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Radio geopolitics: broadcasting, listening and the struggle for acoustic spaces

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Abstract: This paper considers some of the interdisciplinary scholarship on radio and sound more generally for the purposes of considering how geopolitical scholarship might reconsider its predominantly visual focus. The first part considers radio and its relationship to studies of propaganda, international diplomacy and even everyday life. Thereafter, attention is given to new themes such as researching radio cultures, broadcasting infrastructure and technology and, finally, the affective impacts of radio on audiences. The conclusion of this paper urges further critical consideration of radio, sound and broadcasting/listener engagement with the well-established geographical literature on music.

Key words: audiences, communication, geopolitics, listening, radio.

I Introduction

> We have some places. Just stay quiet and you'll be OK. We are returning to the airport.

We open this article, as does the 9/11 Commission Report (2004), with the words attributed to Mohammad Atta, the alleged ringleader of the 19 hijackers responsible for the attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the crash of United 93 in a Pennsylvanian field. This radio transmission made by the hijackers on board American Airlines Flight 11 was the first aural clue for federal air traffic controllers seeking to comprehend the unusual movements (and lack of radio communication) of a number of planes flying over the eastern part of the United States. Given the subsequent developments, these words, as some journalists noted at the time, have an unquestionably 'chilling quality' not least because the hijackers perished with nearly 3,000 other victims. Unable to see the hijackers or the other occupants of American Airlines Flight 11, those on the ground were reliant on listening to the occasional communications by the hijackers. And then radio silence as Flight 11 crashed into the Twin Towers at 0847 am.

Shortly after the impact of the second plane into the Twin Towers, terrified onlookers were shown, via television coverage, exhibiting a range of responses from stunned silence to crying, wailing and holding highly animated conversations with fellow onlookers. To describe these attacks

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as a visual assault on America is to miss a fundamental point; this was an audiovisual spectacle of horrifying proportions. As the buildings began to smoulder, the sight and sound of people jumping from the Twin Towers to their certain death was captured on film. Produced by two French brothers (Jules and Gedeon Naudet) who accompanied members of the New York Fire Department to the Twin Towers, the documentary film *9/11* (2002) is particularly poignant in that regard. It remains the only footage taken inside the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001. Finally, the thundering noise accompanying the collapse of the Twin Towers and the diffusion of suffocating clouds of dust completed, one might say, the first deadly phase of this audiovisual spectacle (Debrix, 2007).

The recorded statements of the hijackers and other utterances such as 'let's roll' issued by one of the passengers on board United 93 has been much analysed and debated by official investigators, political leaders and relatives of the dead. The bipartisan 9/11 Commission, created by the Bush administration to investigate the 11 September attacks, considered all forms of sonic and visual information germane to their extensive brief. Mobile phone conversations between the airborne victims of 9/11 and their friends and relatives have provided further poignant sonic testimony of those last minutes before impact and certain death.[1] Those conversations form part of what National Public Radio described as their Sonic Memorial project. As Cohen and Willis (2004) record:

> How could public radio – a medium focussed solely on aural experiences – contribute to storytelling these tragedies? After September 11th, National Public Radio (NPR) took up the task of aural remembering for the nation through an unprecedented public radio collaboration, consisting of at least 100 NPR stations and their affiliates that contributed and aired up to 30 hours of NPR-produced programming during the week before the anniversary [ie, September 2002]. (Cohen and Willis, 2004: 592)

Moreover, NPR also produced a Sonic Memorial on the internet, hosted by the September 11th Digital Archive.[2]

Radio broadcasting (and noise for that matter) is playing a major part in the American-led War on Terror. Following James Sidaway's interventions on the subject matter of 'banal geopolitics', we should draw attention to the manner in which radio is now routinely used by military personnel in their pursuit of those who masterminded the 11 September assault on New York and Washington, and associated counter-terror strategies (Sidaway, 2001; 2003; Graham, 2007). As part of developing new urban-based fighting strategies, the American military has created a series of training environments, which include 'bombarding' US troops with radio broadcasting in Arabic for the purpose of developing a sense of geographical and cultural 'authenticity', while simultaneously desensitizing the troops to foreign cultural practices.

If we wanted to understand more fully some of the popular cultural dimensions to post-9/11 America, then talk radio would be an excellent place to begin such an investigation (see Croft, 2006). Inaugurated in the 1930s and 1940s, talk radio fundamentally changed in the 1980s when the Federal Communications Commission removed the so-called 'fairness doctrine', thereby absolving radio stations from having to provide a 'right to reply' for those criticized. The consequences of such a decision were substantial and radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh have been able to flourish and enjoy large listening audiences. Talk radio has proven to be an important place for politically right-wing radio commentators and listeners to air their grievances about the world, a broadcasting phenomenon that was illustrated in Oliver Stone's timely, and appropriately named, movie *Talk Radio*, released in 1988. In other areas relating to the War on Terror, loud music and sound more generally have been deployed on suspected terrorists around the world in the belief that these sonic activities will lead to vital intelligence being divulged. In Iraq and

Afghanistan, companies such as Homeland Securities Strategies Inc are developing new radio jamming technologies in the hope that they will be able to interfere with improvised explosive devices placed by the sides of highways and other strategic places. Finally, the Department of State is funding, via the Voice Of America (VOA), a plethora of new radio stations and local language broadcasting in the hope that America's 'soft power' will be able to persuade millions in the Global South not to support violence directed against American personnel and material interests.

While we have opened with some observations about 9/11 and its aftermath, this article's more general purpose is to shift the centre of gravity towards radio for the purpose of broadening popular geographical/geopolitical horizons and encouraging further work, which has tended to be dominated by social and cultural geographical interest in music rather than radio broadcasting, or listening more generally (see, for example, Smith, 1994; Leyshon *et al*., 1998; Jazeel, 2005; Jones, 2005; Matless, 2005). If the twentieth century was in part characterized by the invention of the car and the moving image, it was also the century of mechanically reproduced sounds (Bull, 2004: 248; Whittington, 2007: 1; and other scholars such as Mattellart, 1996; Hugill, 1999). This paper is composed of three substantial parts and initially it considers radio within the popular geopolitics literature for the purpose of explaining its importance especially in the Global South. Radio's role in public diplomacy deserves particular mention here and the role this media technology has played in postwar international crises such as the 1956 Suez Crisis and the 1982 Falklands campaign. There is of course a large literature on radio propaganda during the interwar period and the second world war, which will also be noted. Second, we consider some research themes that deserve further elaboration by geographers such as 'researching radio' and the sound archive, radio and broadcasting infrastructure, and radio and its audiences. Finally, the paper connects up with the established literature on music to consider the geographical implications and consequences of sound. While we specifically address radio and its geopolitical implications, we are mindful of a long-established body of literature more generally concerned with communications, technology and the role of states and empires (for example, Innis, 1950; Mattellart, 1996; Hugill, 1999; Meinig, 2004).

