

BBC Mundo and Latin America: A commented Bibliography

Even though the BBC ended its radio broadcasts in Spanish for Latin America more than seven years ago, the presence of the British media machinery is still palpable on the region. The service was discontinued on February 2011, after 73 years it first went on air with a mission 'to counter propaganda from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy on the eve of World War II'.¹ Nevertheless, the suspension of the broadcast did not mean the disappearance of the BBC for Spanish speaking audiences. BBC Mundo continued its online-based reporting and it is, until today, a significant player in the media ecosystem of Latin America and the Hispanic world in general.

As it is a cultural producer that has been around since the late 1990s, reaching a monthly audience of nearly 20 million people by 2016, the activity of BBC Mundo is not free of interrogation.² Specially since it shares the halo of journalistic objectivity and impartiality the World Service of the BBC generally enjoys, even when for the most of its life was financed directly by the British government, and for the past four years depends mainly – as the rest of the BBC – on a TV license fee paid by the British public. Like other scholarship has pointed out, the need to question the World Service originates in that, contrary to popular belief, it is a British institution that does not remain 'free of self-interest'.³ An exploration of the manifold impacts of BBC Mundo in Latin America is needed because, likewise, its presence in the Hispanic sphere is neither free of interests nor of consequences.

It is the need for researching the relationship between the BBC and Latin America what drives this commented bibliography. What follows here is an attempt to catalogue some relevant scholarship to consider when the goal is interrogating the activities of BBC Mundo and its multiple ramifications in the Latin American cultural field. Although some works mentioned include more pragmatic perspectives of the BBC's World Service and its business, this review is chiefly concerned with works that provide insights into the cultural understanding of its activity, with a particular focus on language. It is at the heart of this overview to shed some light on the ways in which BBC Mundo makes use of Spanish to communicate the Latin American world, both internally and for Spanish speakers all around the world.

Although there is a considerable body of work exploring the BBC's World Service, this review highlights a lack of research centred on Latin America. One of the biggest projects evaluating the World Service is the AHRC-funded 'Tuning In: Researching Diasporas at the BBC World Service'. From 2007 to 2011, it investigated why and how 'certain diaspora groups connect with their home countries via the BBC World Service' categorizing it as a contact zone for diaspora engagement. It had regional focuses on Greater Middle East and South Asia, leaving Latin America mostly overlooked. However, many of the outcomes of this investigation are useful to begin to grasp the complex relationship between the region and BBC Mundo, and it is a starting point both to think about it and to problematize it.

¹ BBC News, 'BBC ends Spanish radio broadcasts for Latin America' <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-12585180>> [accessed 18 May 2018].

² BBC Mundo, 'Acerca de la BBC' <<http://www.bbc.com/mundo/institucional-36400007>> [accessed 18 May 2018].

³ Marie Gillespie and Gerd Baumann, 'Diasporic Contact Zones at the BBC World Service' <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/diasporas/publications/diasporic_contact_zones.pdf> [accessed 1 June 2018]

REFERENCES

Gillespie, M. and A. Webb, *Diasporas and Diplomacy: Cosmopolitan Contact Zones at the BBC World Service (1932-2012)* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

The book analyses the exercise of British 'soft power' through the BBC's foreign language service, and the diplomatic role played by their diasporic broadcasters, from the inception of its Empire Service to the modern days, from the radio to the Internet. The book presents a collection of essays that, under a common framework, analyses different cases of study, focusing on topics including colonialism and corporate cosmopolitanism, diasporic and national identities, public diplomacy and international relations and broadcasters and audiences. The study cases range from Europe to the Middle East and Asia and, although the Latin American Spanish experience is ignored, their analysis is useful to inform research questions about the BBC Mundo's practice on the region.

Gillespie, M. and G. Baumann, *Diasporic Contact Zones at the BBC World Service, Tuning In Working Paper Series, No.14*

The authors use the concept of *contact zones* to examine the diasporic and cosmopolitan encounters at the core of BBC World Service practice. They see the service as a contact zone that functions as a space of cultural translation and innovation, but that is at the same time an agent and a product of conflict and transgression. With this framework, Gillespie and Baumann interrogate the aura of impartiality of the BBC World Service arguing that to understand it, it is necessary to analyse four 'transactions' that occur between its periphery and its centre: transporting, translating, transposing and transmitting. In spite of being an online-only news outlet, the same transactions could be used to explore BBC Mundo's case, as their mechanics could be easily adapted for the understanding of web-based journalism.

Cheesman, T. and Arnd-Michael Nohl, *Many Voices, One BBC World Service? The 2008 US Elections, Gatekeeping and Trans-editing, Tuning In Working Paper Series, No.20*

The authors examine the coverage of the 2008 US presidential elections to explore the ways in which simultaneous translation and editing work on BBC World Service websites. Focusing on how English-language source texts were reworked in Arabic, Persian, Tamil, and Turkish their analysis shows that differing journalistic norms and differing assumptions about audience knowledges and needs have a significant impact in the output of the service. Considering that BBC Mundo also practices cultural translations in their everyday activities, the methodology of this essay could prove useful to explore the dynamics of English articles being re-adapted for Spanish speaking audiences.

Jaber, M. and Gerd Baumann, *The BBC World Service in the Middle East: Claims to impartiality, or a politics of translation? Tuning In Working Paper Series, No.25*

The authors analyse the BBC's Arabic service to assess both its claims of impartiality and its critiques. To do so, they examine the politics of translation behind the service focusing on four of its practices: transporting data from the field to the broadcaster, translating from one language into another, transposing data and message by inflexions of tone, and transmitting the result to selected audiences at selected times. Similar operations take place in Latin America, and although the status of BBC Mundo's aura of impartiality must be analysed first, a critique of this kind could shed some light on the politics behind its operation in the region.

Valdeón, Roberto A., 'The "Translated" Spanish Service of the BBC', *Across Languages and Cultures*, 6-2 (2005), pp. 195-220.

The author uses critical discourse analysis to evaluate the quality of the mediation that occurs when BBC World's English articles are translated into Spanish for BBC Mundo. The article argues that while BBC World's articles can be identified as using standard British English, BBC Mundo's articles make use of regionalisms from Latin American countries and Spain, lacking a policy of 'standardization' into one Spanish for all. Although there is an attempt of problematization behind the decision of not using a 'neutral Spanish', should that be possible, it falls short in the exploration of the processes behind news delivery in BBC Mundo. It is also important that, published in 2005, its findings are derived from articles more than a decade old and since then, not only web-journalism has greatly developed, but also BBC Mundo and its practices have changed.

Robertson, Emma, "'I Get a Real Kick Out of Big Ben": BBC Versions of Britishness on the Empire and General Overseas Service, 1932-1949', *Historic Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 28:4 (2008), pp. 459-473.

Privileging a historical perspective, Emma Robertson explores the particularities of radio in shaping and reflecting perceptions of Britain abroad. The article revises notions of 'Britishness' and 'Englishness' through the broadcasts of the Empire Service and its functioning from its creation in 1932 to 1949. It analyses under what basis – and using what symbols – the BBC attempted to make sense and project the complexities of national identity to its audience overseas. The historical overview favoured by this paper provides an insight into the goals of the World Service at its creation, placing it in a context in-between two world wars. Such insight is useful to think about BBC Mundo as part of a historical phenomenon, whose origin is linked with the satisfaction of specific British needs in regard to the international context.