

Diasporic Contact Zones at the BBC World Service

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This chapter traces a double movement: it examines diasporic and cosmopolitan contact zones through the prism of the BBC World Service, and conversely, it investigates the BBC World Service through the prism of diasporic contacts and their potential for cosmopolitan practices. This double movement is possible and apt because the World Service was set up as an intra-diasporic contact zone for overseas Britons in 1932 (as the 'Empire Service'), and in 1938 its first foreign language service in Arabic started. It later developed into a cross-diasporic contact zone, broadcasting in up to 43 foreign languages (known then as the 'External Services' which comprised the 'Overseas' and the 'European Services'). When we speak of the BBC World Service as a diasporic 'contact zone', we mean that it provides sites of intra-diasporic contact and dialogue, and spaces for cross-diasporic creativity, representation and translation (Pratt 1992, Clifford 1997). Contact zones are marked by historically forged asymmetric power relations (colonialism, imperialism, globalisation), as well as inequalities of gender and class. As such, BBC World Service is an agent and a product of conflict and transgression, as well as a space of cultural translation and innovation.

In tracing this double movement, we are faced with a puzzling paradox: namely, that the World Service is an international broadcaster, funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with an explicit obligation to serve British interests, and an implicit remit to support foreign policy objectives abroad, yet it has a long established reputation for cosmopolitan openness, fairness and impartiality. This reputation for impartiality is evidenced in successive annual audience surveys carried out by independent researchers on behalf of the BBC. The Public Service Agreement requires the World Service to report audience figures and satisfaction rates to the

Foreign & Commonwealth Office every year for accountability purposes. The surveys track perceptions in 10 countries on the categories of awareness, reach, objectivity and relevance.¹

The current global audience estimate is 183 million weekly users for BBC World Service radio, 76 million for BBC World Television (a commercial enterprise), and 11.9 million for BBC World Service on-line news sites. Its global news division (across these different platforms), attracts an estimated 233 million weekly users. In addition to the above services, BBC World Service also includes BBC Monitoring (which receives baseline funding from the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the World Service to monitor, translate and provide news material from around the world), BBC World Service Trust (a charitable Trust which engages in development media and education projects). The estimated audience figures for these combined services confirm the BBC as one of the world's biggest global media organisations, and the only one that provides services, now in 32 languages.² Audience research repeatedly reports that audiences around the world trust the BBC, often more than other international broadcasters and believe that it tells the truth (Sambrook 2007; Mytton 1993). BBC World Service, it seems, provides a reference point that enables audiences to compare and contrast competing versions of events, affording them a more informed, cosmopolitan (in the sense of world openness) and objective stance on current affairs (1993: 147).

Cosmopolitan elites, influential in their social and political milieux, are a primary target audience for 'public diplomacy' purposes. Public diplomacy, part of the new lexicon of 21st century diplomacy, is defined in many ways. The current UK official definition is: 'work

¹ See http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/us/annual_review/2005/ (accessed 02.07.07)

² Audience estimates are contested and controversial. These are compiled from Sambrook (2007) and Booth (2007) For list of language services see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/>

aiming to influence and engage individuals and organisations overseas, in order to improve understanding of and influence for the UK'³. This work is part of a wider strategy to break down communication barriers at home and abroad, and the definition applies both to the broad priorities of UK foreign policy as well as to domestic policy on multicultural society.

BBC commissioned audience research identifies 'cosmopolitans' as being over 21 years old, in the top 10% income bracket, with above average levels of education. They also regularly consume and discuss international news media. The 'cosmopolitan' category was introduced as a target market category in 2001 in order to meet the requirements of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office who see main aim of World Service as reaching people of influence or 'multipliers'. Cosmopolitan status involves more than internationalist outlook. It defines practices that can be measured. Consuming and discussing international news media is one such measurable behaviour. Other target market categories used are 'aspirational', 'crisis' and 'lifeline' audiences⁴.

