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Empire's End? Writers, Decolonisation and Mid-Century BBC Home Radio

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STATEMENT OF DECLARATION:

The work presented in this thesis is my own. I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another university for a degree.

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Abstract

This thesis offers a reassessment of British colonial legacy as culture by interrogating the uses and limitations of cultural broadcasting, especially the role played by writers, in the critical period of empire's official end in the mid-twentieth century. In conjunction with BBC personnel, writers carried significant (though not uncomplicated) agency in imagining and circulating imperial endings, as they unfolded, to those 'at home' in Britain through the mass medium of the era, radio. Scrutinising written and sound archives, on-air output and never-broadcast programme ideas, this study examines the varied and at times contradictory ways in which imperial legacy imprinted itself on the cultural shape of Britain through the BBC Home Radio contexts of six major writers. These contexts are situated in the post-war momentum of political decolonisation, from the mid- to late-forties until the mid-sixties, and range across three core regions of British colonial rule in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. The conjunctures of writer, culture, (de)coloniality and the BBC are explored via three sets of pairings: E.M. Forster and Louis MacNeice on friendship and neutrality in relation to the independence of India; Doris Lessing and Muriel Spark on gendered anti-colonial challenges to white settlerdom in Southern Rhodesia; George Lamming and Stuart Hall on the federation of the West Indies and the positionality of Caribbean media intellectuals in a new, emergent black Britain. *Empire's End?* argues that literary-cultural broadcasting mediated the transition from imperial rule to the Commonwealth imaginary through a careful modulation of rhetoric and of radio form, one that questioned but ultimately validated Britain's self-image as a 'moral empire'. Further, it illustrates the unresolved end of empire through the entanglements between colonial ideology and progressive British culture – of its networks of intermediaries and its institutionalisation through the BBC – revealing links to today's tussles over imperial heritage, cultural politics and the imperative to 'decolonise'.

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Abbreviations

BBC HS: BBC Home Service.

BBC LP: BBC Light Programme.

BBC NP: BBC National Programme.

BBC SA: BBC Sound Archive.

BBC TP: BBC Third Programme.

BBC WAC: BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham.

BLSA: The British Library Sound Archive, London.

HRC: Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.

KCC: King's College Cambridge Archive Centre, University of Cambridge.

NLS: National Library of Scotland Archives, Edinburgh.

UBL: Archives Library, University of Birmingham.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Culture War Crossfires

Writing last year in *The Times*, journalist, broadcaster and former Conservative MP Matthew Parris proclaimed that ‘suddenly, something people call “colonialism” has become the root of all evil’.¹ Summarising the so-called culture wars in which public discourse was, as he termed it, suddenly engulfed, Parris – a regular presenter of BBC Radio programmes – cited the central components of British cultural life that in his estimation were now the unfair targets of a fervent decolonising mission:

Monuments, statues, the National Trust, stately homes,
Cambridge colleges, the school curriculum, even the BBC,
are suddenly diagnosed as suffering from this distressing
condition [colonialism]...We are instructed to decolonise
as a matter of urgency.²

Parris’s lament for a sacred positioning of iconic British institutions and symbols – monuments, stately homes and the rest – advocates for an insulation of such emblems from burgeoning calls for a moment of reckoning with the legacies of empire. Particularly revealing however is the discomfort at ‘even the BBC’ being drawn into what has been described as the ‘crossfire’ of a culture war, one that visibly took hold in Britain, as elsewhere, in the wake of the killing of George Floyd.³ This ideological war – a contentious trope in itself but one central to the framing of debates over culture and imperial legacy in conservative (and other strands of public) rhetoric – has been epitomised, as per the Parris article, on the one hand by a defence of traditional British cultural heritage and on the other by an accelerating momentum

¹ ‘I won’t be decolonising, I’ve no shame about empire’, *The Times*, 7 April 2021.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid; ‘National Trust Gets Caught in Culture War Crossfire’, Geraldine Kendall Adams, 2020. This particular cultural battle (sticking with the war analogy) began to rage in Britain, as elsewhere, from May 2020 onwards following the killing of black American George Floyd (1973-2020) at the hands of a white American policeman. The incident captured international attention during the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic and gave rise to a renewed vigour in the Black Lives Matter movement and to associated conceptual movements such as Decolonising the Curriculum, rooted in the Rhodes Must Fall campaign (2015).

in decolonising or reparatory projects across the cultural sector, including the first ever restitution by a British institution of a looted Benin Bronze statue.⁴

Against this setting, Parris's reference to 'even the BBC' was an implicit nod towards the progressive, liberal aura that has broadly surrounded the Corporation in its nearly century-long role as the nation's broadcaster. Wreathed in memories of an early ethos of moral and cultural uplift (notably through the leadership of its first Director-General John Reith), the BBC's image of tolerance and non-partisanship is also tightly yoked to a historic association with the licence fee – still in place for now but under threat – which positions it in a unique arrangement with domestic British publics, often denoted (by commentators and by the BBC itself) as the true owners of British public service broadcasting.⁵ In contrast, statues of seventeenth-century British slave owners, such as Edward Colston, and organisations like the National Trust, whose properties and land are explicitly entangled in histories of racial capitalism, perhaps make for unsurprising bullseyes in the firing line of what some term decolonial militancy. But surely, Parris's phrasing insinuated, the BBC should be largely undeserving of identification with any kind of 'distressing' colonial nexus?⁶

This thesis makes a historical intervention into these very current debates on British cultural institutions, specifically the BBC, and the reassessment of colonial-legacy-as-culture. Linking back to the critical period of empire's official end in the mid-twentieth century, when the mass of Britain's subject nations won freedom or negotiated greater self-rule, it considers the interplays between media, literature, culture and politics in what has been characterised as the 'British end of the British empire'.⁷ In centering decolonisation within mid-century British-centric contexts, this study explores how imperial endings, as they unfolded, were imagined and circulated to those *at home* by writers and by BBC personnel through the mass medium of the era, radio.⁸ Probing key moments in the formal de-coupling of Britain from outright colonial might – from shortly after the end of the Second World War to the mid-sixties – and interrogating accompanying mediatised narratives and rhetoric, this study brings to light a series of complex cultural and historical junctures that disclose the interrelation between imperial legacy and British culture in the early second half of the twentieth century.⁹

⁴ Bronze returned to Nigeria by Jesus College, Cambridge, in October 2021 (under the leadership of Barbadian-born Sonita Alleyne, Master of the College, and former radio broadcaster). On cultural restitution and the British museum sector see Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums*, 2020.

⁵ Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of British Broadcasting*, 1991: 9-14; Mark Damazer, 'Don't be Horrid About the BBC', 2021.

⁶ Parris, 2021. Colston's statue was hurled into Bristol harbour in June 2020 in the wake of Floyd's death. On the National Trust see Corinne Fowler, *Green Unpleasant Land*, 2020.

⁷ Sarah Stockwell, *The British End of the British Empire*, 2018.

⁸ As per convention, *radio* refers to the medium or to its general location in BBC ecology as a whole, whereas BBC Radio, mostly, signals the system of specific networks (Light, Home, Third and so on).

⁹ Official decolonisation in the twentieth-century, heralding the formal end of the British empire, began with India in 1947 and spread fast across Asia and Africa over the next two decades, including notably Ceylon/Sri Lanka in 1948, Ghana in 1957, Nigeria in

Ranging from the independence of India to the federation of southern African states and later to that of the West Indies, these moments, as envisioned and relayed via the BBC's literary-cultural infrastructures, illustrate the ways in which empire's end 'left many legacies within Britain itself' in both the articulation of British cultural identities and through significant links with the personnel and policies of the predominant British cultural institution of the time.¹⁰ Though colonial rule formally drew to a close, imperial influence was neither unequivocally concluded nor mono-directional given the promotion of the Commonwealth and the fast-incoming cultural trajectories from Britain's former colonies later dubbed an 'implosion' of empire.¹¹ Confluxes of mid-twentieth century media and history, then, are in focus here so that the 'threads and entanglements' between colonial legacy and British culture – its networks of intellectuals, writers, producers and its institutionalisation through the BBC – move sharply into view, providing important but often overlooked backstories to today's tussles over decolonisation, imperial heritage and cultural politics.¹²

Unlike many recent histories of the BBC's relationships to empire, to British nationhood or to literary authorship – focused either on outward international broadcast diffusion or on inward domestic orientations hinging on the interwar or wartime eras – this thesis stakes its analysis to the British post-war terrain.¹³ Drawing together a set of interdisciplinary approaches that cross British imperial history with literary-cultural and radio studies, my analysis offers a fresh scholarly perspective on the cultural impact of decolonisation by closing in, at one end, on the conclusion of the Second World War and the advent of empire's final endgame and, at the other, on the large-scale migration to Britain from its (erstwhile) colonies and a set of interrelated shifts in the racialisation of public discourse. Combed over as a pivotal period in political and cultural history, post-war Britain has principally been cast in relation to the Second World War's European aftermaths, to the birth of the Cold War or as an era cradling the modern British welfare state.¹⁴ Although coloniality's significance to post-war British culture has been taken into account by several scholarly accounts of this period, including some concerned directly with media and

1960 and Kenya in 1963. The West Indies was also given official federation status in 1958, discussed in Chapter Four. From a position as 'the largest empire in the history of the world in the 1930s', Britain became a vastly diminished global ruler over the next three decades or so with its direct political control amounting by the mid-sixties 'to little more than a few outposts'; L. J. Butler, *Britain and Empire*, 2002: xi.

¹⁰ Stockwell, 2018: 2; Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus*, 1995: 54-55.

¹¹ John Mackenzie, 'The Persistence of Empire in Metropolitan Culture', 2001: 21-22; Lars Ole Sauerberg, *Intercultural Voices in Contemporary British Literature*, 2001: 21.

¹² Stockwell, 2018: dust jacket.

¹³ Recent books in this category include (not exhaustively): Simon Potter, *Wireless Internationalism and Distant Listening*, 2020; Daniel Ryan Morse, *Radio Empire*, 2020; Wendy Webster, *Mixing It*, 2018; Ian Whittington, *Writing the Radio War*, 2018.

¹⁴ See Tony Judt, *Postwar*, 2005; David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, 2007; Matthew Taunton, *Red Britain*, 2019.

literature, it is the case that the interrelations between literary-cultural media, specially at the BBC, and an official end, or a dismantling, of colonial rule remains under-scrutinised.¹⁵

In connecting these areas of inquiry, this thesis challenges a consensus on an inward turn at the mid-point of twentieth-century Britain and on the perception of British cultural and national identity from the late forties onwards as increasingly insular.¹⁶ In his history of British intellectual life, *Absent Minds*, Stefan Collini has argued that a post-war return to 'the vernacular' in literary form and expression, as evidenced by the writings of Kingsley Amis or Philip Larkin, denoted this self-conscious inward cultural shift.¹⁷ For Collini this is the undeniable cultural repercussion of wartime, a contraction rather than an extension of the international cooperation in which Britain had been engaged, and a revival of the conceptualisation of the 'nation as pastoral' which he views as extending through the fifties and into the early sixties.¹⁸ Relatedly, empire's influence on British domestic cultures – not only in the post-war period but more generally – was, until relatively recently, deemed to have had 'minimal impact'.¹⁹ In studies such as Bernard Porter's *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* imperial cultural influence – judged to have been acquired, along with the empire itself, through inattention rather than strategy and force – was characterised as radiating chiefly outwards rather than enmeshed in models of interpenetration. Indeed many historians of Britain and empire, as Stuart Ward asserted, had stayed 'all but silent' on the subject of imperial disintegration.²⁰

Over the past two decades or so revisionist trends have emerged which question some of these dominant narratives of post-war Britain as inward-facing and as absent-minded, including the 'new imperial history', the growth of radio modernist studies, and the 'entangled media histories' school of historiography which stresses transnational and transmedial approaches.²¹ Whilst such critiques have gone a considerable distance towards evaluating the lived experiences of empire at home, and of assessing British modernity through the intersections of transnationalism, class, gender and race, residual traces linger, as noted, of an

¹⁵ Analyses of coloniality and culture in post-war Britain include, amongst others, James Procter's *Dwelling Places*, 2003, Rob Waters's *Thinking Black*, 2018, Alan Sinfield's *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, 1997, as well as the writings of Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall. In the context of the post-war BBC however there has been relatively little published; one notable exception is Thomas Hajkowski's *The BBC and National Identity in Britain*, 2010.

¹⁶ Although he also deals with earlier periods, within the paradigm of late modernism, Jed Esty's *A Shrinking Island*, 2004, is an important marker in the delineation of a mid-century British *inward cultural turn*.

¹⁷ 2006: 138.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ For one of the earliest and most prominent critiques of this historiographical trend see Stuart Ward ed., *British Culture and the End of Empire*, 2001:1-12. Mackenzie, cited earlier, is another early critical voice on this issue.

²⁰ Porter, 2004; Ward, *ibid*. On the British acquiring the empire in a 'fit of absence of mind', see J.R. Seeley, 'The Expansion of England', 1883.

²¹ Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose ed., *At Home with the Empire*, 2006; Stephen Howe ed., *The New Imperial Histories Reader*, 2009; Antoinette Burton and Dane Kennedy ed., *How Empire Shaped Us*, 2016; Todd Avery, *Radio Modernism*, 2006; Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle and Jane Lewty ed., *Broadcasting Modernism*, 2009; Marie Cronqvist and Christophe Hilgert, 'Entangled Media Histories', 2017.

outwards axis of imperial influence at the point of empire's formal deconstruction. As a rejoinder, in part, a close-grained approach to the 'interconstitutive' nature of colonialism's official end shapes this analysis, that is, of the interdependence between decolonisation in far-distanced colonies and the articulation of the domestic British national imaginary, the echoes of which reverberate today.²²

Central to the correspondence between then and now is the dominant portrayal of Britain's exercise of colonial power as indicative of a 'moral empire', one symbolised by benefaction, goodwill and benignity rather than visceral brutality.²³ Although a number of contemporary historians have foregrounded the scale and barbarity of the violence which permeated the actions and philosophies of the modern world's largest imperial ruler, British history-writing, as Priya Satia stresses, has too often narrated unexacting accounts of Britain's colonial rule as part-anchored in a conscientious liberalism, contributing to an 'exculpatory' national self-image that 'colludes in the afterlife of empire'.²⁴ This afterlife – or afterlives if we consider recent critiques that appraise present-day Britain as deeply wedded to its imperial pasts through nostalgia, melancholia or via a reaffirmation of the racialised structures of colonialism in a 'new age of empire' – is, or are, entwined in British public recollection with 'redemptive myths about colonial upliftment'.²⁵ The sustained promotion of a balance sheet approach to British colonial legacy, with 'trains, dams', 'the rule of law' and the reach of British cultural influence ranked highly (as *pros*) in contrast to resource expropriation and use of brute force (*cons*), has in the past and continues to undergird a sweeping idea of empire as bounteous or humanitarian.²⁶ For Satia, this memorialisation of apparent right-doings is profoundly interlinked with historians' inadequate holding to account of the many 'well-meaning Britons' involved in the imperial project, of those everyday figures in institutional structures who 'despite good intentions' and a marked degree of moral conscience enacted some of the most egregious outrages of British colonial rule.²⁷

Such historically-sanctioned mythologies of uplift, and a correlated belief in the British empire's moral compass, were perhaps never more in evidence than at the junctions of transfers of power to colonies, lauded by the British as largely 'peaceful, voluntary and gentlemanly'.²⁸ The granting of independence to subject nations, beginning with India in 1947,

²² Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*, 2001: 9; Mrinalini Sinha, 'Teaching Imperialism as a Social Formation', 1997.

²³ Priyamvada Gopal, 'The Moral Empire', 2005.

²⁴ Satia, *Time's Monster*, 2020: 3. On the violence of the British empire see for example Kim Wagner, *The Skull of Alum Bhag*, 2017; 'Savage Warfare', 2018; *Amritsar 1919*, 2019.

²⁵ 2020: 4. On empire's twenty-first century afterlives: Peter Mitchell, *Imperial Nostalgia*, 2021; Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 2004; Kehinde Andrews, *The New Age of Empire*, 2021.

²⁶ Satia, 2020: 3.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

was translated into British public rhetoric – via political speeches, in the print press and through the BBC’s broadcasts – as the fulfilment of a British mission to elevate those in its imperial domain. Thus decolonisation became conjoined, in ‘influential strands of British imperial history and in the popular imagination’, with a ‘glow of post-imperial achievement’.²⁹ Further, the construction and mediation of this discourse was often shaped by ‘well-meaning Britons’ themselves, by progressive or liberal cultural producers who duly recounted and wove into their retellings of the moral empire the contributions made by well-meaning British predecessors.³⁰

It is in this light that the role played by the predominantly liberal and ‘authoritative national cultural institution’ of the time, the BBC, gains salience.³¹ Or, more precisely, the role of the BBC’s production and editorial ecologies (and of the individuals within them) and by those literary writers associated with these milieus who, in conjunction with each other, reimagined empire off and on air in the critical post-war period. In circulating and on occasion questioning or disrupting national self-images allied to notions of empire-as-benevolence, writers and producers (and other personnel) involved in the BBC’s domestic mediation of cultural ideas of empire – of endings and beginnings which ushered in new emphases on ‘exchange’ and partnership between Britain and its former colonies – provide ample and arresting illustrations of the complexities of ‘well-meaning’ conceptualisations of colonial legacy, that is, very broadly of Britain as imperial do-gooder.³² Moral conscience (or well-meaningness) here relates chiefly to the overarching cultural packaging of British imperial legacy to its own constituencies as humane or altruistic, both via the BBC’s policies, or its customs and practices, and via the individual politics of those enmeshed in its cultures. But encompassed within this frame so too are intermittent moments of rupture, of challenge and of contestation, at times on air and more often behind the scenes in production-editorial negotiations.

In three chapters that move, loosely, in tandem chronologically and geographically with the dismantling or transfer of British rule – late forties India, fifties Rhodesia and late fifties to early sixties West Indies – this thesis interrogates the cultural modalities of decolonisation through a close examination of pairs of writers who interpreted imperial legacies via markedly different engagements with BBC Radio. As ‘actors in a field of cultural production’, authors and their attendant networks function as points of convergence for a

²⁹ Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*, 2019: 2, 12.

³⁰ Satia, 2020: 3

³¹ Krishan Kumar, ‘Holding the Middle Ground’, 1975: 71.

³² BBC Yearbook, 1946: 97.

range of interconnections between literary status and cultural prestige.³³ To borrow from Alan Sinfield's lexicon – which itself nodded to Louis Althusser's original concept of the ideological state apparatus – writers are bound with, and in some cases in themselves, 'gatekeepers of the cultural apparatus'.³⁴ Literature and media, or specifically BBC literary-cultural radio therefore constitutes a form of cultural production that 'transmit[s] power' and through its interrelations with dominant ideologies is, in various ways, 'structured into the social order'.³⁵ Accordingly, the pairings of writings under consideration here – E.M. Forster and Louis MacNeice on India, Doris Lessing and Muriel Spark on Rhodesia and George Lamming and Stuart Hall on the West Indies – reveal much about privilege and hierarchised modes of cultural-imaginative production of ideas of empire (as conveyed to Britons as imperial demise occurred).

So too do they demonstrate interrelations with the apparatus of the BBC and particularly its organisational cultures, to its departments and personnel ranging from Talks, Features and Drama and to the two central post-war radio networks of intellectual and literary-cultural speech programming, the Home Service and the Third Programme. These internal cultures in turn highlight the textures and tensions within the BBC's infrastructures, illustrating fissures between the image of the Corporation as an ideologically unified institution and its actualisation as separate and often competing units in what has been described as a 'social-industrial complex' in its own 'private world'; or, in other words, a complicated mix of industrial practices and social relations within a self-contained and mostly self-regulating professional sphere.³⁶ It is in the interactions between these public-private BBCs – between individuals such as Features Unit Head Laurence Gilliam or Talks Producer Leonie Cohn and the Corporation's normative production-editorial systems – and writers-as-cultural-producers, then, that some of the earliest iterations of empire's afterlives within the post-war British cultural apparatus can be discerned.

In simpler terms, by drawing together these various strands I consider how media plays a part in the making of culture – and associated social relational categories such as race and gender – within this decisive period and in relation to ideologies of empire. This formulation, as noted, draws in part on the cultural materialism of scholars such as Alan Sinfield but at its heart is an acknowledgement of debt to Stuart Hall, foundational media theorist and also one of the subjects of this study. It is in Hall's many rich writings on the

³³ Hans-Ulrich Wagner, 'Writers and Radio', 2019: 8.

³⁴ 1997: xxxiv. Sinfield draws on Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's concept of culture as one of the key ideological state apparatuses through which dominant ideologies are established and maintained, from *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, 1970.

³⁵ 1997: 29.

³⁶ Tom Burns, *The BBC, Public Institution and Private World*, 1977: 1-11, 82-85.

media's signifying practices, on its active (rather than passive) ways of '*making things mean*', as Hall termed it, and in his analysis of the media's 'very close, sympathetic relationship to power and established values' that this thesis anchors its inquiry.³⁷ Much of Hall's media theorisation came to fruition in a later period than the one in focus here, possibly shaped by his BBC experiences in the late fifties and sixties and as discussed in Chapter Four. And yet his identification of the structural interconnection of media and culture in (re)producing consensus, when transposed to the mid-century context of coloniality, is particularly apt. As Hall wrote, the media – by which he mostly denoted mainstream media including the BBC – 'favour a consensus view of any problem', promoting 'experts, privileged witnesses, middle men' and those who are 'articulate', thereby forging a strategic mechanism through which a 'consensus view' could be mediated (in this case, of empire's end at the juncture of decolonisation).³⁸ Moreover, Hall established the presence of a defensiveness in established media 'about the sacred institutions of society'.³⁹ Extending, idiomatically, this identification of media's preservation of that which is 'sacred', I argue, as per Satia, Gopal and others, that empire and imperial legacy are amongst the sacred cows of British history, constituted via a mythologising of morality and enshrined in public memory through the consensus-building of British cultural media. A small clarification, though: any references to 'the media' in my analysis encapsulate the tensions outlined earlier between different sections and personnel within the BBC. Relatedly my focus on a consensus on empire relies especially on an attentiveness towards the significance of media producers – in conjunction with writers – in creating 'shared meanings' and on which, as Nicholas Garnham has asserted, 'social maintenance and reproduction depend.'⁴⁰

Within this wide frame, however, there exist possibilities and counter-flows.⁴¹ As Hall's own example as a writer-intellectual on the BBC shows (and as this thesis will detail), the production of culture through media simultaneously carries potentialities of change, of resistance or of repositioning. It is in the 'conjunctures' of history and the social relations of production, as Hall identified them, that moments of crisis emerge; moments that function as hinges which can either (re)produce consensus and hierarchy or rupture and realign societal and cultural power structures. For Hall, the conjuncture – a longstanding Marxist concept of varied meaning – provided the fundamental basis for cultural political analysis by attending to

³⁷ 'The Rediscovery of 'Ideology'', 1982: 60; 'Black Men, White Media', 1974/2021: 51.

³⁸ 'Black Men, White Media', *ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Emancipation, the Media, and Modernity*, 2000: 86.

⁴¹ Counter or contra-flows are a key media theoretical perspective aligned with counter-hegemonic approaches to twentieth-century globalised media (mostly in relation to the Global North and Global South, but this paradigm overlaps in a productive way, I contend, with Hall's paradigm of the possibilities of challenge to power within the British media). On global flows see Daya Thussu ed., *Media on the Move*, 2006.

a close historicisation of political consent, to the specificities of historical momentum in maintaining or in breaking through ‘the mechanisms by which popular consent are won’, an idea drawing on Antonio Gramsci’s notion of hegemonic power.⁴² Hegemony, in the Gramscian sense, is distinct from enactments of outright political dominance (similar to Althusser’s distinction between the ideological and repressive state apparatuses), one in which consent is brokered by encouraging a popular investment in certain ideals. In Hall’s reading of Gramsci, the evolution of politics and ideology – in relation to culture and media – is comprised of a series of such conjunctures, a set of key moments through which common consent is manufactured, or on occasion challenged or even overturned, shaping the very nature of consensus itself. This is not to suggest that there is parity between rupture and consensus; far from it. But in thinking conjuncturally as Hall urged those working at the intersections of culture, media and politics to do, my aim is to trace with a degree of granularity the textures and alignments of a consensus on coloniality and as constituted by a sequence of moments in the mid-century mediatised cultural sphere.

This thesis, then, takes its principal cue from Hall and offers a conjunctural approach to empire’s end and British literary-cultural radio by concentrating on significant junctures in the growing momentum of post-war decolonisation; moments that produced, consolidated or challenged a consensus on the benevolence of imperial legacy. In the chapters that follow, three historical pivotal points that signal a challenge or an official end to imperial rule are foregrounded: Indian independence in 1947, the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1953 and the federation of the West Indies in 1958. These are situated within the social and political formation of the periods that buffer them and assessed in relation to the cultural media mechanisms – including radio form and literary narrative – through which ideas of imperialism were constructed and circulated domestically. Chapter Two considers forties India through the positioning and the output of two very different writers, Forster and MacNeice, in the context of the BBC’s relationship to certain literary and imperial networks (Bloomsbury and the Indian Civil Service) and in terms of contrasting national responses to British colonial rule from English and Irish perspectives. Chapter Three analyses the equivocal role of the (anti-) colonial white settler woman – an equivocality denoted here by brackets – in questioning imperialism. It does so through an examination of the divergent radio engagements of Lessing and Spark with the subject of British settlerism in Rhodesia, a mode of colonialism closely associated with a ‘marauding white man’ image of frontier violence and which presented a

⁴² Sut Jhally, ‘Stuart Hall: The Last Interview’, 2016: 334; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 1971. James Procter provides a useful precis of the conjuncture in *Stuart Hall*, 2004: 49.

challenge to the mediation of a fifties ideal of post-imperial Commonwealth harmony.⁴³ Chapter Four then charts the inward movement of colonised subjects to the imperial metropole – against growing migration and a greater racialisation of British political discourse in the late fifties and early sixties – through an analysis of Caribbean writers, particularly Lamming and Hall, and a ‘war of position’ anti-colonial strategy to win space on BBC Radio’s domestic networks and to speak aloud of a new national consciousness.⁴⁴ In tracing these pivotal events and mediations the aim is to use a conjunctural overview to frame a nuanced reading of an evolving post-war consensus on coloniality, a consensus subject to various ‘forces of governance and oppositions and resistance’ which each chapter unpacks in detail.⁴⁵

In the remaining sections of this Introduction, I offer more detail on the overarching theoretical and historical perspectives that inform this study (and some of their limitations), principally with regards to radio, culture and writers and touching on conceptions that include cultural intermediaries, bi-directionality and voice.⁴⁶ I begin, though, with the significance of BBC Radio in the post-war British ecology.

Three in One on a Non-Shrinking Island

Amongst the many publicly funded arts organisations that flowered as part of the Labour government’s social, political and cultural post-war reconstruction project – including The Arts Council of England (established 1946) and the Institute of Contemporary Arts (created in 1947) – critics have often considered the BBC to be the ‘single most influential’ institution of them all.⁴⁷ Unparalleled in scope and reach through its support for a number of orchestras and its commissioning of ‘music, plays and original features from many of the leading composers and writers of the day’, the post-war era saw the BBC solidify its status as the premier cultural patron in Britain.⁴⁸ This ranking rested in part on the radical overhaul of its structure in the aftermath of war that resulted, in September 1946, in the establishment of the Third Programme. Reflecting, in part, the rising popularity of the arts during the Second World War, which saw a fifty percent increase in book sales (despite paper shortages) and a growing interest in visual arts exhibitions and contemporary music, the creation of the Third also gave credence to the feeling, as Kate Whitehead noted, that wartime had created an appetite for more serious, heavyweight programmes.⁴⁹

⁴³ Marilyn Lake, ‘Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man’, 1999.

⁴⁴ Gramsci, 1971.

⁴⁵ Jhally, ‘Stuart Hall: The Last Interview’, 2016: 335.

⁴⁶ Andrew Crisell, *Understanding Radio*, 1986; *More than a Music-Box*, 2004.

⁴⁷ Hewison, 1995: 54.

⁴⁸ Alastair Davies and Alan Sinfield ed., *British Culture of the Post-War*, 2000: 139.

⁴⁹ Angus Calder, *The People’s War*, 1969; Kate Whitehead, *The Third Programme*, 1989: 11

As a consequence the Third Programme put the BBC centre-stage in post-war regeneration with a service devoted to raising cultural standards through broadcasts of avant-garde, experimental and ‘challenging’ material.⁵⁰ This bold move allowed it to stake a claim, in cultural terms, to being ‘the prime re-educative agency of the post-war world’.⁵¹ In an age of austerity, with food and clothes rationing continuing for nearly a decade after the end of the war, Britons faced a number of privations but, as one Labour journal contended, the Third brought a sense of much-needed cultural affluence and luxury. ‘Poor we may be, economically’, wrote the *Tribune*, ‘but culturally we are probably richer than we have been for a long time’.⁵²

The decisiveness with which the Third was launched merely a year after war’s end belies the fact that during wartime BBC senior management worried greatly about the shape of peacetime broadcasting. The BBC’s Governors, amongst others, expressed concerns about the future relationship between the Corporation’s various services once the exigencies of wartime ended.⁵³ Wartime output had been centralised into one primary domestic network, the Home Service, airing alongside the Forces Programme (transmitted at home and to British forces abroad), and with an Overseas Service that broadcast to audiences worldwide (beginning in 1940). But a looming war’s end had called into question the purpose of the BBC’s multifaceted services. Overseas broadcasting, funded by a grant-in-aid from the Foreign Office (unlike the domestic licence fee) underlined the divergent remits and characteristics of BBC output, with global programming aimed explicitly at the ‘projection of Britain’ and domestic streams viewed broadly as inward-facing platforms that cohered around national identity.⁵⁴ Wartime had of course muddled these divisions from the outset when the internal projection of Britain’s achievements on the global stage had partly mirrored those in the transmissions to listeners in its imperial domains and elsewhere, but as war’s climax neared many in BBC senior circles assumed, somewhat incorrectly as we see later, that there would be ‘a distinct separation between the home and foreign services’.⁵⁵

Several blueprints were drafted, not solely in relation to the differentiation between *home* and *foreign* but with the added aims of amplifying the BBC’s appeal to British listeners across all class constituencies and of underlining the Corporation’s continued (or reinvigorated post-war) dedication to raising cultural standards. For domestic audiences, in

⁵⁰ Whitehead, 1989: 10–11.

⁵¹ Humphrey Carpenter, *The Envy of the World*, 1996: 6

⁵² Quoted in Carpenter, 1996: 54.

⁵³ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, Vol. III, 1979: 587.

⁵⁴ Briggs, Vol. IV, 1979: 138.

⁵⁵ Ibid. *Home* and *foreign*, also often referred to as *overseas* or *external*, were the BBC terms that denoted domestic and international broadcasting in this period.

the words of Asa Briggs, three would become ‘the all-important number’.⁵⁶ A tripartite, or three-in-one, conception of BBC Radio, launched by Director-General William Haley, operated from late 1946 onwards (until 1967). Parallel stations – the Light Programme, the Home Service and the Third Programme – offered tailored schedules designed to draw in Britons from all walks of life. As cultural fare the Light offered predominantly variety or entertainment broadcasting, unlike the more mixed schedule of the Home, comprised mostly of talks, discussions, features and plays. In sharp contrast sat the Third which mediated the most cultivated and sophisticated forms of arts and culture programming – challenging radio dramas, classical music and avant-gardist features amongst them. These disaggregated networks formed a kind of pyramid through which it was hoped (by Haley and BBC senior personnel) that the average Briton would move upwards in a trajectory of social mobility via a ‘steady process of cultural improvement’.⁵⁷ BBC Radio’s post-war domestic networks were therefore dissevered, broadly, along class lines despite a design that that was meant to transcend those very boundaries. At the same time they were also conceptualised as one overall output in which streams overlapped with one another, offering a helping hand to listeners as they made their way up the ladder of social-cultural capital.

Once the three services had run for a few years, however, it became clear the reality was more complicated than the BBC had envisioned at war’s end. A landmark listening survey of the Third Programme in 1953 presented some unexpected results, not least that of a crossover between a sector of audiences tuning in to the Light and to the Third.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, a sizeable minority of the Third’s regular listeners reported they felt the service should be shut down as it was not ‘egalitarian’ or, in plainer words, simply too elitist.⁵⁹ Less surprisingly, perhaps, the constituencies of the Home and the Third were revealed to be tilted towards a model where they ‘march[ed] together’, meaning greater numbers of people tuning into the Third Programme coincided with higher listening figures to the Home Service.⁶⁰ The Home and the Third, then, in some ways fulfilled Haley’s ideal of networks overlying each other within the strictures and designs of the three-in-one radio strata. And yet the Home’s status as the ‘middlebrow’ station further complicated matters.⁶¹ Unlike the more distinctive ends of the domestic radio spectrum, Home had by definition to imagine a broader collective. It had to speak to ‘people of all classes equally’, turning it by the late forties and early fifties into the

⁵⁶ Vol. IV, 1995: 77.

⁵⁷ David Hendy, *Life on Air*, 2007: 27.

⁵⁸ Briggs, Vol. IV, 1995: 557.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ On the rise of ‘brows’ terminology in the twenties and thirties to delineate the distinctions between intellectual and mass culture see Melba Cuddy-Keane, *Virginia Woolf: The Intellectual, and the Public Sphere*, 2003: 2-3.

‘flagship network of the BBC during the post-war era’ but also resulting in a middle-of-the-road approach that often made for rather safe or lustreless radio.⁶² A decade later, this everything-and-nothing identity proved in many ways to be its undoing as television began to claim audience attention and Home’s ratings plummeted. Combined with a lack of imaginative direction from BBC managers, the Home became by the mid-sixties ‘less and less representative of the British population as a whole’ and more amalgamated, in David Hendy’s description, to the ‘rump section of its middle third’.⁶³ ‘In the long run’, as Hendy has adjudged, ‘Haley’s pyramid of radio services had tended to entrench cultural differences based on class and age, rather than transcend them’.⁶⁴

This brief and, by necessity, rather sweeping summary of British radio’s mid-century reinvention serves several purposes here. First, it marries the BBC’s post-war organisational and editorial outlooks, specifically its concerns with class and culture as radio’s *modus operandi*, to the historical period in which formal decolonisation took place. Despite the many contradictions within the BBC’s post-war strategy, of who was imagined to be listening and of what they might want or need to hear, it remains salient that the Corporation – through its primary platform of radio – positioned itself in this era principally as an agency of culture, and not as a political affairs one. In part this was related to war’s aftermath and to the BBC’s location within the cultural regenerative project of the welfare state, as mentioned earlier. But politics, or rather the coverage allied to it through topical news and current affairs, also only took hold more strenuously in the BBC’s ecology from late on in the fifties and in the sixties.⁶⁵ One reading of this development lies in a consideration of technological advancements, such as mobile location recording, which came into effect later in the fifties. Another is of the rather stagnant state of news and current affairs output in the late forties and fifties (in contrast to a blossoming of features programming in wartime and in the immediate post-war period, for example), and which was to some extent due to personnel interests and styles of editorial leadership. In particular, the greater amalgamation of current affairs programming in radio schedules, and in the wider BBC, from the sixties onwards was in no small part related to the Director Generalship of Hugh Carleton Greene, whose time in office as D-G lasted almost the entire decade (from 1960 to 1969) and whose background in news programming, including his role as the BBC’s very first Director of News and Current Affairs (taken up in 1958), shaped

⁶² Hendy, *Life on Air*, 2007: 26. In the late forties the Home Service generally held at least a third, if not half, of the potential British radio audience, reaching as many as fifteen million listeners at one time (the totality of the British listening public at the time was cited as in excess of thirty million). Though television began to be aired in Britain from the thirties onwards it only came into its own as a widely accessed media platform in the sixties.

⁶³ 2007: 30.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Hugh Chignell, *Public Issue Radio*, 2011.

much of the Corporation's strong commitment to current affairs-based broadcasting (and which in many ways is still in evidence today).⁶⁶

As such the provision of culture, including speech programming as part-crafted or voiced by writers or as interlinked in some way to writerly talent, formed a not insignificant strand of post-war radio in the late forties and the fifties.⁶⁷ Further, the Home and the Third, the two networks in close focus in this thesis, marched together as the principal stations delivering cultural content bound up with *literary* writing of some kind, that is, writing bearing the hallmarks of finesse and sophistication and either authored or voiced by a 'literary' writer (a published author of fiction of some kind, or of poetry) and as encoded into the BBC's taste pyramid. This delivery included original, radiogenic (or radio-first) commissions from high-profile or upcoming novelists, poets and playwrights, ranging from the six authors detailed in this study to entire sets of writerly networks such as Bloomsbury (discussed in Chapter Two). But so too did it encompass the presence of authors in schedules as, among other things, author-presenters of talks, discussion or feature participants or, as in the case of Louis MacNeice and a selection of his peers, as BBC radio production staff. Writers (I use the term loosely to include those like Hall at the more academic or intellectual end of the spectrum), in tandem with the BBC personnel with whom they liaised, were therefore essential intermediaries of culture through British radio in the post-war period. Interlocked in dynamics that, in a Bordieuan sense, ensured the provision of 'symbolic goods and services', writers and producers within the wider BBC apparatus (one and the same in the case of MacNeice), needed or sought each other's interest, backing and promotion in order to cultivate, or to change, tastes.⁶⁸

I explore the concept of cultural intermediaries – and interdependences between writers and producers – in more detail shortly, but in returning to the BBC's aims for its post-war radio provision let us remind ourselves of the distinction envisaged between home and foreign services. As noted, near the conclusion of the Second World War some BBC senior personnel assumed a strict division would best suit the needs and remits of external and domestic broadcasting. But this was not necessarily borne out by the shape of post-war schedules nor by perceptions of listener interest amongst certain editorial-production quarters. Despite a strong assumption that British listeners in the forties were, at large, disengaged from matters related to empire – a kind of a minimum impact interpretation in which a deep apathy towards imperial issues was diagnosed (discussed in depth in the next

⁶⁶ Briggs, Vol. V, 1995: 61-72; 309-454.

⁶⁷ BBC Radio historically, and even now, divides programme content broadly into two camps: speech and music.

⁶⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1979/1984; Sean Nixon and Paul Du Gay, 'Who Needs Cultural Intermediaries?', 2002: 496.

chapter) – wartime had of course propelled the BBC at great speed onto the global stage with an expansion of foreign language services grown at an astonishing rate.⁶⁹ Producer Geoffrey Bridson, made responsible for Overseas Features in 1941, noted that wartime had created ‘a world-wide audience for war stories from Britain’, with new channels such as the North American, African, Eastern and Pacific Services clamouring for British news and features.⁷⁰

Crucially, wartime globalisation also brought with it an element of ‘bi-directionality’, meaning that the presence of overseas-related material, and not simply of the news and information variety, grew in domestic schedules too.⁷¹ This reciprocal influence extended into the post-war era as wartime isolation ended, audible in Home Services programming and made visible off-air in the directives sent to Home and External Services staff to cooperate with each other regarding internationally-inflected output, especially as related to ‘the Colonies’.⁷² Organisational rearrangements combined with the interests and influences of a tranche of producers and editors like Bridson (in conjunction often with writers), who pitched and produced globally-inflected broadcasts generating good listener engagement, resulted in a steady stream of foreign programming that became, in various ways, a distinctive attribute of domestic post-war radio. Features Department in particular – merged with the Drama Department in wartime but operating as its own unit after war’s end – brought a strong international sensibility to its output for the Home Service and later the Third Programme, and audience appreciation was reflected in the relatively good Listener Research figures for series such as the long-running *Window on Europe* (first aired during wartime and continuing into the fifties).⁷³ Imperial, or post-imperial, narratives were therefore part and parcel of a varied mosaic of post-war international domestic radio programming.

