

**Diasporic Citizenships, Cosmopolitanisms,  
and the Paradox of Mediated Objectivity:  
An Interdisciplinary Study of the BBC World Service**

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(with many thanks to all our collaborators on the project for their inputs and insights)

This research project traces a double movement: it studies intra-diasporic, cross-diasporic, and potentially cosmopolitan contact zones through the prism of the BBC World Service, and conversely, it investigates the BBC World Service through the prism of intra- and cross-diasporic contacts and their potential for cosmopolitan claims and practices. This double movement is possible and apt because the global broadcaster was set up as a diasporic contact zone from its beginnings on, and was later developed into a cross-diasporic contact zone with cosmopolitan ambitions. We shall explore the external work and internal workings of the BBCWS under five headings:

1. The BBC World Service as a Diasporic Contact Zone
2. Six Interacting Research Themes
3. From Diasporic Empire to Objective Umpire?
4. Transactions: Transporting, Translating, Transposing, Transmitting
5. The Paradoxical Aura of a Mediated Cosmopolitan Objectivity

Proceeding, as we do in the title, from diasporic citizenship, via different versions of cosmopolitanism, to the paradox of a mediated cosmopolitan objectivity will help us, in the end, to shed some empirical light, not only on the paradoxes faced by the BBC World Service, but also on the paradox that is the BBC World Service's elusive essence: a government-funded broadcaster credited by many, though certainly not everybody, with an aura of cosmopolitan objectivity.

## 1. The BBC World Service as a Diasporic Contact Zone

As we indicated, the global British broadcaster has been a diasporic contact zone from its beginnings on. Even its mission statement was diasporic, if selectively so. From the moment of its foundation in 1932, the BBCWS pursued two diasporic goals at once. Its founder and first Director General, Sir John Reith, announced the diasporic missions of the BBC Empire Service with an uncanny ambiguity: this world-wide British radio network would provide ‘a unique opportunity to foster bonds of understanding and friendship between the peoples of Britain’s scattered dominions and the mother country, and to bring to Britons overseas the benefits already enjoyed by the British public at home’ (Mansell 1973:1).

The latter diaspora, that of ‘Britons overseas’, was easy enough to recognize at first sight: they were British-born administrators, soldiers, settlers, experts, and ill-assorted expatriates. A BBC Empire Service would keep them in touch with the motherland, and, to phrase it anachronistically, could put them in virtual touch with each other. This was a touch that many had never felt in their class-ridden home country, and it could even transport them into a seemingly continuous future of ‘connected presence’ (Schroeder 2006). Yet since a worldwide radio service for ‘Britons overseas’ made no economic sense, Sir John, later Lord Reith, invented an alternative, and politically more opportune, diaspora for his foundational argument: ‘the peoples of Britain’s scattered dominions’. (The word ‘peoples’ is interesting here: does it, perhaps involuntarily, anticipate the dissolution of the British Empire into nation-states and their ethno-political or ethno-religious diasporas? We cannot know, of course, but may safely assume that the BBC Empire Service was not meant to provide a global diasporic forum for, say, the descendants of indentured labourers from British India scattered from the Caribbean to Eastern and Southern Africa.)

Lord Reith’s vision of diaspora was thus double-tongued: the diasporic audience of Britons overseas was obvious, yet millions of non-obvious listeners, too, were styled as a diasporic community of loyal ‘peoples’ eager to listen to the Empire Service. Double-tongued or not, the BBCWS’s foundation charter is irreducibly diasporic. Despite that, and since then, the BBCWS has come to be regarded as a symbol and even a synergizer of cosmopolitan

commitments empowered across contending diasporas by a remarkable aura of objectivity. We shall return to the point when we discuss its archives and history in section 3.

At present, when we speak of the BBCWS as a diasporic ‘contact zone’, we mean that it provides sites of transnational intra-diasporic contact as well as cross-cultural encounter, spaces for cross-diasporic creativity and representation, and a forum for cross-cultural dialogue and potentially cosmopolitan translations (Pratt 1992; Clifford 1997). These activities are, however, also marked by historically forged asymmetric power relations (colonialism, imperialism, globalisation), and as such they represent sites of contestation, conflict and transgression. Conversely, diasporic identities are themselves co-shaped by media representations (Gillespie 1995; Karim 2003, Sreberny 2000 & 2002).

Until now, there have been path-breaking studies of the BBC as a national institution (Born 2005) and of the World Service’s media development projects abroad (Skuse 2005), but none that link the two. This project thus asks how a global cultural organization can create and support, or deny and disown (as we shall see), diasporic formations of many kinds, not only linguistic and religious, ethnic and national but also intellectual, artistic and multilingual. Theoretically, these dynamics may be investigated by drawing on a comparative framework enabling comparative analyses of identity and alterity (Baumann and Gingrich 2004). Methodologically, the project focuses on the inter-relations between choices of genre, language and translation as they affect discourses of identity attributed to, or claimed by, diasporic audiences (Toynbee, forthcoming; Woodward 1997). These dynamics are examined through connecting research on creative workers in BBCWS with textual analyses and audience research. The latter will be quantitative, analysing the BBCWS’s own results, as well as qualitative, based on our informants’ own reactions to, and analyses of, the transmitted output.

To enumerate these audiences is a tricky job, given the resources ploughed into reaching them. The BBC global news division, for example, consists of BBC World Service radio, BBC World Television, BBC Monitoring, its international websites, and its charitable arm, the BBC World Service Trust. Together, these services attracted a combined weekly audience of 210 million users in 2006 (Global Voice, 2007). Yet viewed in merely quantitative terms, these efforts seem to reach a miniscule proportion of potential global audience. When

calculating the figures of users (defined by the BBC's own statisticians in different ways), the first impression is one of unrequited effort.

Let us start with radio. Some 42 million listeners tune their radios to BBC's world-wide English-language services each week. They may stand for individuals tuning in for themselves, or even for whole households. Yet even then, this is not a lot of people for the English-language radio services. The radio trump card must thus be sought in the foreign-language services. Here indeed, the World Service reported, in May 2006, that despite growing competition, its radio audiences rose by 3 million since 2001, and that its average weekly radio audience reached 163 million people. (All figures represent people not radios and refer to people who use BBCWS for more than 10 minutes a week. The radio research is based on country wide surveys. The figures are thus estimates and projections and should always be treated with some caution). With the population of the USA counting 300 million, and with radio listeners receiving BBCWS in 150 mega-cities around the world on user-friendly FM, this statistic, too, is far from conclusive. Statistical clarity does not even improve when one takes into account the BBCWS's two other technological arms.

About 60 million households watch BBC World Television (television figures are calculated by household) via satellite or cable (a commercial arm of BBC set up in 1995 and, interestingly, not available to UK audiences – one wonders why?).

30 million people regularly use BBCWS on-line services, 29 million of these outside the UK (These figures are calculated by computer hits not people. It is difficult to get reliable figures of WS on line users by country because a user may, for example, have an American e-mail (aol.com) address but not live in USA). Yet the compound statistics are less than impressive for a global media giant broadcasting in 33, formerly 43 languages. It is thus not the unrequited quantities that tell the story, but the qualitative distributions.

