philip Anderson and were used to explain how British rule was at first established through means of trade. The specific extracts, however, fixated on the opening of an English trading post in Surat and the opening of various factories across India in the eighteenth century, stressing the point that British rule brought industrial development.<sup>143</sup> The third extract was taken from a speech in 1883 by the British historian and leader of the Anglicanists T. B. Macaulay. Macaulay stated that the goal of British rule was to educate native Indians "into a capacity for better government... [then] having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some

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<sup>140</sup> Third Programme [listing]. (1947, October 24) *Radio Times*, 97 (1254), p. 28.

<sup>141</sup> Third Programme [listing]. (1947, October 24) *Radio Times*, 97 (1254), p. 28.

<sup>142</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea*. BBC Written Archives Centre, Radio Talks Scripts, 1 Nov 1947. p.1

<sup>143</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 1 Nov 1947. p.1

future age, demand European institutions”.<sup>144</sup> Macaulay’s speech was used in this programme to express notions of European exceptionalism and the paternalistic aim of British rule in India, particularly the self-righteous belief Britain’s overarching goal in India was to teach Indians self-government because they were incapable of doing so themselves. The fourth and final extract was taken from a piece of Government policy in 1917. The policy related to the process of granting the Government of India more responsibility. The quotation used stressed that there was an “increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions”.<sup>145</sup> Being the final extract used, its intended use was clearly to express to listeners that Britain’s civilising mission was still ongoing in the twentieth century and progress continued to be made. The further significance of the final extract is the fact that policy from 1917 was viewed as being the most recent example of a positive British accomplishment regarding the process of granting self-government, seemingly acknowledging the failed appeasement efforts of the interwar years.

Following the framework that the four extracts had set in the introduction of the programme, Vinden began his talk by highlighting how Britain came to rule India. Corresponding with the first two extracts, Vinden began by briefly overviewing the establishment of British power in India, describing it as initially being a mere “mercantile community”.<sup>146</sup> Continuing with his assessment Vinden went on to assert British exceptionalism by accrediting present day India’s success of being the “eighth in order of importance in world trade” as a result of British rule.<sup>147</sup> Additionally Vinden promoted a paternalistic attitude to support his claim by portraying native Indians as possessing a “lack of technical education” prior to British rule.<sup>148</sup> Further comparisons with Radcliffe’s talk can be made here, markedly to Radcliffe’s argument that the developments Britain brought were

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<sup>144</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 1 Nov 1947. p.3*

<sup>145</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 1 Nov 1947. p.3*

<sup>146</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 1 Nov 1947. p.5*

<sup>147</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 1 Nov 1947. p.5*

<sup>148</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 1 Nov 1947. p.5*

'Roman', further encouraging a focus on the building of infrastructure and other technical advancements throughout the British Raj. Therefore, there is a consistency that can be observed in the portrayal disseminated by the BBC which endorsed attitudes of British exceptionalism.

The focus of Vinden's talk however was the moral justification of Anglo-Indian rule throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. As argued by the historian Ronald Robinson, the morals behind Britain's imperial power were "the first refuge of the British imperialists... [because they] served to justify the empire at its most vulnerable point".<sup>149</sup> The immediate aftermath of Britain's withdrawal from India can certainly be categorised as the most vulnerable point for British imperial justification and Vinden's talk encapsulated the imperial establishment's attempts to rationalise its own existence. In his programme, Vinden's approach to rationalisation was delivered to BBC audiences by means of promoting religious-righteousness, as he argued that "it is probably the Missionaries who chiefly affected the British attitude to India in the last century".<sup>150</sup> Endorsing a combination of religious-righteousness and paternalistic attitudes, Vinden reasoned that it was British missionaries that spread the initial concepts of the Indian people as being "downtrodden, ignorant and superstitious, to whom the light of western civilisation must be brought".<sup>151</sup> Listeners were therefore being told by an 'expert' endorsed by the trusted BBC that the paternalistic attitudes of early British imperialists were justified because of their religious foundations, which supposedly made them morally warranted and something to be celebrated.

Although Vinden expressed great support for the philosophies which underpinned British rule of India, there was a brief recognition that by the twentieth century there were signs of failure in its aim of improving India's ability to self-govern. Demonstrating a contrasting tone to the pro-British rhetoric that dominated the programme, Vinden noted that

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<sup>149</sup> Robinson, R. (1980). p.57

<sup>150</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 1 Nov 1947. p.5

<sup>151</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 1 Nov 1947. p.6

Britain's leadership went astray from its early moral guidance, admitting that "the British have never been very strong at political theory, and in this little was done".<sup>152</sup> Arguing that Britain had no plan on how to develop India politically, the impression given by Vinden was that British rule had begun to fail India. However, to lessen the blame for any shortcomings Vinden contended that "the First World War brought a further political advance – of the parliamentary system".<sup>153</sup> By tactfully ignoring the resistance that caused Britain to try and appease India in the interwar years, Vinden aimed to create a false memory that the changes unfolding in India were part of a gradual process.

Albeit a small section of his talk, the presence of this brief admission of failure shows us how the BBC's imperial coverage remained persistently ambiguous, likely owing to its unshakeable belief in expressing impartiality and adhering as best it could to broadcasting factual information. However, as has also been suggested here, Vinden's talk also sustained the BBC's broadcasting of a buoyant imperial narrative supported by a British establishment that promoted notions of Britain's past imperial greatness enduring postwar. Further controlling the depiction that listeners had of an independent India, Vinden incessantly nurtured paternalistic attitudes that portrayed Britain as remaining a father figure to an independent India that still needed help. Describing Britain as "the benevolent father still protecting the children from harming themselves", the same patronising and paternalistic views of India were presented to audiences to reassure a belief that a British presence was still required.<sup>154</sup> Even though the programme was broadcast two months after Indian independence, Vinden described the transfer of power as "the children no longer want[ing] the father".<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 1 Nov 1947. p.7

<sup>153</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 1 Nov 1947. p.7

<sup>154</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 1 Nov 1947. p.7

<sup>155</sup> *The British in India – The Imperial Idea. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 1 Nov 1947. p.9

## *The British in India – An Indian View 08-12-1947*

Of the seven programmes that the BBC made for the series *British In India*, five were hosted by white British scholars who studied Indian society, or military officers who had once held positions in the British Raj. For the seventh and final broadcast called *An Indian View* the BBC made a gesture towards its avowed impartiality, as the host of this broadcast was the Indian born, “Dr. Rajan... [providing] an Indian's view of The British in India”.<sup>156</sup> In contrast to the speakers that had previously featured on the BBC who were embedded fixtures in Britain’s imperial establishment, Dr Balachandra Rajan provided BBC audiences with an alternative perspective on Britain’s legacy in India. His presence questioned the paternalistic and self-righteous Anglocentric perspectives of previous broadcasts, that had encouraged listeners to remain faithful to British imperial ideas, and to celebrate them. Rajan’s initial observations were on the impression that native Indians had of Anglo-Indians, particularly the feeling that what Indians witnessed was merely “a half-truth”.<sup>157</sup> Further exploring what he meant by this, Rajan questioned Britain’s own propaganda constructs of exceptionalism and paternalism, he argued that “the British believed in their own mythology”.<sup>158</sup> In direct contrast to the support expressed by Vinden towards the ‘good intentions’ and moral certainty of British rule, Rajan ridiculed the extent of the self-righteous lies that were spouted by Britain’s imperial establishment. Rajan describes specifically how at school when he was taught about the British Empire, he was told that:

The British won all their wars because they were morally right, and that the only war they lost was the American War of Independence and that they only lost that because they were morally wrong.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Third Programme [listing]. (1947, December 5) *Radio Times*, 97 (1260), p. 8.

<sup>157</sup> *The British in India – An Indian View*. BBC Written Archives Centre, Radio Talks Scripts, 8 Dec 1947. p.1

<sup>158</sup> *The British in India – An Indian View*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 8 Dec 1947. p.3

<sup>159</sup> *The British in India – An Indian View*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 8 Dec 1947. p.3

The BBC's decision to approve Rajan as a speaker with prior knowledge of what he would say demonstrates clearly that the BBC was not merely a mouthpiece for a British imperialist establishment. Although paternalistic attitudes were prevalent in the immediate postwar years, Rajan's talk exemplifies a certain ambiguity in the BBC's representation of imperial affairs to the British public at a time of incessant change.

Rajan continued to prioritise his comparison of the characteristics of Anglo-Indians to the British (or 'English' as Rajan more specifically noted) at home. In an addition to his originally typed script, Rajan added a handwritten paragraph where he made the critique that the English in England showed that they have the capacity for self-criticism, however, he argued that "the imperial relationship in India has encouraged self-admiration and discouraged self-criticism".<sup>160</sup> The importance of this addition by Rajan is that it shows that he personally wanted to compliment listeners on their ability to be self-critical. Rajan was attempting here to encourage listeners to use this ability on a wider scale, in order to acknowledge that attitudes which promoted supremacist and paternalistic notions were morally wrong.

Rajan's talk was strongly contrasting to the rest of the series and Sir Cyril Radcliffe's broadcast because its criticism of British rule and of Anglo-Indians was not followed by any paternalistic justification that excused Britain of wrongdoing. Throughout his broadcast, Rajan maintained an unwavering devotion to supporting an improved representation of India and the negative reality of British rule. Though not directly addressing any specific individual, Rajan referred to those who argue that without the British (or English), India will fall into chaos, describing them as being "pessimists for whom... [believe] India without Englishmen is a suicidal chaos".<sup>161</sup> Reacting in the conclusion of his talk to such pessimistic views, Rajan emphasised the legacy of British rule as native Indians saw it. He argued that Britain's rule in

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<sup>160</sup> *The British in India – An Indian View. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 8 Dec 1947. no page number.*

<sup>161</sup> *The British in India – An Indian View. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 8 Dec 1947. p.7*



India had provided Indians with examples of what *not* to do, in order for their self-government to succeed, stating that:

It is in the knowledge of what these things mean [...] through the very injustices of British rule in India – that England will make her most lasting contribution to the conduct and character of Indian affairs.<sup>162</sup>

With this final comment, Rajan made clear to his audience how the legacy of British rule would be remembered outside of Britain. This was far from the self-serving, paternalistic, and self-righteous beliefs held by an imperialistic establishment that was frequently promoted through the BBC, that sought only to encourage listeners to celebrate British achievements in India.