II Popular geopolitics of radio: identity, propaganda and soft power

Shortly after President Bush's decision to declare a War on Terror, the US State Department-funded Voice of America (VOA) was given extra funding so that it could expand radio broadcasting in Arabic, Dari, Farsi and Pashto. Created in February 1942, Voice of America is the one of the largest state-funded broadcasters and rivals BBC World Service and Radio Moscow in terms of its broadcasting coverage, language provision and weekly audiences. In 2002 a Middle East Radio Network was launched and one of the most significant developments was the launch of Radio Farda, which is designed to broadcast news and music in English and Farsi to Iran and Central Asia. New investment in radio broadcasting and public diplomacy was judged to be critical in establishing a broader legitimacy for more violent forms of intervention. In his weekly radio address, President Bush announced on 15 September 2001 that:

> This is a conflict without battlefields or beachheads, a conflict with opponents who believe they are invisible. Yet, they are mistaken. They will be exposed, and they will discover what others in the past have learned: those who make war against the United States have chosen their own destruction. Victory against terrorism will not take place in a single battle, but in a series of decisive actions against terrorist organizations and those who harbor and support them.
>
> We are planning a broad and sustained campaign to secure our country and eradicate the evil of terrorism. And we are determined to see this conflict through. Americans of every faith and background are committed to this goal.[3]

Radio broadcasting remains part of that 'broad and sustained campaign' and this is the case not only with regard to overseas broadcasting but also domestically, notwithstanding the highly televised culture of the United States. It is important to recall that the weekly radio address by the President has been a regular feature of American public life since the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration (1933–45), and there are many other examples we could draw upon to highlight the iconic role of radio broadcasting involving European political leaders and dictators, such as Charles de Gaulle, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin and Benito Mussolini as well as postcolonial leaders such as Nehru and his 1947 independence broadcast.

America's commitment to direct funding towards overseas radio broadcasting in the post-9/11 era was motivated by a simple but important development. Since the 1960s, the widespread availability of the transistor radio has meant that many communities, without access to television and uninterrupted power supplies, continue to depend on the radio for their news and other output such as music. Major broadcasting organizations such as VOA and BBC World Service, as a consequence, have recognized that local language broadcasting offers opportunities to reach and potentially influence audiences in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Local language broadcasting has often, as a consequence, been highly sensitized to regional geopolitical change. One example from an earlier era involves VOA radio broadcasting in Spanish and Portuguese to Latin America. In 1956, VOA broadcasting to Latin America consisted of one hour of daily programming and was in English. Foreign language broadcasting had been downgraded as VOA invested its energies in eastern European and southeast Asian language programming. By March 1960, and in the aftermath of the 1959 Cuban revolution, VOA Spanish language broadcasting was restored, and a year later Portuguese language broadcasting resumed. 17% of total VOA foreign programming was directed towards Latin America and a new radio station was constructed in Central America (Fejes, 1986: 170–71).

While national governments in the Global South have sought in the past to 'block' transmissions from foreign broadcasters, radio transmission – especially if broadcast from powerful transmitters located around the world – is extremely effective in transcending national boundaries. This does not mean, however, we should assume that such flows of sound are automatically tied into influence and the subsequent manipulation of political behaviour and collective identities. The record here, as we shall note, is mixed. In the case of recent endeavours by the American government, any transmission associated with VOA is, for some listeners, treated with contempt and suspicion, because of the contemporary military occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq (Gregory, 2004). Colonial radio stations in the English, French and Dutch speaking worlds were frequently linked to expressions of anticolonial agitation and national liberation movements. Moreover, as Katz and Weddell (1977: 8) noted, 'many were prepared to accept training by expatriate broadcasters in order to prepare themselves for the day when liberation would come'. Such training would have disastrous consequences in Rwanda in April 1994 when so-called 'hate radio' was instrumental in persuading thousands to slaughter their fellow citizens. The ensuing genocide was later to encapsulate no fewer than 800,000 lives and the International Criminal Tribunal in Arusha indicted broadcasters associated with Radio Television Libres des Mille Collines for their role in transmitting 'hate propaganda' (see Prunier, 1995; Thompson, 2007).

In other disciplines such as history and media studies, there has been a great deal of interest in radio propaganda, foreign language broadcasting and public diplomacy, which would complement a growing interest in popular geopolitics (see, for example,

Douglas, 1999; Horten, 2002). In the case of the latter, it is now entirely orthodox to claim that popular representations of global geopolitics need to be investigated alongside elite understandings. Indeed terms such as 'geopolitical culture' have been deployed in order to consider how film, cartoons, comic books and television contribute to expressions of popular geopolitics and how and with what consequences audiences react to those media (Dodds, 2007). Recent research has demonstrated how certain kinds of emotional reactions and investments may be provoked and mobilized by particular productions such as a film like *Black Hawk Down* (2001) or a comic character like Captain America (Dittmer, 2005; Carter and McCormack, 2006). Geographical scholars such as Chris Gibson and his co-workers have helped to ensure that popular geopolitical scholars do consider how music contributes to debates about contemporary communications, popular culture and national identity (Gibson, 1996; Dunbar-Hall and Gibson, 2000; Gibson and Connell, 2003; but critically see Power, 2001). Gibson's researches into the music in Australia has been particularly effective in highlighting how indigenous communities can express social identities and contest the hegemonic representations of Anglophone and white Australia. There is surely much more work to be done on the popular geopolitics of music and Anglophone performers and bands such as Bob Dylan, Midnight Oil and Neil Young would feature, as would particular musical genres, such as gangster rap and rock, which have critically reflected on conflicts from Vietnam to Iraq. Until recently only one geopolitical scholar, Marcus Power, had explored in any detail the geopolitical consequences of radio broadcasting, in this case with reference to colonial Mozambique (Power, 2001; cf. Pinkerton, 2007; 2008a).