More generally, the developments outlined above showcase to an extent the BBC’s movement with the times in its shift away from a potential strict separation of home and overseas services and its commitment to pockets of internationalism within the domestic output. The post-war Features team, with a pronounced literary quality to its staffing as epitomised by MacNeice, recounted the details of this commitment in a series of memoirs of their many travels to gather programme material funded by the BBC in the post-war period.⁷⁴ So too was this underlined by the fifteen domestic radio scripts chosen for print publication in

⁶⁹ By early 1943 the BBC’s foreign language services included Afrikaans, Bengali, Burmese, Cantonese, Hokkien and Kyoyu, French (for Canada), Greek (for Cyprus), Gujarati, Hindustani, Malay, Marathi, Maltese, Sinhalese, Tamil and Thai.

⁷⁰ *Prospero and Ariel*, 1971: 80.

⁷¹ Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations*, 2012: 2.

⁷² See for example ‘The Colonies and British Home Listening’ directive, n.d., as related to ‘Colonial Month’ on domestic BBC Television and BBC Home Service in the summer of 1949; BBC WAC R51/93, Talks, Commonwealth, File 1, 1946-1954.

⁷³ Listener Research was the official department of the BBC that conducted a range of different surveys into aspects of listener engagement from 1936 onwards. On early listener research and literary programming on the BBC see Alexandra Lawrie, ‘Who’s Listening to Modernism?’, 2018.

⁷⁴ Rayner Heppenstall, *Portrait of the Artist as a Professional Man*, 1969: 47-57; Bridson, 1971: 133-150.

a special anthology in 1950 by Features Head Laurence Gilliam, of which nine were directly associated with international travel, including journeys to, among other places, Canada, America, Kenya, Tanganyika, Egypt, India, the West Indies and Australia.⁷⁵ Although the average Briton, both pre- and post-war, could only dream of travelling such distances, Features Department's global engagements in the forties and fifties, backed by the BBC's commissioning and financing, reflected a keeping in step with wider mood changes towards the idea of going abroad.⁷⁶ Whilst fifties-living was marked by frugality, several factors came into play that meant greater numbers could conceivably travel outside of Britain or dream of doing so. The wartime-propelled revolution in transport links, especially air travel, had altered significantly British access to Europe and America and, as the fifties went on, to countries much further afield.⁷⁷

Leisure travel may at first glance appear to be at the opposite end of the spectrum from decolonisation in terms of British engagement with the wider world. But it does demonstrate another influential way in which conceptualisations of 'abroad' seeped into British post-war culture, and further fortifies the provocation at the heart of this thesis that a 'long ideological attachment to the narratives of the Island Story' and of Britain's supposed 'splendid isolation' need firmer questioning and rewriting.⁷⁸ In more granular terms, the BBC's post-war investment in global travel to secure domestic radio content, and the commitment from producers, writers and editors to such projects and programme ideas, shows the taking hold within British domestic media culture, as James Clifford describes it, of a 'routed' cosmopolitanism.⁷⁹ In Clifford's take twentieth-century culture consolidates ideas of home through motion – across a range of spheres, sometimes contradictory or overlapping, including colonialist expansion or contraction, migration, diaspora and holidaying – and is where modernity is constituted through the interactions between 'traveling cultures'.⁸⁰ For Clifford, 'rooted' culture, often characterised in the twentieth-century as homogenous and static, needs to be reconceptualised through the idea of travel (and as 'routed'), through 'the ways people leave home and return, enacting differently centered worlds', including 'cultures as sites traversed by tourists' and those crossed 'by radio and television signals'.⁸¹ Similarly, Arjun Appadurai has written of the cultural and imaginative dimensions of globalisation in the second half of the twentieth century and of the manifestations of modernity through

⁷⁵ Laurence Gilliam ed., *BBC Features*, 1950. Scripts included *The End of Mussolini* by D.G. Bridson, *India at First Sight* by Louis MacNeice and *From Anzio to Burgundy* by Wynford Vaughan Thomas.

⁷⁶ On the interwar roots of this pull towards travel and its literary imaginings see Paul Fussell, *Abroad*, 1979.

⁷⁷ Rosemary Wakeman, 'Veblen Redivivus', 2012: 434

⁷⁸ Antoinette Burton, 'Who Needs the Nation?', 1997: 231.

⁷⁹ *Routes*, 1997.

⁸⁰ Chapter 1, *ibid.*

⁸¹ 1997: 103.

experiences and imaginings of a world growing smaller.⁸² In contrast to characterisations of mid-century Britain as a 'shrinking island', then, Clifford and Appadurai provide alternative models (undergirding this thesis) that locate the British post-war nation-state within a simultaneously shrinking and expanding world, so that notions of home, constituted in part through mass-mediated images of self-representation, are decisively loosened from moorings of separation or insulation.⁸³

Cosmopolitanism's critics have often pointed to its anchoring in Kantian ideals of universalism. These critics highlight the presence, at least historically, of a lack of acuity within such usages to the asymmetry of power relations within locations of culture, including what Lyndsey Stonebridge – drawing on Edward Said's writings on Palestine – has described as the 'risk of erasure' of historical realities (of forced migration and displacement) when the experience of exile especially is elevated to a cosmopolitan ideal of 'humanism'.⁸⁴ Further criticisms have also translated into a new cosmopolitanism that encompasses 'cosmopolitan provincialism', 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (centering on hybridity and liminality), and a host of other forms that showcase specificity.⁸⁵ These paradigms overlap to a degree with newer literary modernist readings of the BBC in the mid-twentieth century, especially via ideas of a cosmopolitan 'contact zone' of writers from different cultures in the wartime Eastern Service, the international radio network of the BBC aimed at Asia. Employing Mary-Louise Pratt's coinage to describe (asymmetric) cultural intermingling largely in the colonial context, the Eastern Service's contact zone, as identified by Ruvani Ranasinha and others, fostered transcultural intellectual networks between British and Indian writers and which housed, albeit complicatedly, forms of anti-colonial Indian nationalism.⁸⁶ With programmes such as the literary radio magazine *Voice* (1942), produced by George Orwell (a wartime staff member well-known for critiques of imperialism in novels like *Burmese Days*, 1934), and including highly politicised writer-contributors such as Mulk Raj Anand (who continued his anti-colonial campaigning off-air whilst broadcasting from the heart of empire), the Eastern Service, has been a prime example of the transnational, cosmopolitan sites within the BBC

⁸² *Modernity at Large*, 1996.

⁸³ Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, 2003.

⁸⁴ Stonebridge refers to Edward Said's *Reflections on Exile* (2000) in *Placeless Peoples*, 2018: 3-4. See also Garrett Wallace Brown and David Held ed., *The Cosmopolitan Reader*, 2010; Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins ed., *Cosmopolitics*, 1998.

⁸⁵ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 2006; Homi Bhabha, 'Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism', 1996.

⁸⁶ 'South Asian Broadcasters in Britain and the BBC', 2010. Literary-cultural assessments of the Indian Section of the Eastern Service include Daniel Morse's *Radio Empire*, 2020; Douglas Kerr, 'In the Picture: Orwell, India and the BBC', 2004; Susheila Nasta ed., *India in Britain*, 2013; Henry Mead, "'Keeping Our Little Corner Clean'", 2014. I discuss the complexities and contradictions of Indian anti-colonialism at the BBC in Chapter Two.

that have garnered the attention of those working in radio modernist studies, a burgeoning area of interdisciplinary scholarship in the twenty-first century.⁸⁷

As noted, modernist or literary interpretations of the BBC's transnationalism have broadly fallen into an inward-outward axis with a tight focus on the Eastern or External Services (and with scrutiny of domestic radio output often concentrated on interwar or wartime periods).⁸⁸ As my thesis questions the dominance of such interpretations – by adjoining domestic post-war BBC Radio to literary negotiations with colonialism's end – I turn now to a closer examination of the intersections between literary scholarship and twentieth-century BBC Radio, and to some of the tensions and limitations produced as I apply related methodologies to my research.

Cultural Intermediaries and Textual Tensions

Literary scholars have done much to bring not only writers and their correlated cultural-political contact zones to the fore in histories of the early to mid-twentieth century BBC but to amplify more generally the intricate and powerful connections between radio, literature, sound and modernity. From the earliest studies in this new branch of literary-media critique – including Todd Avery's *Radio Modernism* which utilised BBC output to challenge a perception of high modernist writers, such as Virginia Woolf and T.S. Eliot, as alienated from mass or middlebrow constituencies – radio and literature have been shown to be intimate collaborators in interpreting the anxieties and contradictions of the modern era through formal innovation and via thematic and biographical interminglings.⁸⁹ Much of this critical attention – in books including *Broadcasting Modernism* (2009) and *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era* (2014) and in special journal issues such as that of *Modernist Cultures* (10.1, 2015) – has centred on radio's expansion of modernism's location in literary periodisation and on its constitutive role in the development of techniques and forms that draw on the technocultural aspects of literature-making (such as repetition or echo in sound and literary figuration). Modernist writers have been shown to be particularly attuned to radio's spatial connotations. In Virginia Woolf's 'The Narrow Bridge of Art', radio's ability is represented as crossing terrains and geographical boundaries:

⁸⁷ Another prime example has been the literary magazine programme, *Caribbean Voices*, running from wartime on the General Overseas Service until 1958 and which is discussed as a point of departure for my analysis in Chapter Four.

⁸⁸ Peter Kalliney's *Commonwealth of Letters* (2013), which examines the post-war relationship between West Indian writers and the Third Programme, is one notable exception, although its analysis is framed primarily by an engagement with postcolonial aesthetics rather than post-war British politics.

⁸⁹ 2006. Avery questioned the prevalent view of modernist writers, and the Bloomsbury set in particular, as intelligentsia who shunned 'the masses', as argued most notably by John Carey's *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, 1992.

The long avenue of brick is cut up into boxes, each of which is inhabited by a different human being who has put locks on his doors and bolts on his windows to ensure some privacy, yet is linked to his fellows by wires which pass overhead, by waves of sound which pour through the roof and speak aloud to him of battles and murders and strikes and revolutions all over the world.⁹⁰

Mediatized sound waves, then, in Woolf's imagining of the boxed-up streetscape link inhabitants to each other and to those elsewhere, far away, in a globalised dimension. Radio, for Woolf (and for other modernist authors), held potentiality as a cosmopolitanising force that moved out, up and down through transmitter, wire and home, embodying the geospatial dimensions of modernity – in speaking aloud of battles, strikes and more – and through its intrusion into domestic privacy and its forging of new publics (and which in turn aligned with Woolf's mission to make intellectual culture widely available to a greater cross-section of society).⁹¹ Alongside this recuperation of radio's spatialities, modernist studies have also, among other things, argued for radio's importance in relocating modernism's temporal and geographical nodes, of its construction of listening citizenries within British wartime subjectivities.⁹² Above all, they have aimed to inscribe sound and radio into literary histories and methodologies and in turn to imprint literature into histories of radio and sound.⁹³

This, again by necessity, very sweeping summary of the new literary radio studies serves several purposes too. First, to draw clear lines between those aspects of literary scholarship that apply to this study in relation to modernity. This thesis, as noted, is concerned with the literary-cultural mediation of decolonisation (which unfolded at the start of the twentieth century's second half against the backdrop of a shrinking-expanding world), and as such it offers a close analysis of the uses of formal literary techniques in the BBC's mediation of coloniality. As the following chapters will show, these techniques included (amongst others) Forster's usage of personal voice, MacNeice's aesthetics of 'patchwork' and excess, Lessing's comic portraits and dream-like sequences, Spark's engagement with wit and analogy, Lammington's multi-accentual reworking of English-as-spoken, and Hall's

⁹⁰ 1927: 222.

⁹¹ See Cuddy-Keane on Woolf's aims to encourage literary reading skills outside of the narrow confines of 'highbrow' intellectual or educational circles, 2003: 1-10.

⁹² Morse, 2020; Whittington, 2018.

⁹³ Anna Snaith ed., *Sound and Literature*, 2020. In turn radio or media historians have also increasingly paid attention to the role of writers at BBC Radio, especially in relation to drama: Hugh Chignell, *British Radio Drama 1945-63*, 2019; Tim Crook, *Audio Drama Modernism*, 2020.

interlocution.⁹⁴ My readings of literary-radio formalism are, though, interwoven with a critique of writers' functions as cultural intermediaries.⁹⁵ Here I wish to underline again the definition of the intermediary as standard-setter of cultural discernment and as outlined by Bourdieu, who saw the role in the second half of the twentieth century as dominated by 'the producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio and critics of 'quality' newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers'.⁹⁶ In drawing on Bourdieu, then, this study balances formal critique with the institutional and professional contexts in which writers were situated, and from which they made and influenced cultural tastes in the very broadest sense by harmonising with, or by pushing against, institutional or production direction (which, as noted, were not always one and the same).

As such, the interdependence between writer and producer, though not always in explicit focus in the following chapters, determines my analysis to a great degree. This intersection also draws partly on my own experiences as a BBC producer specialising in literary programming (on Radio 3 and Radio 4, the contemporary equivalents of the Third and the Home). Though this study is not auto-ethnographic, it is inherently shaped by a BBC producer's understanding of literary *talent* (a media term denoting non-staff contributors associated loosely with cultural cachet and who have to be nurtured or produced to deliver on-air content). Writers entangle themselves with the BBC for a number of reasons, as explored by this thesis, rooted in the Corporation's powerful pull as cultural patron and connected to its role in the development of literature itself, especially in the British imperial domain (notably with *Caribbean Voices*, discussed in Chapter Four).⁹⁷ Yet just as writers need the support and backing of producers to navigate a successful career in the BBC (and are unsuccessful when they do not secure such patronage, as in the case of Doris Lessing discussed in Chapter Three), so too do BBC radio producers need to seek out and cultivate literary talent as a vital component of their job as cultural intermediaries. In this sense writers and producers (enmeshed in the institution as a whole) are co-intermediaries in processes of cultural production, their interactions and practices revealing the core significance of a careful positioning and moulding of established and upcoming talent within a programme (and in the schedule at large).⁹⁸

⁹⁴ On MacNeice: Aasiya Lodhi, 'Countries in the Air': Travel and Geomodernism in Louis MacNeice's BBC Features', 2018: 229.

⁹⁵ Bourdieu's analysis, though located in sixties and seventies France, is highly relevant in the context of Britain in the long fifties as cultural industries were fast expanding as part of the post-war British project of cultural regeneration. Bourdieu's conception of cultural intermediaries is rooted in a Marxist definition of the *petit bourgeoisie* (the lower to middle or professional classes that enable capitalism to flourish in tandem with the traditional *bourgeoisie* who control the means of production).

⁹⁶ *Distinction*, 1984: 325.

⁹⁷ Glyne Griffith, *The BBC and the Development of Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, 2016.

⁹⁸ On writers as part of modernist networks of cultural producers (also comprising organisers and administrators in a visual arts context) see Emma West, 'within the reach of all': Bringing Art to the People in Interwar Britain', 2020: 228.

There are, as we see in this thesis, conjunctures that test and complicate such interdependences, including writer George Lamming and producer Leonie Cohn's challenges to each other's ideas regarding British Caribbean writing (in Chapter Four). But in the main the formations between writer and producer (or editor or controller) showcase the contours of the cultural apparatus, in particular its boundaries and its limits. I explore these parameters through various examples but notably through the BBC's rejection of a Doris Lessing play about race and colonialism in Rhodesia deemed by producers, script readers and editors to be too 'extreme' (Chapter Three).⁹⁹ As I discuss in the next section, editorial judgements of extremity and suitability were (and continue to be) forged through the core rhetoric of impartiality as it would later be termed, specifically in a current affairs context, but which in this period took shape at the BBC as a deep attachment towards principles of objectivity and a lack of bias and which enshrined an image of an institutional severance from political alignment. This self-declared neutrality has been called into question many times, most recently by Tom Mills who has argued persuasively that the BBC is 'neither independent nor impartial' but rather, as I briefly outlined earlier, that its 'structure and culture have been profoundly shaped by the interests of powerful groups in British society; and that this has in turn shaped what we see, hear and read on the BBC'.¹⁰⁰

Writers can and do appear to live up to the myth (and associated practices) of editorial independence given their competency with fictional narrative techniques when tackling political subjects and as employed in radio genres sometimes associated with more prosaic approaches to topical affairs. As this thesis will detail in the following chapters, writers are best placed to make use of the dramatic conventions of feature-making (a genre also encompassing more conventional documentary storytelling styles) or to utilise sophisticated metaphor and symbolism in talks, approaches which can be used to distance from explicit political comment. But so too can their writings, comments or actions, as Lessing's experience demonstrates, stray into territory considered to be outside or as veering dangerously close to editorial boundaries (as indeed can the ideas and output of the BBC's own producers). What I want to stress at this juncture – before interrogating concepts of consensus-as-neutrality in more depth – is that this thesis, in an effort to explore and delineate editorial limits, gives due attention to backstage negotiations, production strategies and aborted or never-broadcast programme suggestions (in addition to on-air contributions and productions). These elements

⁹⁹ Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade*, 1997: 126.

¹⁰⁰ 2016: 1-2.

of cultural production form a strand of central textual focus in this thesis instead of functioning as paratext in the strict literary sense.

Having made this claim, however, about one aspect of my textual approach I should clarify that broadcast programmes (and their textual authors in the traditional sense) do of course feature in my analysis and to an extent provide the scaffolding for chapter framing. This is because programmes offer an important alternative to readings of BBC history that, for many years, privileged policies and memoranda over the textures and particularities of the broadcasts themselves. Or, more precisely, to what Daniel Ryan Morse in describing the Asa Briggs school of BBC history-writing calls ‘an official history that favors *officials* over history’.¹⁰¹ Though this may sound unjustly harsh towards the Briggs approach, Morse makes a series of valid points regarding historiographical methodologies that have been closely tied to, and which in a sense reproduce, the BBC’s own organisation of its archives, especially its separation of programme scripts from internal correspondence, personnel files and so on (separated literally by physical space and catalogue organisation at the Written Archives Centre in Caversham). These distinctions have been exacerbated by the dearth of mid-century archival sound recordings. Of those that remain, kept for posterity by the BBC, their existence is interlinked to the talent associated with them (for example, the bulk of MacNeice’s programmes have been preserved and can be listened to by researchers but programmes associated with less starry names have not).¹⁰² Morse notes that Briggs – who by his own admission was not a textually-focused broadcast historian – suggested he had ‘had a hand’ in the formation of how the Written Archives should be presented to researchers when it first opened in the seventies, demonstrating some of the complexities in how an archive comes into being and further how it ‘*impresses* (without completely *determining*) the shape that histories take’.¹⁰³

The question of whose programmes have been privileged in the archiving of BBC history is addressed in a moment in relation to the choice of authors for this study, but here I underline again that this thesis does endeavour to inscribe programmes-as-text into broadcasting history more firmly by listening to them where possible, as well as reading production scripts or transcripts. The lack of extant audio from this period, due mainly to the

¹⁰¹ *Radio Empire*, 2020: 32. Asa Briggs (1921-2016) was the first official historian of the BBC and author of what he termed *the* history of British broadcasting (in five volumes). Subsequent generations of BBC historians have of course offered different and more nuanced perspectives such as Scannell and Cardiff’s *A Social History of British Broadcasting*, 1991, Jean Seaton’s *Pinkoes and Traitors*, 2015, and David Hendy’s *The BBC: A People’s History*, 2022. But detailed programme-textual analysis has not featured prominently in many of these histories, not even in some that were expressly concerned with literature such as Kate Whitehead’s account of the Third Programme, 1989.

¹⁰² Hugh Chignell for example has discussed how the history of British radio drama has been ‘skewed’ due to the slim body of extant sound archive consisting of plays authored by famous writers, *British Radio Drama*, 2019: 2.

¹⁰³ 2020: 32.

prohibitive cost and administrative load associated with making and maintaining recordings – especially in the forties when the bulk of programming, even of complex features, was live – has added layers of difficulty and complexity.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, I have tried to imagine the sonic and aural dimensions of the programme-as-broadcast by trying to listen off the page, as it were, and drawing on my knowledge of radio production. At the same time my purpose is also to firmly situate programme-texts within the cultural apparatus and, as noted earlier, to show them as artefacts of co-production and co-mediation. I therefore challenge the dominant stress placed by much radio modernist research on defining texts through notions of remediation or intermediality, in other words, a scholarly emphasis on shared or intersecting aesthetics, motifs or discourses between radio programmes and literature (as well as with print media and screen media including film and television).¹⁰⁵ By closely examining internal BBC memoranda, and by digging into the negotiations between producers and writers in particular, programmes (as texts) have been integrated firmly here into an analysis of the connective relationship of culture, institutionality and ideology. Or, as Edward Said phrased it in more assertive terminology, to insert the text alongside other discourses in the cultural domain and to move away from a view of literature as ‘an isolated paddock in the broad cultural field’.¹⁰⁶

One final but important point: I have tried to bear in mind the new broadcast historian’s approach to textuality, one in which the schedule might be closer, as Kate Lacey has argued, to a definition of text rather than an individual programme or series.¹⁰⁷ In Lacey’s formulation the schedule is actually somewhere between text and medium, a text-not-text that signals the multifarious dimensionalities and tensions that complicate the BBC historian’s grappling with textuality:

The schedule is a text that is not a text...We listen to ‘the radio’ or to particular named programmes, stations or shows; the schedule as listening event disappears in the acts of reception and recall. There is a strange disavowal at work here, even in those moments when the announcer speaks, assuming the role of the meta-narrator, giving voice to the schedule. The invisible

¹⁰⁴ On the challenges of setting up and managing early programme recordings (from the thirties to the sixties) see Simon Rooks, ‘What Happened to the BBC Sound Archive?’, 2010: 179-180.

¹⁰⁵ On modernist scholarship, the BBC, intermediality and remediation see Morse, 2020: 9-20, and Ian Whittington, ‘Radio Studies and Twentieth Century Literature’, 2014. For broader theoretical overviews see Irina Rajewsky, ‘Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality’, 2005; Jay David Boulter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, 2000.

¹⁰⁶ *The World, the Text and the Critic*, 1983: 225.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Radio’s Vernacular Modernism: The Schedule as Modernist Text’, 2018.

and unnamed announcer ventriloquises the institutional framing of the other-authored texts.¹⁰⁸

For Lacey, radio's textuality in the form of the schedule is bound to a type of dissimulation where its existence disappears in the enactment of listening and in the lack of authorial ownership that undergirds its evanescence (albeit one complicated by the presence of archives). She rightly identifies the institution, the author of the schedule-text, as largely hidden or unspecified although I would argue that when continuity announcers embody and speak the text aloud – *This is London* or *This is BBC Radio 4*, for example – then authorial recognition becomes etched (however faintly) into radio's textual configurations. The schedule also offers rich insights into what those with scheduling responsibilities thought of a programme's importance, and into how their decision-making shaped who (and how many) listened. Further, embedded within this part-unauthored institutional text of course lie the many other-authored texts, produced collectively by co-intermediaries and individually, in literary textual terms, by the writer. For the literary-inclined broadcast historian, then, the task is to be vigilant and responsive to tensions that arise from these very different textualities and authorships; as such, I have tried to navigate with care from institution to writer and between what might be termed meta-text (schedule) and intra-text (programme).

Voice and Blindness

Lacey's pinpointing of ventriloquism as one of radio's primary mechanisms is pertinent, I note, not just in relation to the schedule but more generally to speech radio at-large. It links to my own assessment of BBC Radio as a form of voiced cultural apparatus, where voice as the principal modality of radio's speech both reflects and constructs racialised, classed and gendered hierarchies. This is explored in depth in Chapter Four in relation to West Indian writers, accent, race and class but here I underline the centrality of voice in considerations of radio as ideological mechanism, and its constitution in part by the positioning of literary talent and voice within schedules and programmes. Voice demarcates privilege as enjoyed by those literary figures who make it on air (speaking in their own voices or ventriloquised through someone else's, such as an actor), thanks to status as talent and the correlated intersections with taste and social-cultural capital. In contrast a lack of access to voiced platforms (to the BBC's post-war domestic radio networks in this instance) also mutes those who remain powerless or marginalised in the cultural apparatus – those deemed too extreme

¹⁰⁸ 2018: 168.

politically by the BBC or those who encounter the ‘brick walls’ of gendered and racialised politics.¹⁰⁹ In this regard, voice – as social marker and as embodied presence – signals a fundamental facet of the co-intermediary relationship between writer, producer and institution, one that relies on a consistent policing of who is allowed to speak, when they can do so and in what ways.

The selection of authors in focus in this thesis is therefore shaped to a great extent by which writers could speak aloud via the BBC on empire at a time of decolonisation, and by whose voices (their own or through their literary techniques) can be traced through the BBC’s archival records in print and in sound, oriented as these archives are towards privilege and cachet. As this study is concerned chiefly with the manufacture of consensus on imperial legacy, these voices cannot fittingly be termed truly dissident or revolutionary, although Lessing, Lamming and Hall lean more toward that end of the spectrum than Forster, MacNeice and Spark; rather, they demonstrate the potentialities of working with (or within) a mainstream cultural institution to effect (perhaps radical) change.¹¹⁰ There is undoubtedly work to be carried out to further conjoin media, voice and literature to recent theoretical re-orientations such as Priyamvada Gopal’s *Insurgent Empire*, which challenges the prevalent notion of dissidence as flowing outward from the imperial metropole to detail instead a ‘reverse tutelage’ of British dissent by anti-colonial insurgency.¹¹¹ My thesis encodes this approach to some degree by showcasing the strategic anti-colonialism of Lamming and Hall and by interrogating resistance to imperial rhetoric from Lessing and to a lesser degree from MacNeice, Spark and arguably Forster. Yet these were undoubtedly privileged writers, whose interrelations with the BBC, generally, aided in raising their profiles or in some cases in affirming or generating their canonisation. In conducting, then, this work on status, literary media and a pivotal period in decolonisation it is hoped that newer scholarly approaches can take root which dig deeper into and against archival strictures to attune domestic British history to the mediatised voices of protest and rebellion in the colonial context.

Given the canonical status of the six writers under consideration, this thesis has had to contend with vast bodies of literary scholarship on each author. The limitations of this study have meant I have had to take a strategic, streamlined approach to linking media contexts and outputs to non-mediatised writings by these authors. In pairing writers together in geographical and culturally aligned groupings my main intention was to scaffold chapters

¹⁰⁹ I borrow here Sara Ahmed’s formulation of the brick wall as the closing off of institutional culture to attempts to challenge it. Though she relates it to her experiences of undertaking diversity practice within UK academia, it is a powerful conceptual tool for considering lived, embodied experiences of institutional silencing. *Living a Feminist Life*, 2017: 135-162; *On Being Included*, 2012.

¹¹⁰ On definitions of the scope of literary dissidence from a cultural materialist perspective see Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines*, 1992.

¹¹¹ 2019: 24. Gopal’s early to mid-twentieth century examples include the anti-colonial Indian Swadeshi movement and its links to the Indian Home Rule Society in London.

through sharply contrasting or more subtly differentiated literary voices to explore textures and tensions in the cultural mediation of empire's end. A secondary consideration was to utilise these pairings to shed light on the different trajectories of writers in general through the BBC, and its impact as a prime mid-century cultural patron on the varying junctures of writerly careers in this period.

In some cases there are stark distinctions, such as Lessing's brief, awkward entanglement with the BBC in the fifties in contrast to Spark's more expansive and prolific engagement with radio features, drama and 'voices at play'; or in Lamming's close attachment to *Caribbean Voices* in the fifties which transmuted by the mid-sixties into a disconnection with Britain and its media, unlike Hall whose profound intellectual engagement with media began, arguably, with Lamming drawing him into the BBC and through which he grew into a role as key media interlocutor and dialogist.¹¹² Sharp variations are also visible in the biographical contours of these writers' responses to colonialism (and in those of the BBC's producers as well). Forster's Edwardian English avuncularity alongside MacNeice's Irish critique of gendered nationalism, for example, or Lessing's pursuit of the English as a child of the *veld* versus Spark's encounters as a Scottish adult with the same topography, or Lamming's and Hall's Barbadian- and Jamaican-inflected classed variances in terms of spoken and intellectual accentuality.¹¹³ Yet there are productive similarities too that show how writers with overlapping experiences and understandings of a colonised nation – in conjunction with the varied experiences of BBC personnel – moulded narratives and rhetoric in corresponding ways and at times in explicit relation to one other (for example MacNeice, as discussed in Chapter Two, reading Forster's *A Passage to India* as a primer when heading to India to cover the transfer of power for the BBC in 1947). Disparities and resemblances, then, are brought to the fore through these couplings, allowing for a study of how and why writers spoke through the BBC of empire and its endings.

In thinking of writerly similarities in the voicing of the cultural apparatus, it is fruitful to address very briefly the significant scholarly conceptualisation of radio as a blind medium and to its possible interconnections with the BBC's adherence to ideals of political neutrality. Among the varied qualities that radio scholarship has identified as characteristic of the medium, including ephemerality and intimacy, it is Andrew Crisell's delineation of radio as blind that has generated the most heated of debates. First articulated by him in 1986 and then stoutly defended in 2004 following fierce criticism, Crisell's conceptualisation was rooted in

¹¹² A selection of the many BBC Radio plays and features Spark wrote in the fifties was published as *Voices at Play*, 1961.

¹¹³ Lessing used the term for the title of her memoir on her move to Britain; *In Pursuit of the English*, 1960.

the understanding of radio as a secondary, multi-tasking medium freed from the restrictions of feeding the primary sight of vision.¹¹⁴ As such, Crisell argued radio was a ‘potentially much more ‘intellectual’ medium than television whose words are often overwhelmed by its images’, and its blindness an asset that allowed language to breathe through intellectual, analytical or imaginative mediations (in contrast to what Crisell saw as television’s does-what-it-says-on-the-tin approach to imagery).¹¹⁵ This conception of blindness has come to be seen as a somewhat outmoded construct to defend radio’s particularity, though it was certainly in line with how many mid-century writers and producers, including MacNeice, conceived of the dangers of television as something that would ‘shackle’ imaginative possibility.¹¹⁶

I offer a counter-position here which does not seek to revive the idea of radio’s blindness as a forte in terms of imaginative or intellectual content per se (although it may be that) but rather to situate it within the sphere of ideology and cultural politics, and specifically in relation to a disavowal of the racism of British imperial rule. As the later chapters of this thesis show, a sense of ‘colour blindness’ has underpinned an image of Britain’s colonial benevolence.¹¹⁷ So too has the idea of race as a harmful social construct which is *unseen* by progressive or liberal culture (in its professed anti-racism) calibrated, in complex ways, the BBC’s responses to decolonisation in the mid-century period, resulting in a privileging of narratives which delicately step around a direct confrontation of the legacies of coloniality-as-racism. If blindness can be thought of as an affordance of radio given its literal manifestation as an *unseeing* medium, then radio’s very distancing from an explicit visualisation of ‘colour’ or race could be considered to have worked in its favour as a mass medium dealing with the difficult subject of the end of British imperial rule (in contrast to screen media). Sightlessness in this context can be used to signal a broad liberal anti-racism which functions through a denial of seeing race. At the same time, the use of voice within this overarching paradigm – though comprised of embodied dimensions which relate directly to the politics of social categorisation, as noted – can also be co-opted in various ways, as the following chapters will detail, to disavow the racism of colonial legacy by retreating more easily (in comparison to screen-based forms) into ambiguity and equivocation through the formal mechanisms of cultural radio. Blindness, then, to use the term cautiously and whilst mindful of its ableist

¹¹⁴ *Understanding Radio; More than a Music-Box*. Criticism of the idea of radio as a blind medium included Tim Crook’s *Radio Drama: Theory and Practice*, 1999, which argued for the imaginative spectacle or internal visualisation of radio, an idea echoed by Neil Verma’s *Theater of the Mind*, 2012.

¹¹⁵ 2004: 10.

¹¹⁶ MacNeice, ‘A Plea for Sound’, 1953: 134. See also Ian Whittington’s analysis of MacNeice’s uses of blindness in his 1944 Home Service feature *Alexander Nevsky*, ‘Archaeologies of Sound’, 2015. The concerns around television were to some extent related to worries in BBC Radio about the growing dominance of American popular culture.

¹¹⁷ Kimberlé Crenshaw, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel Martinez HoSang and George Lipsitz ed., *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colour Blindness Across the Disciplines*, 2019.

connotations, is I would contend an attribute of radio intimately bound up with its history as a core platform for the mediation of a softened image of British coloniality, one detached from the brutalities of racism.¹¹⁸

A final point. In thinking back to Matthew Parris and his brushing aside of a decolonising of culture, I note that there has not been room here to delve into the divergences between theoretical perspectives towards decolonisation as a form of intellectual reorientation and commitment – although I do touch on this further in Chapter Four – nor to discuss in depth the distinctions between concepts of postcolonialism, anti-colonialism and decolonial thought.¹¹⁹ But if Parris has no shame about the British empire and rejects attempts to decolonise, then this thesis, in its interrogation of the very territory of empire's end and its cultural mediations, is a small step towards a decolonising of histories: of British culture, of the BBC and of literature. In making this contribution there are again limitations. Unlike the powerful example enacted by Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who stepped away from the colonial language and embraced Gikuyu as his primary means of literary expression, this thesis is enmeshed not only in the hierarchies of English literature and British culture but also in those pyramids that shape knowledge production.¹²⁰ It should be remembered then, as Julietta Singh asserts, that 'there is an intimate link between the mastery enacted through colonization and other forms of mastery that we often believe today to be harmless, worthwhile, even virtuous'.¹²¹ Scholarly knowledge production is expected to display a mastery, of sorts, over subject and method. And yet the nature of writing and performing a decolonising of culture necessarily raises deep epistemological issues over who is mastering what and how. If decolonisation is not a metaphor, as Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang argued in their foundational essay on decolonising academe, and the scholarly sphere needs to urgently engage with decolonisation as a 'difficult practice', then how might the emerging scholar attend to these complications?¹²² These questions are too broad and too structural to be resolved within the boundaries of one short study, but this thesis has tried to keep cognisant of them throughout. In demonstrating a form of intellectual mastery I have tried to balance where possible against ideas of sovereignty of knowledge, by knitting together a

¹¹⁸ I note here briefly that there were challenges to this *unseeing* of race in the mid-century period, in this thesis principally in relation to the praxis of George Lamming and as discussed in Chapter Four.

¹¹⁹ Jane Hiddleston, *Understanding Postcolonialism*, 2009; Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena, 'Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory', 2021; Sandeep Bakshi, 'Towards the Unmaking of Canons: Decolonising the Study of Literature', 2021.

¹²⁰ *Decolonising the Mind*, 1986.

¹²¹ *Unthinking Mastery*, 2017: 9.

¹²² 'Decolonization is Not a Metaphor', 2012; Priyamvada Gopal, 'On Decolonisation and the University', 2021: 895; Gurinder Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial and Kerem Nişancıoğlu ed., *Decolonising the University*, 2018.

conjuncturally-oriented analysis and in aligning to nuance and modulation, and by beginning to reach – especially in relation to BBC history – for newer lexicons.

CHAPTER TWO

‘India Jolts Us Awake’

E.M. Forster, Louis MacNeice and Indian independence

Introduction

The outbreak of the Second World War changed unalterably not only Britain’s relationship with the wider world but also that of the BBC and India. Along with the reorganisation of its domestic services, with programming now divided into the Home Service and the Forces Programme, the BBC needed to radically reshape its external broadcast networks, which until that point had been known collectively as the Empire Service. Amongst the countries identified as key to winning the radio propaganda war was India where, in addition to British radio, French, German and Italian broadcasts were regularly tuned into and where European schedules and wavelengths were printed in *The Indian Listener* alongside details of BBC Empire Service programmes.¹ Radio’s ability to cross national and linguistic borders was now a double-edged sword, as both British and Indian governments discovered, because – despite the most concerted attempts to jam foreign signals – *verboden* radio stations always ‘outwitted regulators’.²

On 11 May 1940, the first broadcast to India in Hindustani aired, lasting a total of ten minutes. By 1942 the BBC was also broadcasting in Sinhalese, Tamil and Bengali and transmitting English-language programmes tailored for the Indian subcontinent, to which high-profile writers including George Orwell, T.S. Eliot and E.M. Forster contributed. Literary and broadcasting historians have devoted some serious critical attention to the BBC’s India Section during the forties, due in no small part to its galaxy of starry contributor names. As noted in the previous chapter, much of this attention has highlighted how the Indian Service functioned as an important and at times contradictory ‘contact zone’, facilitating ideas and relationships between acclaimed British authors (and their attendant networks in metropolitan cultural spheres) and anti-colonial South Asian diasporic writers in London who began to work for the BBC in wartime.³

¹ Joselyn Zivin, ‘Bent: A Colonial Subversive and Indian Broadcasting’, 1999: 215.

² Ibid. See also Diya Gupta, ‘The Raj in Radio Wars’, 2019.

³ Ruvani Ranasinha, ‘South Asian broadcasters in Britain and the BBC: Talking to India (1941-1943)’; 2010; Susheila Nasta, ‘Sealing a Friendship: George Orwell and Mulk Raj Anand at the BBC (1941-1943)’; 2011; Morse, 2020.

The complexities of the alliances forged at the BBC's Indian Section mirrored to an extent the political dimensions of the war itself, inextricably woven as it was with the Indian struggle for freedom. India's 300 million-plus citizens had been signed up to the war by the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, as soon as war was declared and, as historians have noted, without 'consulting a single Indian'.⁴ Carrying echoes of its treatment of Ireland in the First World War, Britain was, on the eve of another great war, 'trampl[ing] on Indian feelings'.⁵ Protests from the leading Indian political parties, including Congress, were voiced but it became clear that support for the war effort was non-negotiable. Indian politicians therefore committed themselves to supporting Britain and the Allies in the hope – again redolent with Irish echoes – of 'future favours' being granted with regards to their country's freedom.⁶ British leaders throughout the 1930s had rightly worried about the outbreak of war in such close proximity to the last global conflict, following which they could foresee a 'nerve-wracking political aftermath [that] might shake Britain's imperial system to pieces'.⁷ As predicted, this aftermath began to unfold as soon as peace was declared. Within two years India became the first nation-state in the twentieth century to win its independence from the British empire.

This chapter seeks to address a gap in the scholarly literature on the broadcasting and cultural histories of this period by interrogating the moment of Indian independence in 1947 (and the years immediately surrounding it) through the BBC's literary-cultural programming on India, not as it was transmitted outwards to the subcontinent (or elsewhere) but rather as it was constructed inwards for British listening publics via the Home Service and the Third Programme (which began in 1946). I examine the ways in which India as a new force for decolonisation was interpreted by different sectors and personnel within the Corporation and how the shifting power balance in imperial relations was circulated domestically through notions of culture on Home networks. In so doing I situate two prolific radio-writers, English novelist E.M. Forster (1879-1970) and Anglo-Irish poet and producer Louis MacNeice (1907-1963) – and the BBC producers, editors and controllers with whom they collaborated – as significant in conceptualising and mediating the 'idea of India' to British listeners at a decisive historical juncture when Britain's colonial certitudes began to diminish and India transitioned from jewel-in-the-crown to modern free state.⁸

As a cultural entity India is certainly overdue greater scrutiny in assessments of the entanglement between empire (and its imminent end) and BBC domestic broadcasting

⁴ Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India*, 1997: 539.