### *The World Today 28-12-1951*

After gaining independence, India and Pakistan faced mounting national problems such as poverty, famine, and political insecurity. These were the same problems which centuries of British rule had failed to address and that were intensified as a result of India's partition, meaning the newly independent nations were left to handle them alone. By the time of India's first democratic election in 1951, British rule continued to be portrayed in a positive light on the BBC, mainly through means of describing independent India negatively by depicting its future as disastrous. Being the largest experiment in democracy in human history, the first election in India received international attention. The BBC provided coverage of the momentous event with several programmes such as a special feature on its long running Home Service news series *The World Today*. Broadcast on 28 December 1951 the programme was hosted by journalist Norman Cliff, who, the *Radio Times* presented as being

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<sup>162</sup> *The British in India – An Indian View. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 8 Dec 1947. p.8*

a trusted expert on the subject, listing him as having “known India for twenty-five years... [and] the issues involved”.<sup>163</sup>

Cliff opened his talk by positively discussing the importance of India’s election, emphasising India’s dedication to the creation of a government that separated itself from the negative experience of British rule, citing their devotion to the “conception of government of the people, by the people, for the people”.<sup>164</sup> Reverting to elevating a paternalistic attitude, however, the positive tone of the programme quickly faded, as Cliff introduced and briefly explained the main parties that were campaigning in the Indian election. Claiming to be providing an analysis of each parties “personalities and their policies, and [...] what their chances” of winning were, the attitudes expressed by Cliff were greatly pessimistic.<sup>165</sup> At first praising the Congress Party, the major political party in India, his depiction swiftly turned negative when he described the party’s governing of India since independence as falling “far short of its high ideals of service and has sadly disappointed many people in India”.<sup>166</sup> With this broadcast being a news report it was acknowledged during the analysis that Cliff was reporting on a situation that he was present for and was said to have known extensively about. However, the significant fact remains that Cliff’s report fell far short of the BBC’s principles of impartiality as he solely took a negative outlook towards his portraying of the reputation of India’s governing parties. Cliff’s pessimism considerably intensifies throughout his report as he broadened his focus from the Congress Party to further depict politics in India as being in turmoil, arguing that the India government overall was “hopelessly split”.<sup>167</sup>

The pessimistic rhetoric seen in Cliff’s talk had been a constant in BBC programming regarding the future of an independent India since 1947. Relatedly, Rajan in the conclusion of his *An Indian View* talk in 1947 for example, spoke of the rising pessimistic voices towards an independent India. Cliff’s talk clearly shows how the same attitudes that were denounced

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<sup>163</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1951, December 21). *Radio Times*, 113 (1467), p. 40.

<sup>164</sup> *The World Today*. BBC Written Archives Centre, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 28 Dec 1951. p.1

<sup>165</sup> *The World Today*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 28 Dec 1951. p.3

<sup>166</sup> *The World Today*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 28 Dec 1951. p.3

<sup>167</sup> *The World Today*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 28 Dec 1951. p.6

by Rajan had not dissipated by 1951 and were still being echoed by the BBC. In conjunction with the emphasis that was given to representing independent India as being in turmoil, the attitude of imperial nostalgia can be observed in programmes such as *The World Today*, as feelings that Britain's work was not finished in India were accentuated. The notion of imperial nostalgia was first coined by the historian Renato Rosaldo in 1989. Rosaldo wrote that this idea "revolves around a paradox: a person kills somebody and then mourns his or her victim".<sup>168</sup> In this context, Britain's imperial establishment would mourn its loss and discredit the predecessor of the British Raj after its own withdrawal from India.

## Conclusion

Indian independence questioned the very foundation of British imperialism in paternalistic notions of British exceptionalism and white supremacy. Echoing through the BBC's programming, the imperial establishment focussed its efforts on how it could maintain a buoyant imperial narrative that positively depicted the legacy of British rule. Creating and then manipulating Britain's collective memory of its own imperial past, prominent imperialist figures featured on the BBC's key programmes that discussed the topic of British rule in India at the time of independence. Through close analysis of a selection of BBC radio programmes, this chapter has revealed how the British imperial establishment attempted to sustain itself after experiencing Britain's first large-scale imperial withdrawal in India. Continuing to promote the imperialistic notions of paternalism and supremacism that had bolstered Britain's rule of its empire since the eighteenth century.

Although the majority of the BBC's India themed programmes involved speakers who were prominent members of Britain's imperial establishment and used the BBC to promote imperialistic attitudes that advocated a positive recollection of British rule in India. This chapter has also demonstrated that there is clear evidence of the presence of a great

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<sup>168</sup> Rosaldo, R. (1989). p.108

tension residing within the BBC between the goals of Britain's imperial establishment and the BBC's own unwavering belief in its Reithian principles. Through its decision to broadcast the programme *An Indian View* as part of its *British In India* series, the BBC broadcast a perspective that disputed the imperial narrative that heavily featured in most of its broadcasts. Advocating for the British to develop their ability of self-criticism to enable them to view the detrimental nature of British imperialism.

### 3. Dominion Emigration

Facing rising international pressure against its continuing imperial power and subsequently experiencing its largest imperial withdrawal with the transfer of power in India in 1947, Britain's imperial establishment grew anxious to how it could retain power for the future. To this end, Britain's buoyant imperial narrative which centred on notions of white supremacy and paternalism remained at the forefront of peacetime methods that were developed to enable Britain to preserve its global influence. The main method of focus in this chapter is the encouragement of emigration of white Britons to the once dependent 'white' dominions (Australia, Canada, and New Zealand). The desired result of this method being that it would safeguard Britain's influence, by developing cultural and social ties between the population of Britain and the dominions which would endure for generations.

Through careful study of BBC programmes which related to the topic of dominion emigration, it is shown in this chapter how the ambition of Britain's imperial establishment to encourage Britons to emigrate went beyond the creation of legislation, it needed to address its encouragement directly to the public. To achieve this, it is argued in this chapter that the BBC, in conformity with the narrative of the imperial establishment, was used to convey paternalistic and British-isle-centric attitudes that depicted the dominions as being reliant on British immigrants. The basis of emigration encouragement was on maintaining white British supremacy in the dominions. This attitude has been demonstrated to have been a crucial aspect of the BBC's initially programming of dominion emigration, as it concentrated its efforts on targeting its female audience.

Endeavouring to broaden its encouragement attempts, later BBC programmes further focused their justifications for Britons emigrating by exercising scare tactics to manipulate listeners into believing that Britain's population was too large, in conjunction with the notion the dominions 'needed' British immigrants. However, it has also been revealed that these programmes illustrate the BBC's enduring devotion to impartiality, broadcasting attitudes that

were against mass emigration and the imperial narrative that supported it. Consequently, it has been shown here that although the BBC initially was complicit with the ambitions of Britain's imperial establishment. The friction that had formed in the postwar era between the principles of the BBC and a wider imperial narrative, are evident from the ambiguity expressed by the BBC's attempts of providing impartiality.

### Drifting dominions & postwar rebirth of dominion emigration

During the Second World War, the BBC had to modify its imperial content, particularly on domestic services. The broadcaster realised that it had been too focused on the representation of white British colonists and was ignoring indigenous peoples around the empire and their potential as an audience.<sup>169</sup> Although, the core principles of the BBC's imperial output remained unchanged: it continued to advocate the concept of a united empire, specifically emphasising the idea of the empire answering Britain's call to arms. Accentuating Britain's close relationship with the dominions was especially apparent in early war broadcasts like the BBC's series *Dominion Commentary*, which was designed to link British listeners with "a speaker from each of the four Dominions".<sup>170</sup> As the war persisted, however, the BBC's strategy towards its imperial content began to change. The need to represent the diversity of the empire became more essential and series like *In It Together* in 1940 illustrated one of the first instances of the BBC promoting the multi-racial nature of the empire, stressing the belief that "unity in diversity... [was] the surest token of the empire's ultimate victory".<sup>171</sup>

Despite the BBC's increased representation of the empire as being a multi-racial and multi-national partnership and rising international demand for a more egalitarian society after

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<sup>169</sup> Robertson, E. (2020). Gendering transnational radio: women listeners and the BBC Empire and Overseas Services, 1932–1967, *Women's History Review*. 197-214. DOI: 10.1080/09612025.2019.1600689 p.202

<sup>170</sup> National Programme [listing]. (1939, July 7). *Radio Times*, 64 (823), p. 68.

<sup>171</sup> Home service [listing]. (1940, August 2). *Radio Times*, 68 (879), p. 14.

the war, as the likelihood of an allied victory intensified, a rejuvenation of Britain's pre-war imperialist beliefs of racial hierarchies ensued. However, in the empire doubt towards the notion of British supremacism had risen during the war, particularly in East Asia, due to expansionism exercised by Japan and Britain's military losses in Malaya and Singapore in 1942.<sup>172</sup> Britain's relationships with its dominions also became weaker as they questioned their pre-war reliance on Britain for defence purposes, instead obtaining protection assurances from other nations, predominantly the United States. Canada for instance, signed in 1940 the Ogdensburg Agreement with the United States, which represented the "first alliance between a member of the Commonwealth and a foreign power", which belittled Britain's military aptitude during the war.<sup>173</sup>

The authority that Britain wielded over its former dependencies came under further strain in peacetime, as the dominions distanced themselves further by proposing their own nationality bills that would have placed British statehood as secondary.<sup>174</sup> Britain's experience of large-scale imperial withdrawals in the immediate postwar years, beginning with India in 1947, caused imperialists to contend that the new Labour Government was pursuing an active approach of imperial dismantlement. However, as is argued by Kathleen Paul, Attlee's government realised that methods of ensuring British global influence used in the past were no longer acceptable and new alternatives were required. British policy makers therefore concentrated on two key areas, migration and nationality, with the initial focus on restarting assisted migration schemes from Britain to the white dominions as they were viewed as the foundation for Britain remaining an influential global power postwar.<sup>175</sup> Dominion interest in the re-establishment of imperial migration schemes in peacetime was non-existent, as became clear during the first Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference in

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<sup>172</sup> Walsh, J. (2012). Mass migration and the mass society: Fordism, immigration policy and the Post-war long boom in Canada and Australia, 1947–1970. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 25(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6443.2012.01429.x> p.6

<sup>173</sup> Paul, K. (1995). "British Subjects" and "British Stock": Labour's Postwar Imperialism. *Journal of British Studies*, 34(2), 233-276. Retrieved April 24, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/175930> p.234

<sup>174</sup> Paul, K. (1995). p.241

<sup>175</sup> Paul, K. (1995). p.236

May 1944. No progress was made by the end of the conference which discussed re-establishing pre-war immigration agreements, as shown by a *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail* article in June 1944. Reporting on a recent broadcast of the BBC programme *Brains Trust*, the journalist noted that when “asked which dominion held out the best prospects for emigration... [, the experts] floundered with hesitant insipid replies”.<sup>176</sup> Though no official agreements for re-establishing assisted passage schemes had been made during the 1944 conference, it was agreed that anyone who wished to emigrate in peacetime, would not be deterred from doing so.<sup>177</sup>

The reluctance of the dominions to open to greater levels of immigration was not ignored by the BBC. Talks programmes such as *Question in the air* in 1946 even questioned the prospect of further emigration occurring at all, asking the question, “does Canada want British emigrants?”.<sup>178</sup> The presence of such a question shows the level of British interest in emigration at the time. It also highlights a rare acceptance being declared on the BBC of Britain’s new weakened relationship with the dominions. These questions contradicted the BBC’s presiding representation of a strong united empire, showing that a level of ambiguity towards Britain’s global power had begun being presented on the BBC early in the postwar era.