The absence, therefore, of detailed consideration of radio is a major lacuna and deserves to be remedied as the critical geopolitics project enters its third decade of existence. The task is not daunting in the sense that other disciplines have been interested in radio broadcasting and listening for quite some considerable time. With regards to making connections with popular geopolitics, we would highlight several strands of this research as relevant. First, there has been extensive interest in radio propaganda especially since the 1920s with many research papers and monographs devoted to Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia and other European states such as Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom (for example, Miller, 1941; Isola, 1995; Shirer, 1999; Menduni, 2004). In his book *Backing Hitler*, Robert Gellately not only shows the importance of radio to fascist German propaganda but also traces the penalties imposed on those citizens caught or exposed listening to overseas broadcasting by the BBC and others. Listening was a matter of life and death and this remains the case in many parts of the world (Gellately, 2002: 186–87).

If radio has been used for propaganda purposes, it has also been a medium that governments have sought to control, 'to jam' and to limit access to other forms of broadcasting. The apparent ubiquity of radio should not be overestimated as national governments have and continue to attempt to engage in political suppression, prohibit foreign broadcasting, limit ownership of radio transmitters and create conditions where listening is far from mundane. Instead, radio listening in contemporary Iran and Zimbabwe and the former Soviet Union could be a dangerous, frustrating and deadly experience. China continues to jam radio broadcasting alongside the internet. Cuba remains particularly active in 'blocking' radio broadcasting from exile groups in Miami and the US government funded Radio Marti. Alternatively, others have pointed to the ability of radio broadcasting, often in dire circumstances, to provide some comfort and solace, as the British captive Terry Waite acknowledged. Held for several years in Beirut, Waite and his fellow captives recorded their gratitude for BBC World Service broadcasting because it, in his words, 'helped to

keep us alive both spiritually through the work of the religious departments and mentally through the varied cultural and news programmes' (Walker, 1992: 165). In different ways, therefore, the geographies of broadcasting and listening continue to be highly contingent.

Second, the radio studies literature has long been preoccupied with domestic radio environments in the western world and keen to decipher codes, conventions, formats and practices of radio programming and reception. Well-known works such as *Radio broadcasting: an introduction to the sound medium* have been important in shaping future scholarship with its focus on the American domestic radio scene and international broadcasting (Hillard, 1985). As a commercial medium, radio has survived and even prospered in 'tabloid culture' America (Glynn, 2000). Its enduring success owes in part to the fact that radio can be listened (and engaged with more generally) in the car, at home, in the workplace and on the street (Hendy, 2000: 2). Moreover, the diversification of radio broadcasting (with the obvious exception of US National Public Radio) has allowed for a series of overlapping listening environments to exist. These specialized listening populations are in some cases further served and encouraged by the development of high-profile 'shock-jock' radio presenters such as Howard Stern who enjoy a highly defined listening segment as defined by race, gender, educational attainment, political persuasion and age. Securing such segments is vitally important for commercial radio stations because of the strong connection with advertising and revenue generation.

As historians of American radio have noted, the place of this medium in national life has long been contested and as such predates some of the contemporary controversies associated with outspoken right-wing radio presenters (Barfield, 1986). In the 1920s, for instance, American jazz was banned on most radio stations because it was judged by regulatory authorities to be both scandalous and subversive. Some radio stations resisted the ban and the music of Louis Armstrong and Bessie Smith was played in Chicago and New York. According to Susan Douglas (1999), jazz was seen as threatening because it was equated with 'jungle music' and thus would promote an erosion of the sonic-social order in the sense of promoting sexual abandonment. While jazz was later aired more generally in the 1930s and 1940s, African-American musicians attracted large numbers of white listeners and indeed jazz was credited with playing a part in building cross-community solidarities during the struggle for civil rights in the 1955–65 period.

Such solidarities need to be set alongside the production and circulation of racist representations of African-Americans via the radio. Shows such as 'Amos'n' Andy' were hugely important, if controversial, in developing the radio serial drama and in this case concentrated on the changing social and economic fortunes of two African-American workers (Douglas, 1999). While resisted and resented by many African-American listeners, radio was later to provide an important public forum for the discussion of racial politics in contemporary American life. By 1941, nearly every family in the United States owned a receiver and radio created an aural public sphere for acknowledging, in programmes such as federally funded 'Freedom's People', the contribution African-American communities have made to labour, music, sports, literature, military service and education (Savage, 1999: 70). The year 1943 was a landmark in American radio history, as Barbara Savage noted, because funding and broadcasting restrictions tightened in response to concerns from African-American communities about segregation and discrimination in American life. In postwar America, progressive dissent continued to appear on the airwaves and radio's place in the social and cultural transformation of the United States is beginning to attract ever more critical attention (see, for example, Hilmes and Loviglio, 2002).

Scholars such Paddy Scannell (1991), Andrew Crissell (1996), Martin Shingler and Cindy Wierniga (1998) have considered radio's role in the social and cultural lives of many citizens, including Americans. As Scannell's landmark edited volume showed, radio's 'expressive dimensions of communication, how things are said, why and for what possible effects' was considered in great detail (Scannell, 1991: 11). There are two aspects to this apparent ubiquity. On the one hand, scholars have examined the role of radio in the making of 'extraordinary' rituals and ceremonies in modern society such as the 1953 coronation of Elizabeth II, the trial of Nazi war criminals and the role of radio during the second world war. Radio audiences were often significant, especially in countries where access to television was either just becoming widespread or had yet to emerge. However, in a salutary study of the role of radio in the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, a team of scholars found that the coverage by Israeli state radio was consistently overestimated in frequency and duration by listeners. In fact, radio broadcasting was more sporadic than people recalled and many believed that the medium must have featured more strongly in daily life because of the sheer magnitude of this public event (Pinchevski *et al.*, 2007: 18). On the other hand, the radio has played (and continues to play) a major role in the more mundane moments of everyday life. As Shingler and Wierniga (1998: ix) contend, 'For many of us, it is the first thing we hear in the morning and the last thing we hear before we fall asleep'. Radio listening whether in bed, while taking a shower or eating our breakfast is part of the daily fabric of many people around the world. The capacity of radio to be so widespread and intrinsic to our daily lives has contributed to it being taken for granted at the expense of other media such as television.