⁵ Trevor Royle, *The Last Days of the Raj*, 1989: 76.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ John Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*, 1988: 34.

⁸ The 'idea of India' comes from the title of Sunil Khilnani's book, 1997. I use it here loosely to signify the cultural-political conceptualisation of India and not, as per the original, in specific relation to democracy and the post-1947 Indian state.

history. Historians, broadly, have been apt to sidestep the subject due to India arguably being ‘a special case’ and due to the tricky issue of determining audience reception to ascertain the impact of ‘imperial issues’ on how ‘British people thought about themselves and the world around them.’⁹ Where India has entered the narrative it has done so relatively fleetingly as example but not focal point, or as focal point but not as the subject of domestic-oriented literary-cultural history.¹⁰ Whilst audience reception can be a problematic means of assessing empire’s impact on domestic broadcast publics in this period, it is also the case that the BBC, with a reach of nearly a hundred percent in terms of the potential domestic listening audience at the time (of some 30-plus million), held a position of some influence in conveying perceptions of soon-to-be-independent India to Britons.¹¹ Crucially, it did so against a general sense that there was great apathy amongst Britons in terms of appreciating or understanding issues related to empire. There was, as the *Daily Mail* reported, ‘an extraordinary public ignorance of Colonial affairs’ as confirmed by a Colonial Office survey in 1948 in which respondents thought America or even Lincolnshire a typical British colony.¹²

Although the 1948 survey has since been shown to have been a rather blunt tool (because whilst respondents could not name colonies they could name recent events in colonies, demonstrating the picture was more complex than it might first appear), at the BBC there was serious concern in the run-up to Indian independence about challenging this supposed apathy and the need to promote an ideal of a modern, progressive empire.¹³ ‘Benevolence, progress, and partnership’ became key themes in the BBC’s empire-related domestic programming, reflecting the wider analysis of Indian independence in some sectors of the British press as a moral act and as the ‘fulfilment of the British mission’.¹⁴ In important ways, however, such ideals at the BBC ran alongside or were embedded in close affiliations to elements of the Raj’s old guard, through directives from the India Office and the Colonial Office and via strong personnel links to the British Indian Army and the Indian Civil Service. Many of the Corporation’s seniormost staff, including the wartime Head of the Indian Section Sir Malcolm Darling and the Controller of Home Programmes Sir Richard Maconachie, had previously devoted decades of service to British rule in India. Furthermore the Director-

⁹ Siân Nicholas, ‘Brushing Up Your Empire’, 2003: 227; Simon Potter, ‘Empire, Cultures and Identities in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain’, 2007: 54.

¹⁰ Hajkowski, 2010; Chandrika Kaul, *Communications, Media and the Imperial Experience*, 2014; Potter, 2020, and *Broadcasting Empire*, 2012; Morse, 2020. I note Thomas Hajkowski’s book does devote some careful attention to India in the post-war domestic broadcast landscape in terms of editorial policy; I reference his work in more detail later.

¹¹ Kaul, 2014: 174; Hajkowski, 2010: 77.

¹² 12 December 1948.

¹³ On the complexity of how ordinary Britons were shaped by empire in this period see Andrew Thompson’s Introduction to *Britain’s Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*, 2011: 3-10.

¹⁴ Hajkowski, 2010: 71; *Manchester Guardian*, 11 July 1947 and as quoted in Kaul, 2014: 190-191. See also the BBC Yearbook 1946: 95-96.

General himself, William Haley, took a very pro-British legacy stance in wanting the transfer of power marked by broadcasts recounting British achievements in India, setting a self-congratulatory tone to the domestic mediation of Indian independence.¹⁵ As with many top-down prescriptions at the BBC, though, internally there were pockets of resistance or circumvention.¹⁶ Haley's desired emphasis on British triumphs was by no means a straightforward editorial through-line. Production decisions made by more progressively-oriented programme departments or by certain individual staff members – including those with considerable authority such as Laurence Gilliam, Head of Features – resulted in strands of programming tilting away from content that might sound too much like a boastful pat-on-the-back for the Raj.

These multitudinous facets of the BBC's attitude towards Indian independence and end-of-empire – a celebration of progress and modernity underlined, mostly but not always, by an insistence on British accomplishments – when conjoined with anxieties regarding a lack of audience engagement with empire help to explain the utilisation of high-profile writers to elucidate the subject for British listeners. The esteemed status of Forster and MacNeice – one whose name had become synonymous with India after the publication of *A Passage to India* in 1924 and the other well-known as a leading creative radio feature-maker – was of value to the BBC in challenging the apparent apathy of Britons to matters of empire. In the context of Indian independence, the utilisation of Forster and MacNeice's cultural status highlights a significant aspect of the BBC's overall approach to navigating difficult colonial and political territory, one reliant on notions of highbrow culture to draw in a range of (arguably indifferent) publics and which in turn mediated ideals of British-Indian relations that were shaped, to a great extent, by classed and privileged formations.

I note briefly here that only a small handful of South Asian literary voices made it onto domestic airwaves in the forties, something of which Forster and MacNeice were likely aware given they worked alongside or socialised with a number of diasporic writers such as Ahmed Ali and Mulk Raj Anand (either at the BBC or through London literary circles).¹⁷ Their examples thus demonstrate how events like India's independence, of obvious and immediate historic importance, were only ever given substantial cultural coverage by the BBC on its Home networks in this period through the words of prominent white British writers and not South Asian authors themselves.

¹⁵ Hajkowski, 2010: 70.

¹⁶ A key example was that of imperial historian Reginald Coupland who refused to continue to work as a consultant on BBC Indian independence programming following Haley's directive. Ibid.

¹⁷ Anna Snaith, 'Introducing Mulk Raj Anand', 2019; Emma Bainbridge and Florian Stadler, 'Calling from London, Talking to India' 2013: 165; Susheila Nasta, 'Sealing a Friendship', 2011: 14-18; Morse, 2020: 77-113.

Within this overall narrative, I aim to locate the agency of these two writers, in conjunction with key BBC personnel, in envisioning and speaking back, as it were, of nuanced and complex interrelations between Indian and British cultures at a critical historical moment. Both Forster and MacNeice in relative terms had a great deal of freedom to shape programme output. Forster, as talks writer-speaker of considerable standing, had the backing of his close friends who were amongst some of the BBC's most influential and powerful staffers, including Darling and George Barnes, the first Controller of the Third Programme. MacNeice meanwhile, lauded as one of the most acclaimed and creative of staff producers in the Features Department, was promoted by the BBC as a uniquely formidable modern writer due to his 'masterly and imaginative command of the microphone'.¹⁸ In 1946, a year ahead of independence, Forster broadcast a pair of talks on the Home Service (re-versioned from talks written originally for All India Radio) following a trip to the subcontinent which prompted an analysis of the changes in Indian society and culture in the twenty-five years since his last visit.¹⁹ In the same year he also recommended the nationalist Urdu-language poet Muhammad Iqbal in another talk to British listeners.²⁰ MacNeice went to India for the first time in the summer of 1947 as part of a joint BBC Features and News team to cover the transfer of power, producing three features the following year that told the cultural history of India (and what became Pakistan following partition) and which ruminated on the shape of their post-imperial futures.²¹

Bearing that in mind, I interrogate to what extent Forster and MacNeice – and the BBC producers and editors with whom they collaborated – could, or wished to, push against what might be termed the Haley line (of a promotion of British achievement in the story of India's freedom) and what versions of modern, decolonial Indian culture they offered to British publics. As this chapter will show, the picture that emerges is mixed. Both writers to an extent were keen to mark what many, including MacNeice, viewed as the welcome end of 'Kipling's India', a phrase synonymous by 1947 with negative, racialised views of the subcontinent and a vigorous attachment to the notion of 'the white man's burden'.²² Alongside this there was a

¹⁸ Gilliam, 1950: 60.

¹⁹ *Has India Changed?* Ep. I: 27 January 1946, ep. II: 3 February 1946, BBC HS. Also published as 'India After Twenty-Five Years I & II', *The Listener*, 31 January and 1 February 1946 (and then again in *Three Cheers for Democracy*, 1951). Forster's original talks based on this trip were broadcast on All India Radio (AIR) from the following cities: Delhi, Calcutta, Hyderabad and Bombay. The first talk was entitled *The Artist in the Postwar World*; the second, *Does Writing Pay?* The third talk from Bombay, *Has India Changed?*, broadcast on AIR on 12 December 1945, was re-versioned into two talks for the Home Service (including some aspects of *Does Writing Pay?*); B.J. Kirkpatrick, E.M. Forster's Broadcast Talks', 1985: 329-341.

²⁰ *Book Talk, Iqbal: A Great Indian Poet-Philosopher*, 8 May 1946, BBC HS.

²¹ *India at First Sight*, 13 March 1948, BBC TP; *Portrait of Delhi*, 2 May 1948, BBC HS; *The Road to Independence*, 15 August 1948, BBC HS.

²² Kipling, *The White Man's Burden*, 1899. In a letter to Features Department Head Laurence Gilliam MacNeice, having spent a month in the subcontinent during the events of independence and partition, outlined a final scheme for the BBC Features series on India. He suggested the proposed series include a programme entitled *Farwell to Kipling's India*, but such a programme never made it to air. 19 September 1947, BBC WAC and as printed in Allison ed., *Letters of Louis MacNeice*, 2010: 501.

more delicate reassessment of liberal versions of India that had been circulated to some sectors of the British public, chiefly Forster's own *A Passage to India*, published nearly a quarter of century earlier. Its significance was reflected in the fact that MacNeice made sure to read the book on his journey out to the subcontinent, proclaiming it – at least en route to India and at the moment of arrival – the 'truest picture of the country'.²³ Yet, as I show, Forster's own 1946 talks reflected the limits of *Passage's* vision of British-Indian friendship, and the rethinking that would be required of its portrait of British-Indian relations thanks to the impending formal separation of colonial linkage.

Forster and MacNeice grappled with authority, ideology and individual voice, as this chapter will demonstrate, through very different radio modalities and forms. Forster's engagement with radio in the context of domestic broadcasts was largely as a type of public rhetoric, mediated via an attachment to the intimate genre of the talk (rather than discussion or documentary) and which relied on the delivery of his authored scripts in his own voice. This fundamental mechanism of the talk genre played directly into his cultivated broadcast image as an intellectual free from party political loyalties and as one liberated from overt institutional interference, best exemplified by his famous Third Programme broadcast, *I Speak for Myself*.²⁴ MacNeice on the other hand was the pre-eminent proponent of the dramatised feature, of highly fictionalised treatments of subject resulting in programmes generally absent of the markers of factual radio material. His broadcasts instead relied on actors' voices and heightened dramatic techniques to construct the feature as a vehicle for intricate but opaquely encoded cultural-political comment. These contrasting modes of radio expression or types of radio vernacular bring to light the intersection of mid-twentieth century radio praxis and the cultural politics of colonialism in the work of two leading BBC radio writers.²⁵ Indeed, radio form was aligned in distinct ways to colonial ideology and yet at conjunctural moments also shaped to further anti-colonial, or colonially-ambivalent, strategies. Talks were constitutive of a 'simulated co-presence' in which a personalised connection, embodied in the voice of the 'I' – the one writer-speaker addressing the idealised-imagined 'you' of the listener – functioned well as a mediator of imperial doctrines of friendship.²⁶ Dramatised features, as mentioned, allowed for more radical or disruptive anti-imperial content given this could be camouflaged in fictional conceits and behind a wall of polyvocalism. There were again, however,

²³ MacNeice letter to wife Hedli Anderson. 10 August 1947, Allison ed., 2010: 472.

²⁴ 11 March 1949.

²⁵ I use vernacular here to mean the grammar of radio as practised at the BBC and as mediated through its genres such as talks, features and so on (borrowing very loosely from Miriam Hansen's use of *vernacular modernism* to describe Hollywood cinema, 1999). This is distinct from vernacular radio which commonly refers to radio concerned with vernacular languages and cultures (such as folk culture).

²⁶ Paddy Scannell *Broadcast Talk*, 1991; Hugh Chignell, *Key Concepts in Radio Studies*, 2009.

counterflows. Talks also offered a directness founded on conviviality and intimacy that could, in some instances, be moulded more effectively to speak against the status quo than features, and which sometimes – as Chapter Four especially will detail – served to disenfranchise the lived experiences of real speakers from their broadcast personifications and thus flatten the form’s radical possibilities.²⁷ In scrutinising the encounter between writer and radio form in this period, then, this chapter (and the thesis as a whole) pays close attention to these divergent or conflicting political potentialities.

Finally, in placing Forster and MacNeice in a comparative paradigm through the lens of India, something that to the best of my knowledge has not been done before, my broad aim is to scrutinise the ‘interconstitutive’ nature of empire’s end, as discussed in the previous chapter, and as experienced through the independence of India in Britain itself.²⁸ To paraphrase a stanza from one of MacNeice’s poems based on his BBC travels in 1947, India’s movement into freedom jolted Britain awake from a slumber.²⁹ It was a moment of reckoning. Threading through the celebration of British achievement and the use of independence as moral justification for empire’s legacy, there were in the BBC’s literary-cultural programming brief moments of acknowledgement of Britain’s culpability in India’s difficult journeyhood to independence, so viscerally encapsulated by the horrors of partition’s communal violence. As MacNeice asked in a 1950 essay, did the British really have a right to ‘feel superior’ once the Indian imperial project reached its bitter end?³⁰ This overarching question frames the analysis that follows, beginning with an assessment of E.M. Forster’s role as a *distinguished voice* on Indian matters and on the BBC’s radio airwaves.

Distinguished Voices: Bloomsbury, the BBC and India

Forster’s close ties to the BBC took root during the Corporation’s earliest days as a public service broadcaster and were anchored in the BBC’s pioneering radio talk format, a type of spoken essay. Hilda Matheson, the Talks Department’s very first Director from 1927 until 1931, had conceived of the talk as centred on the ‘impermanent but living tongue’, something wholly distinct from ‘permanent but silent print.’³¹ Talks were thus designed to take account of the ephemerality of radio by emphasising its qualities as a medium of orality/aurality and by focusing on those elements of script construction and delivery – including cadence, tone and

²⁷ Hendy, ‘Radio and the Voice’, 2014.

²⁸ Woollacott, 2001: 9; Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, 2005.

²⁹ *Letter from India*, published 1948; *Collected Poems*, 2015: 296.

³⁰ ‘India at First Sight’, an essay by MacNeice about his feature in Gilliam ed., 1950: 62.

³¹ *Broadcasting*, 1933: 74.

the use of *I* and *you* – that would encode a live intimacy between speaker and listener.³² Many of these talks nonetheless made their way back into unspoken print through publication, sometimes as-broadcast and at other times in edited versions, in the BBC's weekly magazine *The Listener*, created in 1929 as a platform to both record and amplify engagement with programming. For Matheson, aided by her producer Lionel Fielden – later to become the first Controller of Indian broadcasting – the art of this new radio-writing required particular authors who could craft and play with the boundaries of the written-but-spoken format (or indeed written-spoken-written taking into account *The Listener*), and whose names and voices would carry weight and meaning with potential audiences to draw them in.

In their search for such writers Matheson and Fielding tapped into a group of progressive figures associated with a set of beliefs that in many ways aligned with the early BBC's Arnoldian ethos of culture as public service.³³ Bloomsbury, geographical shorthand for a set of writers, artists and thinkers that ascribed to certain aestheticist principles as ethical praxis – rejecting what it considered to be bourgeois values and emphasising instead a humanism mediated through a valorisation of art and a personal philosophy of conviviality and dialogue – offered in many ways the perfect fit. Although writers of the Bloomsbury set were generally averse to notions of moral uplift, especially as articulated by the avowedly Christian John Reith, their view of high culture as foundational to modern society converged to a great extent with the BBC's mission to nurture culturally-attuned listening and reading publics.³⁴ The Bloomsbury set formed what Alan Sinfield described as a privileged 'leisure class', promoting and sponsoring 'good culture' without capitalist interest at its heart and serving in some ways as a precursor to the post-war welfare model in which good culture was to be 'shared by everyone'.³⁵ Its public image, to use Raymond Williams's description, was one opposed to 'poverty, sexual and racial discrimination, militarism and imperialism' largely communicated through a stress on 'personal or small-group obligations' rather than outright challenges to the infrastructural power relations of politics, society and class.³⁶ In particular members of the Bloomsbury group practised friendship and conversation with each other and with wider constituencies as part of the commitment to their ideals, cultivated from an adherence to a branch of moral philosophy based on the teachings of G.E. Moore (Forster's

³² 1933: 59-60; 242.

³³ Avery, 2006: 11-31.

³⁴ Cuddy-Keane, 2003.

³⁵ Sinfield, 1997: 45-46; ; Alistair Davies, 'Raymond Williams and Alan Sinfield: Bloomsbury and the post-1945 Settlement', 2016: 1020.

³⁶ 'The Bloomsbury Fraction', 1980: 155, 165; Davies, 2016: 1013. I note here briefly that this assessment of Bloomsbury is well suited to Forster but it has been challenged to some extent in recent years, especially in relation to Virginia Woolf. See for example *Virginia Woolf: Ambivalent Activist* by Clara Jones, 2015.

former tutor at Cambridge).³⁷ The voice, as Kate Whitehead has argued, was therefore ‘to many of them, their natural medium’ and BBC Radio, as a platform for the mediation of cultural content and as a form of culture-making in itself, appealed to this aspect of Bloomsbury’s own conceptualisations of interpersonal and intellectual communication.³⁸

From the BBC’s perspective, a significant factor in privileging Bloomsbury was the public profile associated with its prominent figures as writers or thinkers of some renown. In the years before 1932, when the BBC operated from a small set of studios on Savoy Hill and scrambled ‘to find Voices to fill the Hours’, Fielden recalled the imperative for Talks to locate the right type of ‘distinguished Voices’ to showcase the BBC’s cultural remit and to captivate listening publics.³⁹ Bloomsbury already carried a ‘distinguished’ label by the late twenties in metropolitan artistic, academic and publishing circles and in the broadsheet press, its illustrious status underlined by its affiliations to a branch of Cambridge intelligentsia.⁴⁰ Cambridge was also the alma mater of a fraction of BBC staff, a contingent that was somewhat more left-leaning than its conservative Oxford counterpart and which grew in significance, especially in cultural programming, from the mid-thirties onwards when Forster’s friend and fellow Kingsman George Barnes joined the Corporation (becoming Director of Talks before heading the Third Programme). These interrelations served to bind notions of eminence and intellectual stature in the cultural talks sphere in the early BBC and underpinned the regular presence at Savoy Hill of Forster, critic Desmond MacCarthy and novelist H.G. Wells, an almost holy ‘trinity’ of Bloomsbury (or Bloomsbury-adjacent) intellectuals, upon whom Matheson and Fielden relied not only for their spoken-written broadcast voices but also for ideas to help shape the nascent talks genre.⁴¹

For Forster, the talk’s hybridity as a form of rhetorical address – halfway between public lecture and private chat – held considerable appeal for him at a time when his fictional output seemed to be on the decline (and which proved to be the case as *Passage* became the last novel published in his lifetime).⁴² Considered a Bloomsbury luminary, he had earned a degree of literary recognition for novels such as *Howards End* (1910) which portrayed and subtly critiqued Edwardian manners and mores. Yet it was after winning the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1924 for *A Passage to India* that his name gained significantly added traction

³⁷ G.E. Moore outlined in texts including *Principia Ethica* (1903) his notion of friendship as one based on equality, especially sex/gender equality, and as a highly valued state of consciousness. See David Garnett, ‘Great Friend’, 1993: 56-62.; Avery, 2006: 37-38.

³⁸ 1990: 130-131.

³⁹ *The Natural Bent*, 1960: 105.

⁴⁰ On Bloomsbury’s roots in the Cambridge Apostles see Allen, *The Cambridge Apostles*, 1978.

⁴¹ Fielden, 1960: 105. Matheson herself was connected to the Bloomsbury set through a relationship with the writer Vita Sackville-West, helping to broker many of the BBC’s partnerships with the group’s members.

⁴² 18 July 1928. Forster wrote to Darling of his anxieties of becoming ‘dried up’ and how resultingly he was ‘rather casting about for decent work to do’. Edward Morgan Forster Papers, correspondence between E.M. Forster and Malcolm Darling, KCC EMF/18/145.

in newspapers and magazines and through invites to give talks and public lectures. This burgeoning cultural capital rested in large part on the new association of his name with India forged through the highly favourable critical reception of *Passage*, a book many reviewers upon publication agreed was remarkable in exposing the 'interplay of East and West' in a manner wholly different from 'novels about India from the British point of view and from the native point of view.'⁴³

The limitations and prejudices on both sides of the British-Indian encounter were captured, critics of the time felt, by Forster's tale of thwarted friendships and cultural-sexual misunderstandings in the early twentieth-century Raj, portrayed in the amity between Indian poet and doctor Aziz and Fielding, a British teacher in India. The men's rapport is thrown off course when an excursion to a set of hillside caves results in an accusation of rape made by Adela Quested, one of Fielding's fellow Britons out in twenties India, resulting in Aziz's trial. Undergirding elements of this fictional portrait were Forster's own experiences of living in India in the preceding decade and anchored in an unrequited love for Indian educationalist Syed Ross Masood.⁴⁴ This personal connection to India would be writ large in his public image from here on (albeit with the unrequited love translated for public consumption as close association), intersecting with and complicating the various iterations of Anglo-Indians that had gone before – including Kipling's racialised affection for the subcontinent of his childhood – and which imbued his literary success with a measure of cultural-political substance and prestige.⁴⁵

As a result, Forster became a key 'distinguished voice' at the BBC, not only as a speaker on India, literature and culture but also as adviser or liaison, utilising his contacts and leverage at various moments to aid the BBC, including suggestions for proposed series on India or in offering vital assistance to Lionel Fielden to launch Indian broadcasting in 1935 (in what became All India Radio).⁴⁶ Both as networker and as regular talks writer-presenter, Forster's contribution to the BBC as an early- to mid-twentieth-century literary writer was singularly expansive. Giving his very first talk in 1928, entitled *Railway Bridges* (for which he was credited in the *Radio Times* as the author of *A Passage to India*, one of the 'most widely-discussed novels since the war'), he went on to broadcast more than a hundred and thirty talks over the

⁴³ *Manchester Guardian*, 20 June 1924.

⁴⁴ Forster first visited India in 1912-1913 and returned to work as a private secretary to the Maharajah of Dewas Senior, a central Indian princely state, in 1921. The job was arranged by Malcolm Darling, to whom Forster dedicated a subsequent memoir of his time in Dewas, *The Hill of Devi* (1953). Forster credited Masood, whom he had tutored in 1906 when he came to Britain and to whom he dedicated *Passage*, for igniting his love for India.

⁴⁵ Anglo-Indians was the Victorian term for white Britons living in India. By the time of Indian independence it began to more commonly signify those of mixed parentage (i.e. of British and South Asian heritage).

⁴⁶ Mary Lago, *E.M. Forster*, 1995: 98; Fielden, 1960: 183. Fielden had been sent by the BBC to India to help the country establish its own broadcasting system and Forster wrote letters to his contacts in India to help to Fielden put together a selection board of knowledgeable and interested Indians to assist him in recruitment.

next three decades on the Home and External Services, ending with the final one on the Third Programme just shy of his eightieth birthday.⁴⁷ In tandem, as mentioned, he offered ideas and opinions to a range of BBC personnel regarding possible speakers, content and even potential employees, thus functioning as one of the great and the good in the BBC's orbit.⁴⁸

Running underneath this collaboration, as Todd Avery and others have shown, were a host of complicated and at times conflicting impulses centred around the Bloomsbury disinclination to the conservatism and patriotism embedded in the early BBC.⁴⁹ For Avery, those in the Bloomsbury set that engaged with radio talks were 'cultural poachers' who 'tactically deployed their conversational facility' to challenge institutional strictures and to promote 'their own ideals of democracy and equality in culture and human relations'.⁵⁰ Whilst much of this holds true, any such assessment needs to examine with greater granularity how writers' tactics formed part of a cultural politics that was as much aligned with BBC policies as it was in contestation with it. To read Forster as a poacher is therefore a tricky proposition given his BBC talks career was launched and sustained under the auspices of numerous and varied directors, controllers and producers – some progressive, others not – and his status underlined via the high-profile evening 9.15pm slot accorded to almost all of his talks on domestic networks and further promoted through the publication of a significant proportion of his talks in *The Listener*.

A degree of flexibility and an ability to reversion content for very different audiences (overseas and domestic), as well as a distinct avoidance of direct political comment, as I will later demonstrate, was vital to Forster's ability to re-work material for the BBC's different platforms and to adapt to its changing cultural-political outlook. But so too was his iteration of the Bloomsbury ideal, one marked by subtlety and circumvention. Much recent scholarship has rightly recuperated Forster's reputation as an important figure in the evolution of queer and anti-imperial literature, in particular Daniel Morse's analysis which situates Forster's BBC Eastern Service broadcasts aired to India, especially the series *Some Books* (1941-1947), as significant in contesting 'normative values and aesthetics' and in relocating the temporal and geographical nodes of modernism.⁵¹ Yet it is undeniable that the politics of Forster's writings were encoded through an Edwardian attachment to aestheticism, shaped by his (and Bloomsbury's) complicated interrelations with anti-colonialism, and in which overt political

⁴⁷ *Recollections of Nassenheide*, 28 December 1958, BBC TP; *Railway Bridges* was broadcast on 16 July 1928, BBC 2LO and BBC Daventry. *Radio Times* billing accessed via BBC Genome, 13 June 2019.

⁴⁸ See for example Forster's letters to Darling suggesting Indian writers for possible employment by the BBC's India Section, including one sent on 21 May 1940 discussing the novelist Ahmed Ali. KCC EMF/18/145.

⁴⁹ Avery, 2006: 36, 38. See also Michael Carney, *Stoker*, 1999: 72-73.

⁵⁰ 2006: 37-38.

⁵¹ 2020: 36

comment was sublimated to a promotion of liberal humanism espoused through a philosophy of friendship and of individual liberty.⁵² As Forster himself told BBC Home Service listeners in 1946:

You see, I belong to the fag-end of Victorian liberalism, and I can look back to an age whose challenges were moderate in their tone, and the cloud on whose horizon was no bigger than a man's hand. In many ways it was an admirable age. It was humane and intellectually curious. It upheld free speech, had little colour prejudice, believed that individuals are and should be different, and it entertained a sincere faith in the progress of society.⁵³

Although he went on in the talk to acknowledge the altered political horizon of the immediate post-war era, Forster concluded that what he saw as the core strands of his liberal upbringing – including faith in the individual to do the right thing – were still admirable and to be valued. The nostalgia displayed here for supposedly simpler times illuminates some of the tensions inherent in an individual-personal conceptualisation of culture, politics and empire. Alongside a pronounced stress on moderation runs a conflation of free speech with what Forster troublingly saw as a lack of overt racism in Victorian-into-Edwardian England, a romanticised vision of the era's cultural-intellectual milieu as typified by 'little colour prejudice' but itself marked by a certain form of racialised and classed blinkeredness (English literary intelligentsia-aligned) and encapsulating a perspective shaped, in contemporary terminology, by a kind of white privilege.⁵⁴ It underlines the import of Edward Said's criticism of Forster in which he asserted *A Passage to India's* focus on the personal dimensions of the British-India encounter evidenced a deep disrespect for the very real nationalistic aims of Indians.⁵⁵ Although Morse acknowledges the validity of Said's reading, he also balances it against a more positive interpretation of Forster's insistence on personal connection as a reframing of the public sphere, in which his talks are viewed as a platform for inter-cultural exchange and as a defence of literature and culture from narrow nationalistic agendas.⁵⁶ Whilst this may hold

⁵² On Bloomsbury's multi-faceted relationship with anti-imperialism see Anna Snaith, 'The Hogarth Press and Networks of Anti-Colonialism', 2010; also, Mulk Raj Anand, *Conversations in Bloomsbury*, 1981, and Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1993: 202.

⁵³ Forster's talk put forward the perspective of the writer in one edition of the high-profile Sunday 9.15pm talks series *The Challenge of Our Time*, which also included the views of a historian, a philosopher and a scientist. 7 April 1946, BBC HS; published as 'The Challenge of Our Time: The view of the creative artist', 11 April 1946, *The Listener*, Vol. 35, Issue 900.

⁵⁴ Satnam Virdee, *Race, Class and the Racialized Other*, 2014.

⁵⁵ Said, 1993: 204; 241-242; Morse, 2020: 101-109..

⁵⁶ Ibid.

true, the nuances of race in the context of an Edwardian liberal personalised politics, as briefly outlined above, complicate this assessment.

I offer a counterpoint by examining the links between Forster's status at the BBC and his allegiance to a discourse of friendship in the context of imperial relations. In focus are the usages of this status and discourse near to the climactic stage of Indian independence on the Home Service, a conjunction of network and historical moment often overlooked in favour of Forster's wartime Eastern Service connection and his later Third Programme affiliation (in the later forties and fifties). The 1946 Home Service broadcasts by Forster on India carry particular significance as they signal the beginnings of a pivot away from Indian audiences and towards a reconnection with British publics. They reveal both an important recalibration in his post-war broadcast career, which segued into a close association with the Third Programme (once it launched later that year), and a repositioning inwards by the BBC of his cultural status (as revered British intellectual and friend of India) to domestic listenerships at a critical historical juncture. Central to this repositioning was the fact that through three decades of broadcasting Forster's talks consistently spoke up for universal cultural values and personal liberty rather than of collectivist or avowedly politicised approaches to cultural matters, including the purported end of the British empire. He remained above all, as the novelist Rose Macaulay declared in a gushing 1946 appreciation of him on the Third Programme, a 'champion of individuals, of private life'.⁵⁷

My argument proceeds from the premise that Forster's special status on the BBC's networks, but especially domestic networks in the post-war moment (evidenced through examples such as Macaulay's tribute), points to how his philosophy of personal intercourse harmonised to a great extent with the Corporation's overall stance towards culture as a conduit for a softened, cautious approach to matters of politics and which was arguably never more of importance than when independence loomed close. At the very start of his BBC career, Forster wrote to Talks producer J.R. Ackerley of his belief in the need to steer clear of the nitty gritty of colonial politics in cultural broadcasts on the subject of India to British audiences. 'Allow no Englishman to talk about his country's duties', he suggested to Ackerley, 'and no Indian to mention his country's hopes'.⁵⁸ Although this view would become more nuanced over time, and would be produced carefully by the BBC to engage different audiences at distinct junctures, at heart Forster considered cultural broadcasting to be the standard-

⁵⁷ Macaulay's talk was an edition of *Living Writers*, 16 November 1946, BBC TP; published as 'E.M. Forster: An Appreciation', 12 December 1946, *The Listener*. See Lago et al. on Forster's reluctant move towards a role described as an *activist litterateur* in wartime (in which he addressed on occasion social and current affairs), 2008: 23.

⁵⁸ Letter 9 August 1928; quoted in Lago, 1995: 98.

bearer of a 'moderate' tone on the vexed subject of Britain and India (and politics more broadly). This tone, in conjunction with an emphasis on 'social-personal values' – and its links to what F.R. Leavis categorised as the 'coterie-power' of Bloomsbury in British cultural institutions – allowed Forster and BBC Radio (also invested in privileging personal storytelling on cultural matters) to find common ground in avoiding confrontation of the murkier aspects of colonial relations, whilst promoting an asymmetric ideal of the Commonwealth as a 'family of equals, even if some members of the family were more equal than others'.⁵⁹ Thus the promotion of equity in the imperial context in Forster's domestic broadcasts, as I now discuss, was circulated via tropes of British-inflected friendly partnership, reflecting the intersections between a Bloomsbury ethos, broader changes in imperial rhetoric and varied editorial-production contexts at the BBC.

We Parted as Friends

Towards the end of the first of his two Home Service 1946 talks reflecting on the changes in India over the previous quarter-century – broadcast in the prominent Sunday 9.15pm slot – Forster offered Home Service listeners (and readers of *The Listener*) a particularly potent image of British-Indian friendship.⁶⁰ Describing a journey to Gujarat on the trip he made to India at the end of 1945, he sketched an affectionate portrait of Britain and India in dialogue through use of a favoured recurrent trope: train travel. Pivoting in the talk, which until that point involved an analysis of the multiplicity of Indian languages and the use of English in the subcontinent, Forster turned to the railway to illustrate how language and cultural barriers could be overcome through simple acts of individuated generosity. Recalling an animated conversation he held in a squashed train carriage with several Gujarati-speaking passengers, Forster rounded off by stressing the journey had ended on a note of friendship, one that characterised, in his experience, the end of most Indian train trips. Indeed it was 'difficult', he asserted, 'to conclude an Indian railway journey on any other note'.⁶¹

⁵⁹ On empire at the BBC as a family of unequal equals see Hajkowski, 2010: 71; Leavis, *A Selection from Scrutiny*, 1968: 140; 190-196. Leavis defined coterie-power as the use of patronage and status by an influential minority to promote social-personal values in British intellectual and cultural life, with Bloomsbury a central target of this critique.

⁶⁰ The talk aired after the 9 o'clock news, denoting how the 9.15pm slot was framed as the platform for serious, often topical content in the evening schedule (which was weightier in tone and matter overall than the daytime schedule). The choice of speakers in this period was often confined to those considered by the BBC to be relatively well-known and who would likely tackle subjects with a certain gravitas (almost always men), especially on Sundays when a higher listener reach might be expected. See Kate Murphy, *Behind the Wireless*, 2016; Webster, 2018: 116-117.

⁶¹ The first part of *Has India Changed?* published in *The Listener* as 'India After Twenty-Five Years: I', 31 January 1946, Vol. 35, Issue 890: 133.

I quote from the talk at some length here as it in many ways typifies Forster's portrayal of India in the broadcast form, charged with the added significance of having aired at the moment of looming Indian independence. Forster told listeners:

I was travelling one day to Baroda in a crowded second-class carriage. Indians, my luggage, their luggage, myself and a number of loose oranges were piled up together in confusion, and the Indians were arguing. Their language was Gurjarati (sic), but they used so many English words that I followed what they were saying. They were arguing about religion and free-thought. I intervened and was welcomed into the conversation, which was now carried on entirely in English out of courtesy to me. I did not follow it the better for that, but they peeled me an orange and we parted friends. Indeed, it is difficult to conclude an Indian railway journey on any other note. Their response to ordinary civility is immediate. I don't think they are particularly friendly in the street – if you ask them the way they are suspicious. But squashed in a railway carriage they seem to expand. And my reason for wanting English to be the common language is a purely selfish reason: I like these chance encounters...and if Indians had not spoken English my own life would have been infinitely poorer.⁶²

Forster's conceptualisation of India as a land of amicability and generosity (towards Britons) is strongly imprinted in this vignette, shaped by his unwavering belief in the Bloomsbury-inspired model of personal relations, or parting as friends, to counter political discord. As such it offers a coda to the much-discussed ending of *A Passage to India* in which Aziz and Fielding's efforts at friendship famously conclude in a thwarting and a postponement, with the men's horses swerving away from one another in the closing scene and the metonymic Indian sky speaking the words: "No, not yet" and "No, not there".⁶³ In its unresolved finale *Passage* nodded to topical forces at play in the inter-war British-Indian relationship: 'not yet' referenced Aziz's distress over the continued reign of the British, whose cultural superiority and power-plays had resulted in the sully of his name and a subsequent dislocation of his affection for Fielding (who had sympathised to an extent with Adela); 'not there' hinted at the

⁶² *The Listener*, 31 Jan 1946, Vol. 35, Issue 890: 134.

⁶³ 1924/1978: 312. I take a cue here from Morse, 2020, who originally connected the ending of *Passage* to Forster's talks (although in his analysis it is linked to an interpretation of Forster's broadcasting as the crafting of a semi-public space).

more esoteric, orientalist abstractions with which Forster imbued the Indian landscape (including the distinctive 'bou-oum' of the Marabar Caves) and which framed in the novel a geospatially-rooted cultural divide separating the two men and their respective nations.⁶⁴

Nearly a quarter of a century later, *Has India Changed?* presented a greater resolution to the challenges of not yet and not there. In its soft, slightly eccentric portrait of the chaotic train encounter involving orange-laden Indians and the gentle British writer the talk posits that Indian openheartedness can be sparked by the merest British civility. Further, despite the heated political atmosphere of the moment – alluded to loosely in the reference to the passengers' arguments and in Forster's preceding comments on the P.E.N. debates on English as an Indian language – Indian-British friendship is shown to ultimately prevail (albeit in the space- and time-constrained train carriage and journey). Camaraderie is presented here as fruitful and inevitable, striking a more positive note than the troubled conclusion of *Passage* and signalling that the major previous obstructions to this march of friendship – chiefly, the British rule that had so tormented Dr. Aziz – were coming to an end. *Parting as friends* carried therefore a profoundly symbolic charge at the moment of colonial rupture, gesturing towards a geopolitical departure marked by amity and a hope that de-coupling would allow for a flourishing of harmony and concord.

In this sense Forster's leaving-as-friends model of decolonisation offered a powerful alternative to the one popular in certain quarters of the BBC, hinging on an explicit recounting of Raj triumph or legacy.⁶⁵ And yet Forster's paradigm of accord is more problematic than it might first appear. Within the train-carriage template goodwill functions in an uneven manner to smooth over any disputations, especially with regards to the continuing role of the English language in India, a topic Forster notes in the talk is interrelated, as with 'everything' at the historical juncture of 1945/46, with 'politics'.⁶⁶ The resolution via friendship is crucially reliant on Indian largesse (on the part of the Indians who speak English on Forster's account) allowing for a reaffirmation of a British-oriented and personalised experience of geopolitical friendly relations in Forster's reassertion of his own affections for India. Despite the fact, therefore, that Indians in the immediate post-war period were more than ever occupied by politics, as the talk made clear, and that they expressed so more 'vehemently than they did a quarter of a century ago', *Has India Changed?* submits that the mechanism and principle of

⁶⁴ Boum, bou-oum or ou-boum, is the echo sound inside the hillside caves that accompanies the possibly hallucinatory episode in which Adela thinks she has been raped. Forster writes of the monotonous repetition of this sound as emblematic of the mysteries of the Indian landscape, a figuration which critics including Benita Parry have described as 'shapeless' and 'arbitrary' (in contrast to the English landscape), or 'remorselessly metaphysical' (Said). Said, 1993: 246; Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries*, 1998: 229.

⁶⁵ Examples include episodes of the post-war series *Commonwealth and Empire*, BBC HS, and *The British in India*, aired in 1947 on BBC TP, discussed later in this chapter.