In 1947, the white dominions began to open to British immigrants, with Australia and Canada devising the largest assisted immigration plans.<sup>179</sup> Initially, it seemed that postwar Britain viewed migration as the best method to re-establish itself as a superpower. By building a global community of white British origin, it could cement British influence across the dominions for generations as a result of the anticipated cultural ties that would be forged. Using the BBC for its unique position as Britain’s major broadcaster to support the

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<sup>176</sup> Empire emigration hangs fire. (1944, July 11). *Hartlepool Northern Daily*, p. 2. Retrieved from <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000378/19440711/015/0002>

<sup>177</sup> Empire emigration hangs fire. (1944, July 11). *Hartlepool Northern Daily*, p. 2.

<sup>178</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1946, February 15). *Radio Times*, 90 (1168), p. 16.

<sup>179</sup> Walsh, J. (2012). p.5



government's imperialistic ambitions, several programmes were broadcast that heavily encouraged British emigration to the dominions.

### Encouraging dominion emigration to women audiences

Analysis of the programming related to imperial themes in the immediate postwar era demonstrates that the BBC was using innovations in content and audience research to promote and embed its messages in homes across the country. As the British government stepped up its efforts to develop a stronger relationship with the dominions, so did the BBC: the first Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference opened on 15 February 1945. The outcome of the conference was that senior broadcasters from the BBC and each of the dominions own broadcast corporations agreed for the need to develop closer ties with one another.<sup>180</sup> A result of this was that the amount of reciprocal programming between Commonwealth broadcasters significantly increased in peacetime, with the BBC taking the lead, in part due to talent from across the empire migrating to London.<sup>181</sup> Taking the lead on Commonwealth reciprocity stemmed from the BBC's enduring ambition to unite the empire through broadcasting, by disseminating British values and beliefs. To achieve this, the BBC's programming emphasis shifted to promoting apparent similarities between British audiences and audiences in the dominions, doing so by featuring more, as Skoog describes, "ordinary people".<sup>182</sup>

Quickly becoming intertwined, the BBC's approach of using 'ordinary' voices and encouraging Britons to emigrate resulted in series like *Family Gathering* in May 1946, which consisted of recorded messages from "'ordinary people' who had migrated from the north of England during the 1920s and 1930s" to the dominions'.<sup>183</sup> *Family Gathering* brought

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<sup>180</sup> Potter, S. J. (2012). p.139-140

<sup>181</sup> Potter, S. J. (2012). p.153

<sup>182</sup> Skoog, K. (2010) *The 'responsible' woman: the BBC and women's radio 1945- 1955* [Unpublished Doctoral Thesis]. University of Westminster. P.91

<sup>183</sup> Potter, S. J. (2012). p.186

together the twin imperial objectives of the BBC in the immediate postwar period: it depicted imperial unity as a product of kinship ties, and highlighted that such connections were the positive product of emigration. The listings for further programmes in this series offer limited information as to the broadcast's content, however, most families involved were said to be living in one of the white dominions.<sup>184</sup> Promotion of Commonwealth cultural links continued until assisted migration schemes were enacted in 1947. For example, the BBC's celebratory programme *Canada Day* in 1946, which was a joint endeavour between the BBC and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), aimed to present a "cross-section of the ordinary life... [of] both countries and a hint of the ties of interests and memory they have in common".<sup>185</sup> Therefore it is clear that in the immediate postwar period, such programmes and others like them permitted the BBC to experiment with broadcasting techniques – here, ordinary voices – to further goals of imperial unity and, after the return of assisted migration schemes, imperial emigration.

### *Woman's Hour: Women and Emigration – Canada 21-10-1947*

The BBC directed its initial postwar emigration encouragement efforts towards its female audience. A 1946 study of listening data concluded that the BBC's largest audience was female. This audience research led to the unveiling of the long running series *Woman's Hour* on 7 October 1946.<sup>186</sup> The postwar emphasis that the BBC placed on delivering greater representation of wider sections of society was demonstrated by *Woman's Hour*, although initially it did predominantly discuss topics of a domestic nature that were considered of interest to the 'ordinary' woman.<sup>187</sup> *Woman's Hour* proved to be an innovative political force in Britain, due to the growing inclusion of what was viewed as the 'ordinary' woman, initiating

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<sup>184</sup> Home Service North [listing]. (1946, May 31). *Radio Times*, 91 (1183), p. 21.

<sup>185</sup> Gilliam, L. (1946, June 28). Six Canadians talk to six britishers. *Radio Times*, 91 (1187), p. 3.

<sup>186</sup> Robertson, E. (2020). p.201

<sup>187</sup> Skoog, K. (2010). p.92

what Skoog describes as the domestication of politics, with the first connections between Britain's domestic and political spheres gradually forming.<sup>188</sup>

As the lines between home and politics grew fainter on the BBC, the ambitions of both the imperial establishment and the BBC became clearer, notably the supremacist ambitions of cementing a white British global influence via increased emigration to the dominions. British women especially became perceived as vital to any efforts to help Britain retain significant Commonwealth influence after the war, an idea which had its roots in the *Beveridge Report* in 1942. The result of this report was an attitude of empire through fecundity, viewing white British women as nothing more than walking wombs to facilitate the imperial goal of white supremacy in the Commonwealth. Denise Noble highlights the value Lord Beveridge placed on women in helping Britain's prospects as a world power, when she argues that the report stressed the belief that "producing more white British babies... [was] critical for resisting a demographic threat at the level of both postwar national recovery and international relations".<sup>189</sup> The BBC demonstrated its support for the designated imperial role assigned to women by the imperial establishment, by its early involvement in promoting postwar dominion emigration exclusively to women. This involvement began with a *Woman's Hour* feature titled, "Do you want to emigrate?" in January 1947.<sup>190</sup>

Between March and August 1947, assisted immigration schemes officially commenced between the dominions and Britain. Although opening prospects to differing extents, all agreements guaranteed free passage to men and women and their families who had served with the British armed forces, with assisted passages offered to civilians from specific professions.<sup>191</sup> Once the assisted schemes were fully introduced, the BBC followed up in October 1947, broadcasting a new feature on the *Woman's Hour* series which

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<sup>188</sup> Skoog, K. (2010). p.92

<sup>189</sup> Noble, D. (2015). Decolonizing Britain and Domesticating Women: Race, Gender, and Women's Work in Post-1945 British Decolonial and Metropolitan Liberal Reform Discourses. *Meridians*, 13(1), 53–77. <https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.13.1.53> p.59

<sup>190</sup> Light Programme [listing]. (1947, January 17). *Radio Times*, 94 (1216), p. 23.

<sup>191</sup> Rice, A. (1947, April 14). The emigration outlook. *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, p. 2. Retrieved from <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000687/19470414/053/0002>

concentrated on emigrating to each dominion. The first broadcast of this feature was titled “*Women and Emigration – Canada*”.<sup>192</sup> From its onset the series made it clear that it was aimed towards single women, informing listeners that the new assisted migration schemes were not limited only to “demobilised soldiers... [wanting] a new life – but single women too”.<sup>193</sup> Illustrating further how the BBC conformed with the white supremacist ambitions of Britain’s buoyant postwar imperial narrative.

In efforts to ensure the right kind of person emigrated, the necessity of possessing the correct attitude was made clear. It was stressed that the dominions “wanted people with stamina – not escapists”.<sup>194</sup> However, in contrast to the BBC’s admission that ‘escapists’ were not desired, the arguments used in *Women and Emigration* encouraged escapist predispositions, by exploiting the results of the economic crisis in 1947, which became known as the “Year of Crisis”, to influence female listeners to emigrate.<sup>195</sup> Yet the worsening economic climate also cast doubt on the perceived benefits of increased emigration, about which even the BBC expressed concern in the series *Public Enquiry* in February 1947, putting forward the question, “Should we encourage emigration?”.<sup>196</sup> *Women and Emigration* expressed the BBC’s response to its earlier questioning, by portraying the dominions as idyllic havens as compared to Britain, in an effort to address the economic insecurities felt by British women, contending that the dominions offered “sufficient... [wages] to allow a better standard of living”.<sup>197</sup> Attention remained on the concerns towards basic living requirements, such as keeping warm, with it being stressed that due to Canada’s abundance of heating facilities, “the Britisher will not feel as cold there as here”.<sup>198</sup> Further exploitation of economic concerns followed, with aim being taken at food scarcity in on-the-ration Britain; it was

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<sup>192</sup> Light Programme [listing]. (1947, October 17). *Radio Times*, 97 (1253), p. 11.

<sup>193</sup> *Woman’s Hour: Do You Want to Emigrate?* BBC Written Archives Centre, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 23 Jan 1947 p.1

<sup>194</sup> *Woman’s Hour: Do You Want to Emigrate?* BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 23 Jan 1947 p.1

<sup>195</sup> The year of crisis. (1947, January 21). *Belfast News-Letter*, p. 3. Retrieved from <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000038/19470121/090/0003>

<sup>196</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1947, February 7). *Radio Times*, 94 (1219), p. 26.

<sup>197</sup> *Woman’s Hour: Do You Want to Emigrate?* BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 23 Jan 1947 p.4

<sup>198</sup> *Woman’s Hour: Do You Want to Emigrate?* BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 23 Jan 1947 p.3

claimed that “there is plenty of food [...] available at a wide range of prices” in Canada.<sup>199</sup> By utilising the fears and insecurities of listeners, the BBC’s initial efforts to encourage emigration applied the very nature of escapist thinking as its chosen technique, albeit that these escapists were also practical and pragmatic.