In Britain, for example, few people interested in the daily machination of domestic politics would fail to tune in and listen to the morning news programme 'Today' on Radio 4. The so-called Andrew Gilligan affair of May 2003, in the midst of concerns over Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction capabilities, highlighted quite how important radio broadcasting and listening reactions could be. In this case a well-known Radio 4 defence journalist (Gilligan) used his short early morning report to claim that a highly placed security source had told him that the Labour government had 'sexed up' its dossier on Iraq's military capabilities for the sole purpose of persuading parliamentarians and the public that the March 2003 invasion of Iraq was necessary. The reaction to the broadcast was extraordinary and led to the BBC being forced to apologize for the report after the so-called Hutton Inquiry found in favour of the Labour government (see also the Neil Report, 2004). It also, tragically, led to the suicide by Gilligan's source – Dr David Kelly. Alternatively, as Fraser MacDonald has noted with regard to the nightly weather broadcast on Radio 4, 'the cadences and rhythms of the UK shipping forecast have a soporific effect … a familiar and comforting register of sea areas and coastal stations that have come to define the symbolic boundary of the nation' (MacDonald, 2006: 628). What both cases share in common is that listening to Radio 4 is an important daily ritual for many citizens in the United Kingdom.

David Hendy's (2000) *Radio in the global age* is arguably the most impressive intervention by a radio studies scholar because of his willingness to explore how radio broadcasting and listening is now a global phenomenon, even if there are significant local and regional variations depending *inter alia* on the integration with internet technologies, commercialization, listener availability, political control and transnational connections with other broadcasters. As Hendy notes:

> While being a local medium par excellence, radio is able to reach across large spaces, potentially threatening place-specific cultures with its homogenized content, potentially

> forging new delocalized communities of interest; it has a history in which nation-states often led the way in establishing services, but its oral code of communication allows it to tie itself to communities of language, which ignore official borders; it betrays a commercial imperative to reach large, high-spending audiences, but it also has a cost structure, which creates at least the possibility of a community station surviving on the tiniest of audiences. It is, in short, the most adaptable of 'media' in finding its audience. (Hendy, 2000: 215)

In this way, radio is often imbued with an aura of accessibility and democratizing potential (listeners can be contributors and thus not just passive receivers) even if there is a long history of radio broadcasting being either tightly regulated by states or restricted by national authorities throughout the Global North and South.

Finally, within International Relations and Political Science, there has been interest in radio as a form of 'soft power' and its role in public diplomacy during and after the second world war. In his well-known work, Joseph Nye (2004a) has claimed that the Bush administration has lost interest in cultural diplomacy and what he has called 'soft power'. As he noted in an article in *Foreign Affairs*:

> Skeptics of soft power (Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld professes not even to understand the term) claim that popularity is ephemeral and should not guide foreign policy. The United States, they assert, is strong enough to do as it wishes with or without the world's approval and should simply not accept that others will envy and resent it. The world's only superpower does not need permanent allies; the issues should determine the coalitions, not vice versa, according to Rumsfeld. (Nye, 2004b: 16)

Given that Secretary of State Rumsfeld no longer holds office, this sceptical view may no longer be quite so prevalent in the face of rising anti-Americanism and the mounting losses of US service personnel in Iraq. However, Nye detected an apparent disregard of the power of media including radio to 'persuade' others about America's interventions in southwest and central Asia. As he noted, 'During the Cold War, radio broadcasts funded by Washington reached half the Soviet population and 70 to 80% of the population in Eastern Europe every week; on the eve of the September 11th attacks, a mere 2% of Arabs listened to the Voice of America' (Nye, 2004b: 18). The problem, however, with this kind of assertion is that it is implicitly assumed that listening is somehow correlated with potential influence. The other key difference between Cold War eastern Europe and the contemporary Muslim world is that the United States had not invaded and occupied an Eastern European state and supported other countries such as Israel, which many Arabic speaking communities believe disadvantages Palestinians. In other words, the question of legitimacy is likely to be critical in determining potential influence.

Other studies on radio diplomacy and 'soft power' have in the past been better at examining radio broadcasting and state controls rather than listening audiences and potential effectiveness. Hale (1975) and Rawnsley (1996) both consider British broadcast policies and particular international crises and conflicts in the post-1945 era. In the case of Rawnsley, for example, his work considers radio broadcasting with regard to the 1956 Suez Crisis, the 1956 Hungarian Uprising, the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the American engagement with Vietnam. In each case, British and American broadcasting was examined and judged with regard to how it reported these particular crises and the kinds of political and broadcasting conflicts reports from the BBC and VOA engendered. The earlier work by Hale considers three models of international radio broadcasting – the Nazi, the Communist and the BBC. In conclusion, Hale contends that the BBC remains somewhat different to Nazi and Communist broadcasters because it sought since the creation of the Empire Service in 1927 to provide 'reliable' news and information even if that meant clashing with the

British government during the second world war. Hale (1975: ix–x) claimed that by the end of the conflict, a clear distinction existed between the overt and offensive propaganda of Nazi broadcasting compared to the BBC's reputation for 'reliable' news broadcasting. The American and Soviet broadcasters were judged to be single-minded in their determination to pursue their national priorities as reflected by state-controlled radio stations such as Voice of America and Radio Moscow respectively.

More recent research, however, would call into question the claim regarding the BBC's reputation for reliable and impartial broadcasting. Although Hale (1975: 48) recognized that this claim might be a 'carefully cultivated myth', he maintained that many listeners continued to use the BBC World Service in particular as a means to 'check up on the news that they had heard from other sources' (1975: 48). While there is some validity to this claim that other news organizations do indeed use BBC reporting as a benchmark to judge particular news items, it completely underestimates how the 'reputation' of the BBC itself has been historically and geographically contested (Pinkerton, 2007). In Iran, for example, many Iranian listeners still complain to this day that the BBC is unreliable and an agent of British imperialism because of its radio reports concerning the 1953 CIA-backed coup against the Mosaddeq government. Elsewhere in south Asia, for instance, the BBC has enjoyed a chequered history of listening as it has been accused also of being either an agent of British imperialism and/or pro-Pakistani in its reporting of particular crises. Alternatively, there are still many listeners who tune into the BBC World Service in both countries and value it for its news and current affairs reporting. Audience figures alongside listener letters and email comments sent to local BBC offices provide some invaluable insights into these particular listening communities.