⁶⁶ *The Listener*, 31 Jan 1946, Vol. 35, Issue 890: 133.

individuated companionship is paramount, even where that entails a privileging of colonialised apparatus (with English still reigning as the common language in second class).⁶⁷

Encoded in the chatty homily of Forster's talk, then, is a cognisance of the uses of cultural-political asymmetry to serve a progressive British vision. Forster's implication that British culture itself will be poorer for a lack of interchange with India, and that the British-Indian connection (as per his own biographical example) must continue to be nurtured in the decolonial moment, rests to an extent on some residue of the imperial power dynamic remaining in place. For Forster, the problematics of this imbalance are ushered away through a retreat to the personal and the avowal of a 'selfish' love of India. Although he admits, in self-identifying his limitations, that to 'the tragic problem of India I have contributed no solution', in his own words, no good could come of any attachment to 'a political creed'; the difficulties thrown up by decolonisation can only be overcome through the nostalgic values espoused of an earlier British liberalism and by favouring an 'individual vision' of kindness, civility and companionship, even where this implies a perpetuation or a lingering of colonial power imbalances.⁶⁸

Progressive-liberal accounts and projections of British-Indian relations, in this light and at this historical juncture, can consequently be viewed as embracing a devotion to certain aspects of the imperial project, an allegiance that at first glance might seem improbable or atypical. Yet in interrogating the links between Forster's British-accented vision of friendship in *Has India Changed?*, the BBC's approaches to India and a defence of the imperial dynamic, it becomes apparent that this is not the case. Forster's vision was strongly interrelated to an Indian Civil Service (ICS) credo espoused most prominently by his good friend Malcolm Darling (1880-1969) and anchored at the BBC through Darling's role as head of the wartime BBC Indian Section. Both men had formed a strong attachment to a doctrine of personal affection as Cambridge undergraduates under the guidance of their tutor Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (1862-1932) who embodied those values of Victorian liberalism's end-days so cherished in Forster's broadcasts. In a precedent to Bloomsbury, Dickinson encouraged his protégés to elevate the art of friendship and conversation above all, framed by Platonic ideals of love.⁶⁹ Darling – who in 1904 followed his family into the Indian Civil Service (ICS) – found a renewed urgency to practise Dickinson's doctrine when confronted with the realities of Civilian work and in which he found British administrators to be draconian, retrograde and

⁶⁷ The reference to second class was also indicative of Forster's friendly relations approach, nodding to a spurning of first class travel that would increase the likelihood of encountering the average Indian population. It also perhaps nodded to a radio-originated inspiration for the use of the train carriage as a space for social interaction, *Conversations in the Train* (BBC National Programme, 1932-1938)

⁶⁸ 'India After Twenty-Five Years II', *The Listener*, 7 February 1946, Vol. 35, Issue 891: 171.

⁶⁹ Forster's biography of Dickinson, 1934.

dreary, wrapped in a *pukka sahib* lifestyle in which Briton and Indian kept firm social distance from one another.⁷⁰ He vowed, especially after the Amritsar Massacre of 1919, to take a decidedly more cooperative and collaborative approach to his execution of imperial administration.⁷¹

Crucial to this approach was the enactment of personal friendship with Indians, best symbolised by Darling's decades-long camaraderie with the Maharajah of Dewas, Tukoji Rao Puar (1888-1937). It was a relationship, in the words of Forster's eulogy for Dewas, that helped Darling shed the 'feeling of racial superiority' common in Anglo-Indian society at the time.⁷² Darling's deep affections for Tukoji – and Forster's too as he met, befriended and worked for the Maharajah under Darling's guidance – encompassed a number of contradictions, not least the privileging by British intellectual progressives of friendships with Indian aristocracy during the Raj. Ultimately, though, the fostering of brotherly love represented one of the 'two faces of British imperialism' before the Raj's end, an approach shaped by rapprochement rather than subjugation.⁷³ Darling's usage of personal friendly relations formed the bedrock for an ICS philosophy that grew in import as the end of British rule loomed closer and which included the support of Civilians such as Edward Penderel Moon (1905-1987), author of *Strangers in India*, a well-publicised book that strongly advocated for Indian independence in 1944.⁷⁴ In the Darling-Moon school of ICS thought 'mutual affection' at a personal level was interwoven with the political, conceived from the Civilian perspective as an aid to 'ease the empire's passing' for Britain and India and to help both nations move towards an alliance based on respect and cooperation.⁷⁵

Significantly, the very conceptualisation of easing the passing of empire was tilted in favour of the Raj (the 'easing' and the 'passing' carrying connotations of nostalgia for something valuable now in terminal decline). Mutual affection did not brush away the hierarchies of colonial power and neither did Civilian support for Indian nationalism tally straightforwardly, as might be expected, with a complete belief in the harm of British imperial rule. Even within the leftist branches of the Indian Civil Service, as Benjamin Zachariah has

⁷⁰ Darling, who grew up in Bloomsbury, was from a well-connected literary family with strong connections to India. His ICS career lasted nearly 40 years and included the Assistant Commissionership of Punjab; he authored several books on Punjab and two memoirs of his ICS service, *At Freedom's Door* (1949) and *Apprentice to Power* (1966). In *A Passage to India* Ronnie Heaslop, the Magistrate of Chandrapore (the fictional setting of the novel), is an archetypal *pukka sahib* whose limited social interactions with Indians are marked by suspicion and hostility.

⁷¹ Clive Dewey, *Anglo-Indian Attitudes*, 1993: 161-163. The events at Amritsar on 13 April 1919, also known as the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, involved the kettling and killing of nearly a thousand peaceful Indian nationalist protesters by General Dyer and his military forces. It was a defining marker in the development of Indian nationalism and resulted in the poet Rabindranath Tagore renouncing his British knighthood. Kipling meanwhile defended Dyer's actions as borne out of duty. Wagner, 2019.

⁷² *The Hill of Devi*, 1953: 39.

⁷³ Dewey, 1993: dust jacket; 13-14.

⁷⁴ Civilian, in the language of the time, refers to members of the Indian Civil Service.

⁷⁵ 1993: 166.

highlighted, an 'acceptance of the impending fact of decolonisation' did not align with a wholesale condemnation of the Raj's ills.⁷⁶ Rather, there remained still a strong cleaving to the notion of 'some good' having 'come out of the empire'.⁷⁷ Darling himself described the Raj as a 'steel frame' in 1947, the swift removal of which had, in his view, partly led to the unleashing of communal violence in Punjab.⁷⁸ Despite this ambivalence about the steel frame's dismantling, or perhaps alongside it, ran a sense of pride in delivering India's freedom. In the liberal ICS cadre's view although the British in India had been acutely exploitative so too had they facilitated, pragmatically but profoundly, what was interpreted as India's shift from the inequities of the Mughal empire to modern-day democracy.⁷⁹ Zachariah's arguments are salient here given he has shown persuasively how notions of collaboration, friendship and alliance served as 'important strategies invented to cope with the moral dilemmas of empire', and how by the Second World War as imperial mythology grew cognisant of the Raj's impending end it spoke increasingly in the Moon-Darling idiom of friendly relations, undergirded by a self-reproaching cultural need to provide overall moral justification for the imperial project.⁸⁰

Forster's amicability model towards India as expressed in his 1946 talks consequently takes on added meaning in the light of the ICS practice of personal affiliation as political reconciliation. His articulation of friendliness towards Indians can be seen to be anchored in a particular progressive conceptualisation of British rule that spoke of companionship to help assuage the guilt of British colonialism. This sense of guilt can be detected in *Has India Changed?* in the broad depiction of the British as largely cold and unwelcoming in contrast to the warmth and sunniness of Indians. In returning to the grey austerity of post-war London after his trip Forster describes being faced with the 'sulky bulky back' of an unhelpful British policeman, an incident that prompts him to consider it 'understandable that everybody should not care for England'.⁸¹ The English-cum-British, in this retelling cast as an inhospitable and dour people, had their imperial legacy thus associated by implication with a kind of forbidding darkness but any murkiness remained under-explored and ultimately sublimated to the stronger emphasis on friendly relations. Yet in the end imperial rule as presented in these broadcasts carried a discernible positive charge as it resulted, for Forster, in a very welcome mixing and sharing, especially of the English language. A fraternising that had begun under

⁷⁶ 'Rewriting Imperial Mythologies', 2001: 71.

⁷⁷ 2001: 66-69, 71; *Strangers in India*, 1944: 41-42.

⁷⁸ Phrase used in two letters from Darling to Penderel Moon, 25 June and 27 November 1947 and as quoted in Dewey, 1993: 189, 249.

⁷⁹ 2001: 66.

⁸⁰ 2001: 72.

⁸¹ *The Listener*, 31 January 1946.

the aegis of empire had allowed liberal Britons like him to enact a model of friendship, albeit one that reproduced to an extent the injustices of colonial power and which assisted, at a critical historical moment, in offering a cultural justification for the Raj and in mitigating British guilt correlated to the gloomier aspects of its legacy.

Two Faces of Imperialism

In drawing connections between Forster's 1946 talks and imperial rhetoric, and in thinking through their alignment with the Home Service (where, as noted, Forster's two talks had been reversioned from their origination on All India Radio), it is productive to probe into the interplay between BBC Radio networks and the ICS, specifically the 'two faces of imperialism' it housed. Darling's mantle as head of the wartime Indian Section – a role which he was given in 1940 without any significant broadcasting experience and which raised some eyebrows internally at the BBC – demonstrated the value of the liberal-ICS creed to the Corporation's macro-level aims of broadcasting to India and the vital role of friendly relations in maintaining Indian support for the war.⁸² His appointment signalled both a fixed BBC wartime propagandist strategy aimed at India and the broader embedding within British imperial discourse of a rapprochement-focused approach, one that rapidly grew in relevance in the immediate post-war moment when the need to advocate for the Commonwealth became apparent, prompting the British government to send a Cabinet mission to India to make 'personal contacts' with leading figures in the hopes of painting the Commonwealth in a more persuasive light.⁸³ But Darling's tenets, as noted, formed only one half of a dualistic ICS-inflected attitude to India. Its other constituent strand was embodied by a staffer who also oversaw Forster's broadcasts: the Controller of Home Programmes from 1941 to 1946, and former Director of Talks, Richard Maconachie (1885-1962).

Maconachie took up BBC employment in the mid-thirties following an illustrious ICS career, joining a number of interwar recruits armed with imperial connections (including Stephen Tallents and John Coatman, PR Director and Head of News in 1935 and 1937 respectively) who illustrated the proximity of the ICS, or more generally the imperial apparatus, to the BBC in this period.⁸⁴ Maconachie in particular carried, at least for the left-

⁸² Darling's appointment especially caused a degree of chagrin for Lionel Fielden who had led the creation of national broadcasting in India and expected to be the obvious choice for the job. See memo from Deputy D-G Cecil Graves to the D-G Frederick Ogilvie on the *policy control* nature of leading the Indian Section, and Darling's suitability for it (as opposed to Fielden); 3 February 1940, BBC WAC L1/144 Left Staff, Fielden, Lionel.

⁸³ See MPs' discussion on the announcement of the Cabinet's planned mission in early 1946 to India to 'make personal contacts' with leading Indian figures in order to promote the Commonwealth. *Manchester Guardian*; 'M.P.s' Mission to India', 5 December 1945: 5.

⁸⁴ Both Tallents and Coatman had professional connections to the Empire Marketing Board. Several other BBC senior figures had direct experience of the ICS through their families, including George Barnes (who came from a long line of Indian Civil Servants)

leaning members of thirties BBC staff, strong echoes of Kipling. When his list of ICS triumphs was read out by BBC Governors to the Talks Department ahead of his arrival it appeared to many of those assembled as a 'Kiplingesque dossier of deeds wrought on the Indian Frontier'.⁸⁵ Although Forster wrote and gave talks under Maconachie's editorial directorship in the thirties, he was also on record a decade later as explicitly distancing himself from any kind of Kiplingesque perception of India. In his wartime Eastern Service broadcasts Forster had proclaimed Kipling 'rotten with racial-consciousness', contending in unusually muscular phrasing that Kipling 'saw everything and everyone in terms of race', a 'lamentable' fact that marked him out as a 'bully and a vulgarian'.⁸⁶

Given this context, it may seem curious that Forster's talks ended up on the Home Service (when Darling was no longer at the BBC), in line with Maconachie's overall editorial leadership in 1946. However the contributory factors behind this decision – and the specifics of the reversioning required by the Home Service (of the talks which were originally written for All India Radio) – offer striking insights into Forster's adaptability as a writer-speaker and, further, into the connections and contradictions between distinct approaches to empire at the BBC. The BBC did consider the language of mutual affection to be more urgently needed on the Eastern Service (especially in wartime), but it also held a belief that this discourse would be more likely to be understood by listeners in India – imagined as largely an educated Indian elite – rather than by the domestic middlebrow or working class audiences of the Home Service.⁸⁷ A stronger, firmer tone was thought to be necessary on the Home where ordinary listeners were interpreted as largely disengaged from the question of the Commonwealth, borne out by wartime Listener Research reports that indicated the existence of what Maconachie described as a 'deplorable apathy in the adult Home audience regarding the Empire'.⁸⁸

This apathy, as the BBC and as Maconachie specifically saw it, needed challenging in different ways in order to foster the Commonwealth ideal to which it was committed. At the Home Service this had been framed since wartime through an emphasis on an individualised

and Director-General Ian Jacob (D-G from 1952-1960) whose family were the subject of the essay 'Servants of the Raj' (1978). Another prominent ex-Indian Civil Servant was Talks producer Hilton Brown, who produced a number of wartime Home programmes on India.

⁸⁵ Producer John Green's recollections referenced Talks staff reaction to Maconachie and the comparisons to Kipling. Letter to Anthony Barnes (son of George), 21 July 1988, George Barnes Papers, KCC 72/6; piece on the BBC authored by Green in *The Times*, 25 January 1962..

⁸⁶ *Some Books (Kipling, Edward Thompson and Indian Writers)*, 29 April 1942, BBC Eastern Service, as printed in Lago et al., ed. 2008: 185. Forster was referencing a new Faber edition of Kipling's verse selected by T.S. Eliot and which contained a prefatory essay authored by Eliot entitled 'A New View of Kipling', 1941.

⁸⁷ Henry Mead, 'Keeping our Little Corner Clean', 2014: 178-179; Hajkowski, 2010: 64-68.

⁸⁸ Memo on 'Projection of Commonwealth and Empire in Home Service' from Maconachie, Controller (Home) to Director-General, 1944 (n.d.). BBC WAC R51/91/4 Talks, Colonies & Dominions, File 2, 1944-1946. See also Hajkowski on Maconachie's role in setting up the quiz *Brush Up Your Empire* In 1943 on the Home Service in order to engage audiences on imperial matters, 2010: 64-68.

cultural response that would help to cut through to a fabled 'Archway-Road listener', a 'common man' envisioned by Maconachie as the average Home Service recipient.⁸⁹ Moreover, whilst a firm tone was thought essential in reaching this intended everyman, accuracy and personalisation were also considered vital in countering any 'wrong impression' of the Home Service as a platform for views that might imply India would remain in a continued position as a subject nation.⁹⁰ Critics in the wartime British press had regularly lambasted the Corporation's India-related programming on this point from a host of different angles and the BBC took such criticism very seriously (given the Corporation's prestige, in the main, in this period was tied more closely to domestic, not international, critical acclaim).⁹¹ By 1946, Talks Department's response, in part, was to move toward an alertness to the dangers of speaking in an obviously generalised way about the Commonwealth and empire. Internal guidance circulated a year later stressed that Home listeners to broadcasts on the Commonwealth should ideally always hear, in the words of one staff member, 'specific', 'first hand' stories of 'experience, accurately and vividly described'.⁹²

Forster therefore appealed on many fronts to the Home and to Maconachie given his stress on personal relations could be moulded to what were considered the complex needs of the common British listener and of the British press. Crucially, Foster was willing to do the necessary rewriting in order to recast his broadcasts for very different audiences. Though the specifics of this rewriting could not be traced through the extant archival material at the BBC and at King's College Cambridge, we know Forster agreed to a set of changes to bring *Has India Changed?* more into line with the robust and individualised style of Home broadcasts following suggestions from the Controller of Talks R.A. Rendall to make the talks 'more personal', not only in the sense of speaking of 'personal impressions and experiences' but in terms of 'individual Indians' rather than 'Indians' as a whole.⁹³ Whilst the train carriage example discussed earlier did refer to Indians in the plural (broadening out from Forster's references to the Gujarati speakers on the train), elsewhere in the 1946 talks a stress on individualisation can be detected. Forster was at pains to qualify, for example, which sectors of

⁸⁹ Memo from Maconachie to Eastern Services Director Laurence Rushbrook-Williams, 9 September 1942, BBC WAC R51/256/1 Talks, India File 1, 1937-1942.

⁹⁰ Webster, 2005: 111.

⁹¹ 'Misleading B.B.C. India talks' from the *Daily Herald*, 9 May 1942. See also Maconachie memo to the Director of Talks on the need to devote more precise attention to India following the *Manchester Guardian's* leader criticising the BBC's coverage of India, n.d. BBC WAC R51/256/1 Talks, India File 1, 1937-1942. Talks Department received a great deal of correspondence from various interest groups criticising its domestic coverage of India in the early to mid-forties; BBC WAC R51/257/2, Indian Talks File 1(b), 1942-1944.

⁹² Memo, 27 February 1947, from Ivor Thomas (Overseas Liaison) to Gilbert Harding (Assistant to Canadian Representative in Toronto) and to Australian representative (unnamed), re. the prescribed narrative approach in the weekly Home Service talks series *Commonwealth and Empire*, produced by Donald Boyd, which began airing in January 1947 on Sundays at 7.30pm. BBC WAC R51/93 Talks, Commonwealth, File 1, 1946-1954.

⁹³ Letter from R.A. Rendall, Controller (Talks), to Forster, 10 January 1946, BBC WAC, BBC WAC RCONT1, Forster E.M., File 7 1945-1946. The exact script changes have not been tracked in this study as Forster's All India Radio scripts were not accessible.

Indian society he spent time with during his visit to India after a quarter-century, and through whom he garnered opinions on India's imminent future as an independent nation. He declared:

As to the people I met: they were nearly all Indians, of the professional classes – doctors, lawyers, public servants, professors at the university, business men. Many of them were old friends or the sons of old friends. They were what is termed 'intellectuals' and they lived in towns...I met a few Englishmen but not many, and have often looked round a crowded room and observed that I was the only Westerner in it. Such are my credentials for talking to you about India, or, if you prefer to put it another way, such are my limitations.⁹⁴

Such self-reflexiveness functioned at several levels: first, to underline the ethos of friendship as the guiding principle of Forster's personal connection to India – 'many of them were old friends or the sons of old friends' (a notably gendered connection, on which more shortly) – and second, to emphasise an explicit distance from the ruling Anglo-Indian class ('I met few Englishmen') whose racialised insularity had been subject to unflattering depiction in *A Passage to India*. But above all what can be seen is that Forster's philosophy of individual and personalised connection married well with the Home Service blueprint of speaking with explicit accuracy to the idealised British everyman, doing so paradoxically by flagging up the limitations of the author's own world-view and by staking a claim to the importance of highbrow, intellectual culture.

A connection across class structures, of sorts, was being fostered, then, in the signalling of Forster's privilege (of his credentials and his limitations) and in the wider mediation of the imperial legacy-as-friendship model, thanks to an emphasis on specificity in post-war Home Talks. Certainly, Talks personnel had only considered these programmes appropriate for domestic rebroadcast once Forster had agreed to do 'the work of stiffening, in fact rewriting, for the English audience'.⁹⁵ Mary Lago has argued that this rewriting illustrated the Home Service desire to steer Forster away from a collectivist description of Indians as a force for nationalistic self-realisation, in keeping with the established interpretation of the

⁹⁴ *The Listener*, 31 January 1946, Vol. 35, Issue 890: 133.

⁹⁵ Memo from Vincent Alford, Acting Assistant Director of Talks, to Controller (Talks) R.A. Rendall. 10 January 1946, BBC WAC RCONT1, Forster E.M., File 7 1945-1946.

Home as loosely Kiplingesque in its approach to matters of empire and the Eastern Service as a contact zone for anti-imperial forces.⁹⁶ While there may be validity to this assertion there is an alternative interpretation that emerges from the contexts I have highlighted, one that reveals the pliability of Forster's vision of personal, friendly contact and which offers a more nuanced understanding of the BBC's networks at this juncture.

Individuality could be seen here to have worked in a counterintuitive way, with the arguably more right-leaning Home Service – and its insistence on rewriting for the British listenership – proving to be less hazy in some aspects of its discussion of the mutual affection model of British-Indian relations than those traditionally associated with the more progressive, other face of BBC imperialism (the Eastern Service). Further, in bringing the template of friendly relations into a more modern-sounding modality and by conversely concentrating on a different demographic to that of the Eastern Service (to the imagined Archway-Road everyman British listener rather than the educated Indian elite) the Home Service paved the way for Forster to reconnect with British publics on the subject of India a quarter of a century after the publication of *A Passage to India*. Both talks scored decent average listener ratings for a Sunday night 9.15 talks slot, demonstrating that Forster's ethos of amity, when reworked into a melange of stiff and moderate tone, did manage to capture a stronger engagement from the Home audience on the subject of India than might be expected according to the Maconachie apathy model.⁹⁷ Forster himself was certainly pleased with the reception for the reversioned talks, writing to Rendall of how he had received favourable letters post-transmission and that a greater number than he had expected 'seemed to want this approach to India'.⁹⁸ That approach was marked chiefly by Forster's malleability as a writer-speaker, one who showed an astute oscillation between two broadly contrasting (though also interlocking) approaches to imperial rhetoric at the BBC at a decisive historical moment. Another significant facet of this congruence, as I now discuss, was in the employment of individuality-adjacent conceptions, principally of selfhood and free agency, but which did very much rely on a blurring and obscuring of politics and ideologies.

⁹⁶ 1990: 50.

⁹⁷ The Listening Barometer figures, gathered daily by this period for domestic networks, showed the first *Has India Changed?* broadcast of 27 January 1946 reached 12% of the possible adult listening population across Britain (or roughly 3.6 million as 1% equalled an estimated 300,000 people), although it gained more listeners in London (15%). The second talk, aired the following week, garnered 15% of the total potential listening population, going up to 20% in London (c.6 million listeners). 20% was slightly higher than the usual average (c.15%) in this period for this slot. J.B. Priestley gave three talks over January 1946 that immediately preceded *Has India Changed?* on Sundays at 9.15pm, garnering 23% for the first episode of his talks series *The Secret Dream*, which discussed England and liberty. Priestley was considered a wartime radio celebrity with mass appeal and in 1941 captured a record 40.4% of the total possible listening population with his talks; to reach, at least in London, near-Priestley levels of listenership on the topic of India was a notable achievement. All figures quoted: BBC WAC R9/12/1, Barometers, Listening, Daily. On Priestley see Whittington, 2018: 47.

⁹⁸ Forster to Rendall, 11 February 1946, and as quoted in Lago, 1990: 150.

Avuncular Free Agent

In the opening section of the first *Has India Changed?* talk Forster took care to spell out to listeners his firm belief that, on the subject of India and on the BBC, he held the status of a 'free agent'.⁹⁹ While noting that British government approval had been vital in facilitating his trip to India (so soon after the war when some travel restrictions still lingered) he also stressed that he did not have 'to report to anyone' when back in London.¹⁰⁰ By implication, therefore, listeners were alerted to the fact that what was to follow over the course of the next two talks were Forster's opinions, and his only, on India's possibilities as a free nation.

This free agent image was undergirded by Forster's portrayal of himself as an elder statesman-like figure in the cultural sphere, linked to the British Victorian/Edwardian-era ideal he celebrated and cherished. That ideal – rooted in what Forster saw as the values of integrity and moral uprightness in relation to freedom – was mediated in the 1946 talks through the embodiment of a liberal-progressive avuncularity. Defending his position as an 'old gentleman' in the second of his two talks Forster asserted:

Perhaps you may think there was not much justification for allowing a person of my type to go out at a moment of crisis. If you think that, you will agree with a chorus of indignant colonels at Delhi who were overheard exclaiming 'What next! Fancy sending out old gentlemen who fall ill and can do no possible good'. Old I am, gentleman I may or may not be, ill I was not...And did I do any good? Here I am going to make the most conceited remark ever confided to the microphone. Yes, I did. I wanted to be with Indians, and was, and that is a very little step in the right direction.¹⁰¹

The self-defined conceitedness of Forster's belief in, and embodiment of, the value of personal relations with Indians, against the disparaging remarks of army veterans and possibly dissenting listeners, throws into sharp relief the intersections and complications in the British-Indian relationship of 1945/6 as moulded through eminent status, personal friendship and old-gentlemanly liberalism. Whilst Forster's comments set a bulwark against the tenor and tone of old-guard colonial rule (the indignant colonels or the *pukka sahibs* he and Darling so

⁹⁹ *The Listener*, 31 January 1946, Vol. 35, Issue 890: 133.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ 'India After Twenty-Five Years II', *The Listener*, 7 February 1946, Vol. 35, Issue 891: 171.

despised), they also subtly acknowledged that younger, arguably more politicised Britons, and Indian voices too, were largely missing in the Home Service treatment of India at a decisive historical moment. Yet this acknowledgement did not stop Forster from taking up the mantle of authoritative voice on India; rather it served to aid him in elucidating to Home listeners his sense of the high worth of personal affection for India and his own role as the elder intellectual male in speaking, in the post-war and imminently post-imperial moment, of the importance of wanting to 'be with Indians' (including those sons of Indian friends, mentioned earlier, for whom Forster in the South Asian context was considered an uncle, a mark of respect also accorded to him by many of his Indian readers and listeners).¹⁰² Avuncularity, then, was again a reclamation of the Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson mentor prototype, a brand of liberal paternalism which functioned not only in relation to South Asian publics but vis-à-vis domestic audiences too. As noted, Forster had stopped writing fiction after *Passage*, sensing that the Edwardian mores and moods of his novelistic style were out of step with British literary tastes in the thirties and forties; this was mirrored at the BBC by his distance from the wartime Home Service whose audiences' needs, as he wrote to Talks producer Hilton Brown, he felt had become 'dim' to him.¹⁰³ In the 1946 domestic mediation of friendly imperial rhetoric by the BBC, however, his portrait of avuncularity would be transformative, allowing him to settle into the role of British elder statesman-meets-cultural goodwill ambassador, a markedly non-politicised and individuated position which slotted well into the particularities of the post-war and imminent post-imperial conjuncture (and which marked his late-stage broadcast persona).

Of further interest is the fact that in yoking this avuncular role to notions of agency, Forster related his ideals of free speech to a questioning of reality (as attached to India and concepts of authenticity). He argued:

I don't myself like the phrase 'the real India'. I suspect it.
It always me prick up my ears. But you can use it if you
want to, either for the changes in her [India] or for the
unchanged. 'Real' is at the service of all schools of thought.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² See Memo from Francis Watson, Director of the BBC's New Delhi office, to Asst. Controller Talks and Asst. Controller Overseas, on the respect for Forster in this regard; 5 December 1945, BBC WAC RCONT1, Forster E.M., File 7 1945-1946.

¹⁰³ Forster letters to Brown 25 February and 28 May 1943, BBC WAC RCONT1, Forster E.M., File 5, 1943. Forster later discussed his retreat from novel-writing in an extended interview on the BBC arts programme *Monitor*, 21 December 1958, BBC One.

¹⁰⁴ 'India After Twenty-Five Years I', *The Listener*, 31 January 1946: 134.

Forster's declamation on the uses of *real* is heavy with resonances that go beyond staking his own claim as a Victorian-Edwardian liberal to hold forth on India's changed character (one aligned to the conventional gendered conception of India as female, and on which more later in this chapter). The more telling aspect of the phrasing here is the concept of reality being 'at the service of all schools of thought'. Again without drawing too blunt a characterisation, Forster was himself to a degree at the service of many schools of thought at the BBC, translating a free agent image into one that could speak to both propagandistic purposes on the wartime Eastern Service and to more individuated approaches on the Home Service at war's end.

As noted, the constitutive elements of this ability to serve different schools of thought included a willingness to rework broadcast material to network demands, but it was also anchored in Forster's strategic decision to steer clear of staff-related roles at the BBC. As his private correspondence to Darling showed, he could be hugely scathing of BBC policy and of its staff members, but in public his persona was one of a broadcast-friendly author who worked well with a range of personnel.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, there was the repudiation of any alignment with Indian or British political parties and a self-avowed non-politicised approach to the discourse of mutual affection itself which, tied to the idea of a 'selfish' love of India, allowed the BBC to maintain an idealised impartiality towards competing Indian nationalist camps and to their affiliated sectors within the British press and intelligentsia.

Self, individuality and free agency were all far knottier in reality, then, in contrast to the liberal ideal presented in Forster's talks. It is striking that Forster's final Home Service broadcast of 1946 again riffed on the idea of *self* through a portrait of the Indian poet Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), viewed by many South Asians as the literary patron saint of Indian Muslim self-determination and whose most famous philosophical concept – as espoused in his long-form Persian and Urdu poetry – was that of *khudi* or selfhood.¹⁰⁶ *Khudi*, ostensibly drawn from a language of Islamic metaphysics (and conjoined to an extent to Western philosophical ideas Iqbal had studied at Cambridge and in Germany from 1905-1908), was certainly synonymous by 1946 in many Indian intellectual and activist circles with the declaration of an anti-colonial Muslim nationalist agenda (tied specifically to the All-India

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Forster to Darling in which Forster noted the BBC has asked him to join the Indian Section; his reaction was encapsulated in the phrase 'No thank you, Brer Fox!' (a reference to a popular antagonist in American children's literature); 6 December 1943, KCC EMF 18/145. Also, letter from Forster to Darling during period leading up to Darling's resignation from the BBC. Forster sent up the BBC and Darling's deputy Z.A Bokhari by fantasising about a film entitled *Glorious Bokhari*. 26 October 1944, KCC, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁶ Iqbal died before India gained independence but many of his poems, although steeped in Sufi traditions, were considered metaphysical calls-to-arms for the realisation of Muslim political autonomy. His 1902 Urdu hymn *Lab Be Aati Hai Dua* (*Prayer Upon My Lips*) is still sung by Pakistani schoolchildren as an affirmation of nationhood. *Khudi* was a concept Iqbal centred in his most iconic long-form verse including, in Persian/Farsi, *Asrar-e-Khudi* (*The Secrets of the Self*, 1915) and *Javid Nama* (*The Book of Eternity*, 1932).

Muslim League which would form the first Pakistani government).¹⁰⁷ The decision to spotlight Iqbal to British publics – cast in Forster’s talk alongside Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) as ‘one of the two great cultural figures of modern India’ – could therefore be seen to be charged with a pro-Muslim Indian nationalist sensibility.¹⁰⁸ Although Forster disagreed with much of Iqbal’s religiosity, there was an urgent need, he felt, for the British to familiarise themselves with his works in translation. Iqbal’s philosophy of the self, he told readers/listeners, formed part of the poet’s brilliance and he found British incognisance of his writings ‘extraordinary’, arguing further:

I am convinced that he [Iqbal] is a genius and a commanding one, and though I often disagree with him and usually agree with Tagore, it is Iqbal I would rather read.¹⁰⁹

This privileging of one of two great modern Indian cultural icons, of a figure closely associated with selfhood-as-Muslim-nationalism, could be interpreted as Forster actually daring to speak up for a branch of Indian nationalism. Pitching Iqbal so favourably against Tagore might have indicated a rare stepping-up of Forsterian political engagement, a use of free agency to speak as explicitly as could be done within the boundaries of the cultural talk of the need for Muslim self-determination (as arguably tied to Forster’s attachment to Muslim culture through his affiliation to Masood), aligning in some ways with critical assessments of his broadcasts as beacons of equity (for example as per Morse, discussed earlier).

However I would contend that the foregrounding of Iqbal reveals again the blurred lines of Forster’s usage of notions of self and freedom in the context of India. Iqbal’s concept of selfhood, when viewed through its immersion in persistent leitmotifs of stasis and immobility, was at one level also profoundly ambivalent about the colonial dimensions of dependency, cooperation and self-realisation. Javed Majeed has shown how Iqbal’s works are distinct in their ‘combination of protest and acquiescence’, related expressly in his poetry to the Muslim believer’s relationship with deity but which can be extended to a productive comparative paradigm of colonial subject and ruler, both locked (as are believer and Allah according to Iqbal) in a co-dependent intimacy marked by asymmetries of power.¹¹⁰ In this respect Iqbal’s

¹⁰⁷ Anila Zainub, ‘Allama Muhammad Iqbal’s Concept of *Khudi* and Anti-colonial Praxis’, 2019: 1-12.

¹⁰⁸ As per the published version: ‘A Great Indian Poet-Philosopher: E.M. Forster on Iqbal’ in *The Listener*, 23 May 1946, Vol. 35, Issue 906: 686. Tagore’s works were more widely published in translation in Britain in this period and Forster’s thesis can be seen to be borne out by the BBC’s own schedules, in which Tagore’s poetry was featured on-air from the thirties onwards but Iqbal’s was never broadcast. Examples include: *Rabindranath Tagore* (a programme of readings and criticism of his work), 9 November 1941, BBC HS; *Readings from Gitanjali*, 7 May 1935, BBC NP Daventry.

¹⁰⁹ *The Listener*, 23 May 1946, Vol. 35, Issue 906: 686.

¹¹⁰ ‘Putting God in his Place: Bradley, McTaggart, and Muhammad Iqbal’, 1993: 233.

writings, characterised by action and inaction on the part of the Self (believer/ colonial subject), and as Majeed has argued, were emblematic of the experiences and ideals ‘of many members of the Indian intelligentsia, who sought to challenge the British Raj on the basis of its own premises, and who were, indeed, trapped in its conceptual categories’.¹¹¹ Iqbal himself embodied a set of ambiguous positionalities, on the one hand a talisman for Islamic political liberation and on the other an affiliate of imperial networks, best characterised by his grateful acceptance of a British knighthood in 1922.

Thus the promotion of Iqbal – on the surface seemingly pro-Muslim emancipation and redolent with resonances of the Indian right to selfhood – was another symbol of the cloudiness of Forster’s progressive-liberal vision of individuality and agency in the context of India, one that epitomised his broadcast style and which suited the BBC’s overall approach to the politics of empire. Speaking for myself, Forster’s badge as on-air talks writer, also meant *not speaking out* in politicised terms of Indian freedom and nor of the excesses and injustices of British imperial rule. As we see in the next section, the 1948 India features of Louis MacNeice, although rooted in a radio vernacular that was more oblique and abstruse than that of the talk, were arguably more emphatic in their criticism of the British. Various factors were at play in determining this. Perhaps the most significant of these, as I now discuss, was MacNeice’s complicated relationship with Irishness and, relatedly, the entanglements between Ireland and India’s histories as subject and subsequently partitioned nations winning freedom from the British empire.

The British Raj is Dead: India, Ireland and Neutrality

By the end of 1946 the tenor of political discourse in Britain regarding India had grown markedly more forthright. Fast accelerating plans to effect a transfer of power garnered British press headlines on a weekly, if not daily, basis, with *The Observer* noting that ‘whatever London may attempt, the destiny of India lies in India, in Indian hands’.¹¹² Eight months later on the day India won its freedom, *The Manchester Guardian* went further in spelling out the meaning of taking destiny in one’s hands, asserting that the pivotal question of India’s membership of the Commonwealth was ‘for India, not this country, to decide’.¹¹³ Indeed, according to its leader-writer, it was a day to pronounce in no uncertain terms: ‘The British Raj is dead’.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² ‘India’, 1 December 1946: 4.

¹¹³ Leader, *Manchester Guardian*, 15 August 1947: 4.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Contrastingly in the column inches of papers in Eire (the Irish Free State established in 1921), outspoken comment regarding India's unshackling from imperial rule was largely absent.¹¹⁵ Behind this apparent disinterest was a degree of political discomfort regarding the communal violence that accompanied India's partition and which carried bitter echoes of Ireland's own partition. For nationalist sectors of the Irish press, as Clair Wills has highlighted, partition needed to be portrayed unequivocally as an 'as unwelcome imposition by British imperialists'.¹¹⁶ The example of India and Pakistan, where partition had conversely been a nationalist demand (by the Muslim League) to secure freedom, was therefore somewhat problematic. These interlocking dynamics were further complicated by the BBC's presence in the Irish media landscape. Unlike printed material, the BBC's broadcasts could not be excised from the Irish mediasphere with ease. BBC Radio could be heard on Irish airwaves not only through the tailored broadcasts of the Regional Programme for Northern Ireland, for those on the other side of the partition, but also via the Home Service which could be comfortably tuned into through the dials of Irish radio sets, making radio the most prominent medium to cross 'the dyke of Ireland's wartime isolation'.¹¹⁷

These overlapping connections between the BBC, India and Ireland played out in a number of different dimensions in the three 1948 *India and Pakistan* radio features produced by MacNeice in 1947. As I show, Irish and Indian parallels were heavily foregrounded by MacNeice at various moments in his series, especially at the close of the final programme, *The Road to Independence*, in which the words of Anglo-Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) and Tagore bookended an impassioned tribute to national self-determination. Until the 'demand of the Nationalist is granted', quoted MacNeice from Shaw, colonised nations would be kept from entry to what Tagore described as 'that Heaven of Freedom' and into which he had prayed his country would 'awake'.¹¹⁸ Shaw, and arguably Tagore too, were not clear-cut figures in terms of cultural-political nationalism; Shaw especially, sharing similarities with MacNeice, had an antagonistic relationship with his native homeland and with the Irish literary revival as fashioned under the influence of W.B. Yeats (1865-1939).¹¹⁹ Nonetheless MacNeice's usage of the two writers was arresting. It served to spotlight Ireland and India's analogous experiences of British colonisation, and the subsequent fight for Home

¹¹⁵ Clair Wills, 'And Then There Was India', 2009: 426.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Clair Wills, *That Neutral Island*, 2007: 181, 187; Hajkowski, 2010: 203-228. See also Bloom on the preferences of many Irish listeners in the thirties and forties for radio programming that was not from Ireland's national radio station, Radio Eireann, 2016: 11-13.

¹¹⁸ As delivered by the characters of 'Shaw' and 'Tagore', script, *The Road to Independence*, 1948, HRC: 43, lines 544 and 546. Broadcast 15 August 1948, BBC HS.

¹¹⁹ See Kathleen Ochshorn, 'Colonialism, Postcolonialism and the Shadow of a New Empire: John Bull's Other Island', 2006: 180-181.

Rule, to speak aloud to British listening publics of the hidden history of Ireland's subjugation, a story often left out of chronicles of empire both on the BBC and in British culture more generally.¹²⁰ On another level, however, MacNeice's features could be understood as *speaking back* to Ireland too, a doubleness not dissimilar to that of Forster's talking to both Indian and British audiences through his shared or reversioned broadcasts. Although MacNeice was not directly addressing an Irish listenership, the likelihood of Irish audiences tuning in to the BBC in the immediate post-war era, as they had done in wartime, was fairly strong (a fact of which he would have been aware as a staff producer). As such, the potential for listening in from Ireland may well have been a factor in shaping MacNeice's production outlook on his India features.

Taking on board the potentiality of Irish listeners illuminates some of the ambiguities and contradictions that mark MacNeice's Indian features and their relationship with Ireland. Certainly on one hand the 1948 broadcasts can be interpreted as a doubled articulation, a *speaking out* to Britons of their complicity in colonial injustices (in India and in Ireland) and a *nodding to* Irish audiences of the conjoined national histories of oppression shared by those who had been subject to British rule. But further complicating this articulation was the issue of MacNeice's indignation at Ireland's neutral position in the Second World War. Having decided upon a return from America in 1940 to contribute to the British war effort, and taking up the challenge to do so through a job radio-writing and producing wartime propaganda at the BBC in 1941, MacNeice shifted from a previously distanced approach to political commitment to one of active engagement with a duty to 'propagand'.¹²¹ Ireland's neutrality, shaped by poor defence resources but also, crucially, by a colonial past that made both its publics and its leaders not want to 'make common cause with Britain', was viewed by MacNeice (and other Anglo-Irish writers such as Elizabeth Bowen) as moral indifference or, even, cowardice.¹²² In his poem *Neutrality* (1942), composed following the death of a friend in the Atlantic Ocean who fell victim to a German U-boat strike, MacNeice skewered the 'neutral island facing the Atlantic' for its political isolationism, a nation locked in a colonial dynamic that has overshadowed its ability to engage fully with the modern world.¹²³ India as a tale of nationalist triumph also functioned, then, in MacNeice's features – if we remember the possibility of Irish publics listening in – as an example to Ireland of non-neutral political

¹²⁰ See for example Hajkowski's discussion of George Barnes' decision to leave the Irish Free State out of *Brush Up Your Empire*, 2010: 67; 79. This included Barnes' memo to Ursula Eason, Programme Director of the BBC's unit in Northern Ireland, in which he noted: 'Curious how one *does* forget about Eire being in the Empire', 30 October 1943, BBC WAC R51/60, Talks, Brush Up Your Empire.