*Woman’s Hour* broadcast two more *Women and Emigration* features in the weeks following this initial broadcast, encouraging emigration to Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, and conveying the BBC’s ongoing support of the government’s imperial ambitions based on racial preference. Programme output tailored towards female listeners grew as the programmes popularity intensified, notably due to the increased “emphasis on current affairs” which appealed to audiences.<sup>200</sup> Dominion emigration retained its presence in these successive broadcasts, with features such as *A Word to Migrants*, for example, providing “advice to those who think of emigrating”.<sup>201</sup> The precedent that was set by *Woman’s Hour* influenced future female tailored series as well, such as *Mainly for Women* which started in 1951, and in a February 1951 broadcast promoted “reasons for leaving Britain and taking up a new life in New Zealand”.<sup>202</sup>

Using its position as a popular media source for women, the BBC was able to appeal to women in search of both adventure and security. Under the pretence of providing information on how listeners could have a better standard of living by emigrating to the dominions. The BBC encouraged an imperial agenda that was grounded in Britain’s postwar imperial ambition of white supremacy.

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<sup>199</sup> *Woman’s Hour: Do You Want to Emigrate? BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 23 Jan 1947 p.4

<sup>200</sup> Skoog, K. (2010). p.156

<sup>201</sup> Light Programme [listing]. (1951, September 14). *Radio Times*, 112 (1453), p.39.

<sup>202</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1951, February 9). *Radio Times*, 110 (1422), p.22.

## Year of Crisis'

By 1948 the BBC began to target its programmes promoting dominion emigration to a wider audience. Such programmes broadcast on all three of the BBC's domestic services and for reasons of impartiality, listeners started to hear arguments both for and against increased emigration. However, it is clear that positive examples were being used quite explicitly in order to promote emigration. Furthermore, the lasting effects of the 'year of crisis' continued to be deployed to encourage emigration as well. Nevertheless, the introduction of debate programmes such as, *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?* and *Should we leave Britain now?* enabled the BBC to partially distance itself from purely broadcasting a one-sided imperial narrative. Both broadcast in 1948, these programmes both bear further analysis, to examine some of the nuances of technique and content that reveal how the BBC broadcast arguments that opposed and questioned the supremacist attitudes that buoyed efforts to encourage dominion emigration.

### Is Mass Emigration the Answer? 21-07-1948

On 21 July 1948 the one-off programme *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?* broadcast on the BBC Home Service, directly following the 9pm news bulletin.<sup>203</sup> The timing of this broadcast was a primetime slot on the BBC, due to news bulletins remaining as described by Cain, "a vital national meeting point", meaning the BBC's largest daily audience was already tuned in and waiting.<sup>204</sup> The resumption of assisted emigration schemes to the dominions, meant that the topic remained at the forefront of current affairs discussions and debates, namely *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?*. The listing for this programme described it as being an exchange of opinions between "Professor Brinley Thomas and Dudley Barker, both authors of books on emigration".<sup>205</sup> During the programme each speaker was allotted their own time to speak without interruption and at its conclusion, the speakers were asked "to

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<sup>203</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1948, July 16). *Radio Times*, 100 (1292), p. 14.

<sup>204</sup> Cain, J. (1992). p.61

<sup>205</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1948, July 16). *Radio Times*, 100 (1292), p. 14.

comment on each other's stand-point." Unfortunately, however, this concluding section of the programme was a live on-air debate between the two speakers and therefore its content was not included in the BBC's programme files and could not be analysed in this work.<sup>206</sup>

Opening the programme, Dudley Barker focussed on promoting negative push factors which argued how dominion emigration would alleviate what he viewed as Britain's most pressing post-war challenge, claiming that "all discussion of Britain's post-war problems... [should scrutinise] the size of our population".<sup>207</sup> At the time Britain's population had reached over fifty million, a fact towards which Barker expressed his displeasure, stating that "my contention is that this is far too many".<sup>208</sup> Such beliefs became interwoven with Britain's postwar imperial narrative as it was motivated by feelings of imperialistic nostalgia of a more prosperous time for Britain. Asserting his support on the concept that Britain was more affluent in the nineteenth century, Barker argued it was during "the nineteenth century, when Britain was the workshop of the world, ... [and] there were only about thirty-seven million mouths to feed".<sup>209</sup> As Britain's level of food consumption became the lowest it had been compared to both during the war and the Great Depression, Barker's initial comments can be interpreted as an attempt to incite fear amongst listeners, by manipulating people's anxieties about food scarcity.<sup>210</sup> Similarities are therefore clear between this programme and the first *Woman's Hour* broadcast on emigration a year earlier. This technique became a staple in the BBC's programmes which encouraged emigration, especially as public interest in imperial affairs became more apathetic; as Darwin argues, British people had become more concerned with "issues of employment and social welfare than with the defence of

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<sup>206</sup> Is Mass Emigration The Answer?. BBC Written Archives Centre, Radio Talks Scripts, 21 July 1948. p.7

<sup>207</sup> *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 21 July 1948 p.1*

<sup>208</sup> *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 21 July 1948 p.1*

<sup>209</sup> *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 21 July 1948 p.1*

<sup>210</sup> Martin, J. (2016). British agriculture in transition: food shortages to food surpluses, 1947–1957. In C. Martiin, J. Pan-Montojo, & P. Brassley (Eds.), *Agriculture in Capitalist Europe, 1945–1960 From food shortages to food surpluses* (2nd ed., pp. 107-124). Routledge. p.109

imperial frontiers”.<sup>211</sup> Hence the efforts of those arguing in favour of mass migration, attempting to unite the two topics by portraying one as the problem and other as the solution.

Illustrating a future Britain with twenty million fewer people, Barker continued to assert how mass migration was the remedy for Britain to avoid an impending dystopian future. Again, listeners’ anxieties were manipulated, as Barker claimed that the result of mass migration would mean, “no need to import vast quantities of food... [,] there would be no housing problem, no school-building problem – there might even be seats on rush-hour trains!”<sup>212</sup>. Enveloped by the promotion of an imperial narrative that aspired for white supremacy in the dominions. Barker's arguments also reveal a classist discourse at work, by his emphasis on the idea that *some people* in Britain have too many babies, and that *some people* should leave, and go and have their babies elsewhere. The result of this would therefore leave seats on the train and an abundance of food for the likes of him, the higher class of British society, who remained in Britain.

Nearing the end of his given time, Barker drew his use of negative hypothetical situations to a close. Taking the opportunity to manipulate listeners’ apprehensions one final time, he reminded them of the hardships they had endured during the early years of the Second World War, asserting:

Think how much more happily we should have faced 1940 without any need to dispatch troops to distant battlefields, and with the knowledge that we could never be starved out.<sup>213</sup>

Baker’s final comments attempted to provoke an emotional response from listeners, by inferring that blame for the adversities faced during the war lay with listeners, because of their contribution to Britain’s high population and thus the idea that the empire had not been strong enough to stop the war occurring altogether.

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<sup>211</sup> Darwin, J. (1991). p.1

<sup>212</sup> *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 21 July 1948 p.2*

<sup>213</sup> *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 21 July 1948 p.3*



## Should We Leave Britain Now? 10-08-1948

The question of whether increased emigration from Britain would be beneficial, continued to be a common discussion topic for scholars and politicians throughout the immediate postwar years. Only a week after the broadcast of *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?* and being given a very short fifteen minute time slot in the early evening, the BBC broadcast *Should We Leave Britain Now?*, with speakers “Gilbert Harding and William Richmond... [discussing] emigration to the Dominions”.<sup>214</sup> As with *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?*, the speaker who began this programme, William Richmond, approved of increased emigration. Richmond’s primary arguments mirrored those accentuated by Barker a week earlier. A focus was placed on Britain’s population, which Richmond believed could not be maintained and that “anyone who hopes to maintain 45,000,000 people in these islands without a fall in the standard of living is himself out of touch with reality”.<sup>215</sup> Continuing swiftly, Richmond portrayed Britain as a failing postwar state, repeating the same claims made by Barker, particularly the depiction of Britain as no longer being the “[world’s] workshop but a sweatshop”.<sup>216</sup> The immigration policy changes of 1947 were used by Richmond as proof that all the dominions wanted more British immigrants. He centred on Australia, which became an example for those who argued in favour of mass emigration, due to its high demand and openness “to increase [its] population [...] by taking 70,000 immigrants, 50,000 from Britain”.<sup>217</sup> Australia’s desire for more British immigrants was used by the imperial establishment as evidence that the entire Commonwealth wanted and desperately needed them. By critically analysing Richmond’s BBC broadcast, we can see how Britain’s postwar imperial narrative developed to not only include attitudes of Britain’s racial dominance, but the inclusion of a wider notion of nationalist superiority. It was not only

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<sup>214</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1948, August 6). *Radio Times*, 100 (1295), p. 12.

<sup>215</sup> *Should We Leave Britain Now?*. BBC Written Archives Centre, Radio Talks Scripts, 10 Aug 1948. p.1

<sup>216</sup> *Should We Leave Britain Now?*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 10 Aug 1948. p.1

<sup>217</sup> *Should We Leave Britain Now?*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 10 Aug 1948. p.2

white people that were being said to be wanted by the dominions', but BBC audiences were being told that they wanted specifically white British people. The reluctance of other dominions towards opening to more immigrants was simply ignored by people like Richmond and Barker. For example, New Zealand determined in 1946 what its postwar stance on immigration was, viewing it as only being a useful short-term labour shortage stabiliser, in contrast with Australia and Canada's long-term approaches.<sup>218</sup>

Contrary to previous arguments about population, Richmond went further to include the question of race explicitly, contending that the Commonwealth's white population was in jeopardy, due it being "crowded here in Britain into one-nineteenth of its area".<sup>219</sup> Exceeding Barker's attempts to instigate fear amongst listeners, Richmond proclaimed that the concentration of the Commonwealth's white population in Britain was under threat from atomic weapons. Richmond paternalistically depicted Britain as being the centrepiece of the Commonwealth, arguing that "a few atom bombs on Britain would well-nigh paralyse the rest of the Commonwealth".<sup>220</sup> Richmond's promotion of paternalistic, supremacist, and nationalistic attitudes exemplify a lingering belief in white British racial dominance in the early postwar era and demonstrates that concerns over the Commonwealth's survival were intertwined with arguments about the survival of 'white' British society. Richmond's attitudes existed alongside a re-evaluation of Britain's imperial legacy taking place at the time, Perry writes, "through the institutionalisation of a transracial, trans-regional citizenship category", headed by the British Nationality Act 1948.<sup>221</sup> This act represented a significant change in Britain's imperial narrative, with policy being largely used in an attempt to try and maintain the international influence of Britain's imperial establishment without the use of direct force. While these legislative acknowledgements of the Commonwealth's multi-racial nature were significant, the attitudes expressed on the BBC, by those like Richmond, show how

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<sup>218</sup> Ongley, P., & Pearson, D. (1995). Post-1945 International Migration: New Zealand, Australia and Canada Compared. *The International Migration Review*, 29(3), 765-793. doi:10.2307/2547504 p.767-768