At times of environmental disaster, like the Asian Tsunami in 2004 and Pakistani earthquakes in 2005, the World Service becomes a lifeline. During political crises it often acts as a cultural broker, mediating between rival factions. And for hostages like Terry Waite and BBC reporter Alan Johnston 'listening in captivity', provided them with their only beacon of hope (Tusa 1992).⁵ Yet the World Service does not simply target crisis audiences and cosmopolitan elites. It is widely trusted and respected in places where people are poor and media are not free. Its largest (short wave radio) audiences are to be found in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. For

³ Wilton Park Conference WP06/21 *Public Diplomacy Key Priorities and Challenges* 10-12 March 2006:1 see <http://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/themes/governance/pastconference.aspx?confref=WPS06/21> (accessed 30/07/07). Wilton Park Conferences are also funded by the FCO.

⁴ Oral communication, Alan Booth, BBC Controller: Marketing, Communications, Audiences. 15 June 2007

⁵ For details of Alan Johnston's use of World Service while in captivity, see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6267928.stm (accessed 30/07/07)

example, 60% of the Afghan population regularly tune in to the Pashto and Persian services. During the Taliban regime, despite the dangers of reporting from there, it stayed on air, demonstrating its loyalty to its audiences. Afghans learned about what was happening in Afghanistan, even whether it was safe to go out their front doors, through the voice of reporter Zahir Tanin, then head of the Afghanistan section of the BBC world Service.⁶

Like many producers at the World Service, Zahir came to Britain as a refugee and returned home as a reporter. His voice and reputation for impartiality are well known around the world among diasporic and refugee Afghans, particularly through his landmark broadcast of the inauguration of President Mohammed Karzai in December 2001. He is now Afghanistan's Ambassador to the UN. This not only reflects his unique personal skills but also the high levels of cosmopolitan cultural capital and transcultural competence that may be developed and mobilised as a World Service broadcaster. His case also demonstrates the almost familial intimacy between audiences and producers, and potential connections between diasporic broadcasters, public diplomacy and cosmopolitan impartiality.

With the advent of its on-line services, new audience configurations are coming into being. Diasporic and refugee, mobile and migrant groups are increasingly using on line Anglophone and foreign language services as an arena of transnational debate (Gillespie 2007). For example, *Africa Have Your Say*, combines radio broadcasts and on-line discussion across the African continent and its multiple diasporas. Somali, Persian and Urdu speakers make extensive use of on-line services. The new media landscape, technological convergence, an increasingly competitive global media market, institutional change and geopolitical shifts, especially the UK/USA declared 'global war on terror', are now forcing the World Service to re-define itself,

⁶ For more details see 'The Battle For Truth', *Inside the World Service*, BBC Four Television, 28.06.07

its diplomatic priorities and its services. This was apparent in the axing of 10, mainly Eastern European Services in 2006 to make way for a new BBC Arabic TV station in 2007 and a new Persian TV station in 2008. The World Service is at a pivotal turning point and presents us with a timely theoretical and empirical opportunity to examine, close-up, fundamental transformations in international broadcasting and public diplomacy in the 21st century.

The chapter is based on a collaborative research project in its early stages.⁷ There have been studies of the BBC as a national institution (Born 2005) and of the World Service Trust's media development projects abroad (Skuse 2005), but there is no comprehensive academic study of the World Service itself. Our project asks how a global cultural organization creates and supports, or denies and disowns, diasporic formations of many kinds, not only linguistic and religious, ethnic and national but also intellectual, artistic and multilingual. The project draws on social theories of identity and alterity (Baumann and Gingrich 2004), diaspora and cosmopolitanism (Brubaker 2005; Beck 2006; Delanty 2006). Methodologically, we focus on the inter-relations between choices of genre, language and translation as they affect discourses of identity attributed to, or claimed by, diasporic audiences. These dynamics are examined through interdisciplinary research linking ethnographic studies of creative workers at 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' reactions to, and analyses of, the transmitted output. These dynamics will be explored in ways that shed light on the evolving relations between Bush House and Whitehall, and practices of public diplomacy across national, ethnic and linguistic boundaries.

