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Working for the Wireless World: Radio Uganda Technicians and the Wo/manpower of 1970s Cosmopolitanism

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Abstract

This article argues that technicians' working lives and workplaces are crucial to conceptualizing the inequalities that characterized the 'wireless world' of radio broadcasting during a period of demands for a new information order. Taking Uganda's national broadcaster and the files it has preserved as a focus, I follow calls to move beyond the exceptionalism of 1970s Uganda to locate it in global histories of technology and work. Like many broadcasters in decolonizing countries, Radio Uganda struggled to secure space on the electromagnetic spectrum, challenge neo-colonial information monopolies, balance its internationalist ambitions with its reliance on foreign equipment and training agreements, and fill vacancies. In the same years, its technicians responded to hundreds of reception reports sent by amateur distant listeners – most from Western Europe. The labour of responding to these reports and their cosmopolitan pronouncements represents a hitherto unexplored window onto the exchanges that underscored the globalization of radio technology and its limits in the 1970s.

Keywords: broadcasting; decolonization; technology; workplace; technicians; Uganda

'The scientific hobby for better world communication, friendship and good will between peoples of the world.'¹ This was how Edgar Adloff described DXing, or amateur long-distance listening. The pastime involved 'hunting' for radio signals on a sensitive shortwave receiving set, then sending reception reports with descriptions of sounds heard to the presumed broadcaster, in the hope of receiving a reply or QSL verification card, which could then be discussed in a DXing association or magazine.² Adloff, a DXer himself, included this aspirational sentence in a reception report written in Hamburg, West Germany, in May 1972. Several days later, his report was received by Jabbery Katongole, a senior technician working in Kampala for Radio Uganda, the state broadcaster operating under the military dictatorship of Idi Amin. Reading reports like Adloff's was a typical task in Katongole's working day – he received several every week in mid-1972, each of which he checked for accuracy against the studio log book. On this occasion, after

¹Edgar Adloff to Radio Uganda, 19 May 1972, Kampala, Uganda Broadcasting Corporation archives (hereafter UBC), Ministry of Information 1972-73 (box), Local reception reports (file). Archival references for UBC follow this format throughout; box labels are not unique and unfortunately it is not possible to distinguish between multiple boxes with the same label.

²DX is an abbreviation for 'distance'; QSL is a Morse code-derived abbreviation for 'I have received'. On DXing in the interwar and contemporary contexts, respectively, see Rebecca Scales, 'Radio Amateurs and "DX-Ing" between the World Wars', in *The Wireless World: Global Histories of International Radio Broadcasting*, ed. Simon J. Potter et al. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 53–61; Michael Nevradakis, 'Disembodied Voices and Dislocated Signals: The World of Modern-Day DXing', *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 20, no. 1 (2013): 68–86.

looking at the enclosed postcard showing a scene from Hamburg, and perhaps musing over the line on world friendship, Katongole wrote ‘Correct’ on the report, signed it, and passed it to secretary-typist Martha to compose a reply.³

Recent global histories of radio broadcasting have warned against taking statements like Adloff’s at face value.⁴ Depictions of radio technology as a connecting, equalizing force – an agent of mutual understanding across political and cultural borders – were espoused by listeners and broadcasters with remarkable continuity from the interwar period of early international broadcasting to the Cold War era of affordable receiving sets. Amateur long-distance listeners or DXers, like Adloff, were particularly ardent proponents of this technological utopianism. But statements like his mask both the unequal structures that radio broadcasting underscored and the decisive role of empires and nation states in funding and regulating the ‘wireless world’.⁵ The task of historians, then, is to problematize, rather than reproduce, these aspirational, cosmopolitan visions. By studying the relationship of these visions to the practices they purport to describe, radio histories have much to contribute to broader discussions about the unevenness and limits of globalizing dynamics: when writing a global history of radio, ‘inequality must be a central theme’.⁶

If we want to interrogate Adloff’s technological cosmopolitanism and analyse the global structures it obscures, then Katongole’s studio in Kampala, I suggest, is a useful place to start. To substantiate this claim, this article draws on documents preserved by the Radio Uganda division of the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC), centring the working lives of its technicians to analyse the interdependence of listener and broadcaster.⁷ Fundamentally, for Adloff to assert that radio could foster good will between peoples of the world, stations like Radio Uganda needed to be on air, and the skilled labour of people like Katongole and Martha needed to be available. If DXers could not hear a broadcast or receive a reply from places unfamiliar to them, then radio technology lost part of its appeal for this section of its champions. In this most basic sense, Radio Uganda technicians, as much as DXers, were making radio global – ideationally and in practice. Had Adloff written two years later, however, he may have been less fortunate. As I elaborate in this article, by the mid-1970s, Katongole and many of his colleagues had resigned, in the face of challenging working conditions under the government of Idi Amin (1971–79).

In referring to ‘stations like Radio Uganda’, I am interested in a much broader political context than Amin’s regime, as discussed in the next section of this article. In the 1970s, Third World states, many of them having won formal independence from European colonial powers, sought to contest the monopoly over global flows of information enjoyed by the United States, western Europe, and the Soviet Union.⁸ This happened most visibly through calls for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), developed within the structures of UNESCO. Western representatives criticized NWICO for legitimizing state repression of media through its calls for information sovereignty and ‘fair flow’ (rather than ‘free flow’), but recent research on the

³Martha’, through whom reception reports were passed according to the notes written on them, may have been the typist Miss M.T. Ssekiwano, see Engineering Department staff list for 1972/73, UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/68.

⁴Potter et al., ed., *The Wireless World*.

⁵The role of both is demonstrated, for example, in Marissa Moorman, *Powerful Frequencies: Radio, State Power, and the Cold War in Angola, 1931–2002* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019). For a critique of methodological nationalism in radio history, see Golo Föllmer and Alexander Badenoch, *Transnationalizing Radio Research: New Approaches to an Old Medium* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2017).

⁶Simon J. Potter, ‘Out of the Ether: The Wireless World and New Histories of International Radio Broadcasting’, in *The Wireless World*, 8.

⁷When I consulted files at UBC on Nile Avenue, in October–November 2021, this part of the archive was not catalogued or routinely open to the public. My access was made possible by the generosity and work of Kabaale Mubiru Muyinza Malachi in particular.

⁸I use the term Third World not as a geographical descriptor but instead to refer to the spatially and historically rooted political project on whose framework NWICO drew, in the vein of Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2008).

movement has shown that the relationship between authoritarianism, internationalism, and information was far more nuanced than these critiques allowed.⁹ These debates mattered in the workplace, I show, as well as the conference hall, even if they were differently expressed. From Radio Uganda's studios we see how the emancipatory promises of radio met with both the strong arm of the state and the reality that many citizens could not listen to Radio Uganda, given (neo) colonial regulatory regimes and underinvestment in infrastructure.

A wave of revisionist scholarship on Uganda's 1970s has already laid the groundwork for locating UBC within global histories of information, technology, and labour, by nuancing the exceptionalism that characterized older narratives of Amin's regime.¹⁰ During the 1970s and since, Western media nurtured a caricature of a brutal, sadistic, even psychotic strongman, frequently with racist, colonial embellishments of atavism or cannibalism that were sometimes endorsed by exiled Ugandan opposition politicians.¹¹ Academic scholarship had limited capacity to provide more nuanced accounts – and limited incentive, given the imperative to document the very real histories of extrajudicial murders, torture, mass expulsions, and 'disappearances' at the hands of the state. In recent decades, however, the archival collections preserved and made accessible by Ugandan institutions (like UBC) have enabled historians to qualify both the extent of rupture represented by the 1971 coup and the reach of the state thereafter.¹² Strikingly, Amin's government invested heavily in what we could call the information sector, in more multifaceted ways than the model of a propaganda machine suggests: media outlets became the primary transmitters of unanswerable government policy while an intricate infrastructure of bureaucracy supported a 'do-it-yourself' mode of local and institutional governance.¹³ The gulf between paperwork and social realities meant that some citizens – from women traders, to ethnically Asian Ugandans, to government employees – could lead lives in the 'shadow' of the military regime.¹⁴ Benefitting from this scholarship, this article takes up the invitation to treat 1970s Uganda as a case in point – rather than an exception – in the entanglements of information, internationalism, and authoritarianism.

My approach to the relationship between broadcaster and listener stems from this Ugandan context – challenging but not entirely determining – in which technicians read letters from distant

⁹Jonas Bredebach, 'A New Global Media Order? Debates and Policies on Media and Mass Communication at UNESCO 1960 to 1980' (PhD diss., European University Institute, 2019); Vanessa Freije, 'The "Emancipation of Media": Latin American Advocacy for a New International Information Order in the 1970s', *Journal of Global History* 14, no. 2 (2019): 301–20; James R. Brennan, 'The Cold War Battle over Global News in East Africa: Decolonization, the Free Flow of Information, and the Media Business, 1960–1980', *Journal of Global History* 10, no. 2 (2015): 333–56; Sarah Nelson, 'A Dream Deferred: UNESCO, American Expertise, and the Eclipse of Radical News Development in the Early Satellite Age', *Radical History Review* 2021, no. 141 (2021): 30–59.