<sup>219</sup> *Should We Leave Britain Now?. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 10 Aug 1948. p.1

<sup>220</sup> *Should We Leave Britain Now?. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 10 Aug 1948. p.1

<sup>221</sup> Perry, K. H. (2015;2016;). *London is the place for me: Black britons, citizenship, and the politics of race*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190240202.001.0001> p.49

legislation was not an immediate fix to the racial prejudices that British imperialism had forged over centuries. Such attitudes were partly the result of the restrictive language used in immigration policies from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, which sought to maintain British cultural dominance around the empire, specifically restricting entry to categories of people who were deemed could “challenge the dominance of Anglo-Celtic Protestant” immigrants.<sup>222</sup>

Through broadcasting attitudes such as those held by Richmond and Barker, the BBC played an important role in disseminating opinions that stoked fears that British society was under threat, with the aim of abetting imperialistic aspirations. Underlying these was a concern that white Britons were no longer dominant against other ethnicities, but such an admission of this undermined the ideological framework of British imperialism. Underpinning the argument which favoured mass emigration to the dominions was the understanding that the Commonwealth’s very survival lay with the dispersion of white Britons across the globe. This clearly echoes the same notions which were present in the Indian independence radio programmes analysed in the previous chapter. Depicting India as lacking in social stability and requiring a guiding hand from white British imperialists, these programmes emphasised that Britain had supposedly brought justice and infrastructure to India. The India-themed broadcasts depicted British imperial officers and civilians as humanitarians and heroes to the native people they conquered; this was echoed in the radio programmes that vigorously encouraged dominion emigration. Through the analysis of this broadcast content, we see a similar trope of dominant, superior white Britons leaving the motherland to populate and improve the dominions. In both cases, the importance of dispersing British culture and values was stressed; but most of all, this was a question of white people settling and white babies being born from white British stock, to ensure of the survival of the Commonwealth and, importantly, see a reinvigorated Britain retain its place as a major global power.

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<sup>222</sup> Belshaw, J. D. (2016). *Canadian History: Post Confederation*. BC Campus Open Education. Retrieved from <https://opentextbc.ca/postconfederation/chapter/5-11-post-war-immigration/> no.p

## Failure of Dominion Emigration

Although emigration to the dominions was still heavily encouraged in the late 1940s, doubts about the benefits of the approach increasingly began to be expressed in BBC programming. Indicative of the BBC's enduring belief in impartiality, the BBC broadcast alongside Barker and Richmond in their same respective programmes in 1948, some of the earliest public acknowledgements towards the irrationalities of Britain's dominion emigration ambitions. In *Is Mass Emigration the Answer?* Brinley Thomas provided BBC listeners with an argument against mass migration, in sharp contrast to his adversary Dudley Barker. Thomas starkly disagreed that the answer to Britain's domestic and international problems could be solved by emigration, taking aim at Barker's comments of an organised migration plan that would see twenty million people leave Britain for the dominions. Largely concentrating on the potentially substantial economic impact that mass migration could have on Britain, Thomas raised the point of how the loss of Britain's "most precious asset – our young skilled manpower", would damage Britain's future prosperity.<sup>223</sup> The reality of Britain's postwar labour shortage, which in 1946 was estimated to be at least a million, was tactically ignored by those who supported mass migration.<sup>224</sup> As is observed by Kathleen Paul, the initial postwar Labour government itself possessed that same ignorance as shown by its incorrigible pursuit of pro-emigration policies, that placed the imperial ambitions of "shoring up the Empire/Commonwealth... [above] the short-term costs to Britain's domestic infrastructure".<sup>225</sup>

A consistency throughout this particular programme can be seen in each speaker's attempt to exploit listener's memories and fears. While Barker had drawn on an image of a powerful nineteenth century Britain to incite feelings of dread for the nation's future, Thomas

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<sup>223</sup> *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 21 July 1948. p.6

<sup>224</sup> Paul, K. (1995). p.254

<sup>225</sup> Paul, K. (1995). p.255

harked back to a more recent moment of national trauma, the Great Depression, also to invoke feelings of anxiety. He called upon listeners' memories of the Great Depression, arguing that mass migration would turn the whole of Britain into a "depressed area", seemingly to make listeners think mass migration was detrimental to Britain.<sup>226</sup> He focused on areas such as South Wales and County Durham, which had, during the interwar period, experienced disproportionately high unemployment and falling living standards compared to the rest of Britain.<sup>227</sup> Thomas contended that emigration during the interwar years had resulted in Britain being left with, "a crippling load of debt, a growing army of ageing paupers, and a paralysing inertia due to very low morale", which he feared was at risk of happening again.<sup>228</sup> Unlike in *Woman's Hour* where they spoke about life in the dominions themselves and how life there might be, the discussion between Barker and Thomas has been shown to have focused squarely on the British Isles and what life *here* would or would not be like with or without emigration. By use of negative connotations, both Barker and Thomas expressed a recognition of the British public's disinterest in imperial affairs postwar, attempting to use a British-Isles-centric approach to make the subject of dominion emigration appeal to the BBC's domestic audience.

After what Watson has described as a moment when the Commonwealth "seemed to be in danger of losing its sense of direction", significant changes, such as the granting of membership to India, Pakistan, and Ceylon enabled a new way of thinking about what the Commonwealth embodied, particularly its multi-racial nature.<sup>229</sup> This 'new Commonwealth' ideal was heavily influenced by the postwar desire for a more egalitarian society, which brought into question the methods and attitudes of the 'old' Commonwealth, that was viewed as developing into a "white man's club".<sup>230</sup> This change in attitude meant that the perception

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<sup>226</sup> *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 21 July 1948. p.6

<sup>227</sup> Garside, W. R. (2002). *British Unemployment 1919-1939 A Study in Public Policy*. Cambridge University Press. p. 240

<sup>228</sup> *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 21 July 1948. p.6

<sup>229</sup> Watson, J. B. (1971). *Empire to Commonwealth, 1919 to 1970*. Dent. p.121-122

<sup>230</sup> Heinlein, F. (2013). *British Government Policy and Decolonisation, 1945-1963 Scrutinising the Official Mind*. Taylor & Francis. p.304

of the aim of the Commonwealth and of Britain's position, both within it and outside the institution, had to develop. Britain could no longer view the Commonwealth as its pawn, to be used as a way of alleviating its own social, economic, and political problems. This represented a major barrier to Britain's dominion emigration objectives, as by the late 1940s it became overwhelmingly clear to the dominions that heavily relying on British immigrants was no longer a viable option. Labour shortages were felt across most Western countries resulting in, as Troper writes, nations scrambling "for their share of a shrinking pool".<sup>231</sup> This left nations with the most restrictive immigration policies, such as Canada, struggling the most.

To critics of British mass migration, these changes were clear evidence of the failures of the outdated thinking that had been fuelling the encouragement of postwar dominion emigration; the BBC gave the means for these views to be aired. For example, the second speaker, Gilbert Harding, from the programme *Should We Leave Britain Now?*, focussed his argument against mass migration on the point that Britain and the Commonwealth needed to look beyond their own nationalistic ambitions. Canada embodied his argument against Commonwealth migration. There was forming, Harding noted, "an intense and increasing National spirit in the Dominions, particularly in Canada".<sup>232</sup> This attitude made them reluctant to accept greater numbers of immigrants. Critics such as Harding questioned the need for immigrants to the dominions to be of British decent, especially as there remained hundreds of thousands of displaced persons across Europe.<sup>233</sup> Intending to invalidate the arguments made by Richmond, Harding argued that the priority should be on providing aid to all who needed help, asserting that, "if these Dominions want to expand, there are plenty of the unhappy, the miserable, the displaced, the eager, people in Europe".<sup>234</sup> Contending that Britain needed to avoid viewing the Commonwealth through a nationalistic outlook, Harding

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<sup>231</sup> Troper, H. (1993). Canada's Immigration Policy since 1945. *International Journal*, 48(2), 255-281. p.261

<sup>232</sup> *Should We Leave Britain Now?*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 10 Aug 1948. p.3

<sup>233</sup> Walsh, J. (2012). p.16

<sup>234</sup> *Should We Leave Britain Now?*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 10 Aug 1948. p.4

radically questioned the white supremacist attitudes that underpinned the buoyant imperial narrative that was used to promote dominion emigration in peacetime. The BBC's inclusion of these attitudes that questioned the white supremacist perspective of Britain's postwar imperial narrative, are a manifestation of the BBC's withstanding postwar tension between its own principles and the survival tactics employed by Britain's imperial establishment.

Although they depicted the Commonwealth as welcoming to all – in quite a change from a stance that elevated white British stock - these opponents of mass dominion emigration were still supporters of the institution of the Commonwealth itself. The programme *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?* in particular illustrated how despite their disagreement, both sides shared the conviction that Britain must retain a leading role in international affairs, remarking that “as long as the Commonwealth flourishes... [then] Britain will remain great”.<sup>235</sup> Thus despite the pretence or policy of a balanced discussion on the topic of dominion emigration, the BBC's editorial line was by no means impartial. For in reality, although listeners heard a range of speakers each of whom provided their own perspective, there remained a constant underscoring of the indisputable belief that postwar Britain would remain a global superpower, strengthened by the Commonwealth.

Nevertheless, by the early 1950s the white supremacist ambitions of Britain's imperial establishment, that were placed on the success of encouraging white Britons to emigrate to the 'white' dominions, were not met due to low numbers of British emigrants. As a result of this, Canada and Australia which had each pioneered the largest assisted emigration schemes, began to move away from a dependency on British immigrants.<sup>236</sup> These changes represented a new challenge to Britain maintaining a position of global power in peacetime. However, in keeping with its buoyant imperial narrative that rebuked any notions of weakness in Britain's power, the ways in which the wider world could be utilised were increasingly considered. This was particularly evident when in the final

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<sup>235</sup> *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 21 July 1948. p.3

<sup>236</sup> Walsh, J. (2012). p.21

comments of *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?*, it was asked “how best to use the resources of both Britain and the Commonwealth within the wider orbit of the Western World”.<sup>237</sup> The answer to this question, which is explored in the next chapter, was the developing political community in the European continent which was viewed as an alternative method for preserving Britain’s global influence postwar.