⁷ For details of project and collaborators <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/diasporas/>

This chapter sets out the conceptual framework of our study and our preliminary hypotheses. First, we explain why and how the World Service can be analysed as a diasporic contact zone with a reputation for cosmopolitan impartiality. Second, we examine its putative transformation from a diasporic empire broadcaster to a potential global ‘umpire’. Third, we propose an analytical schema for researching the everyday politics and practices of translation and transformation which underpin its reputation. Finally, we reflect on the key challenges facing the World Service.

The World Service as a Diasporic Contact Zone

Set up in 1932 as the Empire Service, the BBC’s overseas broadcasts pursued two diasporic goals at once. Its founder and first Director General, Sir John Reith, saw it as ‘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’, included British-born administrators, soldiers, settlers, experts, and expatriates. The Empire Service would keep them in touch with the motherland. Yet a worldwide radio service for ‘Britons overseas’ made no economic sense, so Sir John, later Lord Reith, set out to target an alternative, and politically more opportune, diaspora for his foundational argument: ‘the peoples of Britain’s scattered dominions’. We may safely assume that the 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. 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.

A contact zone perspective locates transnational and diasporic subjects, and their embodied interactions, activities, networks and spaces, in historically rooted institutions and specific places, thus opening up possibilities for empirical social scientific and historical enquiry. Our sociological approach contrasts with characterisations in postcolonial cultural studies where the emphasis is on hyper-mobility, rootlessness and transience. For example, Clifford sees ‘contact zones’ in very general and abstract terms, and eschews the empirical and the particular in favour of a subjectivist, culturalist approach to nomadic subjects and their ephemeral and experiences (Clifford 1997: 244-79). We aim to bring a ‘grounded epistemic optic’ (Smith 2001:98) to bear on transnational and diasporic contacts at the World Service through an analysis of situated everyday encounters and experiences.

It would be facile to assume that diasporic contact zones in and of themselves generate cosmopolitan cultural capital and competences, or indeed that diasporic or cosmopolitan practices are inherently politically progressive, culturally innovative or socially cohesive. Despite the positive valence accorded to these terms in much of the literature on diasporas and cosmopolitanism, it is worth reminding ourselves that dictators and mass murderers, too, can be diasporics, and indeed cosmopolitans. If there is a link at all between the history of the World Service as a diasporic contact zone and as a forum of cosmopolitan thinking and practices, then that link must be theorized.

The concept of diaspora requires theoretical choices that have methodological consequences. Brubaker criticises ‘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). His argument echoes three decades of social scientific research questioning whether concepts like ethnic group or cultural community can be used as units of

analysis (Barth 1967; Baumann 1996; Gillespie 1995). Diasporas are best understood, not in substantial terms as discrete, bounded cultural entities, but as involving a stance, a claim and a category of practice (Brubaker 2005: 10-12). Diasporas are neither mere hypothetical constructs, nor are they self-evident and self-enclosed unanimous collectives. The dialectical understanding of diasporas proposed here seeks to analyse the relationship between real people who claim and implement a diasporic identity as a common banner (an emic perspective), and institutions that recognise and legitimate and/or undermine and contest such claims (etic perspective).

The concept of cosmopolitanism is equally fraught with ambiguity. Here, we draw on and develop the notion of 'critical cosmopolitanism' (Delanty 2006). This is a new direction in social theory which establishes both an object of sociological analysis and a particular methodology. Critical cosmopolitanism has 'a very specific task: to discern or make sense of social transformation by identifying new or emergent realities' (2006: 25). Unlike political and moral approaches to cosmopolitanism, which emphasise a world polity or a universal culture, it insists on cosmopolitanism as a socially situated process and 'a form of cultural contestation in which the logic of translation plays a central role' (2006: 25). Practices of cultural translation are intimately linked to social transformations in a global world. Relations between self, other and the world may be transformed through local encounters with the global. Such encounters depend on the existence of the 'global public', or globally mediated communication processes, through which discursive spaces are opened up.

