

gische Definition des Faschismus gelingt, ist Elastizität und Übertragbarkeit bis in die Gegenwart. Die Herausgeber selbst, so Geoff Eley in der Conclusio, sehen den Sammelband als ein Handbuch für das Erkennen und Einordnen von Kontinuitäten und Differenzen eines weltweiten faschistischen Repertoires bis in die Gegenwart. Der Bezug zur Gegenwart könnte der Faschismusforschung dabei helfen, den bisherigen nationalen und synchronen Vergleich zu überwinden, denn da blieb es oft bei einer Aneinanderreihung von Aufsätzen basierend auf einer vorher festgelegten Faschismus-Definition. Nicht der Einzelfall macht den Faschismus bis in die Gegenwart faszinierend, sondern die globale Übertragbarkeit der „Ästhetisierung des Politischen“. In diesem Sammelband beziehen sich die Autoren in den Beiträgen aufeinander und suchen so auch den Vergleich innerhalb des Buchdeckels. Das zeichnet den Sammelband aus und sorgt für einen frischen Wind in der Forschung.

**Gordon Johnston / Emma Robertson: BBC World Service. Overseas Broadcasting, 1932–2018, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019, 344 pp.**

Reviewed by  
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This book claims to be the “first full-length history of the BBC World Service.” This is true, but only in the sense that the book carries the many already existing histories of the service forward into the near-

present.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, it is a fairly familiar institutional history of the overseas service, reliant almost entirely upon material from the BBC Written Archive, the UK National Archive, and European Service personnel. It offers a nice synthesis of existing scholarship on the BBC but does not really break new ground.

The text is organized chronologically, beginning with a survey of the role of short-wave radio in knitting the British Empire together and ending with a brief discussion of how the BBC World Service functions in today’s “uncertain” times (p. 247). In each era, the authors attend to the differences in the BBC’s mission, construction of the audience, and relations with the foreign policy establishment. The overseas broadcast efforts began as the Empire Service – a shortwave English language operation targeting British ex-patriots living in the colonies. The image of the audience as white, male, and English-speaking dictated a certain style of programming (“unsentimental” news and classic music programs) and helped police race relations in the colonies by exiling locals from this “resolutely ‘English’ space” (p. 33). Though the BBC eschewed the label of propagandist or diplomat, its explicit mission was to “project Britain” to the colonies in an attempt to keep the commonwealth together. Chapter 2, which covers these events, is perhaps the most well-rounded, featuring thoughtful discussions of technology, programming, and the embodied experience of listening from an outpost of empire.

By 1938, deteriorating international relations, including competition from other broadcasters, forced the BBC to begin providing foreign language news and information to locals in politically volatile

areas. From these early efforts in Arabic, Spanish, and Portuguese, the service would grow to provide hundreds of thousands of hours of programming in 45 languages during World War II (today, it provides news and information in over 40 languages and reaches an estimated 400 million). The always tense relationship between the BBC and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) dated from the inception of the foreign language services. In all formal negotiations, the BBC insisted on its independent status, but a “Gentleman’s Agreement” was struck early on to ensure that BBC programmers would “pay a real and not a nominal regard to the views of Foreign Office” with regard to politically sensitive material. The government “retained the right stop any broadcast,” and, “if the BBC refused to broadcast what the Foreign Office desired, power remained to the government to insist” (p. 74). The FCO frequently complained over the years about news items that made the British government look bad while the BBC insisted that not covering such material, when other broadcasters were, would erode the public trust in the BBC brand. These debates would persist throughout World War II and into the Cold War, as concerns about “projecting Britain” took on new relevance in a crowded international media marketplace.