¹⁰Contributions to 'Special Collection: Rethinking Idi Amin's Uganda', edited by Derek R. Peterson and Edgar C. Taylor, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 1 (2013): 58–182; Katherine Bruce-Lockhart, 'The Archival Afterlives of Prison Officers in Idi Amin's Uganda: Writing Social Histories of the Postcolonial State', *History in Africa* 45 (2018): 245–74.

¹¹An emblematic account is Henry Kyemba, *A State of Blood: The Inside Story of Idi Amin* (New York: ACE Books, 1977).

¹²On institutional archives, see Katherine Bruce-Lockhart and Jonathon L. Earle, 'Researching Institutional Life in Modern Uganda', *History in Africa* 45 (2018): 175–91. On UBC's visual archive, see Edgar C. Taylor et al., 'Archives of Idi Amin', *History in Africa* 48 (2021): 413–27.

¹³Derek R. Peterson and Edgar C. Taylor, 'Rethinking the State in Idi Amin's Uganda: The Politics of Exhortation', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 1 (2013): 64; Katherine Bruce-Lockhart and Riley Linebaugh, 'Coloniality and Power in Uganda's Archives', in *Decolonising State and Society in Uganda: The Politics of Knowledge and Public Life*, ed. Katherine Bruce-Lockhart, Jonathon L. Earle, and Nakanyike B. Musisi (Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2022), 197–221. On presidential decisions communicated to ministers via public radio broadcasts, see Kyemba, *A State of Blood*, 43.

¹⁴Alicia C. Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow: Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014); Anneeth Kaur Hundle, 'Exceptions to the Expulsion: Violence, Security and Community among Ugandan Asians, 1972–79', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 1 (2013): 164–82; Godfrey B. Asimwe, 'From Monopoly Marketing to Coffee Magendo: Responses to Policy Recklessness and Extraction in Uganda, 1971–79', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 1 (2013): 104–24; Mwitia Rukandema, *Uganda: Reflections of a Passing Generation* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2012), 49.

listeners. I understand the ‘world friendship’ aspirations of DXers and the realities of working life at Radio Uganda as two sides of the same coin – the coin being the wireless world of the 1970s. The second and third section of this article elaborate, respectively, upon these two ‘sides’, whose relationship has so far been little conceptualized. As Florence Brisset-Foucault has shown of radio in Uganda’s more recent past, how the technology is used to ‘affirm a connection to the world’ is intrinsically related to how state power is wielded.¹⁵ The prominent position occupied by a state broadcaster in this article may appear at odds with the direction of recent histories of radio, which have moved away from institutional studies in order to bring listeners, soundscapes, and the aural to the fore.¹⁶ Yet I share with this scholarship a fundamental aim: to show that the intentions and narratives of broadcasters had limited capacity to define the meaning of radio. I therefore offer an alternative social history of the wireless world, reframing Radio Uganda as a workplace, rather than a homogenous actor. This means taking seriously the co-production of radio technology and the worldviews of people who interacted with it, first and foremost technicians, and secondarily the listeners whose reception reports they read – a minority of whom were in Uganda.¹⁷

The post-independence radio rush

In February 1973, the Ugandan Ministry of Information held a four-week seminar on ‘The role of public relations and information in Uganda’, including presentations from Radio Uganda staff.¹⁸ It was two years since the military coup that brought Idi Amin to power and six months since his infamous expulsion of Uganda’s ethnically South Asian population.¹⁹ In terms of international diplomacy, a turning point had passed after which Amin’s regime was viewed increasingly unfavourably by many former allies and by the Western world.²⁰ This reality was not apparent in the speech of UBC’s Cosma Warugaba, soon to be director of broadcasting.²¹ Defending Radio Uganda’s transcription service, Warugaba championed a wireless internationalism based on equality and reciprocity:

The responsibilities of broadcasting within a Nation or Community, we have seen, is very obvious. But we live in a much wider Community – the World Community of Nations with which we have and must associate ourselves [. . .] You may ask me whether this is either a necessary or wise expenditure of effort and money to start telling other people about our culture, our pleasures as well as our policies [. . .] We have a duty to educate the world [. . .]

¹⁵Florence Brisset-Foucault, *Talkative Polity: Radio, Domination, and Citizenship in Uganda* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019), 15–16.

¹⁶Notably, Mhoze Chikowero, *African Music, Power, and Being in Colonial Zimbabwe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), chs. 6, 9; Edwin C. Jr. Hill, *Black Soundscapes White Stages: The Meaning of Francophone Sound in the Black Atlantic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), ch. 5; Isabel Huacuja Alonso, ‘Radio, Citizenship, and the “Sound Standards” of a Newly Independent India’, *Public Culture* 31 (2019): 117–44.

¹⁷In centring technicians in African histories of technology, I take inspiration from work including Emanuel Lukio Mchome, ‘Resilience from Below: Technicians, Repair and Maintenance Works in Post-Socialist Dar Es Salaam, 1985–2020’, *HoST - Journal of History of Science and Technology* 16, no. 1 (2022): 73–98; Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga, *What Do Science, Technology, and Innovation Mean from Africa?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017); Joshua Grace, *African Motors: Technology, Gender, and the History of Development* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

¹⁸Seminar report (1973), UBC, 1966–70 Ministry of Information, Seminars and special training courses.

¹⁹On the repercussions of the expulsion of these ‘imperial citizens’ in British and UN policy, see Ria Kapoor, ‘Race, Place, and Resettlement: The Ugandan Asians and the UNHCR after 1972’ (paper presented at ‘Making and Breaking the Global Order in the Twentieth Century’ conference, Leiden, 2022); Chibuikwe Uche, ‘The British Government, Idi Amin and the Expulsion of British Asians from Uganda’, *Interventions* 19, no. 6 (2017): 818–36.

²⁰Holger Bernt Hansen, ‘Uganda in the 1970s: A Decade of Paradoxes and Ambiguities’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 1 (2013): 87.

²¹Ian McGarrity to Cosma Warugaba, 7 March 1980, UBC, 1974–89 Ministry of Information, Commonwealth broadcasts conference secretariat.

creating international understanding and therefore international tolerance [...] There is a real need for us to advertise ourselves abroad to attract the tourist, the investor in all the economic fields, yes – but also [...] to generally let these people know more about us as an Independent People in and [sic] Independent State; as a people who have rights and duties in our own country and also in the world.²²

Warugaba's speech highlighted the ambivalent role of broadcasting technology under authoritarianism. Radio Uganda's transcription service, through which radio programmes had been exchanged with other national broadcasters since 1970, evidently needed defending.²³ This defence could draw on the principles soon to be established by NWICO: that all states should be able to contribute to the global 'flow' of information, rather than only a small 'cartel' of Cold War news agencies.²⁴ Indeed, another delegate at the conference reported that 'developing countries' at the UNESCO conference the previous year had critiqued the 'one-way traffic' that characterized the Western-liberal 'free flow' doctrine.²⁵ Warugaba appealed to notions of national pride and self-sufficiency that were reinvigorated under the auspices of Amin's so-called economic war, but it was unclear whether this aligned with Amin's vision for national media as a tool of governance. On Uganda's borders, the Tanzanian state had recently nationalized media as a 'public service' under a socialist framework, while Zaire embarked on a cultural revival campaign of *authenticité* under a military regime with ties to Apartheid South Africa.²⁶ The role of international exchanges in the making of a 'liberated' national media was not self-evident.

At Radio Uganda, these considerations predated the 1971 coup. Formed as an institution of the colonial state, Uganda Broadcasting Service (as it was then called) began transmitting programmes in English and Luganda in 1954, when Uganda was a British Protectorate.²⁷ Its technologies and propaganda principles drew on British Second World War experiences, while its senior personnel were overwhelmingly white.²⁸ At flag independence in 1962, Uganda's first democratically elected government, under Prime Minister Milton Obote, assumed responsibility for the service. It was renamed UBC but continued to operate under the direct authority of the Ministry of Information (and Broadcasting). In line with developmentalist ideals of organizations like UNESCO and parallel to the growing availability of affordable battery-powered receiving sets on the African continent, UBC emphasized the role that radio (and later television) could play in education, economic growth, and national unity, overcoming colonial underinvestment in other types of communications infrastructure, from roads and wired electricity to literacy and printing, especially in rural areas.²⁹ This trajectory, from colonial origins to (anti-colonial) nation-making echoes existing histories of broadcasting in decolonizing countries.³⁰

²²C. Warugaba, 'The transcription service as a foreign service', speech to 1973 seminar, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Seminars.

²³On the 1970 launch, see Humphreys, 'Radio Uganda Development Projects' (1969), UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Development.

²⁴Brennan, 'The Cold War Battle over Global News in East Africa'.

²⁵J. D. Turyagenda, Speech to 1973 seminar reporting on UNESCO General Conference, Paris 1972, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Seminars.

²⁶Kaarle Nordenstreng and Nkwabi Ng'wanakilala, *Tanzania and the New Information Order: A Case Study of Africa's Second Struggle* (Dar es Salaam: Printpak Tanzania, 1987), 4.