The global public, as materialised through global news institutions like the World Service, can, and sometimes does, play a critical role in catalysing processes of social and political transformation. 'Global conversations' across cultural and linguistic boundaries (of the kind that

take place through the World Service interactive forum '*World Have your Say*')⁸, can activate moments of 'openness', mobilise the cosmopolitan imagination and trigger a learning process. For example, a recent empirical study of responses to mediations of the Iraq War 2003, and subsequent security related events, among multilingual news audiences across the UK, identified particular patterns of response among 'critical cosmopolitans'.⁹ These news media users compare and contrast competing versions of news events, translate across multiple public spheres, create and imagine alternative political news narratives and social realities. They acquire and disseminate new ways of understanding and seeing things in translocal social networks (Gillespie 2007).

Critical cosmopolitanism is committed to three main objectives: first, to a critique of methodological nationalism which presumes the unit of analysis to be the nation; second, to the historical and comparative analysis of the 'cosmopolitan condition'; and finally, to the development of 'methodological cosmopolitanism', opening up new fields of enquiry to expose the principles and practices of transformative cosmopolitanism in wide variety of social institutions, past and present (Beck and Sznaider 2006: 3). Methodological cosmopolitanism seeks to go beyond established dualisms of the national and the foreign, the global and local, centre and periphery, and to investigate the ambiguities of these categories (Beck 2006). So in researching the World Service, we examine how the 'centre' (Bush House) shapes but may also be redefined from the 'peripheries', and how new voices, interests, practices may come to the fore in this process. We investigate how the World Service fosters and forces encounters between cosmopolitanisms of various kinds: how hegemonic, elite, metropolitan versions of cosmopolitanism at Bush House are entangled with vernacular, demotic, multi-centric, and

⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/worldhaveyoursay/>

⁹ For more information see www.mediatingsecurity.com

rooted cosmopolitanisms in the myriad regional outposts in the peripheries. Out of such contacts new and emergent realities can be analysed and understood.

Critical cosmopolitanism is a prerequisite for the emergence of global civil society. But a global civil society depends on the healthy functioning of the 'global public'. As a mediated environment it may be contaminated unless the polarisations and fundamentalisms that threaten human understanding, diminish respect and civility, and disrupt pathways towards global social justice are vigorously contested (Silverstone 2006: 31). 'Proper distance' involves an intense proximity to those who suffer and an obligation to listen to others, because the global public connects us, like never before, and confronts us with our difference and sameness: 'Every culture has a notion of truth or justice, that truth or justice can surface as a component of a shareable, albeit [...] thin morality' (2006: 16). We may not agree about truth or justice but understanding does not require agreement or even shared values. Indeed, conflicts of value are often actually conflicts of interests or meaning, and the World Service has long played the role of cultural broker, mediating between groups with conflicts of interest, practice or meaning.

From Diasporic Empire to Global Umpire?

We have seen that, from its inception, the Empire Service identified itself as a diasporic contact zone. Our archival research and historical research is beginning to show the transformations of this vision into institutional practices, but it may be useful here to raise a few preliminary questions about why and how an Empire Service was set up during the 1930s at a period of gradual social and political breakdown.

A century of Victorian certainties had been pulverised within one generation between the first and second World Wars (1914 -1939). 1930s Britain was pauperized at home because of an

Empire which had ceased to earn net profits, because of the First World War and, because of the ascent of the United States model of imperialism. Britain was plagued with class, gender, colonial and constitutional struggles. It was on its knees with the General Strike of 1926 and with the global economic crisis from the mid-1920s to the late 1930s. The solution to the historic riddle of founding and funding a BBC Empire Service, and its replacement by an Overseas Service in 1938, is embodied not in the government's domestic but in its foreign policy crisis. The failure of Empire, together with the failure of Britain's appeasement policy vis-à-vis European fascists, meant that foreign language services became a political and diplomatic priority.