Areas that showed a particular increase in radio usage included Nigeria, Indonesia, Kenya, India, and Nepal, all of them countries that, between 2001 and 2006, experienced acute crises. Correspondingly, the largest audiences for foreign-language radio services are speakers of Hindi (16 million) and speakers of Arabic (12.4 million of the named 163 million). To combine the quantity of listeners with the quality of unspeakable crisis, take Sudan. Long tortured by a civil war, cast into an oil war by USA trade imperialists, and still subjected to a

genocidal war in USA commercial interests, BBCWS radio scores an audience of a staggering 32.5% the Sudanese population (3,900,000).

Yet qualitative testimonies of users tell a different story. Listeners are keen to tell us anecdotes about the lengths they would go to in order to receive BBCWS radio on shortwave: from climbing on top of wardrobes to fixing transistor radios on fishing rods or washing lines outside their windows. An Anglo-Indian woman in her 50s brought up in Bombay connects nostalgic childhood memories of home and hearth, and listening with mother to her daily diet of WS programmes. Her mother created a quintessentially English home in ambience and décor and crucial to that was the WS (Gillespie, o.c. 2007) An Indonesian man in his 40s living in the UK recalls the many post cards sent by his family and friends to the Indonesian broadcasters at Bush House of WS with whom they felt an almost familial intimacy. If one of the broadcasters had a cold and couldn't broadcast, a 'get well soon' postcard would be despatched. Local daily rhythms of Islamic prayer and listening to the WS were intimately interwoven. 'Just about everyone listened to the World Service, and if you wanted to know what was happening in Jakarta or anywhere else in Indonesia, you'd have to go through the WS' (Gillespie, o.c. 2007). The sense of intimacy, trust and proximity is palpable. Many other poignant testimonies exist about 'listening in captivity' from people like Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese Democracy Movement leader, to Terry Waite, the British hostage in Lebanon who, upon his release, paid a moving tribute to BBCWS for 'helping keep us alive' (Tusa 1992: 16). Such individual testimonies and the collective audience figures agree that, in places where the public media are not free, BBCWS acts as a radio lifeline for many. BBCWS radio audiences, so it appears, increase especially at in places and at times of political, economic or ecological crisis.

Among BBC's on-line services, those in Arabic are among the most popular and successful, and BBCWS will use these as a springboard to launch a television arm to rival the authority enjoyed by Al- Jazeera in the Arabic-speaking world. The research project will start just in time to observe the BBC's new Arabic TV station, to be launched in 2007, and its new Persian-language TV service to be launched in 2008. These are world-strategic decisions since they moved the BBCWS to drop no less than ten of its hitherto 43 foreign-language radio services, among them those to all ex-Yugoslav states and provinces, reducing these to one Serbian-language service.

To summarize this preliminary evidence, the BBCWS is far from the global bestseller that it is reputed to be. By way of a working hypothesis, the BBCWS's aura seems to rely on (at least) two utterly different kinds of audience. On the one hand, there is a solid bedrock of habitués, most of them with higher-than-average education and greater cultural capital in their own national, diasporic or cross-diasporic networks. On the other hand, the BBCWS complements this bedrock audience by temporary and shifting mass usages in regions and diasporas faced with acute political, economic, ecological or human rights crises. It is, perhaps, those momentary conjunctions of the elite habitués across the world with temporary new audiences in a country or diaspora in crisis that spell the BBCWS's finest moments. We shall return to the point below.

Basing this study on a foundational definition of the BBCWS as a diasporic, plus/minus cosmopolitan contact zone, we have made some theoretical choices, and these choices need to be spelled out along with their methodological consequences. One of these concerns the concept 'diaspora'. Brubaker (2005) critiques '[...] the application of the term diaspora to an ever-broadening set of cases: essentially to any and every nameable population category that is to some extent dispersed in space' (Brubaker 2005: 1). Yet probably, the argument merely echoes three decades of social scientists questioning whether concepts like ethnic group (Barth 1967) or cultural community (Gillespie 1995; Baumann 1996) can be used as units of analysis. The consensus among all students is that ethnic, religious or national terms cannot be used in such reifying ways. Gratefully, Brubaker specifies that 'the problem is with the definite article. Diasporas are treated as "bona fide" actual entities and cast as unitary actors' [...] To overcome this problem of groupism, I want to argue that we should think of diaspora not in substantialist terms as a bounded entity, but rather as a stance, a claim. We should think of diaspora in the first instance as a category of practice, and only then ask whether, and how, it can fruitfully be used as a category of analysis' (Brubaker 2005: 10-12).

To answer the interjection, we see diasporas neither as merely hypothetical constructions, nor as self-evident and self-enclosed unanimous collectives. This neither-nor represents, in effect, our answer to Rogers Brubaker's critique of diaspora as a concept. Even in the title, we chose the term 'diasporic citizenships' to avoid stylizing diasporas into cohesive social groups. Our preference for using the term 'diasporics' (rather than diasporas) can thus be read in two ways: for one, it is 'diasporics' as in 'dynamics' or 'physics' (the latter, in the shape of 'social

physics' being the oldest name for the social sciences, coined by Comte (1845). Yet secondly, and *pace* Brubaker and generations preceding him, the word 'diasporics' designates real people who indeed claim and implement a diasporic identity as a common banner.

To study diasporic actors and / or cosmopolitan activities on the world stage of the BBC, we will combine the methodologies of the Arts and Humanities with those of the Social Sciences based on the interdisciplinary and interdependent conceptual triad below:

Institutions & Power

Texts & Technologies

Audiences & Subjectivities

If one imagines the BBCWS at the centre of this conceptual triad, the project needs a threefold combination of methods: institutional and archival research must be combined with textual and discourse analysis, and the results must be confirmed or falsified by qualitative research among producers and audiences.

## **2. Six Interacting Research Themes**

We have identified six themes that cross-connect the three corners of the methodological triangle. The themes are led by members of our core research team and concern:

2-1 Diasporic Nationhood (Anabelle Sreberny)

2-2 Religious Transnationalism (David Herbert and Karim Karim)

2-3 The Politics of Translation (Gerd Baumann)

2-4 Drama for Development (Andrew Skuse)

2-2 Sports Across Diasporas (Kath Woodward)

2-3 Migrating Musics (Jason Toynbee and Farida Vis)

(Further details of research taking place within and across these themes (for example, archival work on the origins and development of the WS, the Empire Service particularly, by Marie Gillespie and Andrew Hill) will be provided by theme leaders at the meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> April).

### **3. From Diasporic Empire to Objective Umpire?**

As we have said above, the BBCWS identified itself as an intra- or cross-diasporic contact zone from its very beginnings, and we may briefly recall its doubly diasporic foundation statement: to provide ‘a unique opportunity to foster bonds of understanding and friendship between the peoples of Britain’s scattered dominions and the mother country, and to bring to Britons overseas the benefits already enjoyed by the British public at home’ (Reith 1932 in Mansell 1973: 1).