²⁷To my knowledge, no full-length institutional history of UBC has been published. A short survey is Edward M. Moyo, 'Uganda', in *Broadcasting in Africa: A Continental Survey of Radio and Television*, ed. Sydney W. Head (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 71-4.

²⁸On British colonial broadcasting, see Caroline Ritter, *Imperial Encore: The Cultural Project of the Late British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 107-32.

²⁹*Developing Information Media in Africa: Press, Radio, Film, Television* (Paris: UNESCO, 1962). On UNESCO's broader information policy in this period, see Brendebach, 'A New Global Media Order?'

³⁰Examples in the African context include Bangaly Camara, *De La 'Radio Banane' à La Voix de La Révolution: L'expérience Radiophonique En Guinée* (Paris: Harmattan Guinée, 2017); Gilbert K. M. Tietaah, Margaret I. Amoakohene, and Marquita S.

There is, however, an explicitly international and global history of Radio Uganda, which is especially apparent when read through the history of technology, and more precisely through the files preserved by Radio Uganda's engineering department. At independence, the engineering department had two priorities: first, to make its broadcasts audible to all within Ugandan borders and, second, to 'Africanize' its operations.³¹ In combination, these processes were understood to make UBC a fitting institution of the newly independent nation-state, ready to play its role in the international field. These twin projects, however, quickly encountered the structural obstacles on which NWICO would elaborate later in the 1970s.

UBC's first priority, securing national coverage, was a fundamentally international project, because it relied on international agreements for the allocation of space on the electromagnetic spectrum. Radio Uganda's problem at independence, as technical assistant Simon Kyanzi described it, was a mismatch between Radio Uganda's transmitting technologies and its listeners' receiving technologies.³² Existing shortwave broadcasts from Kampala could in theory be received across the country (and by DXers thousands of kilometres away) but could not be picked up by the cheap receiving sets accessible to most people. Meanwhile, mediumwave broadcasting only covered the vicinity of the capital. The solution was an expansion plan involving the installation of four new, higher power transmitters in locations around the country.³³ This would also help address the challenge of Uganda's multilingualism, beaming broadcasts in particular language groups at relevant regions (the programmes department were planning for broadcasts in twenty-three languages by 1972) rather than having to divide airtime or bandwidth between languages.³⁴

The expansion plan was partly dictated by a global post-independence rush for frequency allocation. The electromagnetic spectrum is a finite resource subject to competing claims; its exploitation depends on the application of certain technologies. Uganda was not the only country looking to expand its broadcasting capacities in the 1960s: just as the growth of broadcasting in interwar Europe precipitated conflicts over allocation and attempts to 'drown out' competing stations with the use of higher powered transmitters, expansion plans in post-independence African countries prompted similar debates.³⁵ International agreements on the use of frequencies were drawn up by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), where the interests of wealthy states with a longer history of membership held significant weight.³⁶ During the 1970s, engineers even cooperated across the Iron Curtain to outvote redistribution proposals by members from newly independent and non-aligned countries.³⁷

Agreements made through the ITU were a hot topic in Kampala. During the 1966 African Broadcasting Conference in Geneva, rumours circulated at Radio Uganda that it would have to abandon its expansion plan because other African countries were proposing the use of higher

Smith, 'Continuity in Change: A History of Radio for National Development', *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media* 17, no. 2 (2019): 217–34.

³¹H. F. Humphreys, 'Radio Uganda Development Projects' (1969), UBC, 1966–70 Ministry of Information, Development.

³²Simon Kyanzi, Application for training in the United Kingdom (1972), 1966–70 Ministry of Information, S Kyanzi.

³³Humphreys, 'Radio Uganda Development Projects' (1969), UBC, 1966–70 Ministry of Information, Development; Moyo, 'Uganda', 71–2.

³⁴For discussions on the language challenge, 'Achievements of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting during 1972' (1973), UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/108; Report by seven Programmes staff to Ministry of Information (1973), Ministry of Information 1972–73, ARC/09. See also Moyo, 'Uganda', 72–3.

³⁵On the European debate, see Suzanne Lommers, *Europe – on Air: Interwar Projects for Radio Broadcasting* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), ch. 3.

³⁶On ITU in the context of (post)imperial information politics, see Sarah Nelson, 'Networking Empire: International Organizations, American Power, and the Struggle over Global Communications in the 20th Century' (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2021). For an overview of the ITU, see James G. Savage, *The Politics of International Telecommunication Regulation* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989).

³⁷Christian Henrich-Franke, 'Cross-Curtain Radio Cooperation and New International Alignments during the Cold War', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16, no. 4 (2014): 110–32.

powered transmitters, which would produce interference.³⁸ Uganda was represented in Geneva by Radio Uganda's Chief Engineer, Herbert Frederick Humphreys, one of several non-Ugandans holding senior positions in the organization after independence. Humphreys reported that the conference was 'heading for troubled waters' because some countries (he named Egypt, Ethiopia, Congo, and Sudan) were demanding an unrealistic number of broadcasting channels using high power transmitters, with 'meagre regard for their neighbours'.³⁹

The diplomacy of wireless internationalism was thus an existential issue for Radio Uganda. The formal multilateralism of the ITU was paralleled and shaped by international broadcasting associations without comparable regulatory powers. UBC was, at certain moments during the post-independence decades, a member of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA), the Union of National Radio and Television Organisations of Africa (URTNA), and the Broadcasting Organizations of the Non-aligned Countries (BONAC), all of which promoted bilateral exchange and co-production of programmes, joint training schemes, and engineering symposia.⁴⁰

However, UBC's participation in both multilateral diplomacy and bilateral exchanges relied on the Ministry of Information having capacity to send delegates to relevant meetings and administer correspondence – a fact sometimes weaponized by wealthy states.⁴¹ Humphreys complained that an invitation to a 1969 URTNA meeting in Dakar had been lost in the workings of the Ministry, meaning Uganda was not represented in ongoing discussions about allocation and plans to work with the ITU to apply for UN funds for a pan-African training centre.⁴² Moreover, there was often a technological threshold to full participation in international exchanges. In the late 1960s, All India Radio, through CBA, proposed the exchange of reception reports between members – these reports were an important source of knowledge about where and how clearly a broadcast could be heard, given that broadcasting in the tropics was subject to unique geo-technical characteristics.⁴³ Radio Uganda replied that it could not participate because it lacked the high frequency receiving facilities necessary for producing regular reports.⁴⁴

Despite the challenges of frequency allocation on an uneven international playing field, the expansion plan was largely operational by the time Amin assumed power in 1971. The larger listenership that the new transmitters granted paved the way for Amin's use of radio to issue directives and demand compliance.⁴⁵ Amin's repression of independent media is well-acknowledged: his regime was responsible for the murder of high profile journalists, while less dangerous professional pursuits like sports journalism flourished.⁴⁶ It was precisely such practices

³⁸On the conference, *Final Acts of the African LF/MF Broadcasting Conference* (Geneva: ITU, 1966). On the rumours, Humphreys to 'Eric' [nd, 1966], UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, African LF/MF conference.

³⁹Humphreys, confidential report on 1966 conference, 29 June 1966, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, African LF/MF conference.

⁴⁰For example, questionnaire from URTNA Secretary General Ahmed Hosni Antar, 19 January 1970, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, URTNA; Lists of programme exchanges through URTNA in the 1980s, UBC, 1974-89 Ministry of Information, URTNA general; Correspondence from BONAC (Yugoslavia) for 1980s, UBC, 1974-89 Ministry of Information, Non Aligned Countries; Correspondence around 1972 Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference in Nairobi and its planning as a co-hosted East African conference, UBC, unmarked box.

⁴¹Nelson, 'Networking Empire', 395.

⁴²Humphreys to URTNA Secretary General, 8 October 1969; Mohamed Mili, URTNA circular on ITU/URTNA Seminar on Radio and Television Technics in Africa, both in UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, CCIR EBU URTNA.

⁴³Sydney W. Head, *Broadcasting in Africa: A Continental Survey of Radio and Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 8.

⁴⁴Humphreys to R. Raghavachari, 6 February 1967, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Foreign Broadcasting Organisations.

⁴⁵Increased listenership (without figures) cited in 'Achievements of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting during 1972' (1973), UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/108; on Amin's use of media, Peterson and Taylor, 'Rethinking the State in Idi Amin's Uganda', 65-7.