The foundational moment of the Arabic Service on 3 January 1938 is worth considering because it sheds light also on how the Overseas Services set a crucial precedent in juggling foreign policy imperatives and the requirements of impartial broadcasting. The aim of the Arabic Service was to spread 'straightforward information and news', 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 occupied Abyssinia (i.e. present-day Ethiopia and parts of Somalia). Immediately, the BBC found itself in conflict with Foreign Office officials. They objected when the very first bulletin included news that a Palestinian Arab had been executed on the orders of a British military court for carrying a gun. 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' (quoted in Mansell 1982: 53). 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' (1982: 52-53). This classic statement of the BBC's emphatic insistence on independence and impartiality was, according to Mansell, 'to remain the BBC's attitude throughout the war, and indeed right to the

present day' (1982: 54). No written agreement with respect to Foreign Office involvement in the Foreign Language Services was drawn up but the 'gentlemen's agreement' that resolved the issue, superficially at least, could not conceal fundamental differences in approach. This event set an important precedent in relations between Bush House and Whitehall. Since there was no written agreement, it left open a space for negotiation, guidance and or interference – whether this took place conventionally around a committee table, or more unconventionally in the coffee bars between Bush House and Whitehall. 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 expansion of foreign language 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. Soon after, it was decided that the new European services should continue indefinitely.

To summarise, the advent of World War Two brought the Overseas Services under the control and onto the payroll of the Foreign Office which, to this day, funds all its operations.

Galvanizing opposition to European fascists gave the Overseas Services its moral credentials as a globalizing voice for civil rights; 1930s anti-Stalinism further updated its global authority as a cosmopolitan voice for 'democracy'. The British Empire ceased to exist between 1947 (India, Pakistan) and 1962 (almost all African colonies). So could a British World Service apparently liberated from its colonial past now broadcast in a guilt-free voice claiming and proclaiming a global impartiality?

Two things are clear from the above: the World Service'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 paymasters, the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, the fledgling Overseas Service was 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 BBC journalists. But, it may also be argued that, in the long run, broadcasters (sooner than their paymasters) realised that ‘the national interest’ would not be served by succumbing to the kind of censorship and propaganda in which other international broadcasters were engaged. So right from the start, the World Service took a long-term view of Britain’s foreign interests, contributing cosmopolitan cultural capital and an image or mirage of impartiality to the conduct of Foreign and Commonwealth Office affairs. There is, of course, no version of cosmopolitanism that is free of self-interest. The art of hiding self-interest lies in the crafting. But the key riddle remains: why is the World Service’s crafting of British national interests so hard to pinpoint in that global voice of cosmopolitan impartiality?

Much of the World Service’s attraction and intelligence has been and remains engineered by diasporic intellectuals, writers and artists who had no ‘natural’ part in the British-born imperial diaspora that Lord Reith had imagined. The BBC employed and emancipated many prominent members of post-independence political and artistic elites, with examples ranging from India 1947 to South Africa now. Diasporic individuals, especially exiled or asylum-seeking intellectuals from continental Europe (1933-1989) played key roles in the BBC’s Bush House. Archival research is providing us with evidence of the pervasiveness of diasporic, national, ethnic or religious ‘outsiders’ inside Bush House and also in London’s wider intellectual circles (London School of Economics and the School of Oriental and African Studies are just a few minutes walk from Bush House).

These editorial and employment policies and practices go some way to explaining the seeming absurdity of an ex-imperial, ex-Cold War, government-dependent broadcaster being elevated to the near-mythical status of a global emblem of impartiality. Yet the origin of a phenomenon is one thing, its persistence another. The continued trust in the World Service's independence and impartiality is an empirical historical and social-science problem, and even an epistemological one. But it cannot be the diasporic producers and users alone that turned the World Service into the world's most respected cross-diasporic contact zone. It 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 global voice of impartiality. This leads us to three questions which our research addresses: how far, and how exactly, does the World Service function as an intra-diasporic contact zone (where, for example, Persians talk to Persians); how far and how as a cross-diasporic contact zone (where diverse national, ethno-linguistic, and politico-religious diasporic groups converse); and how far and how does it act as a crucible for different cosmopolitan convictions and conversations which have socially and politically transformative potential? If we can answer these three questions, we will come closer to understanding the paradoxical nature of the World Service.