Voice of America and the BBC World Service are funded by the State Department and the Foreign Office respectively. Likewise Radio Moscow continues to be funded by the Russian government. While editorial control and content varies between these three global broadcasters, former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook described the BBC's as Britain's 'Voice around the World' despite its claims to impartiality and editorial independence. There is still a great deal of research to be done on the impact on listeners and listener communities, especially in the Global South. The reputations and impact of global broadcasters has been varied even if each has the capacity to broadcast over large areas that far exceed their country's respective national boundaries. Moreover, as earlier studies did not readily acknowledge, listeners to the BBC, VOA and Radio Moscow also listen, read and watch other media such as television and newspapers. So, in the case of the 1956 Suez Crisis, readers of the *Observer* and the *Guardian* (which were critical of the Anglo-French intervention) might have also listened to BBC World Service broadcasts because they believed them to be willing to be critical of official government statements about the nature and long-term purpose of the intervention (Shaw, 1996). As Roger Silverstone (1994) had noted, people have their own 'media signatures' and researchers need to understand better how and with what consequences people access different forms of media.

III Media and popular geopolitics: new directions

The neglect of radio by existing studies of popular geopolitics is unfortunate but not unsurprising given the preoccupation with visual media and the visual tradition of geopolitics more generally. As Ó Tuathail argued in *Critical geopolitics* (1996), the intellectual tradition of geopolitics has long been preoccupied with the visual whether it be in the form of the Olympian gaze or maps and other representations of global geopolitical

space. Critical geopolitical scholars have tended to focus their energies on visual media such as film, television and comics and textual productions such as magazines like the *Reader's Digest*, which combine text and images (Sharp, 2000). This apparently visual preoccupation needs to be treated with caution, however. In one key respect, terms such as 'visual media', as Mitchell (2005: 258) has warned us, are misleading. As he notes, there is no such thing as 'visual media' as all media including radio are 'mixed media' that involve other senses such as touching, looking and listening. One only has to consider how radio listening often involves looking at the radio transmitter to appreciate that it may well be a case of simply acknowledging a visual predominance. As a form of 'mixed media', radio and film (for instance) involve a braiding and nesting of these senses.

As noted earlier, we believe that this neglect of radio is, if you forgive a visual pun, short-sighted. Three areas deserve further attention –researching radio, radio and broadcasting infrastructure, and listening. First, with regard to researching radio, we need to consider how this intellectual field might be further developed. While radio would appear to have an ethereal quality, which might make research appear at first glance problematic, it is not impossible to reconstruct the varied geographies and geopolitics of broadcasting and listening. Radio, as Tamar Liebes has noted, is capable of creating a series of 'acoustic spaces' through which listeners and communities can express their collective identities. In her research, Liebes (2006) examined Israeli broadcasting and sought to reconstruct how listeners were joined together through ethereal listening networks. Using personal accounts, novels and newspaper reports and articles within the Israeli media, alongside interviews and oral testimonies, she focused on how those radio reports had contributed to a sense of public memory and collective geohistory on the eve of Israeli independence. This task was made all the harder in the sense that there were no official recordings of the broadcasts and many of the interviewees were being asked to remember associated events from over 60 years ago. It is precisely because radio is often not stored in the same manner as newspapers and other printed texts in archives that led researchers to underestimate the significance of radio broadcasting and listening. As Liebes noted, 'The ephemeral quality of the medium, and in Israel's case, the gradual disappearance of records and recordings, and the (partly resultant) reliance of historians on print, contribute to an incorrect recollection of the salience of radio on moulding uniform public outlooks' (Liebes, 2006: 70).

Her research raises some interesting questions about researching radio and, for instance, the relationship between acoustic and textual sources in radio broadcasting and listening research. As Scannell and Cardiff (1991) reflected:

> There is an inescapable paradox at the heart of this project of which we have been acutely aware of all along – our object of study no longer exists. The early pioneers of radio as an art form lamented the 'ghastly impermanence' of their medium. Radio, and later television, developed first as live systems of transmission and recording technologies came later. Thus, although there are some recordings of the more significant programmes broadcast from the mid thirties onwards, the vast bulk of output perished in the moment of transmission. The fleeting, unrecorded character of early radio seems obstinately to resist the possibility of historical reclamation. (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991: xiii)

In their research on radio, Scannell and Cardiff draw upon radio's textual presence in the form of minutes of BBC Management Boards and departmental meetings held at the BBC Written Archive Centre in Reading. There are also listener reports, press cuttings and policy files, which can help reconstruct the broadcasting-listening context so vital for understanding the geopolitical and cultural significance of radio reporting especially during moments of international crisis such as the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war. However, as

Dolan (2003) has noted, there is an inherent tension between the aural and textual sources used by many radio scholars and the value that is placed on written documentation, which is often seen as a 'poor substitute for a voice that cannot be heard' (2003: 67).

Second, broadcasting infrastructure and technology needs to be better understood by popular geopolitical writers whether it be associated with radio, television, the internet or television (see Hugill, 1999). A great deal of existing discussion within popular geopolitics shows little awareness either of the media technologies and infrastructure necessary to broadcast or of the values attached to the technologies themselves. Take radio listening as an example. In the UK, if you want to listen to BBC World Service then you are guaranteed FM quality listening throughout the day and night. Both of us can and do listen to the radio via our digital televisions because we have access to it via the Freeview digital platform. Other listeners can access World Service via digital radio broadcasting technologies. The improved audibility and reliability has brought new listeners to the BBC's international services. However, other listeners in other parts of the world are less fortunate when it comes to availability and accessibility. Just as there is a digital divide, there is a radio listening schism. Listeners in India, for instance, are prevented from accessing BBC World Service on local FM because the Indian government prevents the BBC from rebroadcasting on these channels. As a consequence, the listening experience is quite different and listeners in south Asia often comment that one has to listen to the BBC more 'intently' and 'carefully' than if you were in the UK. Seasonal differences such as the monsoon can also interfere with broadcasting quality of international radio services. The inherent challenges of short-wave audibility appear to demand a more committed and careful form of listening and this can generate different kind of audience reactions and, as we shall note below, emotional investments with the medium, especially if listeners gather collectively to listen to particular reports and news items.