¹²¹ MacNeice used the term in a letter to his mentor, scholar E.R. Dodds, September 1939; MacNeice Archive, Personal and General Correspondence 1928-1963, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

¹²² Wills, 2007: 7; 127.

¹²³ In MacNeice's *Collected Poems*, 2007: 224.

affiliation from a subalternised state, one that utilised the leverage of fighting against fascism to secure its own freedom. Pointing to a shared colonial past therefore could also work in a doubled way: reminding Britain of iron-handed moments in its imperial rule but simultaneously reminding Ireland of its failure to act in wartime.

In highlighting the injustices of imperial rule in the Indian-Irish axis MacNeice's features, in contrast to Forster's talks, were certainly not moderate in tone. Nor were they, on the whole, neutral when situated within the paradigm of BBC editorial practice, where a balancing out of outspokenness against British colonialism with other contrasting viewpoints (specifically a very pro-British perspective) would have constituted a form of editorial neutrality. This outspokenness and lack of balance – not consistently present throughout the features but definitely a pronounced characteristic – paradoxically rested on the freedom available to MacNeice as a staff writer-producer of factually-based but highly fictionalised radio programming where a range of ventriloquised voices were at his disposal rather than only his own (as was the case for Forster and the talk genre). Moreover, in the three India/Pakistan features, MacNeice named characters as epithets, including Ignorance, Other, Hindu, Muslim, Englishman and so on. In allowing stock or archetypal dramatised characters to speak aloud the charges against the British, he was therefore able to utilise the radio grammar of mid-century features to describe the British, in the words of one character as 'hucksters', and equally to showcase the British as either ignorant of India or as poor defenders of imperial atrocities, guided as they were, in the phrasing of one feature, by 'greed and a spot of adventure'.¹²⁴

In a period when location recording was used sparingly in BBC features due to a lack of widely available equipment (pre-dating the era in the late fifties when actuality, the BBC term for location-based sound and voice, began to be used more concretely), MacNeice's features fully exploited the 'interstitial' potentialities of the genre, of its crossing of boundaries between 'realism and drama, fact and fiction', erring more towards the theatrical end of the spectrum by drawing on techniques associated with the conventions of radio drama.¹²⁵ Breaking out against neutrality – speaking out and speaking up against British injustices – was therefore, as I will detail, in one sense easier to deliver through a richly aestheticised approach to programme content and through the use of multiple dramatic figures, which could work to

¹²⁴ *Huckster* charge, implying a deep dishonesty in the British colonial project, spoken by character of 'Muslim', *greed* and *adventure* offered as a defence of the Raj's roots in the East India Company by the 'Englishman'; script, 1948, BBC WAC: 11, line 133; 9, line 117.

¹²⁵ Lodhi and Wrigley, ed. *Radio Modernisms*, 2020: 4. The dramatised framing of MacNeice's features was signposted not only through the use of archetypal characters but also through the absence of factual reporting hallmarks such as a narrated script interwoven with clips of testimony (this testimony in the pre-location recording era came from written material voiced by actors but which nonetheless functioned as a key element of a more conventional documentary-style of feature favoured by some of MacNeice's colleagues).

obscure the ferocity of outright criticism or of what might be perceived as an editorial imbalance.

While contrasting MacNeicean and Forsterian approaches to India, and in thinking back to the role of status and voice, it should be remembered that MacNeice also inhabited a milieu of privilege. Born in Belfast but attaining an elite English education at Sherborne, Marlborough and then Oxford, at the BBC he occupied a position as a staff producer in the Features Department (barring a brief sabbatical) until his death in 1963. Whilst Forster had deliberately eschewed a staff role in order to preserve a sense of independence (whilst also drawing on a network of friends who were senior BBC staffers), MacNeice benefitted from the explicit support of Features Department Head, Laurence Gilliam (1907-1964), a man who sought out creative writing talent and who ran post-war Features as a kind of 'commando unit'.¹²⁶ This meant keeping his staff 'on a very loose rein' by allowing a great deal of creative freedom and by fiercely defending their editorial and production decisions when acting as a 'buffer' between 'producers and administrators'.¹²⁷

It was at Gilliam's suggestion that MacNeice went to India, a country – as we see shortly in relation to the first of the 1948 features, *India at First Sight* – he had had little interest in visiting. And it was Gilliam who backed MacNeice when he revised the series of planned Third and Home India/Pakistan features after having arrived in the subcontinent and having seen first-hand the violence of partition and independence. Given the features would be representative of the BBC's high-profile domestic coverage of a defining event in the letting-go of colonial power, in MacNeice's view the broadcasts needed to be reframed so as not to explicitly crow about the successes of the British Raj, a strategy, he stressed, that would be most 'inopportune'.¹²⁸ Features Department personnel had privately expressed concerns to one other regarding the top-down editorial nudge, via Haley, for documentaries related to the transfer of power in India to strike a 'key note' that celebrated the 'British achievement in India'.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ From Features producer Rayner Heppenstall's autobiography, *Portrait of the Artist as a Professional Man*: 1969: 114.

¹²⁷ Features producer Douglas Cleverdon as quoted in Jeanette Thomas, *A History of the BBC Features Department: 1924-1964*, unpublished PhD thesis, 2004: n.p.

¹²⁸ Letter from MacNeice in Delhi to Gilliam in London, 19 September 1947, BBC WAC and as printed in Allison ed., *The Letters of Louis MacNeice*, 2010: 496., in which he wrote: 'Some English papers, I hear have seized on the [violence in] Punjab and Delhi as a pretty occasion for an I-told-you-so vindication of the British Raj; the BBC should on no account follow suit. Our objections to the old feature scheme, far from being dispelled by the present trouble, are triply reinforced'. The specific details of the old feature scheme have not survived in archival form but it is likely these included a strong focus on the Army, the ICS and British industry and trade, as MacNeice spelt out these subjects as ones to be avoided in his reframing of the series. See also letter from Gilliam to MacNeice, 13 September 1947, in which he discussed the decision by imperial historian Reginald Coupland to step away from a role as a consultant on BBC radio programming on India due to the stress placed by the Corporation on British achievement and record; Allison ed., 2010: 494. I explore the mechanics of the series revision in more detail later in this chapter.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Memo, 'Meeting on India', from the Director-General's office to domestic network Controllers and department Heads, 6 June 1947, BBC WAC R34/432, Policy, India, Transfer of Power 1946-47.

Although MacNeice in overall terms successfully challenged the accent on British accomplishments in the BBC's transfer-of-power coverage (and as mandated by its highest editorial powers), it should be stressed that his features did toe the line in this regard at various moments. But so too did his programmes utilise an arsenal of literary and radiophonic techniques to highlight the ills of British imperial rule, going further in spelling out the darker aspects of empire than Forster's talks and in puncturing the BBC's on-air silence on the murky details of the 'greed' and 'adventure' that shaped Britain's imperial origins. In so doing, he was able to draw as a staff member on departmental support and also on his own status as a distinguished, or stellar even, poet and producer, and to play with editorial and production boundaries in a way that none of the other writers discussed in this thesis could. Having established a reputation as one of Britain's leading thirties poets (with long-form verse such as *Autumn Journal*, 1939), by 1948 MacNeice's currency was at its highest as one of Features' most celebrated literary writer-producers on the Home and the Third, with the scripts for his most elaborate productions published in book form by his publisher, Faber.¹³⁰ His example, a rarity for a BBC producer in terms of the high-end publishability associated with his radio works, illuminates again the cachet forged between certain authors and domestic BBC Radio networks at this juncture.

Incongruity or opposition are terms that often surface in analyses of MacNeice's broadcasting career, especially in discussions of whether the hackwork he undertook caused detriment to his poetry-writing or whether his politics or aesthetics were compromised by propagandising for the BBC.¹³¹ These questions have been answered largely in the negative by a raft of recent scholarship that has demonstrated the richness and complexity of MacNeice's radio archive and its interrelations with his poetic output, including his later works such as *Autumn Sequel* (1954).¹³² I want to highlight the import of MacNeice's three 1948 India/Pakistan features not in terms of close comparison to his poetry but as pivotal in deepening his politicisation. I take a cue here from Emily Bloom's reading of MacNeice as a poet travelling in an opposite trajectory to many of his contemporaries, one who in the thirties was suspicious of political affiliation, especially to communism as espoused by his peers (and who in this regard disassociated himself from the Macspaunday label given to his poetic grouping), but who by the forties readily committed to the BBC out of a sense of political

¹³⁰ Scripts published included *Christopher Columbus* (1944) and *The Dark Tower* (1947). On MacNeice's status as a BBC radio-writer see *The Observer's* description of him as 'one of the most distinguished contributors to Third Programme excellence'; 'Radio: MacNeice', 25 May 1947: 2. Third Programme began to air from 29 September 1946.

¹³¹ Coulton, *Louis MacNeice in the BBC*, 1980: 192-193.

¹³² Notably, Bloom, *The Wireless Past*, 2016; Whittington, *Writing the Radio War*, 2018; Wrigley and Harrison ed. *Louis MacNeice: The Classical Radio Plays*, 2013.

duty.¹³³ MacNeice was by no means straightforwardly conservative in his politics and neither was he a radical, but his iteration of liberalism was, especially in the context of India I would argue, more politically charged than Forster's.¹³⁴ Whilst this is perhaps unsurprising given their generational differences (MacNeice was not alive at the 'fag-end' of Victorian liberalism and neither did he look up to it), there is in his writings and his recollections a sense of being jolted awake, politically and culturally, by the experience of India. As I now show this prompted a querying, within limits, of British colonial influence and culpability and which undergirded the shaping of the three 1948 features in focus, beginning with the Third Programme's *India at First Sight*.

First Sightings, Crash Landings and Haw-Haw Uncles

As part of the BBC's joint News and Features team sent to India in 1947 to cover the transfer of power for Home networks, MacNeice was tasked with fashioning the series opener for Features' contribution to independence-related programming; this first broadcast was scheduled to go out in March 1948 on the Third in contrast to the remaining five features which would be transmitted on the Home.¹³⁵ Although the Third Programme had been on air less than a year when independence took place, and despite the fact that from its inception it was broadly a Europhilic channel, Controller George Barnes had been keen to keep step with Home and Light in terms of updating Third's listeners with news developments from India.¹³⁶ For a more substantive feature engagement with the subject, it was agreed that MacNeice's prowess as a feature-maker for both Third and Home, and his high profile, would befit the task of crafting the inaugural episode of *India and Pakistan*.¹³⁷ Apart from one Talks series aired in 1947 – *The British in India* which in part spoke of the 'benevolent paternalism' of the Raj's administration, in keeping with the general directive to promote British achievement in India – Third Programme had not delved deeply into the subject of Indian culture in the years surrounding Indian independence, and it had certainly never addressed the subject in a

¹³³ 2016: 65. Macspanday was a term coined by poet Roy Campbell in his book *Talking Bronco* (1946) to describe the fashionable left-leaning circle of British thirties poets to which MacNeice belonged and which also included W.H. Auden, Cecil Day-Lewis and Stephen Spender.

¹³⁴ On MacNeice's ideological detachment from left and right politics, see Richard Danson Brown, "'Your Thoughts Make Shape Like Snow'", 2002: 296.

¹³⁵ The team included Features producers MacNeice and Dillon and News reporter-producers Wynford Vaughan-Thomas, Robert Stimson, Richard Sharp and Edward Ward.

¹³⁶ Memo from Barnes to Editor, News, asking for Third to be kept in line with Home and Light's planned news broadcasts on India, BBC WAC R34/432, Policy, India, Transfer of Power 1946-47.

¹³⁷ MacNeice had established his name as a Features producer on the wartime Home Service, but in the first three months alone of Third Programme's existence he had five features aired on the network: *The Careerist* (23 October 1946); *Agamemnon of Aeschylus* (29 October 1946); *The Dark Tower* (4 November 1946, first broadcast 21 January 1946, BBC HS); *Enter Caesar* (24 November 1946, first broadcast 20 September 1946, BBC HS); *Enemy of Cant* (3 December 1946). Several of these broadcasts, including *The Dark Tower*, were repeated on the Third again in December 1946.

feature format.¹³⁸ The marriage of network and feature opener in this context thus gave an additional, perhaps unintended, meaning to MacNeice's usage of the metaphor of *first sightings* in the title of his programme.

India at First Sight drew to an extent on MacNeice's own inexperience and incomprehension of India to portray Britain as a nation blind to the realities of India's cultural history, to its current political strains and, crucially, to the darker aspects of its own imperial rule. Like Edward, the English fictional protagonist of the feature, MacNeice had previously only been acquainted with the subcontinent through a handful of 'headlines' and a correspondingly narrow cultural frame; India was to him, as it was to Edward:

EDWARD: ...A spot of Kipling and a spot of Tagore and a stray conversation in the Oxford Union. And I didn't much like the Indians I met – or the photos of Indian temples – or all this yogi-cum-swami stuff. Was all for the Indian nationalists but apart from that – well, I was allergic to India.¹³⁹

This allergic reaction to India in MacNeice's own life prior to his joining the BBC in 1941 was partly correlated to the other superseding orientations of his education and cultural outlook. Scholarly training in the Classics had aligned him to Greece and Italy, and a later fascination with Norse mythology mapped onto an interest in the conceptual and geographical pull of the *north*, shared with his friend and fellow poet W.H. Auden (1907-1973) and captured in their 1937 joint travel book *Letters from Iceland*.¹⁴⁰ To 'look east' therefore, as Edward is told to do by an inner voice in his head at the start of *India at First Sight* – one accompanying him throughout his journey as a vocalic embodiment of moral conscience and played notably by Irish actor Cyril Cusack – had not been something MacNeice had felt inclined to do.¹⁴¹ A suspicion of what he comprehended as the metaphysics and mysticism of Indian culture, the 'yogi-cum-swami stuff' he saw filtering into much modernist poetry (including in the writings of his editor at Faber, T.S. Eliot), stood in the way of any interest. Moreover, Edward/

¹³⁸ From the *Radio Times* billing for episode 2, *The Imperial Idea*; *Radio Times*, 26 October 1947, Issue 1254.

¹³⁹ Script, *India at First Sight*, 1948, HRC: 2, line 10. MacNeice Papers, Box 7.5.

¹⁴⁰ MacNeice wrote of the impulse to travel to Iceland in 'Epilogue for W.H. Auden' at the end of the book: 'And the don in me set forth/How the landscape of the north/Had educed the saga style/Plodding forward mile by mile.// And the don in you replied/That the North begins inside', 1937: 251.

¹⁴¹ 'Look East, Eddie' says Edward's inner 'Still Voice'; script, *India at First Sight*, 1948, HRC: 3, line 12. Edward was played by Pierre Lefevre. Cyril Cusack (1910-1993) had appeared in a number of MacNeice's broadcasts, including *The Dark Tower*. His performance of Still Voice was delivered in a Received Pronunciation accent rather than an Irish one but it did incorporate some lilting cadences that hinted at Irish speech rhythms, arguably demonstrating an Irish moral conscience inside of Eddie's English exterior. For example, as audible in Still Voice's opening lines: *India At First Sight*, BBC SA, time code: 02'07-03'03.

MacNeice's cultural 'idea of India' was hazily constructed from the kinds of discourse which, as Forster had also in part alluded to, were familiar to a constituency of the British listening public: the writings of Kipling, Tagore's devotional poetry and Oxbridge Common Room-style conversation as purveyed oftentimes by the Talks Department.

Notions of supposed familiarity were therefore something to be punctured in MacNeice's retelling of his own encounter with India, functioning in one way to challenge the apathy of the domestic audience on matters of empire which had so concerned Richard Maconachie. On a deeper level, though, MacNeice's feature also spoke to the British difficulty, a kind of blindness, in recognising its own role in India's present troubles and its complicated history. This handicap, and the concomitant tensions in seeing through and past familiar tropes – both in the context of India per se and in terms of Britain's own culpability in shaping the troubled destinies of its colonies – was underlined to listeners before the broadcast had even begun in a somewhat unusual preceding continuity announcement:

ANNOUNCER: The following panorama is based on the
 author's own impressions when he visited
 Pakistan and India for the first time in 1947.
 It does not therefore claim to be objective.
 The sub-continent which is throughout referred
 to as India is seen – or rather glimpsed – solely
 through Western eyes while the visitor is attended
 by the Western familiars of his mind. For it is only
 gropingly and fleetingly that any such visitor can
 cope with: India at First Sight.¹⁴²

The 'familiar of the mind' that encroach upon Western eyes' ability to see India clearly, via the glimpses of a fleeting first visit, loom large in MacNeice's India/Pakistan features, especially in this broadcast and the next, *Portrait of Delhi*. In both programmes the protagonist, a first-time British visitor to the subcontinent, struggles to shake off the shackles of a British-oriented familiarity, one that paints India as a land of snake charmers and heathens, a place where, as Edward's Nanny tells him, 'they're not like us'.¹⁴³ In *India at First*

¹⁴² Continuity announcement (written by MacNeice), script, 1948, HRC: 1, line 1. Conventional cues to features (the production term for opening announcements) did not usually frame broadcasts in such shaky terms (fleetingly, gropingly); they were, and continue to be, usually written with an air of authority about the audio that will follow. In radio production terms, MacNeice's cue therefore operated as a kind of unreliable narrator warning.

¹⁴³ Nanny recalling an anecdote of seeing an Indian snake charmer biting off the head of a snake, or an 'old wives tale' as Edward describes it; script, 1948, HRC: 1, lines 3 and 4.

Sight these familiars take shape through archetypally-named characters: Nanny, Missionary, Uncle (who jostle for attention alongside figures from Indian history and culture including Tagore and Iqbal, semi-familiar to domestic BBC audiences at least from Forster's talk). In *Portrait* this convention goes further when the familiar and the central character become one and the same, pointedly named Ignorance. Additionally, Ignorance and Edward both crash suddenly into the Indian landscape – in the case of *India at First Sight* with an actual plane crash landing written into the narrative in its opening section – hinting at a violent encounter on their part with the subcontinent. Yet, despite the 'jolting awake' that such landings set in motion, both struggle with seeing India fully as a 'panorama', with true objectivity.¹⁴⁴

Signalling a lack of objectivity, and its linkages to sight and vision, also played to MacNeice's advantage in other ways. In alerting listening audiences that what they would hear was not aiming at clear-cut impartiality – in a sort of echo of Forster's caveat regarding his credentials/limitations and in line with the BBC's editorial stress on the specific and the personal in the context of empire – MacNeice explicitly framed his Indian portraits as highly subjective. *India at First Sight*, listeners were told, was pointedly not objective, made as it was out of fleeting glimpses packaged into the artifice of features-style radio storytelling.

This conceit of momentary-and-first glances pointed in one sense, more emphatically and arguably more radically than Forster's broadcasts, at the exclusionary apparatus of the Western colonial gaze, one that in the conventional language of radio-reporting usually presented descriptive passages of objectified and colonised vistas, panoramas and people. Such colonially-inflected eyewitness accounts were tied closely, as David Spurr has shown, to a Foucauldian paradigm of visual observation, surveillance and spatial configuration in which the colonial journalist – either centred in the landscape or from a high vantage point – enacts the 'privilege of inspecting, of examining, of looking at' at those who, colonised and *viewed* and *looked at*, 'are forbidden from looking back'.¹⁴⁵ In MacNeice's features such acts of visual-journalistic colonisation – arguably encoded in the standard fare of much mid-century BBC reporting on empire and which remained *in situ* even in the post-war domestic network emphasis on vivid, specific description of the colonies – are the subject of sharp satirisation.

On several occasions, interactions between the occupier of the western gaze (Ignorance/Edward) and the colonised visual object are mockingly highlighted when the protagonists of MacNeice's features, overwhelmed by the sheer excess of the Indian

¹⁴⁴ Plane crash landing into the Indian desert, script, *India at First Sight*, 1948, HRC: 3.

¹⁴⁵ *The Rhetoric of Empire*, 1993: 13–16. Spurr specifically links European written eyewitness accounts of empire to Foucault's concept of panopticism (in *Discipline and Punish*, 1975, centred on an interrogation of Bentham's 18th century prison design which allowed prisoners to be seen from all angles and for guards to have a view from on-high).

streetscape, aim to make sense of the vistas they see by offering supposedly-objective, but equally objectifying, visually-extracted reportage. In their comedic descriptions of typical everyday Indian scenes (inadvertently comical on their part), and as framed through the pre-programme caveat, Ignorance and Edward are shown up as deeply limited or even unreliable in their worldview. As Ignorance tells the Home Service listeners in *Portrait of Delhi*:

IGNORANCE: From where I'm standing in Chandni Chowk, it's
just one great vista of traffic – racing cars, bicycles,
tongas, cows and people asleep – Well, this is a great
street for shopping, the shops of course haven't got
any glass windows, they're more like tiny stages
opening on to the pavement, the shopkeepers sit on
them cross-legged or even lie down upon carpets. Well,
it's an animated scene and just on the pavement beside
me a little cropheaded boy – a shade under-nourished he
looks – is crouching on his hunkers – what is it exactly he's
doing – oh yes, now I can see, he's got half a dozen rusty
spanners and he's laying them out in a row on the pavement...
Well, from where I'm standing –¹⁴⁶.

The passage above is redolent with a typical MacNeicean undercutting of authority, a hallmark of many of his features but especially of those related to the British traveller abroad.¹⁴⁷ In the imperial context, however, what is made explicit is the habitation by the Briton in India – and by implication that of other parts of the empire including Ireland — of the colonial figure in surveying mode, a figure that dovetails with that of the broadcaster who inspects and translates vistas and animated scenes for the home listener through a style of evocative description that diminishes and devalues that which it surveys. In aiming to capture India as a milieu of cows, tongas and traffic, and in zeroing in on the malnourished street child with rusty spanners, MacNeice's comic colonial antagonist, so full of clichéd phrases such as 'from where I'm standing' and the repetition of the idiomatic 'well', exposes both the limitations and the power-dynamics of the very gaze, and its attendant discourses, through which his portrait

¹⁴⁶ Script, 1948, HRC: 31-32, line 373. MacNeice Papers, Box 7.3.

¹⁴⁷ See my article on MacNeice's comedic and self-reflexive take on the British tourist in his European-related travel programmes of this period, *Portrait of Rome* (22 June 1947, BBC HS) and *Portrait of Athens* (18 November 1951, BBC HS); Lodhi, 2018.

is mediated.

India at First Sight and *Portrait of Delhi*, through the trope of first sightings, in one sense then conform to the overarching BBC Radio domestic network priority of offering audiences a personalised approach to imperial subjects (where the ignorant visitor stands for MacNeice himself as per the cue), harmonising to an extent with editorial policy as Forster's broadcasts did. Yet the location of the colonial gaze through the comic figures of Ignorance and Edward also delivers a humorous but acerbic critique, encrypted in the fictive archetypal characters that both represent the author (as a representative of the BBC) and simultaneously poke fun and undermine the authority of his outlook and rhetoric. In consistently privileging a first sighting over prolonged entanglement with the subcontinent however MacNeice did concede a lack of expertise in another context too; encoded in his title and motif was perhaps a nod to the long-view of a writer like Forster who returned after a quarter-century and who could claim a life-long love of India, its cultures and its peoples.

As noted at the start of this chapter, MacNeice did re-read *Passage* on his way out to India and, further, discuss it with the first few Indians he met; writing to his wife upon his arrival he asserted that 'even Indians agree that it is the truest picture of the country'.¹⁴⁸ Which aspects of the novel spoke most readily to MacNeice, or to the nameless Indians he consulted, were not elaborated upon, but in framing in part his own first sightings of India through a re-reading of Forster we can see again a creative and critical dialogue at play in his output (as per Danson Brown). For whilst *Passage* may have seemed the truest picture at the start of a three-month journey, its limitations and outmodedness may have come into clearer view after seeing events in Punjab in 1947 and which had a transformative effect on MacNeice. Recalling how he and his BBC colleagues arrived in the town of Sheikhupura the 'morning after a communal massacre', MacNeice detailed in his *BBC Features* essay the grim realities of partition violence that confronted them, traumatised survivors sitting in the street as 'flies swarmed on the stumps of their arms and legs', their eyes 'haunted, or what was worse, quite blank'.¹⁴⁹ Wynford Vaughan-Thomas, who accompanied MacNeice, noted how the incident prompted him to become a 'man of action', assisting refugees onto lorries and aiding in setting up a system ensuring safe passage from the area.¹⁵⁰ He was, stressed Vaughan-Thomas, no longer the writer-producer-as-'detached observer'.¹⁵¹ The Sheikhupura incident was one of the prompts behind MacNeice's strong revision of the Features Department's 1948 series and was

¹⁴⁸ Letter to Hedli Anderson, 10 August 1947, Allison ed., 2010: 472.

¹⁴⁹ In Gilliam ed., 1950: 61-62.

¹⁵⁰ From Vaughan-Thomas' contribution to *Louis MacNeice: A Radio Portrait*, a posthumous BBC Radio profile of MacNeice's life and work, 1 May 1967, BBC Network Three; also as per programme typescript and as and quoted in Allison ed., 2010: 488, n.1.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

also the context in which he would ask, in print in 1950, if the British were sure they themselves were not responsible for some of the violence unleashed at the moment of Indian (and by inference Irish) partition and independence.

In linking back then to a critical-creative dialogue with Forster, first sightings might also function as an acknowledgement of MacNeice's ability to see India for the first time as a newly independent nation, with all its attendant complexities, in a way that Forster could not. As with Yeats, there was in MacNeice's negotiation with other authorial legacies an element of push-and-pull, of paying homage to those that influenced him whilst also critiquing the cultural-political demarcations that shaped such influences. As such, Forster's broadcasts on India, in tandem with *A Passage to India*, can also be located as material reworked and reimagined for a newer, post-colonial epoch by MacNeice's features (and as marked by an Anglo-Irish sensibility).

One central figure that emerges as a reimagining of sorts is that of the English avuncular figure, portrayed by Forster himself in his talks as a gentle liberal espousing a Bloomsburryan and ICS-inflected philosophy of friendship. In *India at First Sight*, MacNeice takes aim at an avuncularity associated with a less progressive version of the colonial Englishman in India. Edward's Uncle Howard, one of the familiars of his mind, is painted as a *pukka sahib* wedded to Raj 'Club rules':

UNCLE: Oh yes, Eddie, you scamp, fine old times we had. I
remember a chap at the station who was a bit of an
eccentric. Spent his time learning Sanskrit and so on.
So one night he was in the Club and we all decided to
rag him. What! What's that? Was he an Indian?
Good Lord, no! Didn't I say in the Club?!¹⁵²

Uncle Howard's racialised insinuations – via reference to the codes of club entry which barred Indians from socialising with the kinds of Anglo-Indians that Forster had critiqued in *Passage* – were woven into a characterisation which also embodied, to an extent, some of the political haziness enshrined in Forster's broadcasts. In the second half of the programme, he comes to realise that India must make its own destiny, and admits that 'we' (the British/English) 'haven't got the right to make political capital out of the birth throes of nations'.¹⁵³ Some sense

¹⁵² Script, 1948, HRC: 2, line 9. On the genealogy of British colonial social clubs see Mrinalini Sinha, 'Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere', 2001.

¹⁵³ Script, 1948, HRC: 29, line 305, p.29.

of British culpability, in exploiting the violence of Indian independence to bolster Britain's own image as imperial peacekeeper, therefore punctures Edward's uncle's understanding of coloniality at the moment of official retreat from India.

Whilst it would be a mistake to attach the portrait of the racially intolerant Uncle Howard too closely to a vision of Forster as gentle cultural paternalist, it is telling that there is no further iteration of a more sympathetic version of avuncularity, or even of an aging, older Briton, in MacNeice's India/Pakistan features.¹⁵⁴ Unlike the Mrs. Moore character in *Passage*, MacNeice's features do not imbue older British (or specifically English) generations with wisdom and insight. Rather, it is the voice of India itself, named India/Other in *India at First Sight* (on which more shortly) that speaks most loudly of India's histories and the potentialities of its present. In doing so it is joined by the possibly Irish-inflected Still Voice and the voices of what are described as Delhi's Literature, Topography and History in *Portrait of Delhi* or of the Hindu and the Muslim, rather than the Englishman, in *The Road to Independence*. The English Uncle-like figure, carrying associations with the Indian Civil Service and to the Anglo-Indian past, becomes outmoded, in MacNeice's versions, at a new historical juncture.

This somewhat acerbic portrayal of the English avuncular figure was certainly emphatic enough to be noted as a failing by at least one press reviewer. *The Manchester Guardian's* radio critic contended that whilst MacNeice's impressionistic storytelling had assembled a good range of interesting characters to provide 'quick flashing glances at the India of many moods and faces', the characterisation of Uncle Howard had been harsh and unjust:

It is surprising how even a writer of Mr. MacNeice's sensitiveness can, in adopting certain conventions, show such an un-critical mind. "Uncle" was the caricature of the supposed retired Anglo-Indian complete with "haw-haw" voice and all the apparatus of contempt for the native. There may be such music-hall types, but there are certainly far more who have worked in and for India with understanding and devotion, and it seems a pity in a serious programme to choose the comic figure as representative.¹⁵⁵

The guffawing 'haw-haw' nature of the racially superior Englishman, and his links to what the

¹⁵⁴ Uncle Howard is also reminiscent of other caricatures of avuncularity in MacNeice's features, such as Uncle Robin in *Portrait of Rome*, 1947.

¹⁵⁵ 'Review of Broadcasting', 17 March 1948: 3.

Guardian identified as a lower-middle class ('music-hall') contempt for indigenous peoples, may have been interpreted as evidence of MacNeice's un-criticality (code for doing a disservice to British contribution to India's success) but it was rooted in a more nuanced understanding of the role of the Anglo-Indian, particularly as related to the ICS, than the paper gave credit for.¹⁵⁶ In his private correspondence, MacNeice had identified the Indian Civil Servant as one that brought with him a particular set of problems. Detailing a conversation with Robert Stimson, one of the BBC News team also in India in 1947 and who knew the country well, MacNeice wrote (again to his wife) of how Stimson had informed him that many Indians were often suspicious of 'earnest Leftists', and that there was a feeling amongst them that 'British army officers were on the whole much more popular than the I.C.S. boys because they met the Indians more half way'.¹⁵⁷ In later writing to Gilliam with his plans for the 1948 features series revision, this awareness of the ICS filtered through into the suggestions of which subjects or treatments the BBC should try to avoid or not foreground too heavily. The army, MacNeice ventured, should be kept to a minimum in the main Indian features programming but could be tackled in a 'subsidiary programme', which 'if tactfully done, would certainly be worth while (sic) – especially as British army officers have a far better record than say the ICS of personal relationships with Indians'.¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile, 'Administration' (meaning the ICS), need not gain close attention, argued MacNeice, especially not in any capacity that would 'laud[ing] British efficiency', going on to note that 'what is an established fact [about the Administration] is that Britain gave to Indians too little and too late a share in responsible jobs'.¹⁵⁹ However in the same letter he did concede that the series would need to carefully toe the line with regards to the BBC editorial policy of promoting *British achievement*, and that both the army and the ICS would no doubt 'appear by the way' in the planned Indian feature series, and moreover that 'indirect and implicit tribute to the ICS' could be 'slipped in naturally in most of our programmes'.¹⁶⁰

MacNeice's critical perspective of the ICS, and a relatively benign assessment of the British army, demonstrates some of the contradictions within interpretations of Raj rule in India in 1947 (as mediated via Britons to each other), and also points to a danger in reading him too readily as a more radical voice at the BBC on Indian matters (in contrast to Forster). Nonetheless, two broader, and more significant points also emerge from MacNeice's

¹⁵⁶ Haw-haw may also have carried connotations of Lord Haw-Haw (William Joyce), the infamous British Nazi propagandist who broadcast in English for German radio in the Second World War, showcasing the disdain with which the critic held MacNeice's characterisation of Uncle Howard.

¹⁵⁷ 19 August 1947, in Allison ed., 2010: 481.

¹⁵⁸ 19 September 1947, Allison ed., 2010: 496-7.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. *Implicit* of course linking back to the Reginald Coupland suggestion to the BBC to avoid explicit crowing about British achievement in India.

highlighting of the contestations around the ICS's footprint in India and in the 'slipping in of indirect and implicit tribute' to the British in the BBC's features coverage. First, that MacNeice understood the ICS to have been seen in a negative light by Indians themselves. This was likely to have shaped to a degree the casting in *India at First Sight* of the English avuncular figure – tied in the cultural politics of the period and in Forster's broadcasts to a notion of benevolence in British imperial administration – as deeply problematic.¹⁶¹ Second, and positioned dialectically, was the careful negotiation with the portrait of British influence in India, one that would on occasion, as MacNeice noted, and in line with the BBC's top-down directive, have to be done implicitly or in a by-the-way mode and involve speaking in positive terms of the army, the ICS or other branches of Raj rule.¹⁶²

Although the plan for subsidiary programming did not materialise, the final series demonstrated the adjustments made to MacNeice's suggestions in order to incorporate some of these by-the-way topics (especially in the broadcasts not produced by him but instead by Nesta Pain, on a British Indian administrator, and Jack Dillon's feature on the army). In MacNeice's features themselves, these moments were few and far between but nonetheless they did appear, often alongside overt criticism of the British, especially in *The Road to Independence*, the most outspoken of the three features and which explicitly drew attention to India-Ireland parallels. In such moments, the Britons cast into the spotlight – including Allan Octavian Hume of the nineteenth-century ICS who was forced to resign for being too 'outspoken' according to a character in *The Road to Independence* (and who shared similarities with the latter-day figure of Penderel Moon, whose book had impressed MacNeice) – were shown as true sympathisers of India and as early predecessors to the Labour government's moral compass.¹⁶³

MacNeice's features can therefore be seen to have had to harmonise with the BBC's domestic editorial emphasis in the Indian independence context (in a similar way to Forster's) and to have accommodated some of the many faces of imperialism that were part of the projection of British Raj legacy. Where the balance in his features was less in check, such as in

¹⁶¹ Trev Lynn Broughton, 'Promoting a Life: Patronage, Masculinity and Philip Meadow Taylor's *The Story of My Life*', 2006. On avuncularity in the South Asian political context: Sailaja Krishnamurti, 'Uncles of the Nation: Avuncular Masculinity in Partition-Era Politics', 2014.

¹⁶² MacNeice used the word *dialectically* to describe to Gilliam the method of incorporating British achievement implicitly into his features, but also to explain that his programming would aim, as per BBC editorial guidelines, for a *balance* between competing strands of Indian culture and politics. This included incorporating and ensuring parity in references to the Bhagavad Gita (Hindu scripture), the Buddha, Islamic Mughal architecture and again, the two cultural icons of Tagore (Hindu) and Iqbal (Muslim); letter to Gilliam 19 September 1947, Allison ed., 2010: 499.

¹⁶³ Hume (1829-1912) is depicted as writing letters to the graduates of Calcutta University urging them to push for nationalist self-determination, and being mocked for doing so by a *Mem Sahib* figure of Anglo-Indian society; script, 1948, HRC: 25-26, lines 295-304. Other references included John Stuart Mill, William Gladstone, Thomas Macaulay and Labour politician Stafford Cripps; 1948, HRC: 19, 31, 7, 40. MacNeice Papers, Box 7.4. Despite his criticisms of the ICS, MacNeice recommended Moon's book, *Strangers in India*, to Gilliam whilst discussing his critique of the ICS, 19 September 1947, Allison ed., 2010: 494.

India at First Sight's harsh portrait of Uncle Howard, as noted it did generate a degree of press criticism, although interestingly the Uncle figure was not subject to such negativity from the BBC's surveyed listeners in its Third Programme Listening Panel who had 'nothing but praise for the cast'.¹⁶⁴ Thus the harsh and unflattering depictions of ignorant British 'familiar' that were embedded into *India at First Sight* had been more readily accepted by the Third's listeners than by *The Manchester Guardian* (although Third listeners were of course a select, highbrow audience and thus less likely to be offended by such a portrayal); this positive reception was also possibly aided by the framing of the programme through its self-professed lack of objectivity in which the writer-producer had 'gropingly' tried to construct a 'panorama' from his own crash landing into India's transition into independence.¹⁶⁵ In presenting his first sightings and glimpses, it was ultimately – in terms of British cultural influence in India – a particular type of British masculinity that caught MacNeice's eye, one embodied in an avuncularity associated with a haw-hawing British colonial administrator and which his programme proceeded to skewer. As we now see in the next section, focused more closely on Ireland and India, notions of gender were also central to a conceptualisation of the Irish-Indian axis and the Mother Nation.

Mother Nations, Partitions and Subjugations

Of the many voices carried around inside Edward's head in *India at First Sight*, only one is not a familiar: the voice of India itself. Urged to tune into it by his part-Irish shaped Still Voice, Edward learns that India – played in the feature by Dorothy Smith – is of course a multitude of voices, languages, religions, cultures and politics. There are, India tells Edward, 'many millions of me', with this 'me' changing dependent on whether the voice speaking is in Bengali, Pashto, Urdu, Hindi or whether, as she tells him, 'I'm wearing my burqa' or 'I'm wearing the kum-kum'.¹⁶⁶ Listen, urges Still Voice, to 'Mother India'.¹⁶⁷

If masculinity was conjoined in MacNeice's India/Pakistan features to the British colonial public servant, its dialectical partner was the female nation subjugated (and eventually liberated) from that very masculine empire. Yet MacNeice was also critical of gendered notions of nation-state, especially those that imbued both Ireland and India with certain feminine characteristics and venerated them as mothers. In *Autumn Journal* (1939) he

¹⁶⁴ Listener Research Report, 1 April 1948, BBC WAC R19/549, Entertainment, India at First Sight.

¹⁶⁵ Script, 1948, HRC: 1-3.

¹⁶⁶ Script, 1948, HRC: 19, 31, lines 174, 313 and 315. *Kum-kum* refers to the powder traditionally used to make a mark on the forehead to denote Hindu religious devotion (and for women, mostly in a dot-like shape). *Burqa* is the Urdu word for the full-body loose covering worn by Muslim women.