The three questions are of degree. Even the distinction between intra-diasporic and cross-diasporic is one of degree. Here, Brubaker's (2005) cautions about the fictitious character of discrete, bounded diasporas are useful. Is a diasporic exchange between Protestant and Catholic Christians an intra- or a cross-diasporic contact? The answer can never be solely etic: simply based on outsiders' analyses, and absolute; it has also to be emic and situational, based on the participants' own assessments in one or another context. By the same token, the distinction between different kinds of cosmopolitanism is one of degree and not a simple dichotomy between, for example, hegemonic, elite, metro-centric versions of cosmopolitanism that thrive

at the post imperial centre of Bush House versus the vernacular, demotic, multi-centric versions that are propagated in myriad regional and peripheral outposts of the World Service. Rather, both diasporic and cosmopolitan claims and practices are dialectical processes worked out in and through power relations and structures within and beyond the walls of Bush House and the Foreign Office. They are also, necessarily, intimately linked to translation activities.

Transactions and Translations

In searching for a bridge between the World Service's diasporic roots and transnational routes, and its reputation of cosmopolitan impartiality, the transactions between regional production centres and Bush House (periphery and core), and the selections, techniques, practices and personnel involved in these, need to be tracked. These transactions comprise decisions about commissions, translators, re-translations, re-versions of genres and texts, editorial structures, and what to do or not do with the products. We identify four transactions: transporting, translating, transposing, and transmitting. *Transporting* signifies the flows of communication to and fro between Bush House and its regional desks and correspondents, stringers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the foreign governments of those languages and countries in which it broadcasts. There may also be peripheral transport lines between regional production centres, but that is an empirical question. *Translating* concerns primarily linguistic matters. *Transposing*, used in the musical sense of term, means playing the same notes in another key. Here we use the term to refer to the adaptation and re-versioning a programme or even a genre for a different audience. *Transmitting* refers to all the decision making about which audiences, where, get what, when, why and how.

These interacting choices about transporting, translating, transposing and transmitting allow the World Service to do its work of *transforming*. From its beginnings to now, the World Service

has always had to transform intra-diasporic contact zones into cross-diasporic ones, and then infuse these with BBC-style cosmopolitan convictions and / or global civil society concerns and a sense of 'world citizenship'. Empirical research using this schema will help us explain the World Service's quintessential riddle: its reputation for cosmopolitan impartiality despite a historical succession of well-known vested interests and biases, and now of widespread distrust of news media and patently obvious political agendas around the 'Global War of Terror' (Gillespie, 2007). Let us begin to test the schema with a few examples.

Transporting

An episode witnessed by an anthropologist colleague working in Bangladesh (oral communication, Hoek, 4 Dec. 2006) illustrates the potential of researching transnational mobilities not only of symbolic goods but of personnel. A local cameraman films a scene that he thinks will interest the World Service. Since informants' statements need translating from Bengali into English, the cameraman dubs the footage and transports the whole package to Bush House. BBC World Service buy the package but reserve all rights to edit and re-edit, re-translate and cross-translate, transmit or not transmit to audiences of its choice. In such cases, it is evident how transporting, translating, transposing and transmitting are interdependent processes before they become acts of transformation.

Translating

Different translatory choices are visualized along two axes: exoticizing versus naturalizing, and historicizing versus modernizing (Holmes 2004: 81). Here, we will just look at the first axis. Naturalization renders the source text in the source language invisible and inaudible. Its linguistic, literary and socio-cultural specificities are encompassed by and into a hegemonic view of the world: the otherness of the source language disappears. 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 provokes the audience to wonder about the otherness of strangers, be it to respect strangers on their own terms or to demonise them.

One can recognize the polarity of naturalizing versus exoticizing in the following examples. World news must by definition aim at global comprehensibility but when an Arabic-speaking interviewee speaks of '*al-jihad*', does one translate this into 'The Jihad' or into 'the Muslim Holy War'? When an American President speaks of a 'crusade' against 'the axis of evil', how does one translate this for the Arabic Service? Does a cosmopolitan stance imply a cultural relativism, and an avoidance of moral and political judgement? Does the impartiality of World Service editors and translators amount to a mediation of competing and conflicting partialities? How decisions about the translation of controversial terms are made are fundamental questions which can be answered empirically.