⁴⁶Zie Gariyo, *The Media, Constitutionalism, and Democracy in Uganda* (Kampala: Centre for Basic Research, 1993), 33-4.

that (for some observers) undermined NWICO's calls for newly independent states to play a greater role in the global information economy. Although Amin was not known as a spokesperson for NWICO, he was present at landmark meetings, such as (alongside his ally, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi) the 1973 Algiers summit of heads of states of the Non-Aligned Movement, where the principle of mass communication as a battlefield for the politics of decolonization was laid down.⁴⁷

At an institutional level, meanwhile, Radio Uganda's engagement with global information politics was discussed by staff with more diverse visions for the role of a state broadcaster. The completion of the expansion plan allowed Radio Uganda to return to other priorities, from seminars like those mentioned above to the launch of an external service in 1975. The other part of the post-independence agenda, Africanization, received new impetus. Africanization had been a topic of planning estimates, reports, speeches and policy statements since the 1950s, in Uganda as elsewhere on the continent, its meaning flexible enough to embrace a plethora of political projects.⁴⁸ At UBC, it sometimes referred to the replacement of 'non-Ugandan' staff, an ever-ambiguous process, dependant on interpretations of race and citizenship, that accelerated after Obote's 1969 Immigration Act and culminated with Amin's expulsion of ethnic South Asians in mid-1972. The engineering staff of the mid 1970s included only a handful of individuals who had been marked as non-citizens in 1969.⁴⁹

Africanization at Radio Uganda was also a cultural project, mirroring the concerns that would animate NWICO and be inscribed in the 1980 Yaoundé Declaration on African communication.⁵⁰ In 1973, the same year that Warugaba defended the transcription service, the Ministry of Information commissioned seven Radio Uganda employees to report on the progress made in Africanizing broadcasting content.⁵¹ The authors concluded that 'Radio Uganda [had] already gone local'. They argued that 'foreign programmes that still appear[ed] [were] essential e.g. those from the United Nations' and they even recommended a new programme, 'Trotting around the world', containing 'items and extracts from programmes we get from abroad', through bilateral exchanges and the transcription service.⁵² These employees declared themselves committed to the Africanization agenda, but for them, like for Warugaba, this meant an engagement with international exchanges on equal terms, rather than a withdrawal. Undeterred by the report, in June 1974, Amin banned foreign newspapers and magazines; the transcription service faltered around the same time.⁵³

The challenges of participating in international exchanges of programmes and training grew as the 1970s progressed, as the paucity of correspondence, invitations, and newsletters in the UBC archive attests. International travel for Ugandan civil servants was at the mercy of Amin's political whims, even when money could be found in the budgets of the ministry or international organizations, severely tightened in the aftermath of the oil shock. Participation in core ITU events continued: F. X. B. Katende (who replaced Humphreys as Chief Engineer in 1972) represented Uganda at the 1976 ITU African Broadcasting Conference, for example, continuing to call out states that sought to dominate frequency allocation, in this case a proposal for a British transmitter

⁴⁷Brendebach, 'A New Global Media Order?', 387–90.

⁴⁸On Africanization of broadcasting in former British colonies, see Ritter, *Imperial Encore*, 115.

⁴⁹A memorandum on the 1969 Immigration Act to engineering staff lists fifteen employees who are not Ugandan citizens, including Humphreys. An assessment of names suggests that most had South Asian heritage, several with Portuguese (likely Goan) names. Only one of these, Farouk Malik, appears in archival files during the late 1970s. See memorandum from Chief Engineer to all staff, 29 December 1969, UBC, 1966–70 Ministry of Information, G. S. Stamper.

⁵⁰Yaoundé Declaration, adopted by the Intergovernmental Conference on Communication Policies in Africa (UNESCO, 1980). On NWICO and cultural production, see Diana Lemberg, *Barriers Down: How American Power and Free-Flow Policies Shaped Global Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 152–77.

⁵¹Report by seven Programmes staff to Ministry of Information (1973), UBC, Ministry of Information 1972–73, ARC/09.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³Kyemba, *A State of Blood*, 265. I am unable to establish the date that the transcription service ended, prior to its 1978 relaunch.

in Cyprus.⁵⁴ But bilateral cooperation suffered: when Radio Uganda looked to revive its participation in BONAC, URTNA, and CBA in 1979–80, its representative stated that it was ‘regrettable [...] that unfavourable political climate prevented Radio Uganda from active participation in recent years’.⁵⁵ By this time, with NWICO preparing its authoritative statement in UNESCO, some of the movement’s early pioneers, now exiled from US-backed dictatorships in Latin America, were doubting that state-level ‘South-South’ cooperation could emancipate global media systems if these states did not share their own vision for equality.⁵⁶

The 1975 launch of UBC’s external service, intended explicitly for listeners abroad, does not neatly map onto this apparent isolationist turn.⁵⁷ Nor is it necessarily surprising: the transcription service was relaunched in 1978 to ‘counteract the hostile publicity’ directed at the regime, shortly before the United States imposed sanctions on Uganda.⁵⁸ The external service had a longer history in the engineering department, with plans discussed since at least 1965; external services were long standing features of national broadcasters from the BBC and Voice of America, to All India Radio and Radio Ghana. A proposal was submitted to Obote in 1965, costed at £600,000, but instead all available funds were channelled into the expansion plan.⁵⁹ With the expansion complete, Katende, the new Chief Engineer under Amin, revived the external service project: it would require the construction of studios, office blocks, and staff housing, agreements with the Uganda Electricity Board for the provision of water and power to the new site, and an estimated fifty-three employees to operate it.⁶⁰ In February 1974, Radio Uganda signed an agreement with the Swiss company Brown Bovari, who were tied to large scale infrastructural projects including dams and oil mines across Africa and the Middle East, for the supply of the necessary transmitting equipment.⁶¹ Three Radio Uganda engineers accompanied the Minister of Information to Switzerland, briefed to ‘prepare [themselves] technically’ to advise the minister in his negotiations with Brown Bovari.⁶² The service went live that year, faced with staff shortages and a severely restrained budget.⁶³

The authors of the 1973 report on Africanization concluded the following: ‘Radio Uganda has arrived at a turning-point in its history. Its pace is to some extent dictated by events in it, in Africa and the rest of the world. [...] we may at times have to compromise between the ideal and the practical[,] basing ourselves on the availability of resources.’⁶⁴ The prioritization of the expansion plan put Radio Uganda – before and after the 1971 coup – in a double bind common to many ‘new’ national broadcasters. Bilateral cooperation between broadcasters in decolonizing states had the potential to strengthen calls for a fairer distribution of the electromagnetic spectrum and a fairer contribution to the information produced and circulated globally. But not only did this require resources that were being directed at the consolidation of national coverage, it also only

⁵⁴*Final Acts of the Regional Administrative LF/MF Broadcasting Conference, Regions 1 and 3, Geneva, 1975*, (Geneva: International Telecommunication Union, 1976).

⁵⁵Quotation, on CBA, in J.C. Sserwadda to Ministry of Information, 23 August 1979, UBC, 1974–89 Ministry of Information, Commonwealth broadcasts conference secretariat. Similarly, Gbade Ishola (Nigerian Television Authority) circular on training, 7 November 1980, UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/111; C. Warugaba, request to renew URTNA membership, 31 March 1979, UBC, 1974–89 Ministry of Information, URTNA general.

⁵⁶Freije, ‘The “Emancipation of Media”’, 316–18.

⁵⁷The launch of the service is commended in Moyo, ‘Uganda’, 72.

⁵⁸Warugaba to Ministry of Information, 4 May 1978, 1974–89 Ministry of Information, Complaints.

⁵⁹Humphreys, ‘Radio Uganda Development Projects’ (1969), UBC, 1966–70 Ministry of Information, Development.

⁶⁰Katende to Treasury, 30 September 1974, UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/111; Katende to Director of Engineering, 9 January 1974, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972–73, External Broadcasting Agreement.

⁶¹Copy of 1974 agreement, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972–73, External Broadcasting Agreement.

⁶²Emojong to Katende, 14 August 1974, UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/68.

⁶³Memorandum from Programme production department to the President (1978), UBC, 1974–89 Ministry of Information, Proposal (development). It is unclear how far the service was able to overcome these challenges, but the report suggests it was still functional by 1978.

⁶⁴Report by seven Programmes staff to Ministry of Information (1973), UBC, Ministry of Information 1972–73, ARC/09.

partly overcame the unequal regulatory regimes governing frequency allocation – allocation that was *itself a prerequisite* for the success of national expansion plans.

Greetings from a staunch listener

Responding to the reception reports of DXers in the early 1970s was, then, consistent with the efforts of Radio Uganda employees to secure their institution's place in the wireless world, rather than an aberration from a nationalist agenda. The exchange of reception reports went hand in hand with the pursuit of national coverage and the maintenance of international broadcasting agreements: a minority of filed reception reports, distinct from those of DXers, came from listeners in Northern Uganda responding to requests for information after the installation of the new transmitter; in another folder, copies of Katende's reports detailing reception of Indian and Nigerian external services in 1972–3 were stored.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, the two files of around 200 reception reports preserved by Radio Uganda are remarkable.⁶⁶ Over the twelve months from mid-1971 to mid-1972, in the aftermath of a military coup and the economic and political uncertainties that quickly became apparent (especially for Ugandans of certain ethnic and political allegiances, as well as resident non-citizens), Radio Uganda employees read, responded to, and filed hundreds of letters from at times oblivious correspondents. Sometimes written on templates from a local DXing association, they included illustrations, postcards, and photographs of DXers' prized receiving sets. A typical letter from Sweden in mid-1972 described over two typewritten pages the life of the twenty-nine year old listener, married to a 'beautiful girl', in a village of 8,000 inhabitants in Skåne, where he worked an export salesman of chemical products for a company that had once sold pharmaceutical components to Uganda, signing off 'best wishes (73s) to all of you down there in Africa'.⁶⁷ To the attached description of a religious broadcast, Jabbery Katongole responded: 'The frequency is quite correct, but at this time of day Radio Uganda is off the air'.⁶⁸

At first glance, the letter tells us about an individual DXer but, as a collection, this correspondence offers a stark window onto the unequal structures of the wireless world, as this section explains. The most interesting reports, for the purpose of this article, are those where a technician has written their response on the received report itself, in the margins or wherever space is found. These notes formed the basis of Martha's typed replies. The files thus present two sides of distant listening correspondence – Radio Uganda's responses would otherwise be scattered in personal papers of recipients, with limited significance as individual historical documents (albeit with past significance for the DXing recipient). We can thus establish the profile of distant listeners from the sample these folders provide: the majority lived in Sweden, Finland and West Germany, with smaller numbers writing from Japan, Italy, Poland, the United Kingdom, Austria, the United States, Switzerland, East Germany, Greece, and South Africa; they included students and middle-aged factory workers, urban and rural; they were exclusively male.⁶⁹ This is a global archive of DXing in which Radio Uganda is at the centre.