¹⁶⁷ Script, 1948, HRC: 34, line 351.

criticised the cultural-literary personification of Ireland as Kathleen ni Houlihan, an emblem of Irish nationalism:

The shawled woman weeping at the garish altar.
Kathaleen ni Houlihan! Why
Must a country, like a ship or a car, be always female,
Mother or sweetheart?...¹⁶⁸

MacNeice's poem questioned the binarism embedded in ideals of womankind, of framing Ireland as mother or sweetheart or as the female that weeps at the altar for nation and son against a backdrop of political oppression and violence. Some of that criticality extended to his depiction of India in *India at First Sight*, which although played by a woman, and conveyed at moments through gendered tropes (the *burqa* and the *kum-kum*) was also pointedly not referred to as *Mother* except for the one identification by Edward's Still Voice. Furthermore, although Dorothy Smith's character was signposted as *India* in the production script, when MacNeice later came to write the promotional billing for the *Radio Times*, he altered the name from *Mother India* to *The Other*.¹⁶⁹

MacNeice's familiarity with feminist criticism of mothered national ideals at the time when he wrote this billing is not obviously detectable in either his correspondence nor his programmes, but the change to an othering moniker stands out in the archives as markedly contemporary. Certainly in India he did spend time with figures such as Sarojini Naidu (also an acquaintance of Forster's), one of the leading female members of the Indian Congress party and an acclaimed poet.¹⁷⁰ And although he made no direct reference to the infamous usage of the Mother India epithet in Katharine Mayo's highly contentious and widely publicised 1920s book – in which Mayo, an American journalist, took aim at what she saw as India's backwardness through an attack, in part, on India's populist national iconography of the nation-as-goddess – the emphasis on Indian opinion in his letters home, and on his own

¹⁶⁸ XVI, *Autumn Journal*, in *Complete Poems*, 2007: 138. Yeats memorialised the figure as an archetypal symbol of an independent Irish state in the play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, co-written with Lady Gregory in 1902. See Ashok Bery on images of ossification and Ireland in MacNeice's poetry and the links to ni Houlihan, *Cultural Translation and Postcolonial Poetry*, 2007: 77-78.

¹⁶⁹ 'Correction to Billing' from MacNeice to the *Radio Times* editor asking for 'Mother India' to be deleted from the cast list accompanying the printed notification of the programme, and to insert instead 'The Other'; 18 February 1948, BBC WAC R19/549. In the published version Smith is listed as 'The Other'.

¹⁷⁰ See MacNeice's letters to his wife on Naidu as a liaison for contact with progressive cultural circles during his trip in India; August and September 1947, Allison ed., 2010: 481, 491.

contextual reading on India, demonstrates he was likely to have some awareness of the deeply negative Indian reception of the othering encoded in Mayo's book.¹⁷¹

The nation as mother, then, is an interesting point of convergence that nods to some of the tensions between MacNeice's negotiation with Irish and Indian nationalisms, his attempts to highlight India's positioning as an othered entity in western eyes and his criticism of Ireland (as related to neutrality). In one sense, the shift of India to Other from Mother was perhaps part of MacNeice's ongoing critical dialogue with Yeatsian nationalism (as discussed in brief earlier), signalling a break from the romanticised ideals of a national cultural-politics that were synonymous, for him, with a deplorable isolationism. In *The Road to Independence*, the feature that most expressly articulates the India-Ireland parallel, this episode of isolationism lurks as a subtext of a discussion of Second World War cooperation between the characters of the Hindu and the Englishman:

GRAMS:	(<u>bugle call</u>) alarm
HINDU:	There, it's happened again. And you've signed us on for it again without even consulting us.
ENGLISHMAN:	But, my dear fellow, don't you agree with this war?
HINDU:	Of course I do - if it's a war for democracy.
ENGLISHMAN:	Well then -
HINDU:	Well then! If I'm to fight for democracy, you must first give me democracy. If not -
ENGLISHMAN:	If not, what will you do?
HINDU:	Do? I shall non-cooperate...
GRAMS:	(f/u <u>machine gun fire and mortars</u>) ¹⁷²

In the quick-fire exchange between Englishman and Indian, bookended by the sharp sounds of wartime, MacNeice captures the quandary facing the colonial subject, signed up again to a war campaign by its imperial master without due consultation (following on from WWI), and cognisant of its own fate in terms of self-rule hanging in the balance. The lack of resolution in the dialogue (which after the gun fire and mortars moves, in typical MacNeicean fashion, to another scene) implies at the level of coercion involved, and that the Gandhian philosophy of

¹⁷¹ Mayo wrote her bestselling book, *Mother India*, in 1927 as a polemic against Indian nationalism, causing outrage in South Asia and even drawing attention in the House of Commons for the 'anti-Indian atmosphere it had created'; *Manchester Guardian*, 'Commons and the Indian Commission', 23 November 1927: 4.

¹⁷² Script, HRC, 1958: 39, lines 485-491. Grams refers to the vinyl discs used to play in recorded sound effects.

non-cooperation could only go so far in challenging imperial dynamics. And yet, the Indian Hindu agrees that a war for democracy is in principle worth fighting for, a principle not held as dearly, in MacNeice's view of Irish wartime neutrality, in the Irish post-colonial ecology.

On a deeper level, though, the move away from Mother India to The Other was also perhaps part of an attempt to complicate binary notions of India's national make-up, its Hindu-Muslim divisions, and the attendant tragedy of partition which accompanied it. In shifting away from a romanticised ideal of India as mother to a divided people and culture (in an echo of Ireland's *ni Houlihan*) MacNeice was arguably able to query with greater efficacy the political interferences and subjugations that had made these divisions palpable. As India/Other states in *India at First Sight*, the British tendency to place blame for India's political dilemmas at the feet of its supposedly binaristic and divided religious cultures is somewhat misplaced:

UNCLE HOWARD: There you are, Eddie; what did I tell you?
 Take any subject you like...and put it before
 the Indians. For every one who is pro there'll
 always be several who are con. And when it comes
 to religion! Your Hindu and your Muslim will never
 get together; their ways of looking at things are
 so absolutely –
“INDIA”: I don't think it's purely a matter of religion.
 There are other reasons for the gulf between them –
 social, economic reasons. And those perhaps might be
 remedied.¹⁷³

In not playing to the gallery in terms of inscribing maternal qualities to “India”, notably highlighted in the script as the only character whose name was printed in scare quotes (pointing again also to the othering involved in representing India through the western standpoint), MacNeice's character calls out Uncle Howard's stereotyping of India as a country where its inherent polarities and dualisms consign it to a fate of disaffection and disunity. India/Other's answer shows again the subtle but corrective finger-pointing encoded in her/its ripostes to Uncle Howard. In particular, the reference to ‘other reasons’ that might have given rise to the gulf between Hindus and Muslims hints at (but does not spell out) the role played

¹⁷³ Script, 1948, HRC: 35-36, lines 356-357.

the British Raj in fostering a divide-and-rule dynamic, one that can perhaps be 'remedied' once India has regained its independence.

By not over-amplifying tropes of motherhood in the colonised nation-state, MacNeice de-coupled India, to an extent, from concepts of passivity and from certain parallels with the Irish story. As noted, these parallels grew complex when transposed to the paradigm most closely associated with religious or communal division, that of partition. Further, the BBC emphasis on the success of British legacy made the depiction of partition a vexed matter. MacNeice's features, as mentioned, were remarkably quiet on the specifics of partition, even *The Road to Independence*. The Sheikhupura incident, which found its way into a non-broadcast published essay (and only some years after the event, in 1950) and into his published poetry, did not explicitly make it into his on-air features in 1948, demonstrating the sensitivity around the topic in the BBC Features milieu.¹⁷⁴ Writing to Gilliam in September 1947, MacNeice expressly raised the issue of the difficulties for BBC Features in covering the subject:

There's one important point: partition? We can't ignore it but I can't see how we can devote separate programmes to India and Pakistan. Such a radio partitioning would be (1) unfeasible and (2) just as likely to offend as if we did the natural thing and let each programme cover both.¹⁷⁵

A radio partitioning of the features series did not of course occur, with *The Road to Independence* framing its content through the Hindu and Muslim characters who spoke up for the Pakistani and Indian viewpoints. But its absence in the other features, when also conjugated to a move away from a Mother Ireland-Mother India paradigm, may also show how MacNeice registered the difficulties he faced in making neat parallels between the Irish and the Indian situation. In *Portrait of Delhi* this was resolved by replacing the India/Other character with a shape-shifting Indian bird, one who goes from bulbul to magpie to hawk, the view changing as per the bird's form and which switches as the bird flies freely across partitioned lands down below.¹⁷⁶ This technique, arguably borrowing from modernist aerial

¹⁷⁴ In his poem *Letter from India*, MacNeice wrote: 'I have seen Sheikhupura High School/Fester with glaze-eyed refugees/And the bad coin of fear inverted/Under Purana Kila's trees', *Complete Poems*, 2007: 296-297. *India at First Sight* contains an oblique reference to Sheikhupura in a description of Punjab and its refugee camps; script, 1948, HRC: 29, line 296.

¹⁷⁵ 19 September 1947, Allison ed., 2010: 498. See also MacNeice letter to his wife regarding an interview he gave to the *Hindustan Times* in which he tried as a BBC producer to not express too overtly a personal political opinion on India's future, instead citing his Irish background as helping him to understand India; *The Hindustan Times* wrote: 'The present atmosphere of tension in India reminded Mr MacNeice of the situation in Ireland, where he was born, when feelings were running high between those in favour of the Free State and those who did not want to separate from Great Britain'. 25 August 1947, Allison ed., 2010: 485-6.

¹⁷⁶ Script, *Portrait of Delhi*, 1948, HRC: 2, line 18.

perspectives on the nation-state, also fed into what Rajiv Patke has described as ‘a poetics of the oblique’ in Irish literary responses to its Irish partition, where poets, including MacNeice, ‘tried to marginalize the politics of partition by practicing [sic] a poetics of obliquity’.¹⁷⁷ The bird, a metonym for India (nodding perhaps again to Forster’s *A Passage to India*), here functions as part of a radiophonic oblique strategy, then, to provide a boundary-crossing view that steps out of the messy politics of partition on the ground.¹⁷⁸

Opacity and ambiguity, as noted, were deeply encoded into MacNeice’s construction of radio features, functioning in many ways to obscure political critique. MacNeice christened his own feature-making style in this period as one marked by a ‘patchwork’ or ‘mosaic’ aesthetic, in which voices were often doubled up (using the same actors to play two, sometimes contrasting, roles) or where they remained nameless, at times overlapping with each other by speaking over the ends of each other’s sentences.¹⁷⁹ Sound too, including location recorded actuality, music and sound effects, crisscrossed with voice and not always in the conventional manner associated with features grammar. Often, as in MacNeice’s travel portraits (1947–1951) and in moments in the three 1948 Indian broadcasts, sound and speech collided in jarring or sharply juxtaposed counterpoints which, when combined with a pointed lack of references from the programme’s characters (again a MacNeicean hallmark), signalled a general absence of signposting, that is, the customary radio codes which clarify and contextualise for the listener what is actually taking place.¹⁸⁰

The varied mechanics and meanings of this radiophonic architecture cannot be detailed in depth here, but what is of concern in the context of India is the overwhelming nature of the audio as listening experience. As I have written elsewhere, part of MacNeice’s motivation in composing sound-and-speech patchworks (jigsaws with parts missing to utilise his description) was to bring to air a listening experience that simulated and approximated that of travelling and journeying.¹⁸¹ Discombobulation (in sound) placed the listener at home in the position of traveller, specifically that of the English tourist full of ignorance of cultures such as India and attended by familiars of the mind. And this proved to be an effective production approach as many listeners to the India series were suitably overwhelmed. Contributors to the Third Programme’s listening panel, for example, noted that though they

¹⁷⁷ ‘Partition and its Aftermath: Poetry and History in Northern Ireland’, 2010: 24. On aerial viewpoints and modernism: Gillian Beer, ‘The Island and the Aeroplane’, 1990: 265–290; Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, 2010: 25–29.

¹⁷⁸ Forster used an unidentified Indian wild bird as emblematic of India’s unknowability to the British; *Passage*, Chapter 8, 1924.

¹⁷⁹ See for example the opening continuity announcement (cue) written by MacNeice for *Portrait of Rome* in which he described the programme that was to follow as a ‘patchwork’ similar to a ‘jigsaw with most of it missing’ (22 June 1947 BBC HS); programme report, BBC WAC R19/953. In *India at First Sight* the voices used to signify India’s cultural pluralism in a set of scenes were labelled as Voices A, B, C and so on in the script but were unnamed on air; script, title page, 1948, HRC. The technique of voices speaking over each other was best exemplified by *Portrait of Athens* (18 November 1951, BBC HS); BBC SA, time code: 03’58 – 06’10.

¹⁸⁰ Lodhi, 2018: 228–232.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

had enjoyed in *India at First Sight*. The Listener Research Report concluded that ‘Louis MacNeice’s conception of India, embodied as it was in a kaleidoscopic pattern of dialogue, characterisation, poetry’, had been enjoyed by the majority of the panel listenership as they felt it ‘symbolised to a great extent, the intensity, complexity and bewildering diversity of life in the sub-continent’.¹⁸² Nonetheless it was noted that some listeners had ‘found it such a varied “mosaic” as to tax their powers of concentration very severely, with a minority pointedly not enjoying it for this very reason and finding the patchwork effect to be “muddled” and “scrappy”’.¹⁸³ At one level, then, MacNeice’s mosaic-like structuring can be heard as a strategy to deliver a sonic experience that aurally concretised the narrative of first sightings and crash landings. But by the same token his 1948 features also sound remarkably orientalist in their design, presenting an India overwhelming in its multiplicity and otherworldliness.¹⁸⁴

In this sense, MacNeice’s features were bounded, politically, by the artifice of their own construction. In centering the Westerner abroad as the main point-of-audition (the sonic equivalent of point-of-view), the bite of any encoded critiques of British imperialism, through character and speech, became somewhat blunted or diffused in the kaleidoscopic complexity assaulting the listener’s senses. Moreover despite an effort to distance himself from gendered or predictable responses to India (drawing on an Irish sensibility) MacNeice had in fact showcased a conception of India as Other, one anchored arguably, as Michael McAteer and others have shown (regarding his Indian poetry), in a romanticised Irish tradition of ‘Oriental Excess’.¹⁸⁵ The utter superfluity of India as sensory overload, and as conveyed in his programming, chimed in to a degree with a strand of mysticism-infused readings of India by various Irish writers, most notably by Yeats.¹⁸⁶ An emphasis, therefore, on the ‘dizzying environment’ of India via the radio architectonic underscored a different set of Irish-inflected resonances (orientalising ones), which in their own way did a disservice to the real nationalistic aims of Indians and which ultimately blurred the lines of political critique that shaped MacNeice’s features.¹⁸⁷

Conclusion

At the juncture of Indian independence, the role of the BBC and its cultural programming in

¹⁸² Listener Research Report, 1 April 1948, BBC WAC R19/549.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ See India/Other’s description of itself as ‘otherworldly’ and accompanying scenes which convey images of India as exotic wonderment; *India at First Sight*, script, 1948, HRC: 38-43.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Oriental Excess: Yeats, Wilde, MacNeice’, 2020: 53-57.

¹⁸⁶ This brand of Irish Orientalism was rooted in the Literary Revival period and centred on yoking Irish folkloric culture to a history of Eastern mysticism. See *Mystic Modernity* by Ashim Dutta, 2021.

¹⁸⁷ McAteer, 2020: 54.

promoting to British publics a morally idealised version of imperial legacy was significant due to the reach of domestic radio across the British Isles (especially Home Service), and the press attention generated by its India-related output. The weight of responsibility in mediating the onset of empire's official end – and the sheer symbolism of India as a pillar of empire – was not lost on the BBC's senior personnel. The core aim became to mediate an idea of India, and its altered relationship to Britain, by framing it within a personalised discourse of partnership (and as encapsulated by Forster's talks as one key example), so as to advance support for the Commonwealth. Although in keeping with the wider political aims of British foreign policy, targeted towards soon-to-be post-colonial nations, domestic cultural broadcasting on friendly relations was instead designed to champion the Commonwealth imaginary for British publics who were considered by some at the BBC to be far too apathetic on matters of empire.

Within this mediation of imperial rhetoric (which had shifted generally in this period towards notions of amity, albeit asymmetrically constructed), and in the relationships between writers and BBC staff and departments, a number of conflicting and contradictory impulses and factors were at play. William Haley, Director General from 1944 to 1952, represented a harder line of sentiment within the Corporation which advocated for a strong triumphalist tone in rehearsing British achievement in terms of the Raj's record. Others, including J. Grenfell Williams, the Head of Colonial Services in 1948, subscribed to the notion of India and the empire being acquired through a 'fit of absent-mindedness', urging caution in the use of on-air language in relation to imperial rule; others still, such as Laurence Gilliam and his staff in Features including Louis MacNeice, felt that crowing about the Raj was 'inopportune' and that radio could and should be adapted to opaquely, and occasionally more explicitly, criticise the British in India.¹⁸⁸

In finding a way through these contestations, the BBC, as it so often did, went for the middle ground. Tom Burns has rightly described this *modus operandi* as a 'politics of accommodation', that is, negotiating a compromise, always, between 'the national interest and the professionalism of broadcasting'.¹⁸⁹ In the case of India this meant not openly or harshly criticising the Raj (but also not overtly bragging about its legacy, or least not too much), nor siding with any major faction in the sub-continent's political landscape in keeping with the editorial principles of neutrality and balance. Marrying opacity to political content was therefore a core objective in covering Indian independence through cultural output in the

¹⁸⁸ Memo from Grenfell Williams to Head of European Services suggesting a proposed series entitled *From Domination to Partnership* have its title changed to *The Growth of the British Commonwealth* given, he argued, it was not a desire to dominate but rather absent-mindedness that had led to British imperial expansion. 10 February 1948, BBC WAC R51/678 Talks, Series Commonwealth Empire A-Z, 1940-1951. MacNeice to Gilliam, 1948, in Allison ed., 2010: 496.

¹⁸⁹ Burns wrote on the BBC's early sixties milieu, but his assessments can be usefully (though broadly) extrapolated to the late forties BBC ecology, as well as to today. 1977: 191.

immediate moments surrounding decolonisation, one that suited (certain) radio-writers. By utilising fictional and radiogenic narrative techniques aligned to specific forms, including the intimacy of the talk and the multivocality of the feature, a range of tricky political junctures, both contemporary and historical, could be addressed with a degree of obliquity, as evidenced by Forster's parting as friends model or MacNeice's first sighting of India as an independent nation. Crucially, both Forster and MacNeice's selection by the BBC to narrate the story of India's new beginnings, and Britain's imperial endings, to Home audiences was tied to a privileging of status, where the prestige of high-profile literary writers (one of whom had written an iconic book on India) would express to listeners the due importance given by the BBC to the momentousness of India's de-coupling from British rule.

Writers, their highbrow status, and political comment in the context of empire alert us to the 'habitus' of the BBC in this period (linking back to Bourdieu), in which internal expectations and norms were formed and modulated through interplays of individualised subjectivity and wider social relations.¹⁹⁰ The BBC's habitus functioned largely through its personnel's interests and their associations of class, gender and educational background, including those of its starry radio-writers, its production staff as well as D-Gs and senior leaders, many of whom were linked to the 'two faces' of the ICS and other imperialist networks. But it also operated through an accepted or assumed way of doing things in matters of actual broadcasting.¹⁹¹ These customary and tacit modes of production praxis were key, in addition to networks of privilege, to the relationship between successful writers and the BBC, especially on matters of cultural politics. A 'stiffening' of language, for example, was both required by BBC personnel and implicitly understood by Forster as referring to a greater personalisation of India without direct comment on the political affiliations of competing Indian nationalist groups.¹⁹² MacNeice, as a staff producer, needed even less prompting, producing features that incorporated subtle nods towards imperial achievement (as per Haley's wishes) with a more vociferous critique of the Raj (a stridency also made possible by his staff status). This shared and often unspoken understanding of editorial limitations – in conjunction with the prestige of literary status – resulted in both Forster and MacNeice enjoying long and successful (though dissimilar) BBC careers, allowing them to pivot from different networks and demographics with an ease that was not accessible to many other writers in the mid-century period, as we see later in this thesis.

¹⁹⁰ Bourdieu defined habitus as an internalised normative mode of being, nurtured by processes of socialisation and mediating between the individual and the structures of social relations. 'The Genesis of the Concepts of Habitus and of Field', 1985.

¹⁹¹ Burns, 1977: 122-154.

¹⁹² Alford memo, BBC WAC RCONT1, Forster E.M., File 7 1945-1946.

From within the BBC's habitus, both writers fostered very different ideals of an Indian-British relationship and as such set certain standards or 'tastes', in the Bordieuan lexicon, for domestic publics regarding the juncture of imperial disconnection (via Home, Third, *The Listener* and for those potentially listening in from Ireland). Forster's version promoted an unequally-configured friendship model that justified Britain's continuing association with India for its own cultural gains, anchored in an ICS-praxis that privileged intellectual and aristocratic sectors of Indian society and the men in those spheres. MacNeice's template, arguably aimed at Ireland as much as Britain, implicitly nodded to the shortcomings of Irish wartime neutrality in contrast to India and highlighted in slightly stronger terms British culpability in imperial injustice and expropriation. But his uses of the trope of ignorant Western tourist and a radiophonic patchwork form meant that India was presented again as exotic marvel, a culture and landscape of excess. Though Kipling's India (a romanticised but aggressively racialised view of the subcontinent) was considered by both writers as outmoded and deplorable, their own iterations were circumscribed by limitations which did not accord India as much of an equal footing as may appear at first glance.

For Foster (and for the BBC itself), some awareness of these limitations may have played a part in a move away from broadcasts to India after independence (where programming became to an extent more decisively voiced by South Asians) and to a new allegiance to Third Programme (via Home Service in 1946) where his persona of avuncular, highbrow intellectual who could speak for himself was freely celebrated. In MacNeice's case, visiting India in 1947 invoked a far stronger sense of a fierce awakening, segueing into a greater engagement with coloniality's endings or its messy continuations.¹⁹³ Yet the emphasis on 'exaggeration' and 'stylisation' in his treatment of imperial cultural politics grew to be somewhat out of step with the BBC's slow and selective move towards a greater realism in this regard.¹⁹⁴ In 1959, MacNeice submitted a synopsis for a proposed allegorical feature on apartheid in South Africa, *The Pin is Out*, that was rejected on the grounds of its lack of forthrightness. P.H. Newby, the Controller of Third Programme, wrote to MacNeice urging him to 'move towards realism' and to aim for a 'bolder treatment' of the specificities of racial segregation; hiding behind fable-like techniques, he wrote, in an effort to 'avoid trouble with South Africa House' was not perhaps as necessary as MacNeice thought.¹⁹⁵ For MacNeice, there was every reason to be concerned given the Colonial Office had intruded into Features

¹⁹³ This included *The Birth of Ghana*, 22 February 1957, BBC HS; *Collected Poems*, 2015.

¹⁹⁴ MacNeice, defending his features treatment, in a memo to Third Programme Controller, P.H. Newby, 13 October 1959, BBC WAC RCONT1 MacNeice, Louis, Scriptwriter File 1, 1941-1961.

¹⁹⁵ 6 October 1959, BBC WAC, *ibid*.

production before, including his own ‘quite innocuous’ feature on the independence of Ghana; further, what Newby viewed as an over-simplification of the subject was one he considered to be so vexed that it demanded a transposition to parable.¹⁹⁶

In the end, the programme idea was shelved and MacNeice was unable to revisit the topic before his death in 1963. The case of *The Pin is Out* is a revealing one, showing by the end of the fifties a gesture within the BBC’s cultural programming, at least on Third Programme, towards a more explicit take on the politics of race and colonial legacy. And yet, as we see in the next chapter, the fifties were also a decade in which obfuscation and elision remained firmly entrenched in cultural broadcasts in relation to southern and central Africa, specifically Rhodesia, and especially when the politics of race intersected with that of gender.

¹⁹⁶ 13 October 1959, BBC WAC, *ibid.*

CHAPTER THREE

Drought and Deluge:

Doris Lessing, Muriel Spark and Gendered Colonial Settlerdom

Introduction

Decolonisation across the British empire gathered momentum in the fifties as African nations started to win their freedom towards the end of the decade and into the early sixties. Yet for those countries marked by white-minority rule linked to colonial settlerdom and subject to a different set of imperial mechanisms, in particular South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe), the transition to full independence was far slower.¹ In the case of Rhodesia, it had been granted self-governing status in 1923, unlike Ghana, Nigeria or Kenya which remained under direct British colonial administration (as with India) until securing independence in 1957, 1960 and 1963 respectively. Correspondingly, black-majority rule for white-run, semi-independent colonies would not be secured for decades to come (in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe not until 1980). In the mid-century moment, then, political transformation on the African continent was marked by sharp contrast and variable pace, surging ahead in West and East Africa whilst progressing tentatively, and more problematically, in the South.²

In relaying these developments to British audiences, the BBC's home airwaves were shaped again by the privileging of (certain kinds of) white voice and experience. There continued to be a dearth of indigenous speakers from countries that were soon to be, or had newly become, independent, as with South Asia a decade earlier. Literary or cultural programming related to Africa through features and talks remained largely the preserve of white Africans (or Britons), especially on the Home Service. On occasion black African voices could be heard, as in a 1953 talk by a young doctor who recalled his shock at coming to Britain to start medical training and seeing 'white men actually waiting on other white men'.³ Talks in this vein were rarities,

¹ Settler colonialism was markedly different from metropolitan (or classical) colonialism in its aim to replace indigenous communities with that of an invasive settler population. Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism*, 1999.

² Political developments in what became Zimbabwe included the formation of the Central African Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, set up in 1953. This was followed by the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 under the leadership of Ian Smith, whose government enshrined white political rule until the election of Robert Mugabe in 1980. I refer to the country as Rhodesia in this chapter in keeping with the naming convention of the fifties but also to make explicit the link between colonialist Cecil Rhodes (1853-1902) and the political subjugation of Zimbabwe in this period.

³ Billing, *Radio Times, An African Came to England* by Seth Cudjoe, 1 April 1953, BBC HS. Accessed via BBC Genome 25 February 2020.

however, sitting in the schedule alongside Africa-related output that often spoke of darkness, primitivity and an unease with the modern world.⁴ On the Third Programme the tone was a touch more nuanced; black African speakers could arguably be heard more prominently giving voice to emerging cultural and political issues. Yet even on the Third it remained the case that a white British presenter – academic, journalist and so forth – almost always framed black speakers (a structural inequity that continues, with more prominent exceptions, to this day).⁵ A colour bar, of sorts, therefore still existed on the BBC's home networks as the second half of the twentieth century began to unfold.

Given the small number of black African literary figures whose work was circulated via the BBC to British publics (despite some notable exceptions, on which more shortly), this chapter moves into the fifties to investigate the domestic radio-cultural mediation of African decolonisation, via challenges to colonial settlerdom, through the output and experiences of two white writers considered to varying degrees as Rhodesian: novelists Muriel Spark (1918–2006) and Doris Lessing (1919–2013). Both first contributed to the BBC in the fifties, having arrived in Britain from Rhodesia in the preceding decade as single mothers keen to forge serious literary careers. In the decade and a half that followed Spark became a prolific radio-writer, winning a coveted Prix Italia along with producer Christopher Holme in 1962 for the adaptation of her own novel *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, and penning a number of other well-received programmes including *The Dry River Bed*, a 1959 Third Programme dramatised feature set in a thinly veiled English settler community in Rhodesia.⁶ Lessing, meanwhile, began the fifties with two Home Service talks that she wrote and presented on the culture and landscape of her Rhodesian childhood but her relationship with the BBC, and her attempts to write radio content on the issue of colonialism in Southern Africa, were less fruitful.⁷ By the end of the decade her play *Before the Deluge* – first shown on a small London stage in 1953 and then revised into a new production, *Mr. Dollinger*, in 1958 – had been submitted for radio adaptation several times and on each occasion had been rejected by the BBC on the grounds of poor taste. In its explicit depiction of the excesses of white settler racism and of the violence that would likely erupt (or need to do so) to loosen the reins of colonial power, Lessing's

⁴ For example, *Initiation into the Twentieth Century*, in which a range of white British and black Caribbean – not black African – voices discussed what was described in the promotional material as Africa's difficult transition from primitivism to modernity. 1 July 1954, BBC HS.

⁵ Examples include *Contemporary West African Portraits*, 11 December 1959, BBC TP. The presenter was British journalist David Williams.

⁶ Other broadcasts written by Spark, some of which were published in a selection of her radio scripts as *Voices at Play* in 1961, include: on Third Programme – *Frankenstein and the Last Man*, 1 February 1951; *The Interview*, 21 May 1958; *The Comforters*, 17 December 1958; *The Dry River Bed*, 4 August 1959; *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, 7 October 1960, and then in a revised production, 27 May 1962 (which won the Prix Italia); *The Danger Zone*, 15 February 1961; on Home Service – *Greetings to John Masefield*, 1 June 1958; *The Poet's House*, 7 July 1960; 'You Should Have Seen The Mess', 25 July 1960; *The Party Through the Wall*, 23 August 1957; on Light Programme – *My Favourite Villain: Heathcliff*, on *Woman's Hour*, 12 October 1960.

⁷ *Crazy Neighbours*, 3 April 1952; *Memories of the Vlei*, 15 August 1952.

proposed radio play crossed editorial red lines, marking her work in the words of one BBC script editor as 'beyond the pale'.⁸ She would not write substantially for the Corporation again.

Spark and Lessing's varied trajectories at the BBC have so far not been placed in productive dialogue with one another and, in large part, have also been overlooked by literary and broadcast historians in their singular formations. Doris Lessing's contributor files post-1963 at the BBC Written Archives Centre had, before this study, never before been subject to requests to be vetted and viewed, a surprising oversight given her Nobel Laureate status. Spark's entanglements with the BBC and radio have been better documented given the breadth of her radio-writing and due to her brief wartime secretarial experience in a covert black propaganda radio unit (headed by Sefton Delmer).⁹ Yet critical attention has tended to neglect the Rhodesian dimensions of her radio-work, concentrating instead on explorations of auditory technology in her published fiction.¹⁰

A comparative analysis of Spark and Lessing in the context of Rhodesia and post-war BBC Radio is valuable, as this chapter shows, as it casts light on several significant factors regulating the radio treatment of Southern Africa in the fifties, both complicating and deepening our understanding of the nexus between writers, the BBC and the cultural politics of colonialism. The first of these is the role played by the differing internal dynamics of the BBC's discrete networks, departments and interrelated clusters of personnel. Whilst MacNeice's experience with *The Pin is Out*, as mentioned previously, may have indicated a move by the end of the fifties towards greater clarity or forthrightness on issues of Southern African racial segregation (at least on Third Programme), Spark's and Lessing's engagements with the subject, and especially Lessing's, illustrate an aversion within other BBC sectors to speaking too unequivocally on the matter. Lessing's proposed play in particular ran into trouble with the Drama department headed by Val Gielgud, considered to be fairly conservative in comparison to Features head Laurence Gilliam who, as noted, was a risk-taker (as evidenced by his backing of MacNeice's revised India series).¹¹ Spark's radio successes were therefore partly rooted in her close association with the Features Unit. The unit oversaw the production of *The Dry River Bed* which, akin to MacNeice's Indian broadcasts, was relatively forthright in highlighting some of the unjust and racialising aspects of colonial rule through the careful manipulation of metaphor and symbolism. Departmental politics and their

⁸ Letter from Frederick Bradnum, Acting Script Editor, Drama (Sound), to actor Oliver Burt explaining the difficulties with adapting the play for radio broadcast; 24 July 1953. BBC WAC, Scriptwriter, Doris Lessing File 1 1953-1962.

⁹ Delmer worked for the BBC's German service at the start of the war and was then recruited by the Political Warfare Executive in September 1940 to launch the black propaganda unit. It broadcast fake news to Germany through the use of German POWs from 1941 to war's end. Delmer, *Trail Sinister*, 1961; *Black Boomerang*, 1962.

¹⁰ Patricia Waugh, 'Muriel Spark's 'Informed Air'', 2018; Amy Woodbury Tease, 'Call and Answer', 2016.

¹¹ Gielgud (1900-1981) held responsibility for radio drama at the BBC, barring a few stints in television, from 1929 until 1963. On Gielgud's cultural conservatism see Chignell, *British Radio Drama*, 2019: 26-28.

intersections with the mechanics of radio form undergirded the place and position of writers, and their access to the crafting of on-air content, to a great extent. This chapter therefore pays close attention again to the multifariousness of the BBC's habitus when assessing the domestic circulation of end-of-empire discourse in the context of African white settlerdom.

Second, and crucially, the examples of Lessing and Spark are critical in signalling the gendered dimensions of colonial ideologies and their post-war BBC mediation. Unlike MacNeice and Forster both writers, as young women trying to eke out a living at the start of their careers, had to be firmly pro-active in searching for freelance work with the BBC. Additionally, in seeking greater remuneration or creative control they were more readily interpreted as troublesome, earning them reputations in notably gendered terminology. There was, as one senior producer noted regarding Spark, a 'general feeling' that she was 'difficult'.¹² Their successes at the BBC were dependent as a result, and not insubstantially, on good relations with the largely male production staff (in Spark's case with Holme and with Features producer Rayner Heppenstall), though Lessing's 1952 talks were overseen by Talks producer Leonie Cohn, an important obverse figure in this regard and the subject of more detailed analysis in the following chapter. Female authors, even when writing of colonial matters, also found themselves nudged towards women's programming on the Light Programme (a network not closely associated with intellectually hefty content unlike the Home and the Third), and which in the fifties grew in prominence with the popularity of the daytime serial *Mrs. Dale's Diary* (first broadcast in 1948 and running until the sixties), the launch of *The Archers* (1951) and the maturation of *Woman's Hour* (aired from 1946 onwards). Tensions between the domesticated discourses of these programmes and more overtly political or colonial-related content modulated too, therefore, certain cultural mediations of empire.¹³ Lessing again fell foul of the BBC's (largely undeclared) editorial regulations on matters of taste when a draft script she submitted in the fifties for *Mrs. Dale's Diary* was also rejected having been judged to be too 'extreme'.¹⁴ What was considered appropriate by the BBC for 'feminine' narratives, then, at a time when feminism was perhaps to some degree in 'abeyance' in Britain, and the interrelations with the subjectivities of gender in the transmission of colonial rhetoric, is under close examination in this chapter.¹⁵

¹² Lorna Moore, Chief Producer of Arts Talks, in a memo to Editor, General Talks, on the reasons why Muriel Spark's appearances (and her writing) dwindled on Home and Third after 1964. 26 January 1967, BBC WAC RCONT12, Mrs. Muriel Spark, Speaker File II 1963-1967. On women and difficulty see Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 2017.

¹³ On mid-century women's programming and the politics of domesticity see Michele Hilmes, 'Front Line Family', 2007; Kristin Skoog, 'Neither Worker nor Housewife but Citizen', 2017.

¹⁴ Lessing on an unsuccessful draft she sent to *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, sometime in the second half of the fifties, in the second volume of her autobiography, *Walking in the Shade*, 1997: 126.

¹⁵ Skoog, 2017: 957; Sinfield, 1997: 230. I complicate the idea of abeyance later but it relates here to a broad scholarly consensus on the long fifties as a period marked by a stalling or a suspension of swift progress in certain aspects of feminist progress.

More than any other writer pairing in this thesis, Lessing and Spark remind us that the power relations of gender were not part of a 'superficial patina of empire' but rather, as Anne McClintock has argued, 'fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise'.¹⁶ Central to this was the mythologising of colonially-expropriated land as empty space (*terra nullius*) mastered by imperial force and made habitable by the domestication undertaken by colonial women (chiefly wives and daughters).¹⁷ In early twentieth-century Rhodesia however, as in other British colonies and dominions marked by settler colonialism (such as New Zealand and Canada), population imbalances were in place due to a lack of infrastructure (including hospitals), which coupled with the arduousness of travel discouraged many British women from settling there. By the interwar period improved travel and health conditions, in conjunction with campaigns encouraging women to move to colonies to attend to the wellbeing of settler men, were taking effect although ratios remained heavily skewed (in favour of males).¹⁸ For Lessing, in interwar Rhodesia from a very young age as a child of English settlers, and for Spark, who moved there in the thirties as the wife of a Scottish teacher, it was these dynamics and disparities that fundamentally moulded their understandings of colonialism and its likely endings.¹⁹

Unknown to each other in Southern Rhodesia, both authors shared an intense distaste for the gendered and racialised hierarchies of 'ignorant' settler communities, as Spark termed them, which they were forced to inhabit.²⁰ Their African fiction – encompassing Lessing's debut novel *The Grass is Singing* (1950) and *African Stories* (1951 and 1954) and Spark's short stories, especially 'Bang-bang You're Dead' (1961) – made reference to the violence that permeated settler life, at times touching on the 'shooting affairs' rife in colonies where the strong presence of a 'marauding white man' syndrome led to murder (carried out by white men, either of each other or of white women in addition to the killing of black Africans).²¹ In their fifties radio content (defined here as on-air output *and* unsuccessfully pitched material), southern Africa was similarly shown to be a landscape brimming with colonial male brutality, or with the threat of it, a place where the anti-colonial white female protagonist (constructed along autobiographical lines by Lessing and Spark) was both caught in the crossfires of

¹⁶ *Imperial Leather*, 1995: 6-7.

¹⁷ McClintock, 1995: 16-17.

¹⁸ Barbara Bush, 'Feminising Empire?', 2016: 513; Emma Robertson, 'Gendering Transnational Radio', 2020: 198-199.

¹⁹ In an undated notebook concerning Africa Spark wrote she had never lived in 'such an ignorant society as that in Southern Rhodesia in the late thirties and early forties'; NLS Acc. 10989/209, Muriel Spark Archive. See also Lessing on the expectations placed on her to follow the preoccupations of Rhodesian settler women, including racialised domestic discourse on black servants; *Going Home*, 1957: 53.

²⁰ Spark noted in her autobiography her isolation amongst the British and European women in Rhodesia and of how she 'would have loved to have someone like Doris [Lessing] to talk to'. *Curriculum Vitae*, 1992: 125.

²¹ 'Shooting affairs' was the British term for gun violence which broke out as a result of white male settler competition for the attention of the small number of white women. See Spark, 1992: 126; also, Marilyn Lake, 'Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man', 1999.

imperial violence and tried to set herself apart from it.

Under scrutiny, then, in this chapter is the position of the mid-century anti-colonial British settler woman, a position both complex and vexed.²² White female settlers, to quote McClintock, were ‘ambiguously complicit’ in the project of empire, ‘both as colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting’.²³ Lessing’s and Spark’s lived experiences, and the (part-)autobiographical characters or narrators of their radio-works, attest to the fact that anti-imperial British women in colonies were to an extent ‘victim[s]’ in the colonial encounter.²⁴ And yet, under their western eyes – to borrow Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s phrase – the plight of black women (and black men) was consistently depicted as largely subordinate to the self-realisation of the anti-colonial white heroine.²⁵ In this sense Lessing’s and Spark’s writings, as many Zimbabwean feminists and other scholars have asserted, colluded in ‘reproducing the very colonial ideologies that they simultaneously condemn[ed] fiercely’, and which in turn could be viewed as contributing to the racialised hierarchies within British feminism which held sway for decades to come.²⁶

Against this overall background my analysis interrogates the varied uses made by Lessing and Spark in their radio-works of a symbolism of *drought* and *deluge*, of a land bled dry by colonialist expropriation in which forces of natural growth – of flora and fauna, floods and torrents – intrude momentarily but also threaten submersion. These forces of nature are variously tied in Lessing’s and Spark’s output to the figure of the anti-colonial white woman (or girl) but also, loosely and hazily, to an idealised and out-of-reach black African landscape. It is one portrayed as (would-be) fertile and verdant – though laced with the potential to swarm and swamp – whilst the colonially-settled veld (flatland), so celebrated in the frontier fiction of Victorian/Edwardian writers such as John Buchan, is shown to be arid and dessicated.²⁷ These tropes indicate the presence of what Anthony Chennells, writing on Lessing, has described as a ‘European romanticism’ at play (echoing Said on Forster), one that did not accord black Africans a ‘new nationhood’ but rather imagined a fabled Eden in which the anti-colonial white heroine, contradictorily, was cast as an ‘Eve’ (her sympathies residing

²² On the racialised nature of anti-imperial British feminism in the context of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century India – reliant on notions of ‘primitive’ Oriental womanhood – see Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History*, 1994.