Archival research and historical contextualization will have to show the transformations of this double-tongued vision, but it may be useful here to raise a few questions. The Britain of the 1930s was pauperized at home (Orwell 19--, 19--), partly because it had bankrupted itself by an Empire which had ceased to earn net profits even before Queen-Empress Victoria had died (Marwick 19--), partly because of the First World War and the ascent of the United States model of imperialism. Class struggles, gender struggles, colonial struggles, even constitutional struggles : name any struggles you can, Britain had them and was on its knees with the General Strike of 1926 and the global economic crisis from the mid-1920s to the late 1930s. A century of Victorian certainties had been pulverised within one generation, roughly speaking between 1914 (WW I) and 1939 (WW II). Just imagine founding a high-tech BBC Empire Service at that period of gradual but incremental breakdown.

The solution to this historic riddle of founding and funding a BBC Empire Service in the 1930s is embodied in Britain’s foreign policy crisis itself. The failure of Empire, together with the failure of Britain’s appeasement policy vis-à-vis European fascists, spelled the BBCWS’s strange document of birth. The episode is worth considering in detail because it has become part of the BBCWS’s own folklore but sheds light also on its squaring the circle between foreign policy imperatives and the imperatives of objective broadcasting. According to the BBCWS’s own website history:

The BBC’s first foreign language service began in 1938 with the launch of the Arabic Service. The aim was to spread ‘straightforward information and news’ (BBC 2003), and the

immediate hope was to counter the propaganda that Arabs were hearing from a station set up by the Italian Fascist leader Mussolini, after his troops had overrun Abyssinia (i.e. present-day Ethiopia and parts of Somalia).

Immediately, the BBC's Arabic service found itself in conflict with the Foreign Office. Government officials objected when the very first bulletin included news that a Palestinian Arab had been executed on the orders of a British military court. The Foreign Office held to the view that 'straight news must not be interpreted as including news which can do us harm with the people we are addressing.' But the BBC remained defiant. 'The omission of unwelcome facts of news and the consequent suppression of truth runs counter to the corporation's policy laid down by appropriate authority,' said a statement (BBC 2003).

Two months later, the Spanish and Portuguese Services were in action – in the face of what was said to be a 'concerted and highly organised' Fascist propaganda campaign in Latin America.

The Munich crisis, in September 1938, ensured that the explosion into international broadcasting would continue. At just a few hours' notice, the BBC was asked to provide news bulletins in German, French and Italian – to accompany an Address to the Nation by the appeasement Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain. Reports tell of a German-speaker being dragged out of a cocktail party to help. It was soon decided that the new European services should continue indefinitely.' (BBC [http n.d. \[2003\]: 'The History of BBC News: 1938: Foreign language services launched'](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/newswatch/history/noflash/html/1930s.stom), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/newswatch/history/noflash/html/1930s.stom>, accessed 23/11/06).

Two things are clear from the above quotes: the BBCWS's unwanted godfathers were the fascist rulers of Italy, Portugal, Spain and, a little later but worse, Germany. More importantly, even when in conflict with its paymaster, the Foreign and Colonial Office, the fledgling Empire Service was now on the way to becoming a world service, and it defended its editorial autonomy without hesitation or compromise. This kind of forthright defence of editorial autonomy can be seen as part of an uncompromising journalistic ethic among BBCWS journalists; but it may also be argued that, even at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in the long run, the national interest may be better secured by winning the battle of

hearts and minds than by bowing to visible (or, at the time, audible) censorship and coercion. The image or mirage of cosmopolitanism is indeed what the BBCWS contributes as a special cultural capital to the FCO or British Ministry of Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Yet there is no version of cosmopolitanism that is free of self-interest. The art of hiding one's self-interest lies in the crafting, of course, but the key riddle remains: why is the BBCWS's crafting of British interests so hard to pinpoint in that global voice commanding a self-made aura of objectivity? Is it that the BBCWS takes a more informed and long-term view of Britain's foreign interests and public diplomacy than the Ministers of the Day can do?

Galvanizing opposition to European fascists gave the BBC Empire Service its moral credentials as a globalizing voice for civil rights; 1930s anti-Stalinism further updated the BBC's global authority as a cosmopolitan voice for 'democracy'. The advent of World War Two brought the incipient beacon of imperialist broadcasting under the control and onto the payroll of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, that is, the British ministry of foreign affairs which, to this day, funds all its operations. This world-historic anomaly will come up time and again in the arguments to follow, including those about objectivity, translation, and cosmopolitanism. Since the British Empire ceased to exist between 1947 (India, Pakistan) and 1962 (almost all African colonies), a British World Service apparently cleansed of its colonial past could now broadcast a guilt-free voice claiming global objectivity.

The Cold War phase was a tailor-made opportunity for the BBCWS. As a public service broadcaster, its editorial independence and managerial semi-independence remained guaranteed. Admittedly, as a pay child of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, it had periodically to re-earn its privileged grant by translating British international policy objectives into objective-sounding news. Yet this worked extremely well, and government interferences could be minimized or even, if need be, named and shamed in front of a worldwide public that wished the BBCWS to sound its voice of real or imagined objectivity. True to old traditions at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the BBCWS saw Soviet-dominated Central and Eastern Europe as a natural ally against the rising West European powers (France, later Germany, later the E.U.), and it thus beat its Cold War drums more against Moscow than against Warsaw or Prague, Budapest or Bucharest. (Belgrade was, of course, beyond critique: the Easterners who are Westerners: see 2-3)

There may even have been explicit distrust against the USA that, after all, used the Second World War debts to cripple the British Empire and annex the remnants of the Commonwealth for their soft drinks and oil trade imperialism. As the British Empire, the *raison d'être* for the Empire Service, turned first into 'The British Commonwealth' and then into 'The Commonwealth of Nations', the British at home missed the 'white revolution' of modernizing their technologies and labour relations under Wilson and subsequent Prime Ministers. The end of a British or Commonwealth perspective on the world came with Prime Minister Thatcher's national self-demolition of Britain as either an industrial or a political power independent of the USA. Not surprisingly, British foreign policies, - and these are what the BBCWS is paid for and by -, then turned from transatlantic *folie* (PM Thatcher's Falklands War of 1983) to transatlantic servitude in a succession of wars (Iraq v. Iran, Iraq v. Kuwait, USA & UK v. Afghanistan, USA & UK v. Iraq). Given the combination of state funding and the British state's self-enslavement to US-American interests, is it not surprising that anyone still believes a word that the BBCWS broadcasts. Is the BBCWS then merely US-American propaganda phrased in competent English? Yes and No. Its English usage certainly sets a worldwide standard of propriety, competence, and that elusive 'authorial voice'. Yet also No: the BBCWS is not widely regarded as a propaganda stooge, and that ( - if we may loop the argument - ) has everything to do with the BBCWS's proven diasporic credentials.

From the 1930s-40s anti-fascism through the 1950s-80s Cold War to the 1990s-2000s transatlantic servitude, much of the BBCWS's attraction and intelligence has been and remains engineered by intellectual diasporics that had no 'natural' part in the British-born imperial diaspora that Lord Reith imagined. Archival research will certainly evidence an inordinate proportion of diasporics and national, ethnic or religious outsiders. Diasporic individuals, especially exiled or asylum-seeking intellectuals from continental Europe (1933-1989) played key roles in the BBC's Bush House, whose Art Deco façade is still adorned today by the seemingly Toraic motto: 'Let Nation speak Peace unto Nation'. The Biblical semblance is entirely fake, by the way, and is probably a quote, not from the Judaeo-Christian or Muslim Scripture, but from a 1930s speech by the diplomat Prime Minister Chamberlain who hoped to appease Hitler's Germany to safeguard the British Empire when the BBC Empire Service was set up.