Infrastructural developments such as short-wave and FM broadcasting availability need to be better understood. The physical infrastructure of radio broadcasting is also significant. The location of a radio transmitter is critically important in determining radio broadcasting range and frequency. Given radio's capacity to transcend international borders, radio transmitters have become frequent objects of geopolitical discord. In south Asia, for example, the proposed location of a radio transmitter by the BBC and subsequently VOA in the early 1960s generated a substantial and highly emotive response in India as local political leaders and newspaper editors complained that America was trying to increase political and cultural influence. At a time when India was a leading member of the Non-Aligned Movement, this was judged to be an unacceptable breach of this foreign policy disposition. The reaction in Pakistan was also highly charged – both radio broadcasters were accused of trying to influence domestic political sensibilities. Cartoonists for newspapers such as *Dawn* (Karachi) recorded the controversy visually with at least one image (12 July 1963) depicting two large loudspeakers belonging to Voice of America, located in north India, broadcasting anti-Pakistani and anti-Chinese propaganda (Figure 1).

The geographies of broadcasting and transmitting deserve greater attention especially in the Global South. In part, this is symptomatic of a broader malaise which concerns a tendency of popular geopolitics to concentrate on the experiences of the Euro-American world and 'western' outliers such as Australia and New Zealand. This is not just an issue for Anglophone geopolitical studies but also for other intellectual fields such as media studies. As Curran and Park (2000: 3) have warned, there is a real need to 'de-westernize' media studies because it leads to generalizations about the availability of media including radio, the nature of

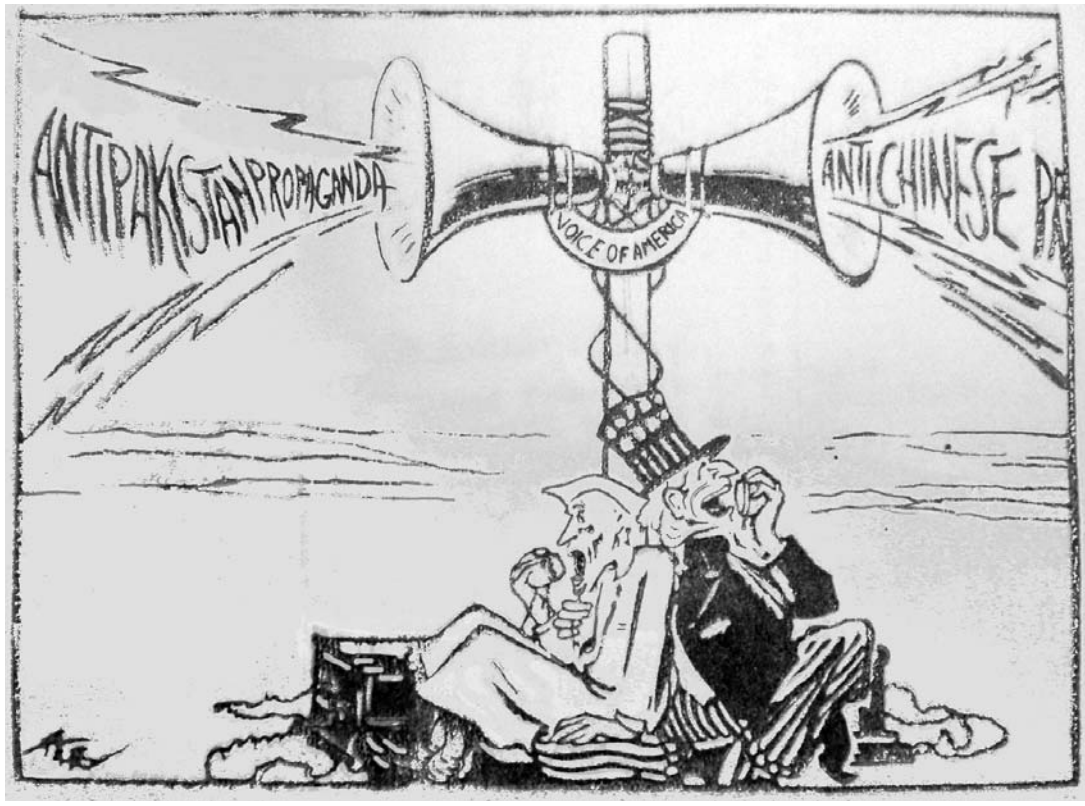

Figure 1 US-Indian mouthpiece: VOA broadcasting anti-Pakistan and anti-Chinese propaganda. Dawn (Karachi: 12/7/63)

listening and commercial relationships that have no purchase in the Global South. While BBC short-wave services in Mandarin are routinely jammed by the Chinese authorities, other places such as Ascension Island, Cyprus, Oman and a new transmitter in southern Thailand (replacing the former transmitter in Hong Kong) play a critical role in facilitating global broadcasting. These transmitter stations have a considerable geopolitical importance as, for instance, Ascension is the key nodal point for reaching Latin American and African audiences. It also hosted the British government's propaganda station Radio Atlantico del Sur, during the Falklands conflict of 1982 (Figure 2). The island was also used in the 1970s by American forces to carry out anti-Cuban operations in Angola.