Wartime service enabled the BBC to burish its reputation for trustworthiness and gain the upper-hand on international competitors. During the Cold War, it was able to extend its reach and importance as an informal diplomacy mechanism. As the authors note, however, the decline of the British empire came swiftly and inevitably recontextualized the BBC’s language ser-

vices. As a trustworthy source of news, the BBC continued to engender goodwill from many listeners, but others had a hard time believing that a government sanctioned broadcaster could remain truly independent. Anti-British sentiment abounded. The overseas service continued to “project Britain” abroad, but decolonization forced a reconsideration of the meaning of “Britishness.” Increasingly the BBC recognized that its job was not to hold the commonwealth together, but to “represent Britain to non-Britons” (p. 242).

The authors treat the Cold War and the decline of the empire in separate chapters, but they do acknowledge the overlap and show how the BBC used the Cold War to reframe its own imperial history. For example, the BBC warned repeatedly of Soviet imperialism and portrayed itself as “the guardian of African independence,” even as it refused to relinquish its hold over the African colonies (p. 236). Such rank hypocrisy could only be passed off in a climate of anti-communist hysteria. In taking up these matters, the authors are in line with much of the recent scholarship on the service, which has centred on its role in the colonies.<sup>2</sup> However, Johnston and Robertson focus predominantly on the English-language Overseas Service and the largely white “listening boards” the BBC established to gauge reception. This approach cannot help but privilege the view from the centre, rather than the margins. The authors acknowledge the limitations of their source materials, but they do not seek to supplement those materials in the interests of presenting a more nuanced perspective. That is a lost opportunity.

The final chapter promises to discuss the modern BBC World Service. The diffi-

culties facing the service – from the end of the Cold War to the rise of fake news – are thoughtfully outlined. The authors also make clear how the daily operations of the BBC and the BBC World Service have converged, and the influence of the Foreign Office has declined.

However, the chapter lacks detailed information about the types of programs produced for multimedia distribution, the degree of local uptake for those programmes, and the feedback BBC is receiving for its work today. The views of the BBC's upper administration are well-represented, but there is little here about the day-to-day operations of the BBC services or their cultural impact. The section titled "Looking Forward from 2018" reads like a press release. As an introduction to the contemporary service, the chapter suffices, but it leaves many questions for researchers to pursue.

Overall, Johnston and Robertson's work verifies earlier histories of the BBC World Service by arriving at largely the same conclusions, using largely the same sources. The discussion of local reception adds some nuance to the story, but, of course, the BBC's listener data is not representative of the actual audience experience. Additional source materials, drawn from the vernacular services and from interviews with or diaries of listeners, might have provided a clearer picture of the impact of British overseas broadcasting. Likewise, oral histories with BBC producers, not just administrators, might have added depth to the final chapter. How well are the BBC and the BBC World Service getting along under this new arrangement? What are the gains and losses of these joint operations? Has the new funding formula (part license

fee revenue, part grant from the Office of Developmental Assistance) provided increased stability or additional chaos? Johnston and Robertson's text offers a basic overview but leaves the nitty gritty questions for future researchers.

#### Notes

- 1 A. Briggs, *Sound and Vision* (= *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, Vol. 4), Oxford 1979; A. Webb, *London Calling. Britain, the BBC World Service and the Cold War*, London 2014; S. J. Potter, *Broadcasting Empire. The BBC and the British World, 1922–1970*, Oxford 2012; M. Gillespie/A. Webb/G. Baumann (eds.), *BBC World Service, 1932–2007. Cultural Exchange and Public Diplomacy* (= Special Issue of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*), Abingdon 2008.
- 2 A. Sreberny/M. Torfeh, *Persian Service. The BBC and British Interests in Iran* (= *International Library of Iranian Studies*), London 2014; Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*; D. Newton, *Calling the West Indies. The BBC World Service and Caribbean Voices in: Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 28 (2008) 4, pp. 489–497; M. Gillespie/A. Webb (eds.), *Diasporas and Diplomacy. Cosmopolitan Contact Zones at the BBC World Service, 1932–2012*, London 2015.

**Vladimir Tismaneanu / Bogdan C. Iacob (eds.): Ideological Storms. Intellectuals, Dictators, and the Totalitarian Temptation, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2019, 548 pp.**

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That Romanian studies have survived in the US is largely thanks to Vladimir Tis-