Biblical or not, the BBCWS's diasporic profile has continued ever since. The BBCWS excelled, from the late 1930s to now, with its exiled and refugee writers, intellectuals, artists

and poets, providing them with a creative ‘home away from home’. Home is not a metaphor in this context, as one can glean from two delightful testimonies of the ‘Poets at Bush House’ (Weissbort 2003), both concerned with translation, too. Keith Bosley, renowned as the most sonorous newsreader ever, pays a tender tribute to his diasporic colleagues and explains it by the World Service’s mission of cosmopolitan objectivity:

‘While most of my translation work is with languages I can handle on my own ([...]), I have translated some forty languages from Abkhaz to Zyryan. Bush House was the perfect setting for such activity and friendlier (in my experience) than a university: indeed, Bush House was famous throughout the BBC for its friendly atmosphere. This was probably because we all believed in our role as truth-tellers to the world, and there was no in-house competition’ (Weissbort 2003: 78).

Some may want to sneer at died-in-the-wool Brits (‘BBCWS types’) who enjoy the company of diasporics and then just exploit them but would this be fair? Even Prime Minister Thatcher could not undermine Britain’s self-image as the world’s ‘Haven of Exile’. From Karl Marx through the East European Jews to the Russian and Eastern Bloc dissidents, Britain excelled as that haven of cosmopolitan openness, and the BBCWS transformed those influxes into a culture of, typically British-positivist, objectivity. Be that a miracle or a mirage, it still informs and sensitizes that global community of mutual recognition who smile: ‘Oh really ? – So you, too, get your news from the BBCWS ?! - I do, too!’ Yet let us not forget the counter-position: the millions that distrust the BBCWS as a state-paid instrument of British propaganda and British ‘public diplomacy’. To balance both exaggerations, it is worth consulting the latest mission statement signed by H.M.Government: ‘promoting an interest in Britain and the English language around the world, projecting Britain’s values of trustworthiness, openness, fair dealing, creativity, enterprise and community’ (Tusa, 1992: 16). (Incidentally, if you did not know what British values were, then you know them now: ‘trustworthiness, openness, fair dealing, creativity, enterprise, and community’ -- as embodied hand in glove by the BBCWS.)

Three things will be clearer now, or at least more enigmatic. One, the continued trust in the BBCWS’s independence and objectivity is an empirical historical and social-science problem and even an epistemological one. Secondly, it cannot be the diasporic producers and users alone that turned the BBCWS into the world’s most respected, though financially starved,

cross-diasporic contact zone. Finally, therefore, there must be a combination of intra- and cross-diasporic skills at Bush House with the cross-diasporic and / or cosmopolitan convictions of its users that keep maintaining or re-inventing the BBC's aura as a global voice of objectivity.

Despite its chequered history, its inconclusive statistics, and its potentially murky state funding, the BBCWS embodies that 'non-attached angel' of objectivity, if we may enlist the phrase by W.H. Auden (1938) who, like his arch-enemy Orwell, actually worked for the BBCWS. This aura of objectivity is all the more intriguing at a time when objectivity is a word of the past.

Habituation to the BBCWS can be seen as a moral pursuit of informed citizenship, and that these citizenships can be diasporic, cross-diasporic, or cosmopolitan. The quote: 'Oh you, too ...?' came from a colleague anthropologist who had learned to listen to BBCWS Radio from her grandfather in war-town Sri Lanka. Reliance on the BBCWS can sometimes appear as a hereditary phenomenon: it is a habit that runs in families. Let us add another quote from a girl of 17 who watches BBC World TV and does not want her parents to know this: 'BBC is objective because they never play on close-ups or exploit dramatics. When I have a question like: "are these humans or animals?", like when I see civil wars, they [at BBCWS] always take a broadband view: none of us are either truly human or totally pigs' (Silva, Baumann, o.c. 2007).

Clearly, objectivity has been a philosophical riddle from the beginning of writing onwards. When Sumerian elites started writing down their tax statistics and prayers, around 6000 BCE, the written document was a sacred chart because it was objective and true (Goody 19-- etc: on literacy 19--, Marpurgo 19--): it rendered objective whatever could previously have been disputed in a face-to-face interaction. All Early Civilizations continued on that path, from Egypt to the Inca Empire. Only Plato turned the question of objectivity from the technological mastery of script into a philosophical riddle of knowing. If humans, constitutionally captive in their cognitive caves or cages, could only see the epistemological shadows of the word out there, how could their writing technology objectify that world? Plato's conclusion was as logical as it was radical: most citizens of his Ideal Republic would not be taught writing or even reading. Needless to say, his social experiment of running a Platonic Republic on Sicily failed, but the fall-out is still with us. Reading leads to scepticism, writing even more so, and

even the writing down of seemingly objective natural facts is a tampering with the facts by having observed them (Heisenberg 19--) or by sticking them into a pre-defined paradigm (Kuhn 19--) or a self-validating discourse (Latour 19--). Understandably, therefore, a discourse that embodies objectivity is a contradiction in terms.

The notion of objectivity has been relegated even further by that post-modern taboo in media studies and cultural studies, media sociology and anthropology, and even history by now. Yet ironically enough, objectivity is the very first notion that researchers hear invoked by just about every listener, viewer and internet user of the BBCWS. Clearly there is a reality gap between us academics and the people we desire to understand. Even when we can quantify how many users of the BBCWS are aware of its funding by a Government Ministry, we need to be baffled by that human notion of objectivity in a time that some professors call postmodern. There seems to live, among two to three million self-selecting tuners-in or loggers-on every week, an almost Durkheimian collective representation that conjures up a global, and thus cosmopolitan, objectivity. Their social profiles do not evidence them as victims of *'The Magic of Modernity'* (Meyer and Pels 2004).

To neutralize this elite and / or elitist faith or doubt in objectivity despite all contrary knowledge, we have used Walter Benjamin's (19--) concept of 'aura'. Benjamin, torn between elitism and snobbery ('authenticity') and socialism ('reproduction'), plays the 'aura' of the authentic work of art against the mechanics of its reproduction. Yet Benjamin had one thing right: what makes the original seem to excel above its copies is its 'aura' of being the original: to coin a phrase, 'the real thing.' The BBCWS has indeed thrived on this aura of authenticity and objectivity. All that we need to clarify about Benjamin is thus a tiny caution: it is not the aura intrinsically possessed by the original work of art (for we no longer have a clear idea of what a work of art is), but the aura socially ascribed to its status as a 'work of art'. What casual consumers or diligent devotees ascribe to the BBCWS is nothing short of an aura conferred by an anonymously shared collective representation.

Connecting Benjamin and Durkheim, we can perhaps transform the intangible quality of the BBCWS's aura into an object of empirical study and analyse its techniques of projecting objectivity. With that problem reduced to empirically answerable questions, we can open up three crucial questions about the BBCWS.