Finally, as other scholars including geographers have recently noted, our attention should now increasingly turn to understanding better the role of audiences and listening practices. As Stephen Barnard (2000) noted:

> Thinking about one's own use of a mass communication medium such as radio is a good point of departure for a study of how the media operate and wield the power they have. Until you appreciate your own viewing, listening or reading habits, trying to understand the habits and predilections of audiences – and the way the media perceives their audiences, respond to, adapt and cater for them – is almost impossible. (Barnard, 2000: 1)

This means in part shifting the direction from further analyses of broadcasting strategies and radio propaganda *per se* to better

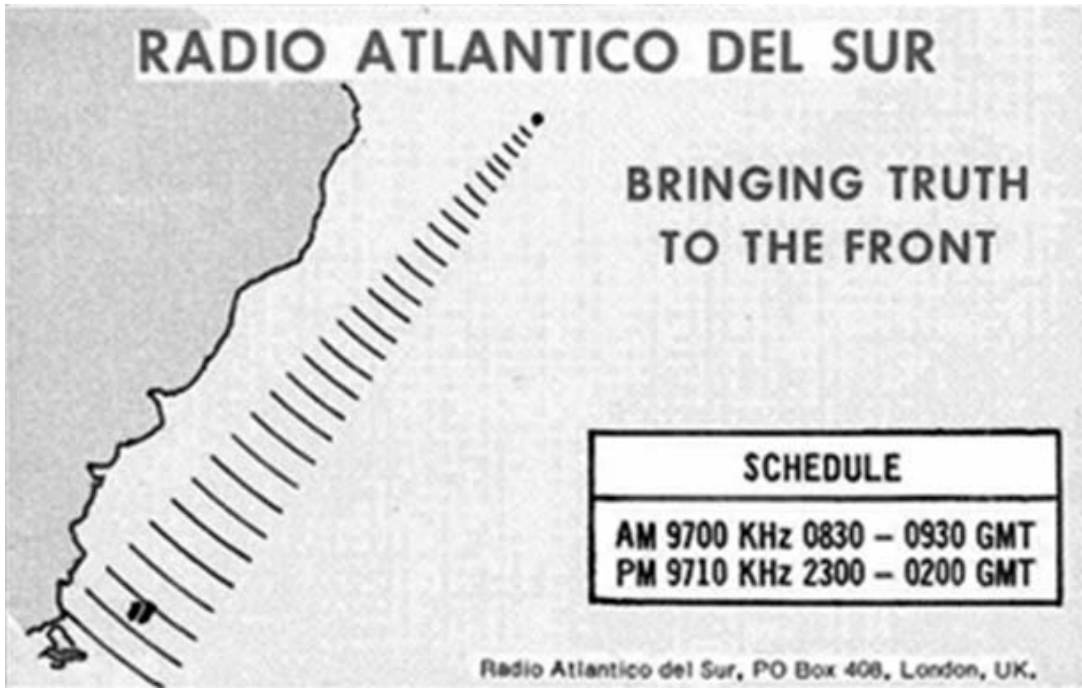

Figure 2 Radio Atlantico del Sur 'QSL' card (1982)

understanding audiences and their reactions. As the historian Jo Fox (2004) has noted:

> In wartime, as at other moments of crisis, there is a need to create unity or a unified community, to make the individual *feel* part of something greater. Radio played a key role in bringing people out of isolation and integrating them with the mass … Radio offered its listeners a 'bridge' between the individual and the mass, and played an essential role in community building. (Fox, 2004: 95, emphasis added)

Although she does not dwell on how British wartime radio broadcasting performed as a 'bridge', other sources (textual and visual) have played a significant role in creating an understanding of how individuals and families listened to the radio.[4] If they did 'feel part of something greater' then it was perhaps due to certain forms of behaviour such as gathering in the living room of a house to listen to reports about the second world war. Likewise the radio occupied a central position in American life as President Roosevelt communicated to over 60% of radio listeners on the eve of the country's entry into war. On 29 December 1940, Roosevelt delivered his famous 'arsenal of democracy' speech to around 65 million listeners (Douglas, 1999). Unsurprisingly, radio's role in mobilizing the nation for war has been much considered by scholars, not least because of the inherent tensions of using a democratizing medium such as radio for the purpose of centralizing control over a populace. What is clear from this research is that the reactions of listeners were incred-ibly varied and depended on a raft of factors including ethnicity, gender, social class and geographical location.

As with any medium, radio listening varied among listening communities in the sense of emotional investments and audience dispositions. In the case of post-1945 south Asia, for instance, listeners to BBC World Service reacted in very different ways to reports about international events such as the 1965

Indo-Pakistani War, the independence of Bangladesh and the Indian Emergency in the 1970s. On the one hand, there were those who viewed the BBC reporting as 'trustworthy' and 'reliable' compared to local radio stations such as All India Radio and Radio Pakistan, which were condemned as 'propaganda mouth-pieces' for the Indian and Pakistani governments respectively. On the other hand, the BBC could also be condemned for being an unwelcome 'colonial' presence in south Asia and intent on secretly pursuing a British government agenda designed to retain control over its former colonies. Evidence for these mixed reactions comes in part from listener letters sent to the BBC World Service office in New Delhi and through interviews with listeners, who often recalled vividly where they were and who they were with when they first heard BBC reports on a particular crisis (Pinkerton, 2008a).

Audience share does not provide sufficient nuance in terms of judging listening habits and emotional investment. Take a recent example involving the BBC Pashto Service, which is broadcast primarily to Afghan audiences. Before the October 2001 assaults, 3.5 million were tuning in to hear a soap opera entitled 'New Home, New Life'. It was the most popular programme in the country and such was its popularity that the Taliban regime was reluctant to impose a ban on radio entertainment for fear of stimulating an insurrection. The BBC's reputation was enhanced and many listeners accordingly tuned into other programmes including news and current affairs. However, that did not mean that the British military's involvement in the country was any less controversial and that listeners were not perfectly capable of enjoying some programmes while deriding others for being 'propaganda' and 'imperialist' in nature. As listeners have demonstrated in many parts of the world, especially with regards to international broadcasters, listening communities can alter in tone and substance.

As radio scholars have noted, listening can always be considered in a more social and cultural context. As Susan Douglas (1999) has claimed:

> the way people listened to radio was profoundly shaped by the era they began to listen … In other words different generations learned to listen and use the radio differently. So it's not only what people listened to … that defined generations. Its *how* they listened as well that shaped people's memories, associations with others, their sense of who they were and their place in history. (Douglas, 1999: 6)

A focus on listening (and how we learn to listen and different modes of listening depending on whether one is listening to news, the weather, music, sport and so on) is essential in developing a critical appreciation of radio. We might, to paraphrase Douglas, also note that the 'place of geography' matters because, as Keith Jones has noted with reference to music and factory work in the midst of the second world war, acts of listening and singing were also shaped by geographical factors such as access to radio, proximity to loudspeakers, the segregated nature of the workplace and the availability of colleagues and friends (Jones, 2005). If this was true of factory work in Britain during the second world war then it is certainly pertinent to acknowledge that listening in places such as India, Pakistan and Afghanistan was as much influenced by prevailing weather patterns as it was by accessibility to the radio and the segregated nature of communal listening.