## Conclusion

Through the use of ‘ordinary voices’ and that of academic experts, the BBC promoted an imperial narrative that supported a method of ensuring the continued power and influence of a global white Britain. By utilising developments in audience research, the BBC directly targeted its female audience in its initial emigration encouragement efforts via *Woman’s Hour*. In these efforts the dominions were portrayed as havens that would allow British women to improve their living standards. However, the undertone of this imperial narrative, that was amplified via the BBC, was based on notions which reduced women’s place in British society to that of baby making machines, that should be sent around the empire to sustain a white British supremacy in the dominions. As the dominions opened up to more immigrants the BBC broadened its encouragement outreach, moving away from solely targeting its female audience. Indicating a change of technique to the one used in *Woman’s Hour*. Programmes such as, *Is Mass Immigration the Answer?* began to use negative push factors to appeal to collective insecurities at a time of strife and hardship, particularly in relation to food security and population size and manipulate these anxieties to scare people out of Britain and to the dominions. This technique a staple of the encouragement efforts on the BBC, with the programme *Should We Leave Britain Now?* widening the use of negative push factors by arguing that the very existence of white society was at risk if people did not emigrate.

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<sup>237</sup> *Is Mass Emigration The Answer?*. BBC WAC, *Radio Talks Scripts*, 21 July 1948. p.7



The BBC, however, remained consistently ambiguous in its broadcasting of imperial themes. Although the imperial narrative of the British imperial establishment remained dominant, it has been through close analysis of these programmes that we can understand the growing reluctance towards the supremacist attitudes that dominion emigration promoted. By analysing different types of programmes, with *Is Mass Immigration the Answer?* and *Should We Leave Britain Now?* being debates, this research has been able to study some of the first postwar doubts expressed towards Britain's imperial narrative. It is significant to acknowledge that the speakers who cast these doubts were both chosen and allowed by the BBC to broadcast their attitudes, illustrating the BBC's uneasy relationship with the dominating imperial narrative and its own broadcasting principles. Differing in some of their techniques, *Is Mass Immigration the Answer?* has shown how similar scare tactics as used by those who promoted emigration were applied. Furthermore, it has been argued that to appeal to the nationalistic mindset of listeners, the attitude expressed against emigration was highly British-Isle-centric, citing that emigration would have a significant detrimental impact on those that were left in Britain. In contrast, however, *Should We Leave Britain Now?* cast doubt on the supremacist attitudes of Britain's imperial narrative, by directly questioning why the dominions needed only more white British people and not the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons in Europe. In either broadcast, however, any admission that Britain was at the time a weaker power remained unfathomable.

## 4. Europe

By 1949, it became clear that dominion emigration was not going to be the answer to Britain's diminishing influence. The failure of efforts to encourage emigration, such as those supported by the BBC, had become too evident for British policy makers to ignore. An alternative means of securing Britain's global position was needed. That alternative was Europe. After the horrors of the First and Second World Wars, there was a great surge of support for greater cooperation between European nations to ensure lasting peace.<sup>238</sup> Numerous prominent British figures supported greater European integration. Notable among them was Winston Churchill, who from 1945 regularly expressed public support to the idea of a United States of Europe. Mauter writes that it was hoped such an entity would co-exist "along with the British Empire and Commonwealth, a U.S.-led Western Hemisphere, and a Soviet sphere".<sup>239</sup> This early moment of support in the late 1940s resulted in Britain performing an instrumental role in the creation of early joint European institutions, such as the founding of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) in 1948 and the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1949.<sup>240</sup>

Yet by the 1950s, Britain was more reluctant to pursuing a firmer relationship with Europe. The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) for example, which was first proposed in May 1950 by the Schuman declaration, was met with great scepticism in Britain due to its core "principle of the transfer of sovereignty to a higher authority", which Britain had long been opposed to.<sup>241</sup> Britain's hesitancy was not due to a lack of support for European cooperation, Tony Judt argues. Britain was in favour of a "European customs union... [however] what made [politicians] uncomfortable was the idea of a supernational

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<sup>238</sup> Judt, T. (2007). p.153

<sup>239</sup> Mauter, W. R. (1998). Churchill and the Unification of Europe. *The Historian*, 61(1), 67–84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24450064> p.70

<sup>240</sup> Childs, D. (2006). p.42

<sup>241</sup> Melissen, J., & Zeeman, B. (1986). Britain and Western Europe, 1945-51: Opportunities Lost? *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-2016)*, 63(1), 81–95. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2620234> p.93

executive” and the power wielded by a joint Parliamentary body, since previous European institutions were either defence related or had no executive powers.<sup>242</sup> There is consensus among historians that it was these concerns about sovereignty, which Britain held (and still, apparently holds) close, that fuelled policymakers’ reluctant stance. Economic uncertainty, particularly in war-torn Europe fuelled Britain’s concerns about the prospects of the ECSC, with these fears overriding questions and concerns about the future of the Commonwealth.<sup>243</sup>

The issue of Britain’s role in a united Europe is shown to have been an important matter of public interest because it was discussed in various programmes on the BBC. By analysing the content and shape of this radio programming, we are able to see a reflection of how Britain and Europe’s relationship changed in a significantly short time. The BBC appeared to follow the line of central policymakers, first proposing Britain as playing a leading role in Western Europe in order to retain its position as a global leader, but quite quickly fading in enthusiasm due to the creation of the ECSC. Following the downward trend in attitudes towards Europe, and with the understanding that dominion emigration was not the answer, the BBC ends this period by rejuvenating the significance of the relationship between Britain and the Commonwealth as the way forward for British global influence. In a short space of time at start of the new decade, the British government’s attitude towards its involvement with a united Europe stalled and the BBC’s attitude quickly emulated these attitudes. By the early 1950s Britain’s power had a significantly decreased. It had a weakened relationship with its once powerful dominion counterparts and had side-lined itself from the European community.

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<sup>242</sup> Judt, T. (2007). p.159

<sup>243</sup> Gupta, P. S. (1975). *Imperialism and the British labour movement, 1914-1964*. Macmillan. p.301

## Before the Schuman Declaration

Arising from the signing of the Treaty of London in May 1949 and subsequently holding its first meeting in August the same year, the creation of the CoE was imperative for the eventual goal of achieving increased co-operation in Europe.<sup>244</sup> The Council itself had no authority over member states and as Reynolds and Brasher described it, the Council represented “a goodwill organisation”, which set the framework for European nations to be able to discuss common problems without the need for military confrontation.<sup>245</sup> Due to its advisory nature, European nations, particularly Britain, were willing to be involved, however, caution endured towards the objectives of the CoE.

### *Prospect of the Council of Europe 09-08-1949*

The BBC provided extensive coverage of the first meeting of the CoE in August 1949. In its 1951 Year Book it claimed that “no other broadcasting organisation dealt with this big event on a comparable scale”.<sup>246</sup> The BBC’s first programme which directly referred to ‘the Council of Europe’ was titled *Prospect of the Council of Europe* and broadcast on 9 August 1949 via the BBC’s Third Programme. The programme aimed to provide listeners with an understanding of the “significance and possible functions of the Council”.<sup>247</sup> The speaker in this broadcast was British diplomat and historian Sir Charles Kingsley Webster, who had studied diplomatic history prior to the First World War and later held various British diplomatic roles throughout the Second World War.<sup>248</sup> Webster was therefore viewed as an authority on European diplomatic history and would have been perceived by the BBC as perfectly situated to offer opinion on developments in Europe. It is important to note,

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<sup>244</sup> Judt, T. (2007). p.155

<sup>245</sup> Reynolds, E., & Brasher, N. (1966). p.244

<sup>246</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation. (1950). *The BBC Year Book 1951*. Richard Clay & Company LTD. Retrieved from <https://worldradiohistory.com/UK/BBC/BBC-Annual/BBC-Year-Book-1951.pdf> p.126

<sup>247</sup> Third Programme [listing]. (1949, August 5). *Radio Times*, 104 (1347), p. 19.

<sup>248</sup> Webster, Sir Charles Kingsley (1886–1961) - Archives Hub. (n.d.). Archives Hub. Retrieved 7 June 2021, from <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/28c5ce99-0675-3a15-a2ba-7374015bfb02> no page number.

however, that this programme was scheduled to be broadcast on the Third Programme. Therefore, its audience would have been smaller than that of broadcasts on the Light or Home services. Nevertheless, it provides a valuable insight into how the BBC sought to represent developments on the European stage.

The cautious approach taken by Britain towards its involvement with the developing European community was reinforced early in Webster's discussion, as he emphasised how the "British Government [...] disliked the idea of any sort of Parliamentary body", which was seen as a threat to member states' sovereignty.<sup>249</sup> Although the programme initially appeared to lean towards a pessimistic depiction of the CoE, Webster goes on to express a rare acknowledgement of Britain's reduced power in the postwar world. As earlier indicated, the historian Wendell R. Mauter has noted that at first prominent figures in Britain idealised the idea of Britain remaining a superpower. Yet in this broadcast, Sir Charles Kingsley Webster makes a rare admission that the idea of Britain as a "third force between the Soviet Union and the United States is now dead".<sup>250</sup> This is representative of how attitudes broadcast on the BBC at times contrasted to the narrative employed by Britain's imperial establishment, which as argued by Darwin, "went to great lengths to avoid or conceal any open reverse of British world power".<sup>251</sup> By suggesting that Britain did indeed now occupy a weakened position, Webster's talk aimed to illustrate to listeners the importance of Britain being more closely involved with Europe.

Overall, Webster aimed to convey a tone of realism towards the new organisation, focusing on the immediate issues which lay ahead of the Council. As the programme's intention was to inform listeners about the function of the Council, particular attention was given to uncomplicated details, such as the seating arrangement for member states representatives and who might be the President of the Council's Assembly.<sup>252</sup> As this was

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<sup>249</sup> *Prospect of the Council of Europe. BBC Written Archives Centre, Radio Talks Scripts, 9 Aug 1949. p.2*

<sup>250</sup> *Prospect of the Council of Europe. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 9 Aug 1949. p.2*

<sup>251</sup> Darwin, J. (1991). p.35

<sup>252</sup> *Prospect of the Council of Europe. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 9 Aug 1949. p.5*

broadcast on the Third Programme, William Haley's prized high-culture service, the broadcast mostly concentrated on explaining the workings of the Council, rather than offering an opinion about it. That said, by the end of the broadcast Webster began promoting optimism towards what the Council could achieve. Similar to the efforts to encourage emigration made by Barker and Richmond, Webster tapped into listeners' recent experiences with economic insecurity, claiming that if successful the CoE would be able to discuss "the economic crisis which has developed in Europe", attempting to promote positive and hopeful attitudes towards the Council.<sup>253</sup>

This broadcast on the BBC by such an authoritative figure as Webster, which promoted a positive and pragmatic view of the emerging European community, contracts Melissen and Zeeman's analysis of the moment. They argue that by late 1948 Britain's positive attitude towards a unifying Europe had diminished. This, they claim, was a result of the community that was being created, conflicting with "Bevin's grand vision of Western Union", which focussed on Britain taking the helm in Western Europe.<sup>254</sup>

### *Taking Stock – Britain and Europe 07-04-1950*

Yet it appears that supportive attitudes towards Britain and the uniting European community remained at the forefront of the BBC's programming into the 1950s. Evidence of this is apparent from a broadcast in one of the BBC's long running discussion and debate series, *Taking Stock*, entitled *Britain and Europe*, on 7 April 1950 in the primetime slot immediately after the nine o'clock evening news.<sup>255</sup> The programme involved four Members of Parliament (MPs) discussing the topic of European unity and Britain's place within the emerging community. Attempting to provide listeners with a balanced debate, MPs from both the governing Labour party and the Conservative opposition were involved. The *Radio*

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<sup>253</sup> Prospect of the Council of Europe. *BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 9 Aug 1949. p.6

<sup>254</sup> Melissen, J., & Zeeman, B. (1986). p.91

<sup>255</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1950, April 7). *Radio Times*, 107 (1382), p. 32.