How far, and how exactly, does it function as an intra-diasporic contact zone; how far and how as a cross-diasporic contact zone; and how far and how does it act as a crucible for different cosmopolitan convictions?

If we can answer these three questions, we will come closer to understanding the BBCWS's own paradoxical nature, or assumed magic. Combining the historical record may go some way toward explaining the BBCWS' continued aura of objectivity. The BBC employed and emancipated many post-independence elites, with examples ranging from India 1947 to South Africa now. It was not least employment and audience policies that explain the seeming absurdity of an ex-imperial, ex-Cold War, and always government-dependent broadcaster being elevated to the near-mythical status of a global emblem of objectivity. Yet as Levi-Strauss (19-- ) persuades us, the origin of a phenomenon is one thing, its persistence another.

In any case, the three questions are clearly questions of degree, not of a Yes or No answer. Even the distinction between intra-diasporic and cross-diasporic is one of degree, rather than absolute essences or self-evident diasporic boundaries. Here, Brubaker's (2005) cautions about the fictitious character of bounded diasporas do, at last, come into their own. Is a diasporic exchange between Protestant Christians and Catholic Christians an intra-diasporic contact or a cross-diasporic one? The answer can never be etic, that is, based on outsiders' analyses, and absolute; it can only be emic and situational, based on the participants' own assessment in one or another context. By the same token, even the distinction between different kinds of cosmopolitanisms is one of degree, not of a black-and-white dichotomy between hegemonic as opposed to mutual, metropolitan as opposed to reciprocal. These polarities, however, indicate one possibility, at least, to link the BBCWS's core activity, translation in the very widest sense, with its core aspiration and widespread reputation, the creation of a global public sphere of cosmopolitan exchange.

#### **4. Transactions and Transformations:**

##### **Transporting, Translating, Transposing, Transmitting**

In searching for a bridge between the BBCWS's diasporic roots past and present, and its claim to, or aura of, cosmopolitan objectivity, our first attempt focused on the concept of

translation. But perhaps translation alone is too literal a concept to use for the bridging task. Other contributors, too, had wanted to broaden the term because it sounded too literalist and left out all the non-linguistic steps: the transactions from local sites to Bush House, from Bush House to local production centres, and all the selections of techniques and personnel involved in these. These steps comprise decisions about commissions, translators, re-translators, editorial structures, and what to do or not do with the products. Many of us (telephone conference Nov. 2006) wanted to see the term translation be broadened out to its widest possible range of meanings: from linguistic translation to cultural translation, technological translation, cross-cultural translation, and translation as a managed metaphor. To take account of these critiques, we have now split up 'translation' into four transactions: transporting, translating, transposing, and transmitting. Let us briefly dub the four transactions.

On (1), **transporting** signifies the flows of communication to and fro between Bush House (Centre) and its regional desks and correspondents. There may also be peripheral transport lines among regional production centres, but that is an empirical question. On (2) translation, we propose that **translating** should perhaps concern only strictly linguistic matters. The next dynamic concerns (3) **transposing**, that is, saying the same thing in another key. Only after that, we can study decisions about (4) **transmitting**: who in the world gets what, and when do they get it?

Perhaps it is these interacting choices about (1) transporting, (2) translating, (3) transposing and (4) transmitting that allow the BBCWS to do its favourite job: **transforming**. From its beginnings to now, the BBCWS has always had to transform intra-diasporic contact zones into cross-diasporic ones, and then infuse these with BBC-style convictions about cosmopolitan citizenship. That, at least, was the original hypothesis if one wanted to explain the BBCWS's quintessential riddle: its aura of cosmopolitan objectivity despite a historical succession of well-known vested interests and biases and now at a time of widespread distrust of global media and their hidden agendas.

On **(1)** Transporting, one may mention an episode witnessed by an anthropologist working in Bangla Desh (o.c. Hoek, 4 Dec. 2006). A local cameraman films a scene that he thinks will interest the BBCWS. Since the footage needs translating informants' statements from Bengali into English, the cameraman does the dubbing himself and transports the whole package, exclusive footage plus improvised translations, to Bush House which buys the package but

reserves all rights to edit and re-edit, re-translate and cross-translate, transmit or not transmit to audiences of its own choice. In cases like this, it is evident how transporting, translating, transposing and transmitting are interdependent processes before they become acts of transformation.

With **(2)** Translating, we now narrow the term to the strictly linguistic. Perhaps the most commonly used polarity to discern different translatory choices is traced to a pioneer of translation studies as an academic discipline, James Holmes. Osimo (2004) introduces it as follows: ‘Holmes [...] proposed a very efficient model to describe the translator's choices within the framework of her own/other's dialectics. Holmes holds that the translator operates in three areas: the linguistic context, the literary intertext, and the socio-cultural situation. In these three spheres, the translator may opt for a greater or lesser preservation of the other's element in the translated text, which is visualized along two axes: exoticizing versus naturalizing, and historicizing versus modernizing’ (Osimo 2004). As Holmes put it:

‘Each translator[...], then, consciously or unconsciously works continually in various dimensions, making choices on each of three planes, the linguistic, the literary, and the socio-cultural, and on the X axis of exoticizing versus naturalizing and the Y axis of historicizing versus modernizing.’ (Holmes 1988: 48)

Bruno Osimo, 2004: Translation Course, online at:

[http://www.logos.it/pls/dictionary/linguistic\\_resources.cap\\_1\\_27\\_en?lang=en#3](http://www.logos.it/pls/dictionary/linguistic_resources.cap_1_27_en?lang=en#3)

[James] Holmes, [arguably!! -TC] the founder of translation studies as a discipline, has proposed a very efficient model to  
Quoting from: HOLMES J. S. *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*. Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1988. ISBN 90-6203-739-9. p.48

The point about naturalization is that it renders the source text in the source language invisible and inaudible, for its linguistic, literary and socio-cultural specificities are encompassed by and into a hegemonic view of the world. This corresponds to Baumann and Gingrich (2004): the otherness of the source language disappears, much as ‘naturalization’ as a juridical process of turning aliens into nationals makes their old nationality disappear from the screen. Naturalization gives the audience no pause to acknowledge the otherness of the other.

Exoticization marks the other extreme. It flags up the different conceptual economy of the source language and culture, and it thus animates the audience to wonder about the otherness of the other, be it to respect it on its own terms or to stigmatize it. Speaking in the cognitive frameworks proposed by Baumann and Gingrich (2004), one may refer to these processes by Edward Said's term orientalization.

Thinking of some of the BBCWS's translation practices in particular, one may perhaps recognize the polarity of naturalizing versus exoticizing in three examples. A large-scale example will question the translatability of world news; a small-scale example will interrogate translatability in the plebeian genre of street corner interviews; and a third example will inject the factor of regional accents into the equations or imbalances of translation and dubbing.