²³ 1995: 5-6.

²⁴ ‘I could not help it, I am also a victim’, thinks the white girl protagonist (of the injustices carried out by white colonial settlerdom) after her meeting with an African chief in Lessing’s *The Old Chief Mshlanga*, 1951: 56. See also Vron Ware on the imperial white woman as victim, *Beyond the Pale*, 1992.

²⁵ ‘Under Western Eyes’, 1984.

²⁶ Sarah De Mul, ‘Doris Lessing, Feminism and the Representation of Zimbabwe’, 2009: 37. On the colonial-racial dimensions of British feminism in the second half of the twentieth century see Hazel Carby, ‘White Woman Listen!’, 1982; Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, ‘Challenging Imperial Feminism’, 1984.

²⁷ See Bill Schwarz on Buchan and the significance of the veld as romanticised-adventure frontier; *The White Man’s World*, 2011: 208-275.

with an essentialised black Africa and yet with her primacy unchallenged).²⁸

Though the iterations of this imagery were markedly different in the outputs of Lessing and Spark (as this chapter explores), in broad terms the heavy use of such symbolism denoted the continued complications of speaking too explicitly on matters of race and colonial legacy through the BBC's channels (as with India in the previous decade). In the case of women and Rhodesia there were the added difficulties of avoiding 'extreme' or direct comment on gender-related problematics (of bodies, violence and the excesses of colonial male behaviour). Further, there was the awkwardness of acknowledging the persistence of hostile white settlerism which swam against the tide of Commonwealth-anchored narratives of progress, exchange and partnership.

In thinking back to MacNeice's interchanges with P.H. Newby at the end of the decade over the role of realism and plain-speaking in relation to apartheid, it is constructive to remember the fifties was a decade of cultural-political flux. Often cast as an era of greyness (of fog-drenched post-war austerity), it moved fitfully towards a time of affirmative 'colour', to borrow Lyn Nead's formulation, that is, towards the mass immigration and (arguably limited) sexual liberation that marked the sixties.²⁹ Though there was 'a clear drift towards the modern', social and sexual conservatism and prudence and traditionalism in many ways remained in place (not least in the sphere of women's rights).³⁰ At the BBC 'stolid' traditionalist values were embodied by former military man Ian Jacob, who took over from William Haley as the Director-General in 1952 and held the reins until 1959.³¹ Another scion of an Indian Civil Service family, Jacob had previously run the BBC's Overseas Service, which included overseeing negotiations regarding African broadcasting. His particular brand of internationalism, affiliated as a rule to Colonial Office and Commonwealth priorities, was accompanied by a generally cautious approach to matters of politics in the arena of broadcasting, marking this period of BBC history as one that tended in the main towards circumspection and vigilance. As I now discuss, in negotiating these lines as an anti-colonial African woman writer, Doris Lessing found herself cast as difficult and troublesome.

She's From Africa

The very first contact between the BBC and Doris Lessing was, unusually, initiated not by the writer (or her agent) nor by the Corporation. It was Lessing's aunt, resident in Britain and

²⁸ 'Reading Doris Lessing's Rhodesian Stories in Zimbabwe', 1990: 17; Robin Visel, *White Eve in the Petrified Garden*, unpublished PhD thesis, 1987.

²⁹ *The Tiger in the Smoke*, 2017.

³⁰ David Kynaston, *Family Britain*, 2009: 11.

³¹ David Hendy, *The BBC*, 2022: 312.

evidently a keen radio listener, who wrote to *Woman's Hour* presenter Olive Shapley in March 1950 asking for her niece, an emerging novelist, to be considered as a contributor.³² Lessing's first book *The Grass is Singing* – the story of a white female settler's mental breakdown in Southern Rhodesia and her eventual killing by the black male domestic servant she baits and castigates – had been published in Britain and America earlier that year. A 'wild success' for its publishers, the novel earned rave reviews as a psychological portrait of 'White South Africa', one that presented an 'indirect and angry comment on [its] racial intolerance'.³³ In her letter to Shapley, Lessing's aunt referred briefly to the literary credentials generated by this reception but was also careful to underline the fact that Lessing had, in her view, a 'very attractive speaking voice and good looks' in addition to (or perhaps in spite of) her curious Rhodesian upbringing.³⁴ These feminine qualities, it was implied, in conjunction with a 'diffident' manner – a subtle nod again to the author's incorporation of feminine modes of humility and modesty – as well her writerly insights into colonial settlerdom emphasised a suitability for *Woman's Hour*.³⁵

Lessing's introduction to the BBC, though handled by a relative media outsider (her aunt), point to both the expectations of the standard entryways to the BBC for a young female writer in 1950 (via the Light Programme and *Woman's Hour*) and the demarcations that circumscribed women's media output on sensitive topical matters, especially racialised and gendered violence in the context of colonialism. The characteristics so valorised here – acclaim married to diffidence and attractiveness (especially of voice) – allude to the primacy of a *softening of edges*: of harsh or 'shrill' female voices, of pushy writers aiming to gain a media foothold, and of hard political critique (encoded in the plot of Lessing's novel but notably not referred to directly in the letter).³⁶ The tensions created by this softening, and a lack of familiarity with the expectations in which they were rooted, were in many ways decisive in moulding Lessing's image as an African female writer in this period and in shaping her experiences with the BBC over the following decade. Having left Southern Rhodesia in 1949 (with the manuscript of her first novel), Lessing's arrival in Britain, as the child of a mother from an 'upper middle class' British elite, was in one sense a return home.³⁷ And yet, never having set foot in Britain, its metropolitan cultures were largely alien to her. She would, in the

³² Letter from Margaret McVeagh (Lessing's aunt) to Shapley, 17 March 1950; BBC WAC RCONT1, Speaker, Doris Lessing, File 1 1950-1962.

³³ *Evening Standard*, 7 March 1950: 11; *The Observer*, 12 March 1950: 7. 'South Africa' was used in the British press in this period to denote regions of colonial settlerdom in Southern Africa, including Rhodesia. Lessing herself described her debut as a 'wild success'; *Review*, 2 April 1971, BBC Radio 4; BBC SA, time code: 07'56-08'33.

³⁴ BBC WAC RCONT1, Speaker, Doris Lessing, File 1 1950-1962.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ On the policing of women's voices on radio and concerns over harsh aural qualities such as 'shrillness' see Anne McKay, 'Speaking Up', 1988; Anne Karpf, *The Human Voice*, 2006: 99-109.

³⁷ *Walking in the Shade*, 1997: 107.

fifties, view 'the English' as both insider and outsider through the double vantage point of migrant colonial and genteel-born Englishwoman.³⁸ Unlike Spark, (who went to Rhodesia from Scotland as an adult), then, Lessing was unaccustomed to the British media habitus and hence more likely to cross norms and conventions inadvertently or arguably with less compunction about required etiquette. But so too could her insider-outsider status be firmly marketed, within the regularised standards of fifties femininity, as a composite and gendered colonial identity likely to garner press and BBC attention (the harsh upbringing softened by dulcet tones). As Lessing herself recalled, her British publisher Michael Joseph touted her at lunches and dinners at 'London's smart places' almost as colonial curiosity, introducing her to the great and the good with the phrase, 'she's from Africa'.³⁹

Lessing's launch on the metropolitan literary scene thus cast her as a new iteration of the (rare) white anti-colonial African female writer, a figure trailblazed by South African author Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) whose *The Story of an African Farm* had similarly won sudden acclaim in 1883, gaining such iconic status that author and novel were the subject of several celebratory BBC Radio broadcasts in the fifties marking the centenary of Schreiner's birth.⁴⁰ Schreiner's book had pioneered the trope of the young settler woman seeking freedom from the strictures of colonial society and wandering alone in the veld, the 'wide, lonely plain', a place of oppressive heat and isolation but also of self-realisation.⁴¹ Yet such epiphany was portrayed as unattainable for black Africans who 'pass[ed] like fitful shadows through the white people's lives, unnamed and without identity'.⁴² Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, some seventy years later and against the background of decolonial momentum, turned the oppressive climate into both symptom and catalyst in the psychological breakdown of Mary Turner, the farmer's wife who finds no comfort in the veld. Instead, Turner channels the racial hatred of colonial society inwards as violence on her own psyche, and outwards onto her servant, Moses, who – similar to the nameless black characters in Schreiner's narrative – functions largely as cipher and whose sudden killing of his mistress is left unexplained without (explicit) motive. This enactment of black male violence on the white female, or intimations of its likelihood, was reworked by Lessing in *Before the Deluge*, the play rejected on numerous occasions by the BBC for its extremity and discussed later. But here I want to pause to consider Lessing – a Schreiner of her time – as perhaps emblematic of a certain type of mid-century cultural intermediary nurtured in relation to African (anti-)coloniality, one distinct

³⁸ Lessing, *In Pursuit of the English*, 1960; Louise Yelin, *From the Margins of Empire*, 1998: 58.

³⁹ 1997: 9.

⁴⁰ *Olive Schreiner* by William Plomer, 20 March 1955, BBC HS; on *Woman's Hour* by her niece Lyndall Gregg, 24 March 1955 BBC LP; *Olive Schreiner* by her goddaughter Olive Renier, 24 March 1955, BBC TP.

⁴¹ 1883: 1.

⁴² McClintock, 1995: 267.

from the Bloomsbury and ICS-related South Asia matrices under discussion in the last chapter and marked by the figure of the white female writer.

As noted, Schreiner was feted by the British literary intelligentsia in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras and the BBC's centenary broadcasts, reflecting on her legacy as an early anti-colonial woman of 'ideals', evince the distinguished status accorded to her at a time of growing apartheid legislation in South Africa (in the fifties).⁴³ This was a status defined as a gendered heroism (a woman standing up to colonial rule) anchored in a contradictory stance, one where the author remained 'at odds with her imperial world' but simultaneously, in erasing the agency of black Africans in her fictional writings, also functioned as 'the most colonial of writers'.⁴⁴ Lessing's promotion on the literary media scene as a latter-day Schreiner ('she's from Africa') by agent, aunt and reviewers – a mantle Lessing herself signposted by quoting Schreiner in the epigraph to her 1952 novel, *Martha Quest*, and in the Afterword she wrote to the 1968 edition of *African Farm* – therefore harked back to this contradictory yet safe image, one that implied that a gendered criticism of white settlerdom would avoid straying too directly into the difficult territory of the needs and wants of black Africans by concentrating on the turmoil of the white anti-colonial woman.

Certainly, at the outset of the fifties the BBC was keen to nurture this brand of female white African writer, demonstrating again the relational dynamics between literary talent (in this case emerging gendered talent), media privilege and coloniality. Olive Shapley (herself named in honour of Olive Schreiner) in her reply to Lessing's aunt confessed she had already read the rave reviews of *The Grass is Singing* and was planning on imminently reading the novel.⁴⁵ Over the following weeks Peggy Barker, responsible for *Woman's Hour* talks, contacted Lessing, asking her to meet to discuss her 'various experiences in foreign countries'.⁴⁶ Meanwhile later that year Lessing's literary representative Milo Sperber made the more conventional approach by suggesting his client, 'the writer from Rhodesia', as a regular contributor to *Woman's Hour* Editor Janet Quigley, and by offering her forthcoming short stories to the programme ahead of formal publication.⁴⁷ Lessing's publishers, explained Sperber, were only too happy for her fiction to be made public first via the BBC.⁴⁸

These polite advances and enquiries around Lessing as upcoming talent and as allied to *Woman's Hour* were not, as noted, successful in securing a long-term relationship between

⁴³ *Radio Times* billing, 20 March 1955, for Plomer talk on Schreiner referencing the significance of her 'life and ideals' in the South African colonial context, accessed via BBC Genome July 2020.

⁴⁴ McClintock, 1995: 259.

⁴⁵ Letter from Shapley to McVeagh, 21 March 1950, BBC WAC RCONT1, Speaker, Doris Lessing, File 1 1950-1962.

⁴⁶ Letter from Peggy Barker to Doris Lessing, 27 March 1950. BBC WAC, *ibid*.

⁴⁷ Letter from Milo Sperber to Janet Quigley, 29 November 1950. BBC WAC, RCONT1, Scriptwriter Doris Lessing, File 1 1953-1962.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

writer and Corporation (on which more shortly). But what they do perhaps allude to are the attempts by many within the broad progressive British literary-media nexus in this period to promote a feminising or, womaning, of African (anti-) colonial voice. As such, these efforts could showcase a determined advocacy for the subjectivities of African coloniality to be shifted away from white masculinity (so often tied to figure of the 'marauding white man') to white woman, though in so doing black Africans remained silenced and occluded. This perspective can also be considered in conjunction with the general absence of black African literary voices on domestic BBC Radio in the fifties. As mentioned, there were some notable exceptions, most prominently male Nigerian authors at the forefront of the fast-growing Anglophone African writing scene. One early example was that of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, adapted for broadcast and aired on Third Programme in 1955.⁴⁹ Later in 1959 Chinua Achebe read an extract from his debut novel *Things Fall Apart* on the Third, although his work would not be featured on the Home Service until 1964.⁵⁰ Wole Soyinka meanwhile contributed as an actor to one or two short productions on Home Service in the late fifties and also as a young Nigerian in London to a rare discussion on the Light Programme entitled *Our Nigeria*.⁵¹ However his first piece of fiction adapted for radio did not air until 1966 (*The Lion and the Jewel*, produced by Douglas Cleverdon).⁵² These instances at one level underline the assertion by Alan Hill, founder of the Heinemann African Writer's Series, that despite the boom in black-authored English-language African fiction in the fifties such literature remained 'virtually unknown outside specialist circles' in Britain until the mid to late sixties.⁵³ Whether the Third Programme qualified as a specialist circle for Hill remains unclear but what these examples do show is that African literary ingress on Home networks (including the Third) for the best part of the fifties was certainly, though unsurprisingly, tilted in favour of white writers. In that context, the seeking out of female authors like Lessing – largely but not only for female-targeted series on Light Programme – signalled a privileging of writers whose anti-colonial sympathies were accompanied by a softening of edges, and a honing in on the internal ramifications of colonialism through a focus on landscape, psyche and white womanhood.

⁴⁹ 27 November 1955, BBC TP.

⁵⁰ 5 October 1959, BBC TP; *Prose and Verse Readings*, 2 March 1964, BBC HS. The publication of Achebe's debut novel was in part thanks to former Third Programme producer Gilbert Phelps, who had suggested Achebe contact his own publishers (Heinemann) when they met on a BBC training course (as Achebe at the time worked for the Nigerian Broadcasting Company as a producer/editor).

⁵¹ *Saturday Night Theatre*, 31 May 1958, BBC HS; 6 September 1956, BBC LP.

⁵² 19 May 1966, Network Three. Fellow Nigerian John Pepper Clark's *The Raft* was also broadcast on Network Three in the same year, 29 July 1966.

⁵³ 'The African Writers Series', 1971:18. The series was hugely influential in the promotion of black-authored English-language African fiction in Britain, though it began in 1962 primarily aimed at the African student market. Its books were not published en masse in higher quality editions for the British market, nor made widely available in British bookshops, until 1969.

This promotion of, or a leaning towards, a gendered-but-cushioned approach to literary-anchored colonial critique ran alongside a set of general editorial concerns in BBC Radio on the challenges of covering apartheid as topical subject. Martin Esslin, later head of Drama but in this period a producer on the European Service, recalled some of the difficulties involved following a trip to South Africa in 1953.⁵⁴ In pulling together his programming he noted there had been significant pressure to portray the subject in a dispassionate light, and to only lightly hint at ‘how terrible’ he considered the segregationist government of South Africa given the BBC ‘couldn’t be too rude’.⁵⁵ Though Esslin’s broadcast aired on the External Services, this sense of pressure on producers – also hinted at by MacNeice in his memo to Newby on *The Pin is Out* – was tied to an extent to a ‘mild explosion’ in the wake of a forthright domestic radio broadcast in the late forties by producer Geoffrey Bridson on South African racial policy.⁵⁶ The South African High Commission had gone to Whitehall after the BBC refused to pull the broadcast, asking for the Corporation’s transmitter to be taken off air ‘in the interests of Commonwealth solidarity’.⁵⁷ Though the Director of Programmes Basil Nichols supported Bridson, helping to ensure he was shielded from any blame ‘for having stirred up such a ruckus’, it was also made clear to production personnel that the BBC should aim if possible to make only constructive pronouncements on the issue of apartheid.⁵⁸ Bridson, like Esslin, had found racial segregation – or the ‘colour bar’ situation in the language of the time – ‘disgraceful’ and ‘very hard to accept’; in the early fifties, Talks producer Prudence Smith (born in South Africa) also tried to raise concerns about the impact of staying silent on the matter.⁵⁹ Despite making several pleas for greater use in Home talks of African speakers and contributors ‘who live in the world of which they are speaking’, including black nationalists, Smith was largely overruled, leading her to complain to the Controller of Talks that ‘we [the BBC] are very much more compliant with Colonial and Commonwealth Office ‘quietism’ than we may realise’.⁶⁰ Such dampening down was perhaps most in evidence on the Home Service, the network that would continue to be, as Director-General Ian Jacob told BBC governors in 1951 in somewhat coded terminology, ‘the main instrument for carrying out the BBC’s obligations in the more formal public service broadcasting’.⁶¹ These obligations, as

⁵⁴ Apartheid legislation in South Africa increased rapidly in this period, including in 1953 the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, which enshrined racial segregation on public property and vehicles, and The Bantu Education Act, aimed at controlling and limiting the educational aspirations of black South Africans.

⁵⁵ BBC Oral History interview, 1982, quoted in Hendy, 2022: 351.

⁵⁶ Bridson, *Prospero and Ariel*, 1971: 140. Bridson’s programme, *Focus on South Africa: The Colour Question*, was broadcast on 19 August 1947, unusually, on the Light Programme.

⁵⁷ 1971: 134–141.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Memo from Smith to Controller, Talks, 10 June 1952, BBC WAC R51/11/2, Talks, Africa File 2, 1947–1954.

⁶¹ Quoted in Briggs, Vol. IV, 1995: 549.

discussed in the last chapter, were yoked tightly to the advancement of the Commonwealth ideal.

Against these internal complications at the BBC – of production staff (especially in Talks and Features) privately dismayed at the perpetuation of apartheid but reined in by having to demonstrate on-air reticence on the matter – the positioning of Lessing as softened (gendered) anti-colonial writer paradoxically also gains salience as a possible useful strategy to avoid too much ‘quietism’. And yet, as far as can be ascertained, Lessing’s stories did not make it on air to *Woman’s Hour* and neither did she become a regular contributor to the strand. As with *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* – the popular series Lessing termed the BBC’s ‘radio soap opera’ about a doctor’s wife and for which she submitted an unsuccessful script about a ‘delinquent child’ later in the decade in an effort to make money – there emerges a sense from archival material that Lessing’s persona and content were too ‘extreme’ for many departments or networks at the BBC.⁶² I discuss the political dimensions of this in a moment, but it is important to underline here that any image of extremity was of course framed through the prism of the woman writer (and all that it entailed in terms of a cushioning of critical content). Despite the fact that by the fifties *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* and *Woman’s Hour* were broadening their scope, with more current affairs content in *Woman’s Hour* and with an aim for more realism in *Mrs. Dale* so that characters were to be shown as fallible and womanhood did not have to be portrayed always as the ‘source of all human virtues’, it remained the case that there was strict regulation of how such programming validated and maintained societal ideals.⁶³ The family, above all, in *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* was to be valorised as a symbol of normative middle-class values and graphic depictions of turmoil, emotion or physicality, including sex, were to be avoided.⁶⁴ Further, female writers linked to daytime serials faced entrenched attitudes regarding their ability to tackle hard current affairs-related subjects, still largely thought of as a male domain.⁶⁵

Though the particulars of Lessing’s ‘extreme’ draft for *Mrs. Dale* have sadly not survived and though the script was unlikely to have directly tackled coloniality, its broad contours as a portrait of delinquency, that is, a deviance from the family ideal through the exploration of misconduct, alert us to Lessing’s discomfort with a softening of edges or with what Elaine Showalter has described as the author’s troubled relationship to supposedly

⁶² Lessing noted the script was rejected for being too ‘extreme’ but gave no further details; 1997: 126. This draft script is not extant in BBC Archives.

⁶³ Document on editorial policy on *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*, 26 May 1949, BBC WAC R19/779/1, and as discussed in Michele Hilmes, 2007: 21–23 and Skoog, 2017.

⁶⁴ Hilmes, *ibid.* Depiction of sex in dramatised daytime content mostly did not begin to feature explicitly – and even so rarely – until the sixties, as was also the case with discussion of sex in features or talks content. See Hendy on the very subtle portrayals of love scenes in *The Archers* in this period, 2022: 398–399 and programmes such as *Tender Passion: The British Attitude to Sex*, 18 January 1961, BBC HS.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

feminine styles of writing.⁶⁶ Citing examples from *African Stories* (written mostly in the fifties) Showalter has documented Lessing's struggles against archetypally 'feminine' narrative elements, noting how the novelist favoured the style of her story *The Pig* – a 'straight, broad, direct' tale – over the more traditionally feminine hallmarks of *The Trinket Box*, another story from the same period written in an 'intense, careful, self-conscious, mannered' fashion popular with publishers and readers of female-authored fiction.⁶⁷ At the same time, Lessing was also famously sceptical of pronouncements of her magnum opus, *The Golden Notebook* (1962), as a seminal text of twentieth-century feminism. She notably rejected such categorisation, arguing the novel's (thinly veiled autobiographical) depiction of the central character Anna Wulf's writer's block and psychological turmoil was not intended as feminist critique but rather concerned with the inadequacy of attempts to compartmentalise narrative and experience (indeed, reading it as feminist critique was another form of compartmentalisation).⁶⁸

These antagonistic attitudes to femininity and feminism in the narrative form – a preference for a very direct realism alongside a repudiation of it as narrative totality, and a further dismissal of any feminist labels – were in development throughout Lessing's work in the fifties and showcase an unease with straightforward categorisations. This growing discomfit likely negatively impacted on her relationship with the BBC given she was directed firmly (or tried to direct herself on occasion when in need of money) towards writing for women's programming. Further, the interplays between feminised and colonially-racialised categorisations would also become problematic for Lessing in relation to the BBC, as we see later with *Before the Deluge* when her work was again marked out as reckless when it refused certain modes of restraint by explicitly portraying the threat of black violence against white settlers in a semi-sympathetic light. Though her most successful commissions were her first two talks of 1952 produced by Leonie Cohn (discussed shortly), from then on many of Lessing's ideas did not come to fruition, including a detailed synopsis for a proposed Home Service dramatised feature on a rural white southern African family (*The Year The Station Changed*, 1955).⁶⁹ No charge of extremity was made in this case, but certainly when communicating with Lessing on this and her many other ideas, BBC personnel often resorted to diplomatic, vague phrasing by arguing they could not 'do justice' to the writer's vision and realise it on air.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *A Literature of Their Own*, 1977: 252-254.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Lessing in interview with Peter Duval Smith, *Life and Letters*, 20 April 1962, BBC HS; BBC SA, time code: 04'06-09'58; Lessing in conversation with Susan Hill, *Bookshelf*, 15 January 1987, BBC R4; BBC SA, time code: 12'22-12'54.

⁶⁹ See correspondence between Lessing and Eileen Capel, Features producer, over October 1955, BBC WAC Doris Lessing, Scriptwriter, File 1 1953-1962. Capel forwarded the synopsis with great enthusiasm to Laurence Gilliam, Head of Features, but there is no record of a response from him.

⁷⁰ Barbara Bray (Drama Script Unit Editor) letter to Tom Maschler, Lessing's publisher at Jonathan Cape, dismissing a proposal to adapt for radio Lessing's 1958 play *To Each His Own Wilderness*. 15 January 1959, BBC WAC, *ibid.*

Given the pressures of ‘quietism’ on staff it is likely that some of the discussions on Lessing’s (in)appropriateness were conducted off-memo and in-person. One other significant factor, not directly addressed in any memoranda, must surely have been Lessing’s political leanings which in this period became more problematic from the BBC’s perspective. In 1952 Lessing officially joined the Communist Party, having been part of a group of Marxist ideologues in wartime Rhodesia, famously captured in the Black Notebook section of *The Golden Notebook*. Despite leaving the Party in 1956 and voicing criticism of communism from then onwards, she remained under MI5 surveillance until the sixties.⁷¹ Party membership itself was not completely *verboden* at the BBC – it was the case that some staff members were openly Communist at various moments, including producer Arthur Calder-Marshall (featured briefly in the next chapter in relation to West Indian literature). But yet again there was a distinction between those who enjoyed staff status and those who were contributors to the BBC. Freelancers such as theatre director Joan Littlewood (who had worked with Olive Shapley on *The Classic Soil*, a radical Marxist programme aired in 1939) and folk singer-songwriter Ewan MacColl, for example, were amongst those who had struggled in ‘finding a permanent berth in the BBC’ thanks to the semi-blacklisting of their names prompted by their Communist commitments.⁷² In this context, then, Lessing’s example also serves as a reminder that the status of emerging writing talent, especially female talent, was precarious and often dependent on the strong backing of particular producers or personnel (as we see more clearly through the case of Spark). Despite a strong promotion from agents and publishers, Lessing did not secure any firm attachment from production personnel (apart from Cohn at the very outset). Olive Shapley, whom Lessing’s aunt had contacted and who was a BBC thirties radical, was by the fifties a presenter and no longer a producer, and therefore in a contributory role rather than a decisive staff position. As such Lessing’s political outspokenness – not in isolated relation to (anti-)coloniality but as intermingled with Communist sympathies – was more likely to be considered dangerous or extreme.

Such negative experiences likely fed into, by 1962, Lessing’s acerbic portrait of media producers in *The Golden Notebook* as agents of de-politicisation, following a gradual turn away from media engagement from the late fifties onwards, best articulated in her 1957 essay, ‘A Small Personal Voice’.⁷³ Lessing’s essay was a socialist plea, somewhat counter-intuitively, for

⁷¹ Henry Stead, ‘Comrade Doris’, 2021. Richard Norton-Taylor, ‘MI5 spied on Doris Lessing for 20 years’, 21 August 2015, *The Guardian*.

⁷² James Smith, *British Writers and MI5 Surveillance*, 2012: 82.

⁷³ In *The Golden Notebook* the protagonist, author Anna Wulf, is courted by TV and filmmakers keen to adapt her bestselling novel, *Frontiers of War*, set in a thinly fictionalised thirties Rhodesia. The media producers propose adapting it into a made-for-television movie and toning down its political resonances to foreground the love story, a source of immense frustration to Wulf. 1965: 257-260.

the fifties novelist to return to what she described as the humanism of the great, notably male, novelists of the nineteenth century such as Tolstoy, Stendhal and Chekhov. In a similar vein to Forster's harking back to a Victorian-Edwardian liberal ideal, Lessing argued paradoxically that the contemporary realist novel, though anchored in nineteenth-century iterations which were not overtly political, was the only form that would allow for humanist or 'moral' values to be clearly conveyed, values that Lessing thought ought to be firmly internationalist and concerned with Britain's own changing affiliations to colonial politics.⁷⁴ The British novelist, she implored, should re-imagine Britain not as a 'profoundly parochial' nation but one deeply connected to the millions in countries now referred to as 'the Commonwealth'.⁷⁵ Though the essay is often cited as a signal of Lessing's move away from Communism and the worthy-but-dull fictional texts she felt it often gave rise to (where characters' dialogue was crafted almost as pamphlet-speak), so too does it indicate an important attempt to interweave issues of coloniality to the wider currents of political momentum in fifties Britain (a place she portrays as devoid of political energy, of 'languid conformity' that eats up its cultural politics like 'dry rot').⁷⁶ Although we see again Lessing's resistance to easy categorisation (in the conjoining of socialist commitment to the realist novel of a century earlier and in the lionisation of masculine writing talent), her efforts to place colonial responsibility within the novelist's imagining of a new politics, though not unproblematic, was noteworthy given that the Cold War and decolonisation were, on the domestic cultural front (in the press, media and in literature), often mediated as separate concerns from each other in this era.⁷⁷

As with Forster's vision of friendly relations, however, Lessing's conception of British writerly colonial responsibility was marked clearly by asymmetry. The principles she proffered – though no doubt rooted in a cognisance of the stratified or unequal construction of the Commonwealth with Britain perched at the top or embedded at the centre – were also, as laid out in the same essay in rather more problematic language, allied to a rosy view of British literary heritage and its links to a colonised intelligentsia. In questioning if leftist Britons cared about the colonial dimensions of Britain's history, Lessing asked if they understood:

...that hundreds of thousands of the more intelligent people
in the Colonies, people whose awakening has very often been

⁷⁴ 1957: 17.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ 1957: 16.

⁷⁷ 1957: 17. My assertion regarding the separation of Cold War politics and that of decolonisation is borne out by programme listings and schedules for the Home Service in this period (with the 1956 Suez crisis functioning arguably as one notable exception). Home networks could be viewed as contrasting in this regard with the BBC's External Services broadcasting where the 'projection of Britain' was perhaps more decisively constructed by the interplay of Cold War and colonial politics; see Alban Webb, *London Calling*, 2014.

fed by the generous age of British literature – poets like Shelley and Byron and Burns, writers like Dickens – look to them for help and guidance? For the most part, socialists are not very interested in what is going on in the Colonies.⁷⁸

The phrasing here is revealing and surprising in its idealisation of a generosity of British literature. It is this generosity that Lessing sees as sparking the very ‘awakenings’ of colonised subjectivity, embodied contradictorily not by the colonised working classes (in keeping with her declared politics and with the mission to set alight British socialist awareness of coloniality) but by an ‘intelligent’ and educated elite, one the essay hints lightly (through the nod to its rousing) is tied to a kindling of anti-colonial and decolonisation momentum. This is the constituency to which the fifties British writer must attend, in Lessing’s view, a formulation that can be seen to validate the notion of Britishness as moral imperialism, in which decolonising stirrings in the ‘Colonies’ blossom from the words of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literary giants, from the canons of Romanticism and Victorian social realism.

Further, in outlining the British novelist’s political potentialities in the fifties colonial context, what is of salience is that Lessing situates this in, at the end of the essay, to a pronounced disenchantment with media. It was the novel-writer alone, she asserted, who could mediate socialist political ideals to publics and not the mass media:

...[T]he novelist has one advantage denied to any of the other artists. The novel is the only popular art-form left where the artist speaks directly, in clear words, to his audience. Film-makers, playwrights, television writers, have to reach people through a barrier of financiers, actors, producers, directors. The novelist talks, as an individual to individuals, in a small personal voice.⁷⁹

The obstacles that characterise Lessing’s portrait of media production, of finances and intermediaries, are viewed by her as absent from the world of publishing, an infrastructure that recedes into the background in favour of a deep romanticisation of the immediacy of connection between novelist and reader. It is only through the novel (whose popular status

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ 1957: 21.

and reach is thought by Lessing, questionably, to rival that of film or television) where unmediated communication can occur between writer or artist and their publics. Though it is notable that Lessing does not mention radio here, perhaps because she was still submitting occasional ideas to BBC Radio in this period (including the ill-fated *Mrs. Dale's Diary* script) or arguably because she did not consider radio's reach as a threat to the novel, it is also striking that the very discourse of intimacy reached for in her eulogising of the novel is one that was foundational to the radio talk: connection through 'a small personal voice'. This veneration of narrative voice as one of modesty (the humble unpretentiousness of a smallness) and personalisation echo Forster's mantra of speaking for himself, a holding up of Victorian ideals of moral rectitude without state or party interference, though Lessing's usage also conversely pivots in the opposite direction from Forster (who abandoned fiction for talks-writing), by suggesting a move away from media to the realist novel. Such a move, she argued (unlike Forster), would enable a speaking out against the quiet parochialism of mid-century British letters and British socialism (and of foregrounding colonial-political matters against a 'dry rot' of disinterest).

In the next section I discuss this exaltation of realism in the context of radio form (an extolling it should be noted Lessing moved away from in her fiction by the early sixties, as captured by Anna Wulf's failed attempts to contain realist narrative in *The Golden Notebook*). What is of note at this juncture is the rejection, by 1957, of media alliances for the political writer, a stance shaped contradictorily by the language of radio intimacy. Five years before the publication of this essay, when Lessing was not as disillusioned with media collaborations, the two Home Service talks she wrote and presented showcased a negotiation with the very praxis she idealised in 'A Small Personal Voice', that is, a (limited) speaking out on coloniality through smallness and personalisation of (broadcast) voice. I now consider the role of these writerly tactics in shaping the acceptable boundaries of Lessing's gendered (anti-)coloniality in terms of successful on-air output at the BBC, an acceptability that also resided, as I detail, in a softening of edges through symbolic figurations of landscape and a distance from harsh realism.

Veld, Vlei and Otherworlds

Following the overtures to, and initial enthusiasm from, *Woman's Hour* Lessing was paired in 1952 with producer Leonie Cohn from the Talks Department. Cohn, under closer examination in the following chapter, was a German Jewish émigré with a growing reputation in this period as a producer of cultural and international talks content. Hardly any of the fifties'

correspondence between the two has survived in archival records, but it is likely that Cohn (who was often paired with 'foreign' writers, in the BBC idiom) encouraged Lessing to write in a personal voice, a strategy central to the cultural talk genre in the fifties as it had been in the forties, and which Cohn also brought to bear on her production of George Lamming and West Indian writers. Both of Lessing's Home Service talks made this personalisation explicit and particular by flagging up from the outset, via *Radio Times* publicity and continuity announcements, that they were constructed of childhood memories of an 'early life' spent on her parents' farm in remote Southern Rhodesia, the same setting as that of *The Grass is Singing*.⁸⁰

Such remembrances served a double purpose, however. By framing the ensuing content through the device of childlike innocence, an unknowing, as it were, of the full sweep of politics, Lessing's recollections could more readily be shaped as an indirect or warm-hearted address on Rhodesia's current predicament. Perhaps, as she recalled in the opening to *Memories of the Vlei*, the vlei was smaller than she remembered it; 'I haven't been back', she told listeners, 'since I grew up'.⁸¹ Growing up, then, might involve a more acute assessment of the colonial settlerdom of childhood rather than the largely comedic rendition presented in Lessing's first talk, *Crazy Neighbours*. Focusing on the unlikely friendship between two contrasting British settler men who lived near the farmland of Lessing's early years, the talk painted a mostly gentle portrait of eccentricity in the midst of the veld. The Colonel, the chief figure occupying Lessing's memories, is a naturist committed to walking around naked in the blistering heat, whereas his friend the Major lives an exaggerated version of European colonial life in the backwaters of Rhodesia, fully clothed in Victorian regalia and with an army of black servants trailing in his wake.

Lessing's picture of male colonial settlerdom is, on the surface, humorous and gentle in its recollection of the awkward social occasions attended by the Lessing family (taking tea, making small talk), marked by the presence of a certain type of colonial avuncularity, not of the liberal or intellectually elite kind as in Forster's iteration but one of 'pleasant maniacs', as she describes them, inhabiting the 'backveld'.⁸² Their entertaining agreeability, demonstrated for example by the Colonel's eventual compromise of wearing a loincloth when in social company, is shown in the main as the unthreatening side of a contrarian or unprogressive

⁸⁰ Billings, *Crazy Neighbours* and *Memories of the Vlei*; *Radio Times*, 28 March 1952: 28, 8 August 1952: 26. Cues to both programmes (opening announcements), BBC WAC.

⁸¹ Script, *Memories of the Vlei*, 1952, BBC WAC: 1.

⁸² Script, *Crazy Neighbours*, 1952, BBC WAC: 2; 6. 'Backveld' referred to the landscape of Lessing's childhood, of very remote districts with several miles between each farm inhabitation and a largely unsophisticated settler culture (in comparison to cities).

masculinity that dominated many remote areas of southern Africa.⁸³ This was a world woven in reality by its rejection, as Bill Schwarz has detailed, of what it considered the laxness of the 'English at home', a place and people (by the early twentieth century) thought to have 'grown soft' politically and culturally, especially in loosening attachments to an ideal of strict racial hierarchy and so becoming a force that 'sapp[ed] the strength of the empire from its centre'.⁸⁴ Marching through the veld – naked or fully suited – was therefore an act of 'denunciation' against the stuffiness and unmanliness of the metropolitan elite, even in the Major's outpost home adorned with bookshelves and antimacassars, a place where, as the Major tells Lessing's father in a conversation she recalls, he aims to live in true 'civilisation' unlike London or Paris, big cities which to him have become nothing more than 'slums' fashioned as 'democratic nonentities'.⁸⁵ It is this indictment of metropolitan softness that binds together the Colonel and the Major despite their distinct interpretations of colonial settlerdom, a softness that was doubly encoded into Lessing's talk with its mildly critical portrait of British colonials behaving eccentrically. In laughing (albeit lightly) at settlers like the Colonel and the Major, the talk would have likely been seen by its targets as evidence of England's ever-growing soft political culture in the early fifties' juncture (and as broadcast by the BBC, arguably an organ of metropolitan values for those in rural Rhodesia). Meanwhile, the gentleness of its criticism of coloniality as charmingly deluded or pleasantly maniacal was itself a softening of a political worldview taking root in the metropole, one that viewed racially segregationist colonial African societies, privately at least, as disgraceful.

Certainly, much of this softening was mediated through the light-hearted descriptions Lessing deployed – the eleven-course meals comprised of ingredients 'flown from town by special aeroplane' at the Major's residence, or the 'hygienic and horrid dinner[s] of undressed green stuff and minced nuts' at the Colonel's, punctuated by his nudity bar the loincloth.⁸⁶ But the eccentricities at play were also heightened by the excision of material in the script that sought to substantiate the links between colonial 'maniacs' (pleasant or otherwise) to a certain kind of Britishness. One line in particular, crossed out by hand on the script (on a copy that was likely Cohn's or her assistant's), excised references to the origins of British settlerism in ideas of how Britons ought to behave in the lands they colonised. Lessing told listeners that 'when people are forming a new community in a strange country, they tend to be conservative', but the second half of her sentence – crossed out – read, 'and this community

⁸³ The Colonel, a vegetarian as well as a naturalist, was also captured in the figure of Lord Jamie, who 'walked naked round his farm, and ate only fruit and nuts' in Lessing's novel *Martha Quest*, published in the same year; 1952: 58.

⁸⁴ Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, 2011: 211.

⁸⁵ Schwarz, *ibid*; script, *Crazy Neighbours*, 1952, BBC WAC: 6.

⁸⁶ Script, 1952, BBC WAC: 2.

was very conscious of its respectable British origins, and of the proper ways of behaviour'.⁸⁷ Maniacal behaviour (masked as pleasant oddity), then, as Lessing noted in the following sentence (and which remained uncut), was common in settler societies; figures such as the Colonel and the Major were 'not [a] few' in number and were part and parcel of the conservative Rhodesian colonial scene.⁸⁸ But the 'respectable' British roots of this scene she identified, hinting at original ideals of classed and racialised hierarchy in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain from which so many settlers had emigrated, did not make it onto air.⁸⁹ Whether the cut was made for time reasons or for editorial purposes is unclear. But the direct linkage of settler colonial praxis *over there* (eccentric or maniacal as code for a deep conservatism) to *back here*, the place from where this iteration of British colonialism was exported, may have been considered too problematic by Cohn (or others) given the tightrope walked by producers of staying quiet on such matters.