*Times* listing for this broadcast provides useful context as to which specific MPs participated, these were:

Duncan Sandys (Conservative), Member of Parliament for Streatham

Brigadier J. G. Smyth, v.c. (Conservative), Member of Parliament for Norwood

Christopher Mayhew, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs from October 1946 to March 1950

Maurice Edelman (Labour), Member of Parliament for Coventry North.<sup>256</sup>

This broadcast demonstrated that there was to some extent agreement across political parties that Europe needed to unite, if not for economic reasons, then for a “Free Europe’ [...] to exist”.<sup>257</sup> Especially, since in 1947 Europe became split between Western European nations that were a part of the United States Marshall Plan, and Eastern European nations that were behind the Soviet Union’s Iron Curtain.<sup>258</sup> Though, persistent divisions were also expressed in relation to what the extent of a joint European institution should be. Three out of the four MPs – Sandys, Edelman, and Smyth – expressed a shared attitude that an overarching authority was required.<sup>259</sup> Edelman, for example, strongly believed in Federation, claiming that he wanted “to see Europe as united to the United States of America”.<sup>260</sup> Despite the BBC’s representation giving the impression that MPs largely supported greater integration with Europe. As has been argued by Cooper, Britain generally lacked individuals who supported the idea of a further intertwined Europe, in contrast with the continent which had “Robert Schuman or Jean Monnet” it “[therefore had] no readiness to think in radically new terms”.<sup>261</sup> The BBC’s programming, nevertheless, provided a

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<sup>256</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1950, April 7). *Radio Times*, 107 (1382), p. 32.

<sup>257</sup> *Taking Stock: Britain and Europe. BBC Written Archives Centre, Radio Talks Scripts*, 7 Apr 1950 p.1

<sup>258</sup> Reynolds, E., & Brasher, N. (1966). p.219

<sup>259</sup> *Taking Stock: Britain and Europe. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 7 Apr 1950 p.4

<sup>260</sup> *Taking Stock: Britain and Europe. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 7 Apr 1950 p.4

<sup>261</sup> Cooper, R. (2012). Britain and Europe. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-2012)*, 88(6), 1191–1203. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23324909> p.1191

counterbalance to a vision of overwhelmingly negative views about Europe as the leading attitude. Only one of the four guests on the programme, the MP Christopher Mayhew, appears to hold such negative views, arguing that the CoE was sufficient as an institution of unification, and that no one should “worry too much about new machinery in Europe”.<sup>262</sup> Edelman was shown to react to Mayhew’s comments, although not directly. He was critical of those who worried more about “their sovereignty... [because] they weren’t prepared to give up anything at all”, which therefore slowed efforts in developing a closer European community.<sup>263</sup>

While it cannot be denied that this programme is not representative of Parliament as a whole, or indeed national views more broadly, it is important to note the significance of the BBC choosing to broadcast views which fell more on the side of European integration than not. The BBC’s aim was to educate and inform its listeners, and its influence and impact should not be underestimated.

## Post-Schuman Declaration

The future of European unification was drastically altered by the Schuman declaration made in Paris on 9 May 1950. In practise the proposal was simple, the establishment of a high authority in Europe that would control the production and pricing of coal and steel in participating nations.<sup>264</sup> In theory, the Schuman declaration aimed to go a step further than previous institutions like the CoE, in achieving the goal of European integration, with particular emphasis on ensuring that war in Europe became, as desired by Schuman, “not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible”.<sup>265</sup> As has been established both from the BBC sources and historiography, Britain had long since been against the

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<sup>262</sup> Taking Stock: Britain and Europe. *BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 7 Apr 1950 p.3

<sup>263</sup> Taking Stock: Britain and Europe. *BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts*, 7 Apr 1950 p.4

<sup>264</sup> Judt, T. (2007). p.156

<sup>265</sup> Schuman, R. *The Schuman Declaration*, Paragraph 4 (9 May 1950) Retrieved from <https://www.cvce.eu/en>



creation of a high authority in Europe and declined the invitation to join.<sup>266</sup> Concerns regarding how Britain's inclusion in the European Community would impact the Commonwealth was, as argued by Gupta, to have been of little significance to the decision to reject the Schuman plan. As noted by Gupta, during a debate on Britain joining the ECSC, "of the fourteen Labour speakers only four used the Commonwealth connection as an argument against European unity", thus it represented a minority concern in 1950.<sup>267</sup>

### *Can the Council of Europe Survive? 07-10-1950*

After the Schuman declaration the BBC's coverage of developments in Europe began to shift towards conformity with the pessimism expressed by the British imperial establishment. While the BBC's attention in 1949 concentrated on the significance of the mere existence of the CoE, straying away from depicting the community as either positive nor negative for Britain, this pragmatic attitude, however, did not endure. In August-September 1950 the CoE held its second meeting, which the BBC reported on extensively, with the creation of a new weekly series titled *The Council of Europe* that provided a review of the Councils deliberations. In October 1950, Sir Charles Webster was brought back by the BBC to provide an annual review of the Councils first year and particularly to discuss, as the programmes title eloquently details, *Can the Council of Europe Survive*. The longevity of the CoE had now come into question and the BBC aimed to establish to listeners whether the CoE "has a real function to perform and [...] whether it can fulfil this function".<sup>268</sup>

The CoE had always come under scrutiny due to its consultative nature, which, as acknowledged by the French Ambassador to the United States in 1951, meant "the Council often ran into the obstacle of too strong a sentiment of national sovereignty" due to its lack of authority.<sup>269</sup> In his BBC assessment, Webster conveyed a similar attitude to Bonnet, but from

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<sup>266</sup> Judt, T. (2007). p.157

<sup>267</sup> Gupta, P. S. (1975). p.302

<sup>268</sup> Third Programme [listing]. (1950, October 7). *Radio Times*, 108 (1406), p. 241.

<sup>269</sup> Bonnet, H. "The Schuman Plan." *World Affairs*, vol. 114, no. 4, 1951, pp. 99–102. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20668537>. Accessed 3 Dec. 2022. p.99

a British perspective. It is worth bearing in mind the timing of this broadcast: just a few months before in May 1950, the Schuman declaration was made; Britain's rejection of it meant that the possible answer to the question of maintaining Britain's global power status if dominion emigration failed was, it quickly emerged, a non-starter. The tone of Webster's talk was unsurprisingly pessimistic, illustrating the BBC's return to conforming with the narrative of the British establishment, by describing the CoE as a failed institution due its being in "something like a crisis" that required fixing.<sup>270</sup> Bonnet's mentioning of the strong sovereignty that persisted in the CoE was likewise depicted by Webster, as he used the high level of internal bickering as evidence of the Council's failure.<sup>271</sup> Webster goes on to epitomise the argument made by Darwin, that British politicians made a collective effort "to inoculate public opinion against the pessimism [...] experienced by other powers in decline", through the refusal to publicly admit that Britain's international prowess had declined.<sup>272</sup> Unable to help himself, Webster paternalistically claimed that Europe wanted "to throw the whole responsibility for the deadlock on the [...] British Government", invoking the notion that Britain was a father figure that helped the bickering children in Europe.<sup>273</sup> Webster's attitude is important as it demonstrates the speed at which the BBC's representations changed with developments in the wider world. By late 1950, Britain's position in Europe was significantly weakened because it had side-lined itself from ECSC, which further united the European community without it.

### *Taking Stock Britain and the Commonwealth Today – An Anglo-Australian discussion 04-01-1951*

By 1951 the BBC demonstrated a further change in attitude, with the Commonwealth returning to the forefront of discussions about Britain's future and the European community.

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<sup>270</sup> *Can the Council of Europe Survive?. BBC Written Archives Centre, Radio Talks Scripts, 7 Oct 1950. p.1*

<sup>271</sup> *Can the Council of Europe Survive?. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 7 Oct 1950. p.4*

<sup>272</sup> Darwin, J. (1991). p.35

<sup>273</sup> *Can the Council of Europe Survive?. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 7 Oct 1950. p.3*

In January 1951, three months before the Schuman plan was signed thus officially creating the ECSC, the BBC broadcast as part of its *Taking Stock* series, *Britain and the Commonwealth – An Anglo-Australian discussion*. In this broadcast the overall question was “how can Britain combine her position in Europe with her position in the Commonwealth?”, bringing together two British MPs and two Australian politicians.<sup>274</sup> With Britain stepping back from the European community, the BBC no longer promoted pessimism towards it, instead persisting with similar paternalistic attitudes that Webster depicted in 1950, of Britain as being crucial to the new European community, whether it was a member or not. For example, Labour MP Michael Foot stressed the idea that “the Commonwealth is perhaps the most important factor in the possibility of preventing... [a] Third World War”, attempting to devalue the significance of the newly created ECSC.<sup>275</sup>

The ‘white’ dominions had come to realise, especially by 1951, that Britain was no longer able to offer the same level of protection and financial benefits it once had done, and were now seeking both from the United States instead.<sup>276</sup> There was nevertheless a remnant of the old imperial mindsets in the BBC’s programming and an extension of Darwin’s argument (that British politicians were purposefully avoiding acknowledging Britain’s weakened position) to the dominions. John McCallum, an Australian senator for New South Wales who spoke in the programme *Britain and the Commonwealth*, initially displayed disapproval of Britain’s recent handling of international affairs, specifically in India and Israel.<sup>277</sup> Restraining himself before any anti-British sentiment could be acknowledged by other speakers, McCallum made it clear that “we’re not criticising the British government; we feel that they were in a state of necessity, they could do nothing else”.<sup>278</sup> McCallum’s comments echo the sentiments of paternalism and British exceptionalism that were also promoted by Brigadier Vinden in his *British in India* broadcasts in 1947. Specifically,

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<sup>274</sup> Home Service [listing]. (1950, December 29). *Radio Times*, 109 (1416), p. 32.