Let us start on the largest scale. When an Arabic-speaking interviewee speaks of '*al-jihad*', does one translate this into 'The Jihad' or into 'the Muslim Holy War'; and when an American President speaks of a 'crusade' against 'the axis of evil', how does one translate this for the BBCWS's Arabic Service? Foreign correspondents usually insert one or two standard words from the local language or *lingua franca* to lend a whiff of local colour and linguistic competence to their reports. Yet the exoticizing 'authenticity' is usually a Potemkin's façade, not least since most Western correspondents working from the Middle East to East Asia must rely on the thinnest veneer of local language knowledge. At the height of the Second Intifada of Palestine, the hundreds of international correspondents reporting from Cairo to Baghdad included not even a dozen who could read an Arabic newspaper, let alone a government decree, without the help of their translation stooges and local peons (*o.c. confidential or quote ??*). The same reliance on unemployed local post-graduates and all-knowing taxi drivers pertained from Bosnia (*o.c. confidential or quote ??*) to Sri Lanka, and from Somalia to Southern Thailand. The reported results were predictable even after cross-checking the translatory choices at Bush House: for example, Bosnia was no longer an international war *about* Bosnia (which it was), but '*the civil war in*' Bosnia. Transmission by the BBCWS must by definition aim at global comprehensibility. The flourish of exoticization is thus more usually performed in the presenter's introductory commentaries on these 'remarkable goings-on' in those strange cultures.

The inverse is also true: how does one translate the technical term NGO (non-governmental organization) from a pseudo-democratic civil society into a language that encapsulates a totally different view of the relationship between the state and its citizens' civil society? The Arabic [this needs correction:] Manama khiir hakumiyya can easily indicate an anti-government organization. Orientalist assumptions that Muslim societies make no distinction between state politics, religion, and civil society are clearly nonsense. Asad (19XX: pp. XX-XX) has shown this to be an ethnocentric case of skewed lenses, although, admittedly, he employed a comparison that was rather provocative: the freedom of civil society in Saudi mosques versus the self-doubting cowardice of the United Kingdom incapable of protecting Salman Rushdie. Yet polemics apart, it is obvious that there are large-scale questions of translating world news because all translations are contingent. Turning from the large-scale problematics of translation, let us cast a glance at the translation of workaday sound bites, such as we find in the genre of casual street corner interviews.

Seemingly spontaneous street corner interviews have three advantages on the scale between naturalizing and exoticizing translations. One, they shine 'local colour' on all the re-reportings of the long-predicted events having happened as the BBCWS had intimated weeks ago. Secondly, and as importantly, they adorn correspondents with the double halo of journalistic authenticity combined with local access. Most importantly, they confirm a myth, invented in the USA but imitated by all totalitarian states since, that 'democracy' is 'the voice of the people', especially those who volunteer for sound bites on hap-hazard (or preferably hazardous) street corners. Here, then, is a street corner 'voice of the people' interview, anywhere from Morocco to Indonesia, which ends in the words: '*in sha'*-Allah'. This may be translated by anything from the most banal 'maybe' via the cautiously naturalizing 'God willing' to the most exoticizing 'if Allah wills it'. All three translations, as well as another half-dozen, are linguistically correct; yet which is chosen for which context, ranging from the grieving mother in Palestine to the opposition intellectual ( - or is he a fundamentalist or even a *jihadist* ? - ) in the Muslim South of the Philippines. The choice is entirely the translators' and his or her editors', and thus all translations of street corner sound bites are inevitably fraught by either wilful or unwitting choices between naturalization and exoticization. The conundrum can only get worse when even BBC World, the World Service's commercial television arm, excels with street corner snapshots of mothers in the paroxysm of mourning their children killed by AIDS (American International 'Defense' Strategy). Did the mother say: 'Maybe (*'in-sha 'Allah*) our own soldiers will do the same?', or did she say: 'With God's

help (*'in-sha-'Allah*), our own fighters will avenge my children's death' ? – As an afterthought to this second example, one can only be glad that Al Jazeera started its English-language TV service (world-wide except for the USA where it cannot be received because of 'technical problems' not pertaining in Canada) before BBC World started its Arabic language TV service.

On the tiniest scale of manipulation, it is not even translation, but accent that marks the difference between naturalizing and exoticizing approaches. This is not as subtle as it may sound. BBCWS radio tried out a policy, some twenty years ago (ca. 1988), to broadcast interviews with non-English interviewees by using 'ethnic'-accent voice-overs to re-sound their words. So when Luis Ignacio 'Lula' da Silva was still a radical trade unionist, rather than the President of Brazil, his sound bites were dubbed *inna fonny Portugows Inglis*, and each NGO from Francophone Africa *tawkede too zee lisseneurs of zee BBC vitta strainch Frens akksont*. The silly experiment in exoticizing accents was abandoned when hundreds of listeners wrote in, especially from the Caribbean and South Asia, to protest against these demeaning voice-overs imposed on intelligent people by a BBCWS that wanted to exoticize every voice outside the West by giving it an ethno-comic accent. Hundreds of letters reached the BBCWS's radio grudge box, 'Write On', and the BBCWS's only defence was, notably, that 'one' had only employed native speakers of the original language to dub the message in a native accent. Just imagine hearing Nobel Peace Prize winners like Rigoberta Mench'u of Guatemala, Professor Wangari Maathai of Kenya, and Muhammad Yunus of Bangla Desh being dubbed by a 'native translator' selected for a rare incapacity to pronounce English-language phonemes! Gratefully, this demeaning habit has stopped for all but a few exceptions, among them, however, a representative of the Indian *Dalit* ('outcast') movement insisting on the same civil rights for all. Yet let our phonology remain philosophical: maybe (*'in-sha'Allah*), exoticizing the victors' or victims' words by fake ('on the buses') accents is better than naturalizing them through a Texan accent. But all this does beg the question of which accent is OK then?

As we have said, this short section is to unpack our previous holdall concept of translation into four constituent parts: (1) transporting in and out, (2) translating to and fro, and (3) transposing the key, and (4) transmitting selectively, in order then to trace the transformation of the messages to eventual consumers. We now proceed from (2) translating to (3) transposing.

**(3)** Transposition is mainly used as a musical term: you play the same thing, but in a different key. For an experiment, ask your child or a friend to play Bach's 'Air on a G-String' in A-flat Major. Half a tone up should make no difference, but they will break their fingers, ruin the tune, and curse your perversity. Transposition matters. Just as the listener cannot feel at home in Bach's homely C-Major Prelude (the one we all know) when the self-same notes are transposed into brilliant E-Major, so the BBCWS cannot provide solace or conviction if it gets the pitch wrong. So the pitch needs to be adjusted, attuned, and transposed according to the user's receptivity. It is, - and here Tusa (1992) is right -, a matter of nuance and inflexion, the latter quite often by accident and accent.

The most radical example of translation combined with transposition may well be Skuse's study of the quintessentially English farmers 'The Archers', transposed into a bestseller in Afghanistan. Less radical exemplars will be found in all our themes.

A good historic example can be seen when George Orwell worked for the BBC's Eastern Services during World War Two, he found, according to Douglas Kerr, 'an organ of colonial discourse propagating the word and world view of the metropolitan centre to its peripheral subject people' (Kerr 2002: 473-90). Apparently, it was Orwell's commitment to anti-fascism that sustained him in his work for the BBC, even though it sometimes compromised his equally fervent anti-imperialist stance.