⁶⁵Including Lucy Apaco (Gulu) to Chief Engineer [nd, 1972]; Cyclic Opinyo Dradebo (Kilembe) to Chief Engineer, 30 May 1972; Lawrence Obonyo-Pata (Pakwoch) to Chief Engineer, 18 April 1972, all in UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports. On India and Nigeria, see Katende to R.N. Srivastava (All India Radio), 1 February 1973; Katende to O. Soetan (Broadcasting House Lagos), 18 September 1972.

⁶⁶The two files are labelled 'Reception reports' and 'Local reception reports', in two separate boxes, both labelled Ministry of Information 1972-73. Reports from distant listeners appear in both folders, contrary to the description 'local'; the folders contain around 200 reports, of which only 10 are from within Uganda, including the only identifiable woman listener.

⁶⁷Jan-Erik Järlebarke (Sweden) to Uganda Broadcasting Service, 2 June 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports. '73' was a sign-off in amateur radio.

⁶⁸*Ibid.* Underlining in original.

⁶⁹On DXing and gender, see Nevradakis, 'Disembodied Voices and Dislocated Signals', 72.

Three people are identifiable as having carried out the labour of reading the reception reports and checking them against the log book: Jabbery Kantongole, A. Senabulya, and Amos Bake.⁷⁰ These men were employees of varying seniority in Radio Uganda's engineering department, working under the chief engineer (Humphreys until 1972, then Katende); all three had attended a CBA studio operations course in Accra in 1970.⁷¹ To what extent they undertook the task gladly or were obliged to as part of their duties is difficult to establish, but certainly they read the reports with enough care to respond to cases individually, rather than with a generic reply. Senabulya's responses were variations on: 'It's quite correct that the station this gentleman listened to was actually Radio Uganda'.⁷² Sometimes the technicians found the information too 'scanty' to assess, or asked for clarification: 'is it East African Time or GMT?'.⁷³ When a technician found the report to be incorrect they added details of what *had* been broadcast: 'during that period no music was played. The station transmitted vernacular news and Magazine of the Air in English'.⁷⁴ When a Finnish listener described hearing a French-language broadcast, Katongole suggested that this was more likely from Zaire, Rwanda, or Burundi, than Uganda.⁷⁵ Indeed, Radio Uganda responded more often than DXers expected: one listener who received a negative reply wrote that 'in such a case, most radio stations simply do not answer'.⁷⁶ Kantongole, Senabulya, and Bake repeatedly engaged with DXers on the terms through which the DXing world functioned, where listening to and identifying transmissions was a worthwhile end in itself.

And yet the unevenness of the wireless world was built into 1970s DXing. A verification or QSL card qualified as 'rare' – and thus valuable – by dint of few DXers in the community having received such a verification, either because they struggled to hear and identify a station, or because the broadcaster was unresponsive to requests. DXers' capacity to hear cost leisure time, skills, and equipment, while the audibility of a station depended on the broadcaster's location and the strength of its transmitting technology. This meant that broadcasters without a dedicated external service and with limited capacity, in terms of transmitting technology and staff to verify reports, were among those sought out most enthusiastically by DXers. Radio Uganda, like many other broadcasters in newly independent states in the tropics, fitted this description.

The point is not to pass judgement on the ethics of distant listening, but to recognize the ways in which DXing culture was embedded in the structures of the decolonizing world. The files of reception reports contain echoes of imperial collection and appropriation practices – whether of tourist souvenirs, safari trophies, or plant samples. It was commonplace for letters from DXers to Radio Uganda to state how many countries and stations they had already 'bagged' – often over two hundred stations from over fifty countries. Katongole, Bake, and Senabulya read this structural condition in the reports they received: 'the verification of Radio Uganda is very rare in Germany and I would be very proud to own such a QSL!'; 'Radio Uganda is my fourth station from Africa'; 'I particularly enjoy listening to stations located in Asia, Africa [sic] and the Near East. As stations in those parts of the world are hard to receive and thus only infrequently listened to in Europe'.⁷⁷

⁷⁰Katongole began working for Radio Uganda in 1961, see staff file, UBC, 1955-60, Katongole. Bake and Senabulya are both listed on the 1972/73 Staff List, UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/68.

⁷¹Memo from Chief Engineer, 4 August 1970; undated report from course instructors, both in UBC, 1955-60, Katongole.

⁷²Theodosios Vaharis (Thessaloniki) to Chief Engineer, 26 June 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports.

⁷³Uwe [surname illegible] to Radio Uganda, date illegible [1972], UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports; Willy Andersson (Kalmar) to Radio Uganda, 4 May 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Reception reports.

⁷⁴Hans-Joachim Theil (Siegen) to Radio Uganda, 30 June 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports.

⁷⁵Jarmo Sorvari (Tampere) to Radio Uganda, 4 June 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports.

⁷⁶Albert Kosnopfel (Böhmenkirch) to Chief Engineer, 27 June 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports.

⁷⁷Mayer (Bisingen) to Radio Uganda, 9 July 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports; Hannu Torikka to Radio Uganda, 18 December 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Reception reports; Uwe Lippert

Simultaneously, the reports of DXers contained the very promises of cultural exchange, of a 'fair flow' of information from Uganda to wealthy countries that Radio Uganda employees (like Warugaba) and NWICO proponents advocated. Katongole, Bake, and Senabulya frequently read letters from men who described themselves as regular or even 'staunch' listeners.⁷⁸ According to the files of reception reports, they tuned in, above all, for the music. One particularly enthusiastic student from Italy described: 'African rithmys [sic] played with African instruments and sing [sic] by Africans voices. I like very much this music!!!!!!'.⁷⁹ A more cautious listener in West Germany wrote: 'Everytime [sic] I think African music shall sound very terrible for European ears but it is not so'.⁸⁰ Radio Uganda was providing something that many European listeners could not otherwise access: 'Stations in these countries sometimes broadcast your music but it is not as good as that broadcast by your stations'.⁸¹

These listeners might, then, have welcomed Amin's 1973 directive to make the station 'more Ugandan', but the programmes staff who authored the Africanization report were less sure: 'Although we agree with the concept of going local, we consider that though African Music should dominate, a percentage of other kinds of music of European origin be allowed on the air especially music of English origin'.⁸² Reception reports from listeners closer to home attested to mixed preferences: a listener in Nakuru (Kenya), who could hear Radio Uganda's broadcasts better than those from Nairobi, enjoyed hearing songs by Jim Reeves; another in Ngeza (Tanzania) commended the Congolese music played; one in Mukono (Central Uganda) requested songs by the Morogoro Jazz Band; a listener in Kakumiro (Western Uganda) promised regular reception reports in return for music that was 'up-to-date'.⁸³ In contrast, DXers displayed in their enthusiasm the uneven knowledge that stemmed from the dominance of Western cultural products in the wireless world. They described 'African music', sometimes using adjectives like 'traditional' or 'folk', while naming Western pop songs in detail ('Simon and Garfunkel song: "The Sound of Silence"').⁸⁴

The unevenness of knowledge exchange in a world of 'free flow' extended to DXers' comments on Ugandan politics and economics. Katongole, Bake, and Senabulya saw that listeners were by no means dismissive of Radio Uganda's content. One report – among the few from listeners in East Germany – gave a positive assessment of broadcasts in the early Amin years: 'I find your programmes fairly versatile, for you deal with any problems of everyday life, culture, politics, economy, history, etc. Your programs help widen my knowledge of the life in, and the advancement of, your country'.⁸⁵ Most distant listeners did not hear programmes in detail, however, and so Radio Uganda staff frequently read descriptions of their own news bulletins – based on wires from 'cartel' agencies like Reuters – relayed through the snippets that were easiest for listeners to grasp: 'Europa... President... Soviet Union... United States... Vietnam... city... Nixon... news... office-service... corporation... China... Tansania [sic]...

(Frietal) to Radio Uganda [1972], UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports. On this aspect of the culture, see Nevradakis, 'Disembodied Voices and Dislocated Signals', 69.