Transposing

Just as the listener cannot feel at home in Bach's homely C-Major Prelude when the self-same notes are transposed into brilliant E-Major, so the World Service cannot communicate effectively across linguistic and cultural boundaries if it gets the pitch wrong. So the pitch needs to be adjusted, attuned, and transposed according to the cultural and political sensibilities of the audience. As John Tusa, former Managing Director of the World Service (1986-1992), puts it, it is a matter of nuance and inflexion, the latter quite often by accident or accent: [translators] are cultural porter, offering the users of one language an imaginative equivalence of the meaning expressed in another' (Tusa, 1992: 109).

A good historic example of transposition can be seen when George Orwell worked for the BBC's Eastern Services during World War Two, and 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). Orwell's commitment to anti-fascism sustained him in his work for the BBC, even though it sometimes compromised his equally fervent anti-imperialist stance, according to Kerr.

The newsletter texts that Orwell wrote were translated into Hindi and Urdu and read out by an Indian Muslim - Zulfaqar Ali Bokaharu - a friend and colleague of Orwell 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. According to Kerr, Orwell's newsletters exhibit 'rhetorical habits of judiciousness, restraint, and a gentlemanly tone, a commitment to verifiable facts, and an unwillingness to exhort or browbeat the listener' (2002: 483). But to the listener the texts were spoken as if by an Indian to Indians.

The perceived credibility and authority of Orwell's newsletters derived from their unrivalled access to news from around the world through BBC Monitoring - an organisation that translates and transcribes foreign language news into English - challenging and relativising 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' (2002: 480). This omniscience enabled Orwell to assert that his newsletters reported the truth (verifiable facts) rather than propaganda. Even if the newsletters masked the process of their production and translation and so naturalised a British view of the world, Orwell was no government lackey, and nor was the BBC.

The most radical example of translation combined with transposition is the longest running, quintessentially English BBC Radio 4 soap opera, ‘The Archers’, transposed into an Afghanistan radio soap opera, translated as *New Way New Life* (Skuse, 2005). ‘Edutainment’ serial drama with the purposes of humanitarian and health information purposes has become a prominent feature of the World Service Trust’s development-oriented work not only in Afghanistan but also in Rwanda, Somalia and India. The World Service Trust, a charity, exploits new patterns of migrant and diasporic transnationalism and uses ‘edutainment’ drama formats to build transnational production relationships with media professionals in these areas, employing writers, producers and actors from migrant or refugee communities, and translating westernised development themes into local discourses. In doing so, producers, editors and translators apply specific cultural and political filters, enabling diasporic creative personnel to stake a role in diasporic civil society through explicit and implicit political and cultural brokerage.

Transmitting

Questions of transmission may appear to involve a simple exercise of documenting the schedules across the world. 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? BBC World TV (a commercial enterprise) 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 public diplomacy is the job of the World Service, and the aim of its government financiers, then decisions about

transmitting are crucial to understanding the paradoxes in question. Suffice it here to indicate the relevance of such decisions. The answers must be empirical.

What to transmit to whom also involves editorial decisions which can be reconstructed by comparing different versions of the same news item across BBC output. For example, in early 2007, BBC World TV carried a diplomatic report about President Mugabe of Zimbabwe being allowed to attend yet another session of the African Union. World TV and World Service radio abstained from mentioning his old Maoist pretensions, his genocidal campaigns against the Southerners in 'his' country, his military evictions of hundreds of thousands of citizens from their shanty towns because they had not voted for him, and the vigilante expropriation, for Mugabe's private gain, of Zimbabwe's economic backbone, its agricultural industry. Only the BBC 24 News report about Mugabe being invited by other African Union members was supplemented by some basic facts. Since the remaining third of Zimbabwe's agricultural industry was still in the hands of British-born Zimbabweans, perhaps the British World Service did not want to push a semblance of 'national interest' above its interest in 'African affairs'?

This example illustrates that even the greatest claim to cosmopolitan impartiality and brokerage can never play an innocent game of reciprocity among all parties involved. Choices in transporting, translating, transposing and transmitting are made daily and, inevitably, they challenge the World Service's claims to being an impartial cosmopolitan voice and a provider of culturally sensitive, regionally adjusted services. Should, for example, the World Service compromise its reputation by 'relaying' its services on a local radio station of ill-repute in order to get information to people who have no other impartial source of information? Hard ethical decisions constantly have to be made.

