

Professor Marie Gillespie
Diasporic Contact Zones at the BBC World Service
End of year report for 2008

The project examines how public and cultural diplomacy initiatives and strategies are manifest through its music, drama and sports programming. This includes research into the training of foreign nationals into the BBC ethos: producing persons both able to perform 'BBCness' and Britishness, and the complexities of identity-formation that this engenders. Findings are revealing about how processes of institutional enculturation work in multi-ethnic milieux.

There is analysis of how bodies, those of broadcasters and of the people represented on BBCWS output, move in and out of BBC physical, social and symbolic spaces and assess what these movements suggest about changing power relations. Sporting competitions forge cosmopolitan 'contact zone' par excellence, and are revealing about the regulation of sporting bodies (raced and gendered) and regulatory bodies (such as the BBCWS which regulates access to news and information). Transformations in media technologies and discursive regimes are examined: from the declarative style ("this is the way the world is") of the 'airwave diplomacy' of the Empire Service to the more interrogative and interactive style of the 'Have Your Say' forum. The BBCWS' interactive forum are widely used by the BBCWS's digital diasporas, and provide the key to understanding and researching its corporate strategy aimed at fostering a 'global conversation'.

The project's historical research highlights how the BBCWS's relationship with the FCO is founded on 'constitutional niceties' and 'gentlemanly agreements' and this has forced the team to address intriguing research questions about the changing forms and operations of power - 'soft power' especially - via forms of *public, cultural and media* diplomacy. These terms can be approached as neologisms or euphemisms for propaganda, depending on one's ideological perspective, but whether we like them or not, they increasingly dominate policy and academic debate about the nexus between international politics and broadcasting, political and media power.

Online research (Andersson and Gillespie) has shown that, over 50% of all users of BBC World Service's 32 internet sites in languages other than English (LOTA) can be defined as diaspora users. This finding came as a surprise to us and to the BBCWS who see themselves as an inter-national broadcaster – broadcasting nation to nation. Our research has fed directly into BBCWS revising its ideas about its audiences and programme planning. The BBCWS management and the British Foreign Office also now see diaspora audiences as important to their fulfilling their strategic objective of fostering a 'global conversation'. As a result of our research, we were invited by BBCWS to undertake a qualitative study of UK Pakistani diaspora audiences which will contribute to shaping new online services for Pakistanis and other diasporic groups in the UK (Somali and Bengali)

Highlights of the research /important findings

BBC World Service, 1932-2007: Cultural Exchange and Public Diplomacy'
We published a special issue of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (Vol 28(4), October 2008). Full details of the conference and transcripts of plenary sessions are available at
<http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/diasporas/conference-december2007.doc>

Events Planned

Migrating Music: Media, Politics and Style, SOAS, July 2009
Keynote speakers include two BBC broadcasters, Charlie Gillett and Robin
Denselow.
What's social about sport?

Generation 2012: An Open Day at Bush House, 6 March 2009.

"What's Social about Sport" at Sheffield United football ground, Bramall Lane on 9
March.

BBC World Service and the Polish Solidarity Movement
Witness Seminar, March 2009
Diasporas@the BBCWS
Reception at Bush House March 200

The Fall of the Berlin Wall: 20 years On
Bush House Project Witness Seminar, May/June 2009
Co-organised by Alban Webb and Frances Dodsworth