⁷⁸Uwe Lippert (Frietal) to Radio Uganda [1972], UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports. See also Taisto Saarela (Helsinki) to Radio Uganda [1972]; Frank Helmbold (Hamm) to Radio Uganda, 6 July 1972, both in UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports.

⁷⁹Miko Montanari (Vigevano) reception report, 12 February 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Reception reports.

⁸⁰Uwe Andreas (Gelsenkirchen) reception report, 2 July 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Reception reports.

⁸¹Bo Göran Eriksson (Western Finland) to Radio Uganda, 5 June 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports.

⁸²Report by seven Programmes staff to Ministry of Information (1973), UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, ARC/09.

⁸³Johnson Ondengo (Nakuru) to Chief Engineer, 22 April 1972; Marcus Maganga to Chief Engineer, 15 April 1972; J. Nchimbi to Chief Engineer, 6 June 1972; James Uyana (Kakumiro) to Chief Engineer, 18 May 1972, all in UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports.

⁸⁴Lars Winberg to Radio Uganda [1972], UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports.

⁸⁵Uwe Lippert (Frietal) to Radio Uganda [1972], UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports.

Libya . . . oil' (technician response: 'the report is O.K.').⁸⁶ These generic inventories of the Cold War global circulated through the wireless world, but they were not 'Ugandan' in the way Warugaba described.

True to the 'one-way traffic' that Radio Uganda employees observed in the global circulation of information, listeners rarely showed awareness of (or sympathy with) news from Uganda.⁸⁷ Sometimes Amin's name featured in summarized programme descriptions, and in one exceptional case a listener explained why he (and perhaps others) were interested in Uganda: 'When General Idi Amin made usurpation of power in the autumn 1970 [sic] we could hear commentaries of Radio Uganda in our TV-news, because there (at Finlands TV) were a dx'er [sic] who listened every evening your programme and at that time every Finnish known about existence of Radio Uganda.'⁸⁸ The report was signed off as 'generally true' and this applied to the story too: the coup took place in January 1971. While the Finnish listener recalled Radio Uganda producing news of the coup, Radio Uganda's own employees recalled obtaining this information through the BBC: journalist J.C. Sserwadda Sempiri, realizing that filler music was being played at Radio Uganda, went to the home of his engineer colleague Katongole, where he learnt of the coup by listening to the BBC's external service on Katongole's radio.⁸⁹

Annotated reception reports give us glimpses of the technicians' frustration with the ignorance of distant listeners. On one report a listener in Sweden wrote: 'You closed the station with a national song I think'. In the margin, Katongole corrected 'Uganda's National Anthem'.⁹⁰ A listener in West Germany described 'a speech (mentioning often Uganda – military authorities . . . prosperity and economy)', to which Bake specified 'The Programme was the President [talking] to the West Nile Elders'.⁹¹ Whether these comments were evidence of professional commitment or national defiance, the limits of the technicians' time or patience appear in the lack of responses to frequent (often blunt) requests for information about Uganda and Kampala: 'Which is your economy based on?' asked one listener, 'Are you always exporting much coffee?'⁹²

There were immediate technical barriers to communication between DXers and Radio Uganda technicians. Language, as the quotations above suggest, was a problem. While the use of European languages on many African radio stations made them relatively accessible to international DXers, listeners could not describe large sections of Radio Uganda's multilingual programmes, prompting descriptions like: 'male speaker spoke in some vernacular or very bad English'.⁹³ The standard of English in letters from DXers – mainly non-native speakers in this sample – was inferior to that of the Ugandan technicians (who were fluent in at least English and one Ugandan language).⁹⁴ Reports sent in German did not receive replies.⁹⁵ Similarly, translation between technologies stalled the verification of reception reports. When listeners sent cassette tapes with recordings of

⁸⁶Taisto Saarela (Helsinki) to Radio Uganda, 21 May 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Reception reports.

⁸⁷On 'one-way traffic', Turyagenda, Speech to 1973 seminar. An impression of how Uganda Radio narrated Ugandan politics can be obtained from *Summary of World Broadcasts: Non-Arab Africa* (Reading: British Broadcasting Corporation Monitoring Service, 1973).

⁸⁸Heikki Pulkka (Iisalmi) to Chief Engineer, 8 June 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Reception reports.

⁸⁹Radio Uganda and history through Sempiri's eyes', *Daily Monitor*, 10 May 2015, at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/lifestyle/reviews-profiles/radio-uganda-and-history-through-sempiri-s-eyes-1610488> [accessed 23 June 2023].

⁹⁰Lars-Erik Fernström (Sweden) to Radio Uganda, June 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Reception reports. Underlining in original.

⁹¹Rüdiger Häckel (Kiel) to Radio Uganda, 7 July 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports.

⁹²Rödel (Bürchau) to Radio Uganda, 8 June 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports.

⁹³Heikki Pulkka (Iisalmi) to Chief Engineer, 8 June 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Reception reports.

⁹⁴English was the lingua franca for the sample of correspondence and reports in UBC files, although templates used by DXers in West Germany contained section headings in English, German, and Spanish, to increase intelligibility for the receiving station.

⁹⁵Günter Bischoff (Stuttgart) reception report, 13 May 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Reception reports.

what they had heard, Katongole replied that he had no way of playing the format of the enclosed tape, but would retain it for when the means were available at Radio Uganda.⁹⁶

As a window onto an unexplored aspect of the wireless world, these reception reports are rife with the ambivalence, contradiction, and ambiguity of interaction between listener and broadcaster. I am unable to say whether the practice of receiving, responding to, and filing reception reports only began in 1971 (perhaps due to interest in the results of the newly installed transmitters) or if it ended after mid-1972 (perhaps with the change of Chief Engineer from Humphreys to Katende).⁹⁷ There is much that cannot be known from these folders, not least what motivated Katongole, Senabulya, and Bake to reply to DXers, and how they interpreted the enthusiasm, curiosity, and ignorance they read. But certainly the exchange would have increased the technicians' awareness of the structures that NWICO sought to challenge. To better understand the labour of verifying reception reports, I locate this labour, in the final section of this article, within Radio Uganda as a workplace, drawing on personnel files and meeting minutes to reconstruct how the working life in the engineering department changed as the 1970s unfolded.

Shortages, training, and morale

It is possible that Radio Uganda lacked the wo/manpower to respond to DXers by the mid-1970s. The engineering department staff list of December 1972 listed twenty-six vacant posts alongside 124 employees (including Bake and Senabulya, but not the more senior Katongole): it was missing one sixth of its workforce, mainly in senior roles, including that of Chief Engineer (Katende was soon to fill the post).⁹⁸ The situation did not improve over the following years: by November 1979, seven months after Idi Amin fled into exile, marking the end of the 1978-79 Uganda-Tanzania war, a senior employee told the Ministry of Information that Radio Uganda was 'operating at the verge of total collapse'.⁹⁹ The challenges faced by Radio Uganda in the 1970s were not entirely new, however, nor were they unique to Uganda – in some ways they were archetypal of the 1970s. The price rises and commodity shortages felt in non-oil-producing countries after the oil shock of 1973 were already commonplace in Uganda following the departure of 'non-Ugandan' factory owners the previous year.¹⁰⁰ Amin's coup came in the wake of a handful of comparable events on the African continent in the late 1960s, from Algeria to Congo, and foreshadowed military coups in Latin America in the 1970s, all of which fostered a growing global disillusionment in the promises of 'development', whether along socialist or capitalist lines.¹⁰¹

For Radio Uganda technicians, the challenges of the 1970s were partly felt through stymied professional ambitions, neither pre-determined by the global and Ugandan contexts nor apart from them. An illustrative case, Simon Kyanzi began working for Radio Uganda in a junior technical role in 1966, aged twenty-five, with hopes for rewarding opportunities as the post-independence state invested in skilled Ugandan workers. In 1971, he claimed that his 'interest and morale [were] at their lowest as a result of long frustration' relating to 'conditions of service'.¹⁰² He

⁹⁶Manfred Scholz to Radio Uganda, 20 June 1972, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Local reception reports.

⁹⁷Humphreys notes that Radio Uganda's shortwave broadcasting is not powerful enough for external reception, in Humphreys to URTNA, 30 September 1967, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, URTNA. A Finnish DXer claimed that the 1000-strong membership of the Helsinki DXing association had around 100 verifications from Radio Uganda by mid-1971, see Tapani Laitinen to Radio Uganda, 12 July 1971, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Reception reports.

⁹⁸Engineering Department staff list for 1972/73, UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/68.

⁹⁹Sserwadda, report on Rugaba broadcast, 25 November 1979, 1974-89 Ministry of Information, Religious broadcasts.

¹⁰⁰On African responses to the oil shock, see Emily Brownell, 'Reterritorializing the Future: Writing Environmental Histories of the Oil Crisis from Tanzania', *Environmental History* 27 (2022): 747-71.

¹⁰¹Jean Allman, 'The Fate of All of Us: African Counterrevolutions and the Ends of 1968', *The American Historical Review* 123, no. 3 (2018): 728-34.