<sup>275</sup> *Taking Stock: Britain and the Commonwealth*. BBC Written Archives Centre, Radio Talks Scripts, 4 Jan 1950. p.2

<sup>276</sup> Watson, J. B. (Jack B. (1971). *Empire to Commonwealth, 1919 to 1970*. Dent. p.121

<sup>277</sup> *Taking Stock: Britain and the Commonwealth*. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 4 Jan 1950. p.3

<sup>278</sup> *Taking Stock: Britain and the Commonwealth*. BBC WAC, Radio Talks Scripts, 4 Jan 1950. p.3

Vinden's argument that Britain always had good imperial intentions, it was merely the later application of these intentions which were at fault. Therefore, what can be observed is an imperial narrative of British exceptionalism, which avoided acknowledging the reality of Britain's reduced postwar power, possessing its own international influence as demonstrated by McCallum's views in 1951. Following Britain's rejection of the Schuman plan, the BBC's broadcasts on these developments have shown how the broadcaster returned to presenting a buoyant postwar imperial narrative that propagandised Britain's Greatness as being secure as the head of the Commonwealth, and not with Europe.

## Conclusion

With dominion emigration never achieving the levels that were hoped for by Britain's imperial establishment, old imperial ties began to fray as the dominions' strayed further away from any previous reliance they had on Britain. Britain therefore sought an alternative to retain global influence and began moving closer to the idea that it had a significant role to play in a uniting Europe. In the BBC's reporting of the political developments in Europe, (prior to the Schuman declaration in 1950) it has been demonstrated that its initially representation of Britain's place in Europe was one that went against the dominating imperial narrative of the postwar era. In the 1949 programme *Prospect of the Council of Europe*, the BBC chose an authoritative figure that was depicted as being a trusted source, to provide audiences with a positive and pragmatic view towards the potential Europe offered Britain. Neither voicing a positive nor negative opinion towards the empire, the BBC conveyed an awareness of Britain's reduced postwar power that was in direct contrary to the British exceptionalism promoted by Britain's buoyant postwar imperial narrative. The BBC's choice of speakers in programmes discussing Britain and Europe remained a highly significant factor for this study. Continuing to publicise a contrasting position to that of the imperial establishment, in a 1950 broadcast on its long-running series *Taking Stock*, the BBC

broadcast a debate between four British MPs. Although historiography shows that most British MPs were against closer ties with Europe, it has been revealed that the BBC broadcast a distinct representation that many MPs held supportive attitudes towards Europe, in stark contrast to the reality of the paternalistic opinion held by the imperial establishment.

After the Schuman declaration in May 1950, which established a high authority in Europe, Britain disdainfully rejected joining. This marked significant turning point in the BBC's programming, which saw a return of the establishments imperial narrative being aired, with the broadcasting of ideals based on British exceptionalism in the Commonwealth context. The pragmatic tone towards Europe ceased to feature, with programmes such as *Can the Council of Europe Survive?* signifying a return of paternalistic attitudes by portraying Britain as a father figure for the European community, that was described as being in constant crisis. By 1951, towering notions of British exceptionalism were encouraged, which claimed that with Britain in or out of the community, Europe would still *need* Britain because it was Europe's link with the world via the Commonwealth. Although Britain profusely rejected the notions of a higher authority in Europe. Analysis of BBC content has shown a revitalisation of airing an imperial narrative that was based on the imperial establishment seeking refuge in the idea of reclaiming old imperial ties, which placed Britain as itself a higher authority.

## 5. Conclusion

From its birth the BBC experienced challenges to its core principle of being an independent broadcaster and impartial national (and later international) voice. Owing to its close ties with the British government in its formative years, the BBC was prone to being influenced by a British imperial establishment that in the post war period was in fighting for its own survival. Amid a rapidly changing global power balance and rising egalitarian ideals, the centuries-old imperial mindset of Britain's elites, which accentuated attitudes of British exceptionalism and white supremacy, was in turmoil. As the sole British broadcaster and with radio the dominant medium post war, the BBC's output during the initial stages of Britain's decolonisation era reveals how Britain's imperial establishment attempted to control public attitudes and shape memories of the empire. Through a close analysis of the content of BBC radio broadcasts – a source little exploited by historians – this thesis has demonstrated that the BBC, although chiefly reflecting the attitudes of the imperial establishment, nonetheless conveyed a level of ambiguity towards imperial themes which was more in line with its principle of impartiality. Focussing on three major international developments in the immediate post war period, each chapter of this dissertation has demonstrated how Britain's imperial past, present, and future were portrayed on the BBC during the tumultuous immediate post war period.

Imperial depictions in British media in the early twentieth century typically conformed with an imperial mindset that refused to acknowledge any signs of decline, instead illustrating an image of imperial unity. While Britain experienced several major imperial withdrawals in the immediate post war period, the BBC at first ignored the reality of imperial decline and instead celebrated the legacy of British

rule. Britain's first large scale imperial withdrawal occurred when Indian independence was granted in August 1947, and reports on the event dominated the BBC's imperial programming in the months leading up to and after the transfer of power. The extent of the imperial establishment's infiltration of the BBC is clear from the programming relating to Indian independence, with many of the speakers employed being leading members of the establishment, such as Sir Cyril Radcliffe and Brigadier Fredrick Vinden; each expressed support for British rule in India. The result of such a dominating presence on the BBC's programming was that a residual paternalistic attitude was fed to audiences, a posture which corresponded with that held by Britain's imperial establishment that aimed to justify and encourage the public to celebrate the legacy of the British Raj. Yet a divergent perspective running contrary to the imperial narrative was also apparent: the BBC remained persistent in maintaining some level of impartiality towards the topic by providing listeners with a rare perspective of the British Raj from a native born Indian. Shifting from an Anglo-centric focus that heavily featured in previous programmes, listeners were provided with an opposing view. Emphasising the need for Britain to look beyond its self-righteous and paternalistic attitudes, it was argued that it needed to regain its ability to self-criticise with particular focus towards the way it remembered imperial past. Albeit a momentary example of the tension against an imperial establishment wishing to maintain a buoyant imperial narrative, it nonetheless demonstrates the BBC's conscious reluctance to abandon its core Reithian principles and become merely a mouthpiece for the imperial elite.

With Britain facing increasing domestic crises and a sudden decrease in its imperial power at the onset of decolonisation, the increasing focus towards encouraging emigration in the late 1940s programming shows that Britain's imperial

establishment continued to assert itself. By utilising developments in broadcasting techniques, specifically the growth of audience research, anxious imperialists disseminated chauvinist and supremacist attitudes across the airwaves, portraying women as vessels that could be sent around the empire, to produce white babies and sustain a fictitious notion of kinship between Britain and the empire. The key to endorsing these supremacist ideals was the eventual reignition of free and assisted emigration schemes to the white dominions. At the same time, there was a reversal of the methods seen previously in the BBC's India themed programmes, which had promoted the positive aspects of the British Empire, both domestically and abroad. Radio programmes encouraging Britons to emigrate presented an image of present-day Britain as a nation in constant crisis, in an attempt to frighten people to emigrate to the dominions. Rather than face its diminishing imperial power, Britain's imperial establishment sought to triumph despite the significant losses it experienced. Dominion emigration was viewed as a quick and simple substitute to this reduction of global influence and the BBC became a platform for imperialists to shout their support. Yet friction emerged again, with the BBC giving airtime to contrary beliefs that questioned the supremacist stance that underpinned the imperial establishment's justifications for dominion emigration. Although impartiality was not present in these programmes at first, gradually voices that questioned the supremacist rationale and financial justification for greater emigration began to be heard. In its attempt to maintain some sort of impartiality, the BBC's stance towards emigration appears highly ambiguous: it both encouraged emigration and broadcast Anglo-centric attitudes that argued that true British patriots would stay in Britain to help it recover post war. Institutionally, the corporation itself was also pursuing closer relationships with dominion public broadcasters, yet in this quest too, its priorities



differed to those of the imperial establishment. The BBC focussed on ensuring that reciprocal programming allowed for the sharing of talent and culture between nations, rather than emphasising the dominance of Britain.

As Britain's imperial power further diminished into the early 1950s, the future of Britain's global power status was increasingly debated. The view that an alternative was required was growing. To ensure that it held a high-level international position, Britain's imperial establishment looked to the developing international communities forming in Europe as a possible answer. Approaching Britain's closer involvement with Europe cautiously, however, the imperial mindset that refused to acknowledge imperial decline also resulted in a reluctance to join any institution that would have the powers of a higher authority in Europe. So instead, imperialists turned towards the remaining colonies and the Commonwealth. However, some weakness in the imperial establishment's influence over the BBC is clear from the BBC's coverage of these developments. Initially the BBC approached the subject of European cooperation with greater impartiality than it had towards imperial withdrawal and dominion emigration. Taking a more realistic approach to the reporting of developments in Europe, at first the BBC did not reflect the imperial establishment's negative attitude towards Britain's relationship with Europe. However, conformity soon returned, as Britain moved itself irreversibly further away from greater cooperation with Europe and instead fortified itself within its own vision of its ongoing imperial power. BBC coverage of the newly-formed European institutions suddenly became predominantly negative. Imperialist attitudes based in notions of British exceptionalism were used to discredit European institutions as failures without Britain's involvement, and self-importantly accentuated the importance of the Commonwealth for Britain's future and world peace.

Questions about the political positioning of the BBC and who decides its output continue to cause it problems. Two recent cases – Gary Lineker and Richard Sharp – have relit debates over both the impartiality of BBC presenters and its management in relation to the government. The recent resignation of BBC Chairman Richard Sharp, for example, demonstrates that this quest for impartiality continues to be ambiguous whilst illustrating an enduring close relationship between the British government and the highest levels of the BBC. Comments made by presenters, such as Gary Lineker, which express direct opposition towards government policies have exemplified how in a backdrop of a highly polarised and politically aware society, the BBC's commitment to impartiality has become a greater challenge. Considering the BBC's enduring commitment to impartiality and the completion of decolonisation in the late twentieth century, there is a remanence of a buoyant imperial narrative within present day BBC programming. Deriving from the incessant postwar attempts of an imperial establishment that encouraged notions of British exceptionalism, the BBC remains devoted to positively interpreting events that have deep associations with Britain's imperial past. Such events include, the coronation of King Charles III, the Commonwealth games of 2022, and ongoing debates over imperial statuary and naming. Additionally, amidst the ruins of the Brexit referendum, the question of the extent of government influence on the BBC can be applied towards the BBC's reluctance to let go of an imperial past and to accept a place in Europe.

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