The complicated modalities of the newsletter texts he wrote repay close attention. They were translated into Hindi and Urdu and read out by an Indian Muslim Zulfaqar Ali Bokaharu - a great friend and colleague of Orwell, with whom he enjoyed a wonderful sense of mutuality and reciprocity, who was later to become the head of Pakistan Broadcasting Services. The newsletters raise important questions of translation and transposition, authority and rhetoric, genre and medium that are central to our project. Orwell's newsletters exhibit, according to Kerr (2002, 'rhetorical habits of judiciousness, restraint, and a gentlemanly tone, a commitment to verifiable facts, and an unwillingness to exhort or browbeat the listener'. But to the listener the texts were spoken as if by an Indian to Indians. Was soft propaganda an essential part of the missions of the BBCWS, and is it now ?

The perceived credibility and authority of Orwell's newsletters derived from their unrivalled access to news from around the world through what is now called BBC Monitoring. This organisation translates and transcribes news from foreign languages into English from around the world – a mutuality that continues to challenge and relativise a British centred view of events. It was and still is an invaluable journalistic resource that, according to Kerr 'underwrites the authority with which the strategic gaze of Orwell's newsletters to his Indian audiences sweeps the globe, for the ears if not the eyes of the BBC were everywhere' (Kerr 2002: 480). This omniscience enabled Orwell to assert that his newsletters reported the truth rather than propaganda and the truth, to him, was based on verifiable facts. Even if the newsletters masked the process of their production and translation and naturalised a British view of the world, Orwell was no government lackey, and nor was the BBC.

From **(3)** Transposing, let us go to **(4)** Transmitting. This work may appear easy if one simply documents the transmission schedules of BBCWS productions across the world and the web. Yet the ease vanishes with the task. Exactly which parts of which World Service productions are broadcast to whom at what times and by what means? As we mentioned earlier, BBC World, the commercial television arm of the BBCWS, makes its choices semi-transparent by exempting certain regions from real-time transmission ('except for viewers in Asia'). Yet what counts as Asia, what of it as the Middle East (sometimes in, sometimes out), and what counts as South Asia-only or East Asia-only in these seemingly self-evident schedules? If cultural diplomacy is the job of the BBCWS and the aim of its government financiers, then decisions about transmitting are crucial to understanding both enterprises, ministry and broadcaster, in their interactions. It may suffice here to indicate the relevance of such decisions, for the answers must be empirical. (BBC World TV is not available in Britain, but is re-hashed, re-mixed, and re-packaged as 'BBC 24' at around 2 o'clock in the night, British time. Then, a pointedly British re-packager takes the presenter's desk. Insomniac Radio 4 listeners find themselves tuned in the WS in the dark hours of the night).

Let us take a classic example that shows these tensions of what to transmit to whom. The BBC World input carried a diplomatic report about 'President' Mugabe being allowed to attend yet another session of 'The African Union' (date?). BBC World TV and BBCWS radio abstained even from mentioning his old Maoist pretensions, his genocidal campaigns against the Southerners in 'his' country, and his military evictions of several million homeless from their shanty towns because they had not voted for him. Only in the BBC 24 report about

Mugabe being invited by other African Union (kleptocrat) members was supplemented by some basic facts. These basic facts included the systematic bulldozer demolition of tens of thousands of slum homes housing anyone who had not voted for him, and the vigilante expropriation, for Mugabe's private gain, of Zimbabwe's economic backbone, its agricultural industry. A remaining third of that wealth-creating industry was still in the hands of British-born Zimbabweans who had not sold up to Mugabe yet. And so perhaps the British World Service did not want to push a semblance of 'national interest' above its interest in 'African affairs'?

Even the greatest claim to cosmopolitan brokerage can thus never play an innocent game of reciprocity among all parties involved. Choices in transporting, translating, transposing and transmitting are the inevitable mortgages imposed on any centre that claims an objectivist cosmopolitan voice, but also needs culturally sensitive, or world-regionally adjusted, services. Yet before we can be sure about this, we must be sure about the data. A good place to start, may be to study what actually goes on within the editorial systems in place: the monitoring, the monitoring of the monitors, and the formal and informal rules about recruitment, training, lines of command, and, in the end, the decisions about what gets translated or re-translated by whom in which ways for whom.

Far more common than full translations are selective translations, where editorial decisions use omission, condensation or simplification as part of the translating, or even pre-translation, process. Even when a full translation was demanded, these processes of selection can take place on the editor's desk at the last minute. Often, the text that is broadcast is not really a translation at all, but a new artefact. True, it is based, or at least sourced from, old artefacts, but it is now tailor-made to serve the purposes of the audience as the broadcaster wishes to address them.

We need also to be mindful of the 'loops and flows' of translation among the different languages. After all, translations will be going on between Hindi and Russian, Farsi and Arabic, and less obvious examples, and not always in pairs and under the censorship of English. The ST (source text) is not canonical, pre-established at the imperial centre IS the very ongoing process itself of inter/transnational/lingual/cultural translation, i.e. politics, art, media, reportable discourses on events: what BBC "covers" and of course plays some part in producing. When one thinks of the Politics of Translation in broadcasts to Sri Lankans and the

former Yugoslavians, how does the BBCWS manage to translate (if that is the word) a news text in Tamil into ‘the same’ news text in Sinhalese? – How does the BBCWS ‘translate’ a news text from Bosnia, delivered in Serbo-Croat, to the Kosovo Albanians? – Where does English interfere, where does the BBC come in, and how does British international diplomacy intervene? Clearly, we cannot know the answers without the data, but much of the Politics of Transformation must be happening informally and certainly off-air. Just as clearly, we cannot dive into the informal agreements in the Bush House cafeteria, but we should keep our eyes open for the production processes, not least the decentralized ones.

## **5. The Paradox of a Mediated Cosmopolitan Objectivity**

Cosmopolitanism as a modernist term, as opposed to its earlier uses among humanist thinkers, was coined in the 1840s and 1850s. An early usage by J.S. Mill (1848) reads almost like a definition of globalization: ‘Capital’, writes Mill, ‘is becoming more and more cosmopolitan’. (1848: II,iii,xvii: 113). The term reached a far wider public through the local press of New York in the 1850s (Rindoks MS 2003) when old New Yorkers felt swamped by new immigrants. *Three Quotes coming*. Even now, the term is used there to assuage the fears of people who feel their interests threatened by global forces. Thus, David Held, the British political scientist, argues that cosmopolitanism is the antidote to nationalism in order to justify (unreasonably) globalization: ‘Cultural nationalism is, and in all probability will remain, central to people’s [sic] identity ; however, as political nationalism – the assertion of the exclusive political priority of national and the national identity and the national interest – may not remain as significant ; for political nationalism cannot deliver many sought-after public goods without seeking accommodation with others, in and through regional and global cooperation. In this respect, only an international or, better still, a cosmopolitan outlook can, ultimately, accommodate itself to the political challenges of a more global [sic] era, marked by overlapping communities of fate [sic] and multilevel / multilayered politics’ (Held 2003 PAGE?). This is poor social science but cosmopolitanism as a concept has always been the cheapest street worker on the block.