¹⁰²Kyanzi to Ministry of Public Service and Chief Engineer, 24 February 1971, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Simon Kyanzi.

had recently taken up employment with a private company, International Computers, alongside his Radio Uganda job, without the knowledge of either employer, because he considered his Radio Uganda salary insufficient to support his family.¹⁰³ When his double employment was discovered, he was accused of ‘deceitfulness’, and he resigned.¹⁰⁴ But his resignation was refused. Kyanzi was, according to the Chief Engineer, a ‘first class Technician who knows his market value in this technically denuded sector’ and so Kyanzi was (belatedly, in his view) promoted to Senior Technical Assistant.¹⁰⁵ In 1972, he was selected to train with the BBC in London, made plans for a course with the electronics company Philips in the Netherlands, and in mid-1973, undertook a study tour of the Philips factory in Nairobi.¹⁰⁶ But six months later, Kyanzi resigned again. His resignation letter stated that he had ‘failed to make progress fitting [his] experience and qualifications’.¹⁰⁷ The final straw was that somebody less skilled had been promoted to supervise him: ‘my continued stay does not only embarrass [sic] my superiors but also embarrasses [sic] me’. He was rumoured to have found employment at another private firm, Associated Sound Productions.¹⁰⁸

Kyanzi’s story raises three important issues: the labour market, training, and morale. All of these depended on Radio Uganda’s embeddedness in international exchanges, especially within the East African region. Throughout the 1960s, Radio Uganda struggled to recruit the numbers of suitably qualified people it hoped to. As explained in the first part of this article, UBC was expanding its services at the same time as removing ‘non-Ugandan’ personnel, so vacancies were created on both fronts. The situation was shared elsewhere in the decolonizing world: ‘manpower’ forecasting came to be a major component of the five or ten year economic plans drawn up by governments with ambitions for large-scale extension of public services and hopes for an indigenous and highly skilled workforce who had previously been excluded from senior posts.¹⁰⁹ Obote and Amin both sought to oversee recruitment to public bodies, like UBC, through planning and recruitment embargoes.¹¹⁰

Radio Uganda recruited actively and regionally, but with limited success. Its 1968 recruitment drive at Makerere University College in Kampala saw twenty candidates interviewed but only one eventually employed, although there were nineteen graduate vacancies.¹¹¹ This was despite UBC offering vacation work to students and conditional contracts ahead of graduation.¹¹² To improve recruitment, the 1969 drive was targeted internationally: Makerere was, at the time, one of three sister colleges in the University of East Africa, so representatives were sent to its partners too.¹¹³ Regional integration in East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania) was supposed to benefit national labour markets by pooling resources for specialized training and facilitating trade and mobility – including through study tours to the Voice of Kenya or the Philips factory in Nairobi

¹⁰³Humphreys to Permanent Secretary, 2 December 1970, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Simon Kyanzi.

¹⁰⁴Kyanzi to Ministry of Public Service and Chief Engineer, 24 February 1971, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Simon Kyanzi.

¹⁰⁵Humphreys to Permanent Secretary, 2 December 1970, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Simon Kyanzi.

¹⁰⁶Kyanzi to Chief Engineer, 3 February 1973; Kyanzi, report on Nairobi study tour, 28 June 1972, both in UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Simon Kyanzi.

¹⁰⁷Kyanzi to Chief engineer, 23 November 1973, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Simon Kyanzi.

¹⁰⁸Katende to Permanent Secretary, January 1974, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Simon Kyanzi.

¹⁰⁹Valeska Huber, ‘Planning Education and Manpower in the Middle East, 1950s–60s’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 1 (2017): 95–117.

¹¹⁰Humphreys to Ministry of Information, 8 July 1968; Katende to Treasurer ‘Lift of embargo’, 30 September 1974, both in UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Recruitment.

¹¹¹Humphreys to Ministry of Information, 8 July 1968, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Recruitment.

¹¹²Katende to Director of Engineering, 15 March 1974, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Engineering copies.

¹¹³C. B. Widgery (Public Services Commission) circular, 22 November 1969, UBC, 1974-89 Ministry of Information, Recruitment.

(like that of Kyanzi).¹¹⁴ Under Amin, the recruitment drive at Makerere continued, but *regional* recruitment became increasingly difficult: the University of East Africa had split into its three constituent parts in 1970, mainly at Uganda's request.¹¹⁵ Regional integration even began to appear detrimental to the Ugandan labour market: between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s, tens of Radio Uganda employees resigned to take up posts in the institutions of the East African Community (EAC), notably in aviation or meteorology, 'in search of better terms of service'.¹¹⁶ Many moved to, and stayed in, Nairobi; at least one employee moved to the Voice of Kenya directly.¹¹⁷ The EAC disintegrated in 1977, Tanzania having never formally recognized Amin's government.

This was also a global story. Like all state institutions in East Africa, UBC competed with private firms that offered considerably higher salaries, as Kyanzi's case hinted: in 1969 Humphreys accused one company of 'recruiting [his engineering] staff by backdoor methods' and asked the Ministry to reform the salary grade structure to stop the 'brain-drain' from gaining impetus.¹¹⁸ Reform was not forthcoming and the 1973 Salary Commission concluded that unless salaries across UBC were increased, Radio Uganda would be unable to 'cope with the modern technological advances in the broadcasting world'.¹¹⁹ Amin styled his economic war as a challenge to the power wielded by private firms that were foreign owned or backed by foreign capital, but the expulsion of 'non-citizens' exacerbated the recruitment challenge – Katongole left to 'join business' following 'the President's appeal'.¹²⁰ The international fallout also damaged Radio Uganda's training agreements. Katongole's request for a study tour in Nairobi was rejected in 1972 and opportunities at the BBC were at risk; Kyanzi's colleague, of South Asian descent, who accompanied him to London never returned to Uganda.¹²¹ In 1973, employees demanded training in 'friendly countries' to replace lost opportunities, but such countries were fewer and fewer. When offered technical assistance from the USSR in 1974, Katende requested a visiting expert to train staff on maintaining specific pieces of equipment but flatly rejected sending Ugandan technicians to train in the USSR, whether out of principle or reluctance to lose staff.¹²² By 1978, staff were organizing their own study tours without permission, presumably confident that their post would not be filled in their absence.¹²³

Indeed, the foreign technology and equipment that Radio Uganda relied on pre-conditioned its relationships with manufacturers abroad. In some cases, Radio Uganda

¹¹⁴On one such trip, Michael Sequeira to Humphreys, 24 September 1970, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Michael Sequeira. On the economics of East African integration, see Assefa Mehretu, *Regional Integration for Economic Development of Greater East Africa: A Quantified Analysis of Possibilities* (Kampala: Uganda Publ. House, 1973).

¹¹⁵R. A. Anyoti to Heads of Sections, 6 October 1971, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Circulars. On the breakdown of the University see Bhekithemba R. Mngomezulu, *Politics and Higher Education in East Africa from the 1920s to 1970* (Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg Press, 2012), ch. 6.

¹¹⁶'Achievements of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting during 1972' (1973), UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/108

¹¹⁷Katende, list of twelve Radio Uganda engineers who moved to EAC civil engineering division in 1973, 30 October 1973, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Engineering copies. Crescent Were wrote from the Voice of Kenya asking Radio Uganda for proof of his service, 16 March 1973, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Crescent Were.

¹¹⁸Humphreys to Permanent Secretary Ministry of Information, 4 December 1969, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, S. K. Ntege; Katende to Permanent Secretary, 6 March 1973, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Papers on general subjects.

¹¹⁹Ministry of Information, Addendum to the Salaries Commission Memorandum (1973), UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Studio VII.

¹²⁰Katongole to Chief Engineer, 31 October 1972, UBC, 1955-60, Katongole.

¹²¹Katende to Ministry of Information, 22 February 1973, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Simon Kyanzi. On BBC relations with Uganda, see Gordon Johnston and Emma Robertson, *BBC World Service: Overseas Broadcasting, 1932-2018* (London: Palgrave, 2019), 259.

¹²²Katende to Permanent Secretary, 26 September 1973 and 14 January 1974, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Engineering copies.