To assess the balancing of competing partialities and conflicting interests, further research is required on the editorial systems: 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, and for whom. Editorial decisions also use omission, condensation or simplification as part of the translating, or even pre-translation, process. These processes too are being studied through ethnographies of production.¹⁰ Even when a full translation is demanded, 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 on, 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.

There are also the 'loops and flows' of translation among the different languages between Pashto and Russian, Farsi and Arabic, and less obvious examples, not always under the editorial eye of staff at the centre, Bush House. The source text is no longer canonical, its meaning pre-established at the imperial centre. Rather it is a mobile text, an 'intertext' caught up in processes of transnational movement and translation of politics, art, media, news – everything that the World Service "covers" and of course plays some part in producing. Much of the politics of transformation (its ascribed role as a humanitarian agency and its designated public diplomacy functions) happen informally and certainly off-air (e.g. in the canteen and local coffee shops), and these informal discussions and decision-making require as much investigation as the formal editorial committee meetings.

Cosmopolitan Impartiality versus Public Diplomacy

¹⁰ See Annabelle Sreberny's and Andrew Skuse's research on project website <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/diasporas/>

This chapter has so far traced how BBC World Service was set up as an intra-diasporic contact zone to connect British citizens and subjects overseas in intimate anonymity to the ‘mother country’, and later developed into a cross-diasporic contact zone, where competing goals and conflicting interests have to be negotiated on a daily basis. We have argued that employment practices and editorial and translation activities at the World Service have been central to its functioning in the mediated space of the global public, and to its potential to contribute to an emergent global civil society. We have used social theories of alterity and difference, diaspora and cosmopolitanism to develop a grounded epistemic framework for analysis. Further empirical work is required to test this framework. We have argued that by analysing cosmopolitan practices and their transformational potential, using a critical and socially situated approach, we hope to get closer to explaining the paradox of the World Service: namely its reputation for cosmopolitan impartiality despite Foreign Office funding and a remit to serve national foreign policy interests.

The question of whether the World Service can achieve its diplomacy objectives while maintaining both its reputation for cosmopolitan objectivity and its market position has implications well beyond immediate institutional horizons. Power and reputations can change: ‘Objectivity, like democracy – is an ideal continually to be sought after, measurable only by the rigour with which it is pursued. The truth is always campaigning [...]. The BBC remains a precious resource if we are careful with it. A regard for the truth and an attempt to reach it is the basis of its capacity to hold governments, businesses and others to account’ (Seaton 2007:41). Safeguarding impartiality in the 21st century is a major priority, as blogs and citizen journalism expand the range of voices but tend to undermine the ethos of journalistic objectivity.

The British state remains a primary actor. It controls where and in which languages, if not what, the World Service broadcasts. It defines the ‘national interest’ and the foreign policy objectives which direct decisions about services. The new Arabic TV station has a ready-made audience of 12 million regular users of Arabic radio and online services. What better way to reach a strategic target audience for the purposes of mediated diplomacy? But it remains to be seen how World Service Arabic TV will fare with competitors like Al Jazeera, Al Arabya and a host of other Arabic stations, not to mention other international diplomacy broadcasters such as the US and German equivalents of BBC World Service, ‘Voice of America’ and ‘Deutsche Welle’. The USA has recently failed in its efforts at mediated diplomacy: its Arabic station, *Al Hurra*, has attracted much criticism.¹¹ Now France, China, Iran and Korea, among others, are looking to develop broadcasting as an means of public diplomacy.¹² Their impact on international relations is uncertain, but the media landscape is clearly now a battlefield in which public diplomacy, aimed at winning hearts and minds, particularly Arab and Muslim hearts and minds, has assumed paramount importance in fighting the ‘Global War on Terror’.

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¹¹ See, for example, http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/marc_lynch/2007/06/alhurra_marti.html (accessed 16/06/07).

¹² See, for example, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/iran/story/0,,2117128,00.html> (accessed 03/07/07).

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