Already Ulf Hannerz (1990) had distinguished between the false cosmopolitans, such as refugees and labour migrants, and the true cosmopolitans such as you and me, the true metropolitans: ‘Now and then, exiles can be cosmopolitans; but most of them are not. Most

ordinary labour migrants do not become cosmopolitans either. For them going away may be, ideally, home plus higher income; often the involvement with another culture is not a fringe benefit but a necessary cost, to be kept as low as possible'. Not surprisingly, such value-laden arguments sparked radical scepticism such as Peter van der Veer's: 'Cosmopolitanism is the Western engagement with the rest of the world, and that engagement is a colonial one that simultaneously transcends the national boundaries as it is bound to them.' (Van der Veer 2002: 16).

Alot of people working for Bush House, but not at Bush House, would probably nod in resigned agreement. Yet the BBCWS would have died ages ago if it did not live on, and breathe a voice into, that aura of post-imperial and post-colonial cosmopolitanism. After all, it was hundreds of extraordinary exiles and involuntary diasporics that breathed the voice of an enlightened cosmopolitan ethos and ethics into that forever-bankrupt remnant of a bankrupt ex-Empire.

Yet the link must not be forged by a misplaced concreteness, as in : diasporic staff at the BBCWS create cosmopolitan thinking. This shortcut would spell a mechanistic sociology or, at best a collection of reminiscences, just as if diasporic staff could, by themselves, create a cosmopolitan contact zone. If there is a link at all between the BBCWS's history as a diasporic contact zone and its aura as a forum of cosmopolitan thinking, then that link must be theorized. This is a tough job, but we have already started it with our three methodological poles as quoted above (institutions and power, texts and technologies, audiences and subjectivities).

To remind the reader, we set out to study diasporic and / or cosmopolitan contacts through the prism of the BBCWS and, conversely, to study the BBCWS through the prism of diasporic and / or cosmopolitan contacts and practices. A prism is an ensemble of lenses: white light enters, refracted light exits. The metaphor is more appropriate, we think, than the stale alternative metaphors of 'transmitting' or 'broadcasting', since the medium, after all, cannot do other than refract whatever has entered it. (*Refraction also in Anthropology: Evans-Pritchard, Godfrey Lienhardt*).

To approach the third leg of our conceptual tripod, ‘audiences and subjectivities’, we may thus want to trace the lenses by which BBCWS audiences re-refract the already-refracted beam of sounds and images that the medium supplies. That metaphor is doubly apt as every lens is also a mirror. Whenever we select a lens through which to view and interpret what is offered to us, we want this lens to do justice to our intentions and even our self-attributed identities. The lenses chosen by the sceptic will mirror the sceptic, the lenses favoured by the believer will mirror the will to believe. If every lens is thus also a mirror, as the very word ‘subjectivities’ indicates, we will want qualitative audience research to find out how different users of the BBCWS compose their prisms of lenses to read and interpret, sort and order their perceptions of the WS. This may not be as hard to do as we think, if we can do two things: first, to get a reliable overview of the WS’s own audience research, and secondly, to co-operate with the WS in designing a pointedly qualitative mass survey (after all, one of the great inventions of British social sciences, best known, or rather near-forgotten, as Mass Observation).

What lenses, then, can we surmise as forming a part of those mobilised by WS users? A few hunches may be in order here. Of the lens-mirrors that one may presume all users of the BBCWS to take into account, some raise obvious questions:

### *1. Britishness*

In what ways is the BBC World Service British ? Which identifications of ‘British’ do users mirror themselves in ? It could be: ‘The Mother of Parliaments’ as the ancestor of parliamentary rule, ‘habeas corpus’ and ‘trial by jury’ as the ancestor of modern civil rights, ‘The Commonwealth’ as the exemplar of wise and timely decolonization. It could also be other identifications of what is ‘British’: ‘perfidious Albion’ as the prototype of unprincipled Realpolitik and manipulation, ‘Pomp and Circumstance’ as either the apogee, or else the dregs of ---- . Clear to see, the different lenses examining the Britishness of the BBC World Service can be used side by side.

### *2. Self-Criticism/Irony*

In what ways is the BBC self-critical ? Another lens that may be used or discarded by the users may focus on the BBC World Service’s practice of publicizing self-critique and even outside critique, yet always coupled with a cult of understatement and effortless superiority. Is self-effacement and self-irony a quality that contributes to its aura?

### 3. Objectivity

In what ways, if any, is the BBC World Service objective? Having mentioned the BBC World Service's role as a government-financed broadcaster, we can perhaps trace the view through a third lens-mirror: the oxymoron of a government paying for 'objective' news and opinions. Clearly, there is no such thing, and we have taken all pains possible to speak of 'an aura of objectivity', bought-into by some users but not by others, and to speak of a 'purported government-neutrality', credited by some government departments but not others. Yet what is the alternative, other than selling the BBC World Service to Emron? How many lovers, and how many haters of the BBC World Service believe that commercial funding provides better, or at least other, standards of that phlogiston we call objectivity? Again, a qualitative questionnaire can find that out, if we find the co-operation of the BBC World Service's Audience Research Department.

Ang and Hawkins (MS 2006) postulated two different visions of cosmopolitanism between the poles of concentric metropolitan hegemony as opposed to a multi-centred concert of voices recognized as equals. To add an example, the former polarity might be called the Roman model of cosmopolitanism: despite its power of *Roma locuta, causa finita*, the Oriental Jew Saulus, later Christian St. Paul, was a fully emancipated *cives Romanus*: though seditious according to Roman laws, he was guaranteed his civil rights up to his death by an honourable decapitation rather than the crucifixion inflicted on a famous non-citizen of the Roman Empire. That Empire was thus cosmopolitan, as opposed to racist or ethnocentric, but its cosmopolitanism was concentric and hegemonic, as indeed was the British Empire when the BBC Empire Service was established in the 1930s. At the other extreme, parallel to the translation polarity that Ang and Hawkins called 'mutuality' or reciprocity, is the ethos of a multi-centred cosmopolitanism, one where everybody's centre is also somebody else's periphery, and every periphery thus an equal centre. Such a vision can only ever be an ethos, of course, for we know of no social orders, or even disorders, without hegemonic leaderships. In combination, however, the juxtaposition can serve as a data processing machine: examine different translations and transformations, and then relate them to different visions of cosmopolitanism; and vice versa, test different practices of cosmopolitanism by examining their transformational practices.

After all, what else is a claim to cosmopolitanism if not a faith in, or at least an ethics of, the multicultural translatability of points of view or points of ambiguity?

Still, the paradox stands. How can it be a government-financed broadcaster that encapsulates an aura of cosmopolitan objectivity to some, though a state-paid propaganda machine to others? The latter is no riddle: if Moldavan journalists (Cheesman o.c. 2007) distrust the BBC World Service, one wonders how many users may trust the Moldavan media they work for. The former, however, remains a riddle: a state-financed broadcaster that exercises all skills and tricks of transporting, translating, transposing and transmitting and is rewarded with a halo of cosmopolitan objectivity by so many, not entirely uncritical, masses. The criteria of independence is clearly out of the race, given state financing. Moreover, the dimension of objectivity is out, for there is no such thing as objectivity in transporting, translating, transposing or even transmitting. Is there, then, something that appears to be particularly cosmopolitan about the BBC World Service? To find that out, we must examine the very notion of cosmopolitanism.

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