¹²³Minutes from meeting with superintendent engineers, 10 July 1978, UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/78.

entered into contracts with electronics companies that included staff training and equipment repairs – inevitably on terms favourable to the manufacturer. These unequal relationships left engineers dependent on the possibility of sending equipment (and personnel) to Europe for maintenance, the logistics of which became more complex as Uganda's economic situation worsened during the mid-1970s. When G. Wamala returned from a training placement with Agence France-Presse in 1973, he noted the advantage his French equivalents had in using standardized equipment, while at Radio Uganda staff needed to be trained separately on operating each machine purchased from Britain, Italy, the Netherlands or wherever else through individual agreements.¹²⁴ Like elsewhere in East Africa, the shortage of foreign currency made purchases ever harder as the 1970s progressed.¹²⁵

These global, structural issues were expressed by employees (or those who remained) in terms of the disappointments of working life at Radio Uganda. Kyanzi was not alone in his low morale of 1971. Taking over as Chief Engineer in 1973, Katende pledged to 'uplift the morale of the Technicians'.¹²⁶ There was long-standing tension between the engineering department (where trainees with a science background were sent) and the programmes department (where those with a humanities background were sent).¹²⁷ Despite equivalent salaries, there were (rarely granted) requests for transfers from engineering to programmes.¹²⁸ Kyanzi's case suggests that lack of career progression was a primary complaint. This was about knowledge acquisition and professional fulfilment as well as salaries: demands for a properly stocked library accompanied concerns about needing to pay exam fees.¹²⁹

Training had long been recognized as an important part of the solution to low morale: in 1962, staff submitted a letter to the Commissioner for Africanization demanding better training opportunities.¹³⁰ Over the next two decades, discussions about new training initiatives frequently resurfaced: suggestions to release trainees for one week every month for courses at the Technical College, a 'crash course' for recent recruits, or the designation of a training officer.¹³¹ These initiatives could only do so much. In the 1970s, the training officer complained that staff were moved – before he had trained them – into responsible positions where the need was urgent, and that he lacked basic equipment.¹³² The consequences of inadequate training were occasionally laid bare, as in one 1974 incident, when an untrained technician mismanaged a frequency change, risking a breach of international broadcasting regulations.¹³³

All these issues, from training to international isolation, fed into a discourse of 'discipline' at Radio Uganda, throughout the 1960s and 1970s. This discourse had parallels across public

¹²⁴G. Wamala, 'Brief report on what I observed in AFP during the course of studies', 18 July 1973, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Papers on general subjects.

¹²⁵Memorandum from Programme production department to the President (1978), UBC, 1974-89 Ministry of Information, Proposal (development). On Tanzania, see George Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar Es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961-1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 238-41.

¹²⁶Minutes of an engineering division meeting, 31 March 1973, UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/68.

¹²⁷Katende to Controller of Programmes, 'Lack of cooperation', 5 November 1973, UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/68.

¹²⁸For example, Michael Sequeira to Chief engineer, 18 March 1970, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Michael Sequeira.

¹²⁹M.B.S. Mangen to Permanent Secretary, 20 August 1973, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Engineering copies.

¹³⁰UBS Engineering Staff to Director for Africanisation, 23 April 1962, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, General notices.

¹³¹Katende circular 'Technical Assistants training programme', 8 November 1973, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Engineering copies; Humphreys to Permanent Secretary, 5 July 1968, UBC, 1966-70 Ministry of Information, Recruitment.

¹³²L.L.V. Obonyo to Head of engineering, 23 April 1974, UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/65; Kityo (training officer) to Head of engineering, 25 July 1974, UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/111.

¹³³'Technical staff inefficiency' circular from Chief Superintendent Engineer, 4 March 1974, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Engineering copies.

institutions in newly independent African countries.¹³⁴ Time and again, employees were warned that ‘lateness’, ‘drunkenness’, and ‘desertion of duties’ would not be tolerated, while polished shoes and ties were applauded.¹³⁵ In a 1978 meeting on the ‘staff situation’, a senior studio manager said that the employees under him had become ‘uncontrollable’: one technician had refused to record a scheduled programme because the studio in question was leaking rainwater and had no functioning lights.¹³⁶ This had been years in the making: ‘the personnel, technical installations, facilities and equipment [were] long overdue for rehabilitation’ according to the senior programmes controller.¹³⁷ Power failures in the link system between newly installed transmitters and the Kampala studios risked losing the gains of the expansion plan that had been the broadcaster’s primary focus.¹³⁸ The archive only hints at how problems extended beyond the workplace and into employees homes. A 1978 memorandum from staff sent directly to the President stated that ‘staff find it difficult to concentrate on their work’ because preoccupied with the difficulties of obtaining basic commodities like sugar and paraffin. The authors implicitly alleged corruption by complaining that the same handful of civil servants were allocated the few cars, bicycles, and radios that were available: ‘As broadcasters’, they argued, ‘first priority should be given to us whenever radios and Televisions are imported’.¹³⁹

Conclusion

Jabbery Katongole was not likely to take at face value Edgar Adloff’s conviction that long-distance radio listening brought about ‘better world communication, friendship and good will’. By the time he read Adloff’s reception report in mid-1972, the limits to Radio Uganda’s participation in the wireless world were increasingly felt by its technicians. These limits were not entirely preconditioned by structural questions that forced the broadcaster to negotiate with wealthier and more powerful actors for equipment, training, and frequency allocation – structures rooted in empire and magnified by the difficulties of obtaining foreign currency later in the 1970s. In fact, bilateral cooperation, especially between broadcasters in newly independent states in the tropical region, *did* represent a powerful challenge to this information order, but these relationships were themselves contingent on investment (especially of wo/manpower) at a time when Radio Uganda prioritized reaching people *within* its borders. Nor were Radio Uganda’s difficulties a direct consequence of Idi Amin’s military dictatorship: its challenges paralleled those of other states, and predated 1971; the 1970s in fact saw considerable investment in seminars, report writing, and new infrastructure – not least the external broadcasting service.

Importantly, these limits manifested themselves in working life at Radio Uganda, and from this perspective a level of contingency is evident. The professional ambitions of junior staff employed in the late 1960s were, to a large extent, left unsatisfied: these employees wanted training, career progression, and – in some cases at least – the impression that their work *was* part of a hopeful technological endeavour that was moving in a direction of fair international exchange. Instead, at times, they were driven to withholding their labour because neither they nor the recording studios

¹³⁴Jeffrey S. Ahlman, ‘Managing the Pan-African Workplace: Discipline, Ideology, and the Cultural Politics of the Ghanaian Bureau of African Affairs’, *Ghana Studies* 15/16 (2012): 337–71.

¹³⁵Minutes of a meeting between Minister of Information and UBC section heads, 28 [illeg] 1974, UBC, Ministry of Information 1972-73, Engineering copies.

¹³⁶Minutes from meeting with superintendent engineers, 10 July 1978, UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/78.

¹³⁷Sserwadda, report on Rugaba broadcast, 25 November 1979, 1974-89 Ministry of Information, Religious broadcasts.

¹³⁸Report on performance of the Link System (1973), UBC, Broadcasting and Tourism, ARC/79.

¹³⁹Memorandum from Programme production department to the President (1978), UBC, 1974-89 Ministry of Information, Proposal (development). For further reflections on distribution of commodities, see Rukandema, *Uganda: Reflections of a Passing Generation*, 51.

had the basic resources to make it worthwhile. As we seek to explain the emergence of calls to decolonize information in the second half of the twentieth century, this article shows how global information inequality was felt by technicians without formal representation in NWICO and expressed in terms relevant to their workplace.¹⁴⁰

How does the correspondence of distant listeners fit into this picture? Read, as it was by Katongole and his colleagues, in close proximity to the material realities of the Radio Uganda recording studios in the 1970s, DXers' wireless cosmopolitanism lays bare the gulf between transmitter and receiver, between the lived and the imagined. The interference that forced a listener in rural Finland to fill gaps in their reception report with ellipses or to describe the unfamiliar music they heard with their limited command of an English lingua franca is not only an evocative metaphor. The growing interest in listeners in histories of radio is certainly justified, but we cannot assume that histories of listening are inherently 'bottom up' or that those of broadcasting institutions are 'top down', certainly when it comes to the distribution of technology and power. The receiving equipment in a DXer's home and the leisure-labour hours their hobby demanded sometimes outstripped the capacities of the state broadcaster whose response they awaited. Files preserved by UBC allow us to disrupt the visual imaginary of radio that accompanied the developmentalist hopes of the 1960s, in which a broadcaster disseminates from above to a multitude of listeners below – one that authoritarian regimes also relied on. Instead, a visualization of the wireless world that took seriously the role of decolonizing countries would need to incorporate a more complex set of connections that recognized how necessary and precarious the labour of a trained technician could be.¹⁴¹

I began this article with the observation that Edgar Adloff relied on Jabberly Katongole to receive his verification card in 1972. The analysis of Radio Uganda's 1970s presented here has made the case for the extension of this observation to a bigger historical pattern. Long distance listeners enthused about the potential for improved, globalized radio technologies to bring them closer to distant places in the decolonizing world. Their optimism was circulated in popular radio magazines and reaffirmed by wealthy state broadcasters like the BBC who looked to secure support for their own external service.¹⁴² But these convictions were nurtured by the excitement and the enhanced value of receiving responses from broadcasters who had only *just* the necessary resources to transmit powerful shortwave signals and only *just* enough wo/manpower to check reception reports. This exchange – unequal in the many respects described here – was predicated on some broadcasters existing at the edges of the wireless world, vulnerable to the political and economic shockwaves of the 1970s.

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¹⁴⁰Research on these calls is broadening beyond NWICO, see forthcoming work through the Non-Aligned News Research Partnership, www.nanrep.org.

¹⁴¹Relevant in this regard is the framework proposed by Carolyn Birdsall and Elinor Carmi, 'Feminist Avenues for Listening in: Amplifying Silenced Histories of Media and Communication', *Women's History Review* 31 (2022): 542–60.

¹⁴²Potter, 'Out of the Ether', 5.

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