IV Conclusions: towards a radio geopolitics

This review of some of the literature associated with radio needs to be contextualized with regard to geography's longer-standing engagement with music and sound. Over 10 years ago, Susan Smith (1994) was one of the first to alert geographers to acoustic spaces and the connections between music and sonic geographies. Over the following decade and

a half, others have followed and considered in more detail the role of sound in creating spaces, borders and power; sound as a form of memory and belonging; sound and everyday life; sound's capacity to stimulate movement, dance and performance; the institutions and industries that market and sell aural culture and the machines and technologies that produce, store and disseminate sound in the form of music and other forms of noise (see, for example, Bull, 2004). In short, a great deal of literature now exists on how and with what consequences sound is embedded in history, cultures, institutions, technologies and of course geographies.

From our point of view, the special issue on sonic geographies in the journal *Social and Cultural Geography* (2005) is richly suggestive in terms of how we might further pursue a sonic geopolitics. First, following David Matless's (2005) paper on 'Sonic geography in a nature region', we might consider the acoustic ecologies and how a sonic environment is defined, valued, experienced and communicated. One example that illustrates that potential well is the impact on the Falkland Islands community in April 1982, following the landing of the Argentine invasion task force. After a short bout of resistance, the Islands were taken over and the radio station was ordered to broadcast instructions of Islanders about the situation confronting them. In the period between the landing and the takeover, the station manager Patrick Watts received countless phone calls from Islanders passing on details about the military task force and using their phones and two-way radios to communicate with the radio station (Pinkerton, 2008b). In a community scattered over a number of islands and without access to television, the radio was the key medium in people's lives. It enabled news to be broadcast, music to be played and gossip to be exchanged. Many Islanders later recorded that the takeover of the radio station by the Argentine military authorities was the most traumatic event of the occupation, in a conflict which was later to be mercifully light on civilians compared to later conflicts in the 1990s and beyond. When the local broadcasting station became 'Argentine', listeners relied on BBC World Service for further news about the military situation affecting the Falklands (Pinkerton, 2007).

Second, using the work of Nick Megoran (2006) on the politics of remembrance following the 11 September 2001 attacks, popular geopolitics should consider how prayers, readings, songs and sermons co-join in complex ways to produce commemorative encounters in, for instance, St Paul's Cathedral in London. Listening, as Susan Smith (2000: 634) has noted, is much more than simply overhearing sounds, it involves a performance, which helps listeners decipher, classify and interpret sound. How do certain sonic experiences then become connected to geopolitical cultures and affect? If the combination of music, silence, praying and crying have the power to move embodied subjects, then this deserves more detailed consideration because expressions of American geopolitical power in Afghanistan and Iraq owe as much to strategic planning as they do to an affective response seeking not only to punish those who planned the attacks but also to seek a form of uplifting denouement for a country and its populace hurt, humiliated and traumatized by 11 September 2001. What is lacking from important interventions by scholars such as Ó Tuathail (2003), for example, is a clearly stated commitment to develop audio-ethnographies so necessary to better our understanding of listening practices. The embodied habits that Michael Billig (1995) mentions, such as saluting the flag, need to be co-joined with other practices such as singing and listening to national anthems. Likewise, it should be noted that religious chanting and exhortation in the form of 'God is great' is also central to the embodied habits of Islamic radicals.

Third, we might further contemplate the unequal geopolitics of sound and consider

how some countries such as the United States, Britain and Russia have a greater capacity than others to intrude on sonic environments. For instance, the BBC World Service, as noted earlier, while often valued by many listeners around the world also has been a deeply resented presence in the sonic lives of listeners in Iran, India and Pakistan. During the post-cold-war era, these global broadcasters continue to use their network of transmitters to produce and disseminate news, music and commentary to listening communities around the world. Listeners and other broadcasters are not simply sonic sponges as, in many parts of the world, these overseas sources are just one radio source and popular geopolitical scholarship needs to understand better how listeners combine different radio sources and other analogue and digital media to produce individual and collective media signatures.

Finally, other scholars have pointed to the need to consider the place of 'affect' and the manner in which radio alongside other mediated communication can be registered at the level of the physical body. Affect, as Brian Massumi (1987) has noted, is not the same as emotion and feeling. Emotions are social, feelings are personal and affects are pre-personal. In the case of the latter, it is the most abstract in the sense that it refers to a moment of unformed and unstructured potential. Affect adds intensity and helps determine the relationship between the body, the environment and others. New research in media studies is, as a consequence, calling into question the notion of 'media effects' and instead considers affective resonance. Radio scholars such as John Tebbutt (2006: 859) have analysed the role of commercial radio in Australia, and 'the audience body is a site of a multiplicity of potential responses and the media the site of a range of possible provocations. Their encounters give rise to "affective states". Here we are not dealing with "messages" but rather moods, perceptions'. So if music has a capacity to 'move' then the cultural effects of radio (the tone of a voice, background music and so on) deserve further consideration especially with regard to the micro-bodily geographies of listening.

V Coda

On 31 October 1938, the *New York Times* reported how listeners to a radio production of 'The War of the Worlds' feared that New York and its environs were being subjected to a Martian attack. 'Shaken' and 'agitated' residents left their houses and fled to parks and other open spaces in an attempt to escape a suspected and imminent gas attack. Local police and emergency support services were overwhelmed. In the aftermath, it was apparent that few listeners had distinguished the fictional nature of the programme and were persuaded by its veracity in part because of the manner in which it was delivered – as a news bulletin format.

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Notes

1. One significant difference between 2001 and the time of writing this article (ie, September 2007) is that mobile phone technology has shifted so that it is now common for users to be able to use their phones to photograph and video. Survivors, within the Twin Towers and elsewhere, might have created a very different audiovisual archive.
2. http://www.911digitalarchive.org/ (last accessed 18 April 2008).
3. http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010915.html (last accessed 18 April 2008).

4. 'London Bridge' was the name given to the BBC's direct programming to Britain's South Atlantic colonies (including the Falkland Islands) during 1944. The programme evolved into the 'Calling the Falklands' programme, which rose to prominence during the 1982 conflict with Argentina.

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