Within this overall production tightrope approach there was in Lessing's talk, alongside the minimal descriptions of black African servants, a slightly more pronounced acknowledgement of the more troubling aspects of colonial settler rule. This was conveyed chiefly through the figure of the Colonel's wife (Mrs. Cornforth), a woman who refused to comply with the ethos of nudity (as colonial masculinity) and with whom Lessing's family, the Taylers, sympathised greatly. It is her plight, that of the white settler woman – again, as per Schreiner's template and Lessing's own published fiction – that is the central focus of the more critical components of the narrative. 'Why does poor Mrs. Cornforth put up with it? wondered my mother', Lessing recalled in her broadcast, going on to note herself of the Colonel's wife: 'Certainly, she had no easy time of it'.⁹⁰ The intimation, left largely unsaid, is that Mrs. Cornforth has few options and that having agreed to be a colonial wife she must, in Lessing's words, 'stick loyally to her promise'.⁹¹ The difficulties of sticking 'loyally', then, to the enterprise of colonial settlerdom, from a (white) gendered perspective, was shown to be the pre-eminent challenge of life in the backveld, a loyalty that Lessing herself negotiated with, in one sense, by presenting a lightly barbed (and not extreme) comic portrait of eccentric colonial avuncularity.

Lessing's next talk, at one level, was more forthright in both foregrounding the gendered experience of colonial settlerism and in centering the figure of the white female who questions colonial dominance more emphatically (that figure being Lessing herself). In

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ This crossed out content was definitely not aired as Lessing delivered the talk live and the extant script that I viewed had been checked against the actual broadcast; script, 1952, BBC WAC: 1.

⁹⁰ Script, 1952, BBC WAC: 5.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Memories of the Vlei, a more serious autobiographical talk on childhood interactions with the Rhodesian landscape, Lessing described her fascination with the topography of the vlei, the small 'pot-holes' that dotted the veld plain and which filled up with rain water half the year to become life-giving oases.⁹² The talk however began with memories of the dry season, of the trails in the vlei that became 'thick with dust and unused' when animals and farmers went elsewhere in search of water, rendering the vlei seemingly 'empty'.⁹³ This emptiness is a mirage, as the young Doris discovers (and as narrated by her older self), as it masks a world of furious animal activity on and below its surface, of 'lizards, vivid as jewels' and 'myriad insects who take vitality from the burning sun', all forming a 'new dimension of life' only apparent if the viewer sits still to observe.⁹⁴ Lessing was clearly drawn strongly to this trope – of the superficially unoccupied landscape populated by a life-affirming animal force – utilising it, possibly for the first time, in her talk, in some of her fifties African stories and then most prominently in *The Golden Notebook*, in which Anna Wulf recalls furiously copulating insects in the landscape invisible to the unsettled eye.⁹⁵

On the one hand, the symbolism was unequivocal. In showing the idea of empty landscape as illusion Lessing's figuration overturned the *terra nullius* image so forcefully propagated by (male) colonial settlerism, depicting instead abundant microscopic life-forces overlooked by the coloniser's eye. It is, notably, the female settler girl or young woman (in this talk and in Lessing's other fiction) who sits still in the vlei, taking the time to acknowledge the 'denizens of dryness' (the insects lurking beneath the visible surface) as the 'the proper inhabitants of heat', as residents that withstand the expropriation of natural resources (the settler farming which exacerbates the effects of the harsh dry season) to come together 'with a myriad minute working jaws, scarring legs, whispering songs'.⁹⁶ The vlei thus functions as a space of alterity within the flattened and occupied veld plain (as glorified by Buchan and others), a microcosm that challenges the notion of vacuity embedded in discourses of male coloniality which seek to erase or deny the presence of other lives and beings. It is also, significantly, in *Memories of the Vlei*, a place of awakening for the white anti-colonial woman (in the tradition of Schreiner), though this self-realisation is far from problematic.

Within this overall frame of figuration, however, it is important to note that the vlei's true inhabitants as depicted in this talk – at a literal level the insects whose jaws, legs and songs come together, at a symbolic level the black Africans of Southern Rhodesia – are also,

⁹² Script, *Memories of the Vlei*, 1952, BBC WAC: 1.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ 1962: 415.

⁹⁶ Script, 1952, BBC WAC: 3.

troublingly, shown to be gripped by a stupidity and a mindlessness. A substantial section of the talk was devoted to a description of beetles relentlessly rolling balls of dung unsuccessfully uphill, a task the narrator can see will always fail as the beetles continually aim at the wrong angle. This monotony, coupled with the lack of superior consciousness (as possessed by the narrator), prefigures the later representation of unthinking and repetitive insect copulation in the thirties' Rhodesian backveld in *The Golden Notebook*.⁹⁷ In the novel the insects are similarly watched over, with some disdain, by Anna Wulf and her group of white Marxist ideologue friends. Whilst life on or under the surface of the colonised landscape may well have been invoked positively as an otherworld of black African potentiality, such depiction also showcased, to quote Joseph Boone, a deeply 'orientalist stereotype' at play in which the 'proper inhabitants' of the landscape are represented as 'a fount of boundless, mindless fecundity' and the white anti-colonial onlookers as both drawn to and perturbed by what they see.⁹⁸ Boone notes that Lessing's novelistic treatment of this motif involved a self-awareness of its limitations, in which the characters' perspectives are problematised to some extent as racist, misogynistic or homophobic.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, a sense of orientalist representation persists, one that can be traced back to Lessing's Home Service talk a decade before *Notebook* was published.

Similarly, Lessing's talk also demonstrates an early engagement with the limitations of white settler anti-coloniality, again through the semi-orientalised trope of African fecundity. In the second half of *Memories of the Vlei*, in a dream-like sequence, Lessing recalls a sudden downpour at the start of the wet season. The vlei overflows with water, the previously dry brown land now green, turning it overnight into a 'different world'.¹⁰⁰ The insects are now no longer visible, transformed into elements of a jungle amphibian scene, one that is lush and verdant but also dank and claggy. Intercutting the narrator's recollections is a poem Lessing wrote in her teenage years and in which she ruminates on the 'beautiful and repulsive lilies' which grow underwater in the vlei, where '[d]ry Africa became a swamp', and where she cannot resist the urge to pull up the flowers and pile them on the ground. As soon as the flowers are dislodged they start to die, a fact the young Lessing is aware of but which fails to quell her urge to wade into the waist-height water and pluck them:

I don't know why I picked those lilies,

⁹⁷ Script, 1952, BBC WAC: 2; 1962: 368-370.

⁹⁸ Joseph A Boone, 'Sex/Race Wars on the Frontier: Homosexuality and Colonialism in *The Golden Notebook*', 2003: 282.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Script, 1952, BBC WAC: 3.

Piling them on the grass in heaps,
For after an hour they blackened, stank,
And when I left at dark,
Slow and sore and stupid from the heat,
Happy as if I'd built a town,
All over the grass were rank
Soft decaying heaps of lilies...¹⁰¹

The older Lessing, as narrator, offers no explanation of why her younger self could not resist the desire to claim the flora, leaving listeners to ascertain for themselves the meaning of the poem dropped into the talk with little context. What is apparent is that there is a compulsion to erect a settlement of decaying lilies, the girl as 'happy as if she'd built a town' (typically associated with the male colonial settler who toils in the heat until dark to fashion a habitation out of natural resources), even if its composite materials blacken and stink as they decompose.

Lessing's talk, then, in its sketching out of the possible otherworlds of the vlei points to several significant strands in her mid-century iteration of agency and complicity in the anti-colonial gendered position. On the one hand, the (anti-colonial) white woman recognises the beauty and magnificence of that which lurks underneath the vlei, if it is given sustenance (water), and its potency as a force to make Rhodesia a 'different world'.¹⁰² On the other, she displays a deep concern about the overwhelming nature of the jungle that emerges after the downpour, its potentiality risking a swamping perhaps of order and structure, its beauty tempered by what she considers a repulsiveness. As such, the settler girl who enjoyed her somewhat dispassionate observation of the otherworld of the dry vlei – the busy, mindless insects – is both pulled towards and repelled by its waterlogged form, to its deluge, and also driven to kill what grows inside it (the lilies). This negotiation situates the anti-colonial white heroine as both a critic of coloniality and as its (somewhat unwitting) accomplice.

Further, in its mixing of memories – through narrative reflection years later and the juvenilia of young adulthood – and in its invocation of a dream-like other reality (on which more shortly) Lessing's talk also played with the boundaries of realism in the radio talk form, a genre founded through a realistic relay of human experience through the small personal voice.

¹⁰¹ Script, 1952, BBC WAC: 5. *The Lilies*, the teenage-authored poem in the talk, was later published in *Going Home* (1957), Lessing's memoir of a trip to southern Africa following the lifting of a ban which had stopped her entering the region due to her Communist activism.

¹⁰² Ibid.

In its sudden pivoting to the poem of her youth *Memories of the Vlei* contained several abrupt departures from the usual convention of talks, especially in the second and third poetic excerpts which Lessing read without any of the usual signposting (phrasing that cued forthcoming material) to help explain to listeners what she was about to read.¹⁰³ This kind of jumping one from text to another, denoted only by tonal change in Lessing's voice rather than through specific phrasing which would usually accompany such a move (for example, 'as I wrote in my poem' or similar), demonstrated a reaching beyond the parameters of talks realism, and of a heading towards the semi-fictionalised patchwork aesthetic common in features (and as discussed in relation to MacNeice).

In the absence of any production notes from Cohn it is difficult to ascertain how much of this jumping around was initiated or nurtured from a production angle, but in radio textual terms Lessing's talk nodded perhaps towards the limitations of a form that usually spoke in one voice. This in turn served a purpose in underlining the multiplicities of female colonial agency and subjectivity as presented in *Memories of the Vlei*. Lessing's juxtaposition of two overlapping but distinct 'I' voices – the unknowing one of teenagerhood ('I don't know why I picked those lilies') and the latter-day one sitting in a London studio which spoke more straightforwardly of the magnificence of 'the drying, dusty vlei filled with pink and white lilies' – revealed, through multi-textual voice, the movement of the young white (anti-)colonial female from a position of unwitting participant in the colonial settler project to an older one more overtly critical of it.¹⁰⁴ In this sense, Lessing's multi-vocality also offered an alert to listeners of the limitations of the anti-colonial white cultural figure (as Forster had done through the singular, small personal voice), one that signalled – implicitly rather than overtly – towards a positioning of (anti-)colonial womanhood as vexed, complicated and multifarious. These concerns around multiplicity and narrative form, voice and gendered coloniality, on a much larger scale, would come to dominate *The Golden Notebook* a decade later. Thus despite the fact that Lessing argued in 1957 for the nineteenth-century realist novel as the pre-eminent political art-form, it can also be seen from *Memories of the Vlei*, and its links to *The Golden Notebook*, that Lessing's changing ideas on coloniality in relation to the 'small personal voice' followed a more variable or zig-zagging trajectory of development (beginning with her early experiments in radio talk-writing in 1952, moving towards a rejection of media engagement and a defence of the traditional realist novel in 1957, and then a return to some of the textual and voice experimentation of 1952's radio-writing but writ large in novel-form in 1962). I note

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. I attend to the more critical voice later in this chapter.

here that my assessment has not taken into account in any depth some of the other significant writing Lessing did in this period, especially *The Children of Violence* series which began with *Martha Quest*, another semi-autobiographical novel, published in 1952. Nonetheless, by situating radio more firmly within the arc of Lessing's early career as a pre-eminent female African writer of this period, her complex engagement with the difficulties of gendered colonial subjectivity come more firmly into view, at the same time as underlining (again) the lack of easy categorisation of her literary style and its intersections with politics.

In linking back to the acceptable boundaries of cultural-political talks on the Home Service on the subject of colonial settlerdom, as noted, Lessing's highly figurative approach and the use of multi-textual voice likely aided in getting the broadcasts on air. At the end of *Memories of the Vlei*, Lessing reached more decisively for a heavy symbolism by underscoring the dream-like quality of her recollections of the water-filled vlei. Once the waters had receded, she told listeners, and the vlei returned to its dry, dusty state, everything retreated to its 'proper place, water and land, sensibly divided', so that it was hard to imagine its previous greenery, the lilies standing in the water, the butterflies flying overhead; 'one must have dreamed it', she noted.¹⁰⁵ As such, the (albeit complicated) vision of the verdant vlei, that is, a liberation of southern Africa and a breakdown of the divisions that bound it (of water and land in the symbolic usage) was both a repressed or unreliable vision – the memory a dream which the narrator cannot believe really took place – and one that was also out of reach in the juncture of the early fifties, a deep improbability. Everything had to return, for now, to its 'proper place' in the colonial order. Upheaval, and its transformative potential, was thus kept largely in check within Lessing's second 1952 talk. But as we now see, tensions and strains spilled over more unequivocally into her next major offering to the BBC, a play that crossed over into what was considered unacceptable editorial territory.

Deluge and Hysteria

In 1953, Lessing's play *Before the Deluge* was submitted to the BBC's Drama Department for possible adaptation. It had had a brief run on the London stage earlier that year in the small Boltons Theatre which operated as a private members' club in west London, allowing it to stage plays that might otherwise come under threat from the official Theatres Act (under which, until 1968, broad and sweeping censorship could be readily instigated).¹⁰⁶ Set in the same milieu as *The Grass is Singing*, it told the story of a group of white settlers in the

¹⁰⁵ Script, 1952, BBC WAC: 6.

¹⁰⁶ Boltons operated from 1947 until 1955. Lessing's play was staged in February 1953. J.P. Wearing, *The London Stage 1950-1959*, 1993: Appendix, n.p.

Rhodesian hinterland, with farmer's wife Jane Woodard as the play's lynchpin, a figure who both despises and enacts the racial hierarchies of settler life by taunting her black servant, Sixpence. The imagery of drought and deluge was again in use, this time explicitly encoded into the title. And unlike *Memories of the Vlei* the sense of an impending torrent was more pressing given the action – one evening over dinner and drinks at the Woodards' farm – was set against the backdrop of heated political campaigning in which black nationalists were standing for election for the first time. This fictional reference to real-life elections taking place in 1953, which resulted at the end of the year in the first legislative assembly of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (an outcome, as noted earlier, which was not a particular success for black nationalism at this juncture), charged the play in a way that Lessing's previously aired broadcasts – softer, personalised talks – had avoided by virtue of looking back at a period of relative innocence (of childhood memories).

Though an original script for *Before the Deluge* does not remain extant (including the one submitted to the BBC), its staging in a small members-only London theatre points to the likelihood of it having being viewed potentially as controversial. This was further underlined by the fact that Lessing revised it for a new production in 1958 at the Oxford Playhouse, including changing the title to *Mr. Dollinger*, the name of a black nationalist character in the play who, as far as can be ascertained, was previously in the 1953 version a white politician.¹⁰⁷ Even with rewrites and a renaming, though, an atmosphere of approaching deluge remained in the play. Critic Kenneth Tynan noted of the 1958 version that Lessing had shown competing camps in white-settled Africa as 'too far gone for compromise' and as a result of which, he wrote forebodingly, 'the holocaust impends'.¹⁰⁸ This sense of imminent black-led violence on the African continent against white coloniality, captured by the reviewer's sensationalist phrasing, reflected a change in the tenor of wider discourse on Africa throughout the mid-fifties, not least fuelled by the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya which began in 1952 and dominated British press headlines in this period through depictions of terrorist violence rather than anti-colonial insurrection.¹⁰⁹ Submitting a play to the BBC, therefore, associated in some way with an annihilation of white settlerdom (to draw on Tynan's inflammatory description again), would seem to have been an unsound idea from the outset. But the placement of

¹⁰⁷ The only mention made of this revision comes from an untitled and undated hand-written note by an unknown author in the BBC's Lessing files. It reads as if written by a member of BBC staff, most likely a Drama or Script Unit producer. The note reads: 'Mr. Dollinger. This is the new name for 'Before the Deluge'. Mrs. Lessing says this now needs considerable re-writing owing to the situation in Africa. Apparently Dollinger should now be a black nationalist instead of a white man?' BBC WAC Scriptwriter, Doris Lessing, File I, 1953-1962. There were no further references to this radical transformation of Dollinger from white to black, although producer Michael Bakewell did take a look at the new script in the early sixties, but this was returned to Lessing and any comments have not survived in the archives. It is the 1958 *Mr. Dollinger* script to which I refer throughout.

¹⁰⁸ 'At the Theatre', *The Observer*, 13 July 1958: 15.

¹⁰⁹ Lessing referred to these headlines in *The Golden Notebook* when Anna Wulf pastes newspaper clippings into her personal diary; 1962: 224, 226.

Lessing's script within the BBC's sphere demonstrates again the power of networks of interconnection and influence associated with literary talent, specifically in this case, between the British theatre scene and BBC Drama. A personal appeal was made to BBC producer Frederick Bradnum by the actor Oliver Burt, who had played the character of Henry Woodard (the farmer) in the Boltons production, to take a look at Lessing's play.

In its favour was the fact that *Beyond the Deluge* (as per the *Mr. Dollinger* version which this assessment is based on), at least on the surface, was not ostensibly about violent revolution. For the most part it alluded, through its rather stagey dinner party setting, to the hypocrisy of liberal settlers who engaged in colonialist expropriation on the one hand whilst fashionably, by the early fifties, parroting a discourse of equality for black Africans. These themes were writ large in the tension-filled marriage of the Woodards, revealed mostly through the growing anxiety and anger of Jane, who yearns for the rains to come, and for a deluge of water and wind to 'blow everything to pieces'.¹¹⁰ Her husband Henry, a tobacco farmer, is the progressive, lawful face of the marauding white man, one whose sexually illicit behaviour (with other white settler women) is well-known and who grows rich from what Cedric Robinson would later characterise as the 'racial capitalism' of colonial enterprise, that is, the conjunction of racism and capitalist endeavour mediated through the imperial project.¹¹¹ In spite of his embedment in colonialist domination, Henry professes to campaign in the elections for Dollinger (the presumably white liberal candidate in the 1953 version, later in 1958 a black nationalist), a falsity which his wife calls out in front of the dinner guests by noting that that 'he's been coining money with one hand and writing flaming revolutionary speeches with the other'.¹¹²

Under the surface, however, and as the play progresses, this skewering of liberal settlerism turns more vicious as the threat of violence encroaches. The possibility of violence is not articulated in the first instance by Sixpence, the black servant, (nor by Dollinger who remains off-stage) but by the settler himself when Henry notes that promoting uplift for black Africans is a necessary compromise. 'Either that', he notes, 'or we should all clear out before our throats are cut for us'.¹¹³ In a caustic retort, his wife notes that 'Dollinger wouldn't like that', as 'he and his friends want the satisfaction of cutting them – when the time comes'. This turning outwards of a hatred of liberal colonial hypocrisy, mediated through Jane's riposte, towards the impulses of an impending black anti-colonial violence (emerging when the 'time comes')

¹¹⁰ Script, *Mr. Dollinger*, HRC, 1958: 40, Scene 1. Lessing Papers, Box 50.8.

¹¹¹ *Black Marxism*, 1983.

¹¹² Script, HRC, 1958: 31, Scene 1.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

leads to the charged scene in the second half of the play when Jane challenges Sixpence on his desire to kill white settlers. As a thunderstorm nears, mistress and servant become locked in a public exchange in which Jane attacks the evasive dialogue of coloniser and colonised:

JANE: (politely) Sixpence, I wanted to ask you a simple question. Would it give you great pleasure to cut all our throats for us?

SIXPENCE: (very politely) Yes, madam.

JANE: (laughing) Quite right. And are you going to?

SIXPENCE: No.

JANE: As a matter of interest, why not?

SIXPENCE: (very politely) We have better things to do, madam.

JANE: (icily) What a pity.¹¹⁴

Before the Deluge, from what can be traced of it through Mr. *Dollinger*, treads, then, in its second half towards a literal voicing of the threat of white colonial obliteration through violence, but one that at the same time acknowledges a certain necessity in this. Jane's recognition that it is a *pity* that Sixpence will not turn murderous against his masters despite a desire to do so showcases the gendered distinction between a fear of mere recognition of such an outcome (as articulated by Henry) and a welcoming of it (along with deep provocation to invoke it) by Jane.

I pause here to note that Lessing's play in one sense captures or even prefigures some of the anti-colonial rhetoric of violent uprising that was in formation in this period, and which would in the following decade be more widely circulated through works such as Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). In the finger pointing of the Woodards at the prospect of black violence against white settlerdom (welcome or otherwise), Lessing showcases the crucial interrelation between African revolutionary retributive action and the violence of colonial discourse, with the latter prompting the first, or as Fanon summarised it, whereby the very 'argument the native chooses [regarding violence] has been furnished by the settler, and by an ironic turning of the table it is the native who now affirms that the colonialist understands nothing but force.'¹¹⁵ By being told that the black subject is capable only of understanding and enacting brutality, as Fanon would describe, so then does it

¹¹⁴ Script, HRC, 1958: 2-3, Scene IV.

¹¹⁵ 1961: 66.

become the only option available for a breaking down and breaking through, or a cracking up and cracking open, of colonial rule. Yet this purging, emphasised as a requisite for breaking the cycle of coloniality (and prompted by Jane's internal turmoil), is ultimately thwarted by Sixpence, who suppresses hatred to eschew violence. Suppression and repression then, internal and external (psychic-emotional and colonial-racial), for white settler and black African, was a core theme of the play, one that in the context of white female subjectivity did not lead to interior reflection (as in *Memories of the Vlei*) but to a voicing of the need for cataclysmic change.

This broad outline of *Before the Deluge* /*Mr. Dollinger* highlights some of the challenges facing the BBC Drama department when presented with a copy of the script. As noted, Drama was on the whole a more conservative unit in the early fifties in comparison to its sister (and rival) department, Features, and where self-censoring norms operated informally within editorial and production staff circles. Nonetheless, drama output on the Third Programme in this period had gained a reputation as the home of 'Unpleasant Plays' – productions that would be considered 'either macabre or unpleasant or possibly both' if transmitted on Home or Light – and may well have been a target for Burt and Lessing as a possible platform for *Deluge* (the network where Spark's *The Dry River Bed* would be aired in 1959).¹¹⁶ Lessing's play however never progressed as far as discussions of networks given immediate concerns were raised about its suitability for any BBC platform, concerns that were moulded through a gendered prism.

In a letter to Oliver Burt, Frederick Bradnum stated that both the Woodards were deeply problematic characters given their unlikability and the implication of sexual impropriety (through references to Henry's extra-marital affairs and to Jane's flirtation with a young Englishman in the colonial settler set).¹¹⁷ Burt noted that Henry in particular 'would have to be shown as a good deal more positive'; other sections too – unspecified in the correspondence – would have to be 'pruned' or 'heavily cut' though these likely involved the provocations by Jane towards Sixpence.¹¹⁸ But internally Bradnum was far more forthcoming, writing to his Acting Script Editor:

This is a very sincere play about white settlers in Rhodesia. Its main fault is that it plays on one note and that note is hysterical; the reason

¹¹⁶ Briggs, Vol. IV, 1995: 694. Briggs notes that critics of the Third Programme in the fifties described many of the network's dramatic productions as *unpleasant*. Much of the criticism however resulted from the Third's horror or crime plays rather than those of an explicitly sexual or racial nature, and with productions in the early part of the decade still operating within relatively conservative taste and decency guidelines.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Burt to Bradnum, 15 June 1953. BBC WAC, Scriptwriter, Doris Lessing File 1 1953-1962.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

for the hysteria is perfectly apparent in the story but somehow it does not come off dramatically. One feels that these white people are a pretty bad crowd and hardly worth while (sic) writing a play around.¹¹⁹

Several salient points emerge from the phrasing here, including the lack of positivity in the portrayal of the individual farmer and of the settler community as a whole as a 'bad crowd'. Above all though, despite the earnestness of Lessing's approach, it was, in Bradnum's words the hysterical treatment of a sensitive subject that dominated and which made it impermissible. Hysteria denoted of course the general white settler panic about the perils of black violence but its use here also illustrated a gendered understanding of the limitations of female authorship, one where a woman writer might be assumed to have a tendency to write in an overwrought or unrestrained manner on the issue of race, sex and violence (linking back to the boundaries set upon female writers in relation to women's programming discussed earlier). Bradnum went on in the memo to underscore this point by noting that it was a shame that Lessing, who came 'from these parts', had tried to write about a situation on which she lacked perspective due to her own ties to this milieu, implying that her emotional proximity to the subject had pushed her towards the pitfalls of a hysterical (code for psychically feverish and female) approach.¹²⁰

The intersections between hysteria and female narratives are many and expansive, and cannot be interrogated in any depth here given the limits of this study.¹²¹ What is of particular significance, though, is the way in which the critique of white African coloniality in Lessing's play, through the voice of an outspoken white settler female character and through the pen of a politically strident female writer, is translated into a charge of uncomplicated ('one-note') hysteria. This term – in its fifties' context, and now, and rooted in the thorny, troublesome language of Victorian psychiatry and then Freudianism – alerts us to some of the deeply problematic issues around the gendered reception of female-authored writing by a male-centric literary (and media) culture. To cite Showalter again, to 'label women's writing as "hysterical" is to denigrate it as art, no matter how strenuously it is valorized as "literary"'.¹²² This deprecation in relation to *Before the Deluge* is tied to a lack of objectivity, an implied psychic closeness to the subjects of race, gender and colonialism which Bradnum's memo signals is unseemly and uncontrolled in Lessing's writing, even if its causes are apparent (the

¹¹⁹ Memo from Bradnum to Acting Script Editor, Drama (Sound), 8 July 1953. BBC WAC, *ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ For an overview see Sander Gilman et al. *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, 1993.

¹²² 'On Hysterical Narrative', 1993: 33.

inequities of Rhodesian colonial society and the facade of political progress).

It becomes clear, then, that the mid-century anti-colonial African female writer attempting to write assertively on cultural-political matters through the BBC was in a quandary. Positioned as a voice of a softened and personalised response to the difficulties of continued colonial settlerdom in Africa (by Talks), she was at the same time expected to be distanced and objective and not hysterical about the changes she envisaged (by Drama). How much Lessing herself was aware of this aspect of the backstage BBC negotiations regarding her work is difficult to pinpoint, but the fact that the play was re-submitted several times to the Drama Department demonstrates a belief, on her part and that of her agents, of pushing back and trying to circulate the play to a wider set of publics (in comparison to those at small London or Oxford theatres).¹²³ Certainly Lessing was in a fervent phrase in 1953 regarding her anger at the generally positive welcome given by the British press to the inauguration of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the political event which shaped the backdrop to *Before the Deluge* and which Lessing felt was nothing but a 'high-minded formula' to make the British feel better about their culpability in colonial settlerdom.¹²⁴ Meanwhile BBC editors and controllers too were under renewed pressure from the Rhodesian High Commission to promote a picture of progression in the country, as encapsulated by the Federation, 'to show what has been done and is being done for the African in southern Rhodesia'.¹²⁵

These tensions played out in Lessing's unsuccessful entanglements with the radio dramatic form and with the BBC at this particular juncture, going on, as noted, to possibly shape her avowed break with media-writing in 'A Small Personal Voice'. It was conversely this very voice, in the radio talk form, that flourished in the BBC habitus on matters of African colonialism, by sticking closely to personalisation and by speaking (only) in one's own voice(s). In so doing, a critical yet complex picture of a gendered resistance to (some aspects of) coloniality could be mediated, one that limned the subjectivities of anti-colonial white femalehood as both condemnatory of and complicit in the continued colonial project in southern Africa. For the female writer less prone to extremity, both in her writing and in her political stance, the trajectory through the BBC was in many ways far easier, as we now see through the example of Muriel Spark.

¹²³ The play went through three readings resulting in rejection in 1953, first through Bradnum, then via Mollie Greenhalgh and Charles Lefeaux of the Script Unit, and finally through Script Editor Barbara Bray. Bray wrote to Kitty Black, Lessing's agent at Curtis Brown, to declare the script was 'sour to the point of being unpalatable', 11 November, 1953; BBC WAC, Scriptwriter, Doris Lessing File 1 1953-1962.

¹²⁴ 1997: 172.

¹²⁵ Letter from Colin Black, Public Relations Officer at the High Commission of Southern Rhodesia, to Mary Somerville, Controller of Talks, 9 April 1952. BBC WAC, R51/11/2, Talks, Africa, File 2, 1947-1954.

Girling and the Fifties (African) Radio-Writer

Spark's first appearance on air was also with a talk, a year earlier than Lessing in 1951, not in relation to southern Africa but rather in a critical appreciation of Mary Shelley on Third Programme.¹²⁶ The relative ease with which she entered the most highbrow of BBC networks, after writing to the Controller of Talks, P.H. Newby to pitch a broadcast tied to the centenary of Mary Shelley's death, demonstrates the distinct metropolitan nexuses of cultural intermediaries through which Lessing and Spark passed on their way to the BBC.¹²⁷ Though Spark had returned to wartime Britain from Rhodesia in 1944 she had, following war's end, initially concentrated efforts on establishing a career as a poet and as an editor-cum-critic, including taking on the editorship of *Poetry Review* from 1947 to 1949. This identified her to BBC personnel as a writer perhaps more likely to be attuned to the needs of media production, including shaping ideas to the demands of BBC schedules and slots (illustrated by her pitch a year ahead of the Shelley centenary).

Spark's first fictional publication did in fact signal her Rhodesian connections. Winning an annual short story competition in *The Observer* in 1951, 'The Seraph and the Zambesi' told a tale of white Rhodesians putting on a Nativity play against the backdrop of the Victoria Falls.¹²⁸ But her public profile thereafter moved away from an African context. By the end of the fifties, she had become a prominent novelist, publishing her debut *The Comforters* in 1957 and at the end of the decade *Memento Mori* (1959), perhaps her most acclaimed novel after *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), books which showcased her Scottish heritage and her conversion to Catholicism (from Judaism).¹²⁹ In this same decade of novelistic growth, as mentioned at the outset of this chapter, she authored several pieces for BBC Radio (at least ten), comprised of original dramatised features, talks and radio adaptations of her own fiction – mostly for Third Programme but also for Home Service. This expansive fifties' radio career, as noted, was yoked to the patronage she secured of two significant Features producers, Rayner Heppenstall (1911-1981) and Christopher Holme (1905-1991). As Spark wrote in the introduction to *Voices at Play* – an edition comprised of her radio-writing and of short fiction influenced by radio-writing techniques – it was Heppenstall who first suggested she try to write dramatised features, the genre to which she would become most closely aligned, by encouraging her to write freely when constructing voices and characters for radio and to 'not conform to a settled category'.¹³⁰ This flexibility, as mentioned, was a key hallmark of the

¹²⁶ *Frankenstein and the Last Man*, 1 February 1951, BBC TP.

¹²⁷ Letter from Spark to Newby, 23 September 1950. BBC WAC, RCONT1, Mrs. Muriel Spark, Speaker, File 1, 1950-1962.

¹²⁸ *The Observer*, 23 December 1951: 2.

¹²⁹ *Curriculum Vitae*: 1992: 192.

¹³⁰ Author's Note, *Voices at Play*, 1961: V.

Features Department's approach to the radiogenic genre of the feature, of a nurtured fluidity between drama and documentary, and which clearly played a significant role in generating considerable experimentation with voice by Spark in her published fiction.¹³¹ For their part, both Heppenstall and Holme identified Spark to editors and heads of department as a writer with something 'distinctly original' to offer the medium.¹³²

Set against this milieu and under close focus in the next section is Spark's only radio feature on Rhodesia, *The Dry River Bed*, also concerned with gender and race in the white settler colonial context. What is of note here is its commission by the Third Programme, which was relatively swift and reliant on the good relations between Spark and Heppenstall (in contrast to Lessing's fruitless entanglements with women's programming and with the Drama Department). At the end of 1958, Spark and Heppenstall pitched a dramatised feature for the Third Programme entitled *The Interceptors*, in which the action would centre on two characters communicating only via telephone.¹³³ The feature was commissioned as a thirty-minuter and scheduled for the following summer, but by March she had changed her mind and decided to write a feature for the same broadcast slot set in Africa. The discussions between Spark and Heppenstall regarding this change have not survived in the archives, but Heppenstall clearly agreed as he wrote to the Controller of the Third Programme to recommend the change. Arguing that the details of the content of *The Interceptors* had only been agreed in very broad terms, Heppenstall urged the Controller to agree to Spark's idea for a programme entitled *The Dry River Bed* with all the same contractual arrangements.¹³⁴ In justifying his decision he wrote that Spark had told him the programme would 'have an African setting (like several of Mrs. Spark's best short stories)', and that in terms of atmosphere the writer would aim to 'render the effect of fabulous heat'.¹³⁵ No further explanations were offered and from archival evidence it does not appear that any were required as the programme contract was duly revised and *The Dry River Bed* went out on air in August 1959.

As noted, the ease with which the feature was slotted into the BBC's schedules – in contrast to Lessing's experience with *Before the Deluge* – could be taken as confirmation that this particular idea, and its portrayal of what Heppenstall described as Africa's fabulous heat,

¹³¹ See Heppenstall's famous definition of a feature in his memoir: 'There was no short answer to the much-asked question: 'What is a feature programme?' ...The real answer was that a feature programme was anything put out by a producer in Features Department'. *Portrait of the Artist*, 1969: 26-27. Lydnsey Stonebridge, 'Hearing Them Speak', 2006.

¹³² Memo from Heppenstall to Assistant Head of Features Department, 6 Dec 1957, following the broadcast of Spark's first radio feature, *The Party Through the Wall*. BBC WAC RCONT1, Muriel Spark, 1951-1962.

¹³³ Heppenstall memo to Assistant Head of Features, 19 December 1958, BBC WAC RCONT1, Muriel Spark, Personal, File 1, 1951-1962.

¹³⁴ Heppenstall to Controller, Third Programme, 12 March 1959. BBC WAC, *ibid*.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*.

was of a more palatable nature to producers and editors than Lessing's. But in considering this it is worth remembering other factors at play, including the fact that Spark disassociated herself from a political association on the question of African colonial settlerdom (unlike Lessing), which I address shortly. First, though, in situating Spark as a member of the literati (albeit of humble Scottish origins and not an elite English background), we can relate her pre-existing know-how, through her work as a critic, of the relationships between writers, producers, publishers, networks and the habitus of distinction creation (in the Bordieuan sense again) to her forging a highly prized reputation within the commissioning circuits of BBC Radio. Certainly, Spark's letters to all the BBC producers she worked with demonstrate a knowingness of the etiquettes of cultural intermediary praxis through her clear and pragmatic professionalism. On another level, though, there was a gendered dimension at work, one that showed Spark's acuity in strategically calibrating to the gendered norms set by the largely male production Features milieu (and again, in some contrast to Lessing's challenges to the gendered containment expected of women's programming at the BBC).

Spark's correspondence with male production personnel is imbued with a performative feminine quality reminiscent of Judith Butler's concept of 'girling', where women's subject positions are interpellated through the enactment of certain stylised forms and acts of gender embodiment.¹³⁶ The deference shown by her to the male producers or controllers in question, and the subordination of her own work stresses to theirs is stark. One key example is a letter to Holme regarding *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, first broadcast in April 1960 on the Home Service and then revised into a more experimental version in May 1962 for Third Programme (which won it the Prix Italia). Spark's role in re-working the text was crucial to each stage – from adaptation of the book to radio script, and then from that script to another, more elaborate one. And yet her written exchanges with Holme demonstrated a strong sense of deference or obeisance to (male) production authority in a manner that reads, on the page, as unsure or self-effacing. 'Do please say, if these ideas are all wrong', she stressed in a hand-written addendum to a letter in which she had outlined thoughts on how to make the adaptation work as a radio musical.¹³⁷ The addendum downplayed her own radio expertise (given she had been writing radio pieces for nearly a decade by this stage); in the same letter, Spark went on to note she did not want to trouble Holme before he was ready to engage in the specifics of the project. Indeed, even though, as Spark wrote, she was herself busy finishing a novel, she would be able to work on the radio-version of *Peckham Rye* 'in between-times'.

¹³⁶ *Bodies that Matter*, 1993: 7.

¹³⁷ Letter from Spark to Holme, 9 January 1960. BBC WAC R71/578/1, Mrs. Muriel Spark, Drama, File 1, 1959-1960.

Holme, she emphasised, should not trouble himself and should only reply to her when he had the time.¹³⁸ 'Please don't hurry,' she wrote again a few weeks later; 'I'll be ready for "Peckham Rye" whenever you are'.¹³⁹

This pliable tone was fairly typical of Spark's dealings with BBC producers or controllers in the first decade of her career, specifically her interactions with Holme, Heppenstall and Newby.¹⁴⁰ As noted, her persona on the page reads as a type of performativity that, as Butler has asserted, takes place within the highly rigid frame regulating the construction of gender (and where women are positioned in a repeated set of acts that bind them to the process of gender construction).¹⁴¹ Certainly in the fifties and sixties Spark almost exclusively worked with male BBC producers and, unlike Lessing, her son had been sent to Scotland to live with her parents so as to allow her to advance her career.¹⁴² This freed her to an extent from her the domestic responsibilities that Lessing had to shoulder, and yet Spark recalled in her memoir the pressures of the financial burdens on her to provide for her son and her aging parents.¹⁴³ Spark's tone in her correspondence to male producers, and any correlated gender performativity, therefore needs to be read in the light of her experiences as a woman author earning a living on her own in fifties London, with all the attendant difficulties and pressures that entailed (and which also bore down on Lessing).

On a wider canvas, the progression of feminism in Britain was arguably in a state of suspension in the fifties and early sixties despite greater numbers of women entering the workplace and demanding equal pay. Although recent feminist scholarship has sought to challenge the ease of such assertions and a broader consensus on this period as a 'quiet patch' in British feminist evolution, it remains the case that the long fifties was marked by a strong promotion of ideologies of domesticity.¹⁴⁴ It was also a time in which a greater number of women entered the workforce but equal pay remained restricted to a few sectors like the civil service.¹⁴⁵ In this paradigm, then, Spark's and Lessing's experiences can be viewed as symptomatic of, or a negotiation with, this period's feminism-in-abeyance. Both writers navigated between their positions as figures of alterity, as single mothers (living apart from

¹³⁸ Ibid. The novel was most likely *The Bachelors*, published later that year.

¹³⁹ Letter from Spark to Holme, 17 January 1960. BBC WAC, *ibid*.

¹⁴⁰ See BBC WAC RCONT 1, Muriel Spark, Personal, File 1, 1957-1962, for Spark's early correspondence with Heppenstall; for her correspondence with Newby see BBC WAC RCONT1, Mrs. Muriel Spark, Speaker, File 1, 1950-1962. Spark was also concerned about attempted sexual impropriety on the part of Heppenstall, which possibly led her to distance herself from him professionally; see Stannard, 2009: 193.

¹⁴¹ *Gender Trouble*, 1990: 25.

¹⁴² *Curriculum Vitae*, 1961: 163.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Penny Tinkler, Stephanie Spencer and Claire Langhamer, 'Revisioning the History of Girls and Women in Britain in the Long 1950s', 2017: 1; Jessica Mann, *The Fifties Mystique*, 2012; Anne Karpf, 'Constructing and Addressing the "Ordinary Devoted Mother"', 2014.

¹⁴⁵ Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives*, 2020: 269.

some of or all of their children) at a time of normative motherhood's elevation in cultural status, and as women writers earning their living in a male-dominated progressive cultural sphere where it may have been assumed that intellectual and economic equality were a given. For Spark, as with Lessing, the answer did not lie in a straightforward affiliation with feminism, and in interviews she was generally cautious about spelling out her version of feminist ideals.¹⁴⁶ As her biographer Martin Stannard summarised, Spark's concern was primarily with equal pay 'and not about much else'; she wanted to win equal rights to remuneration for her writing and then to be 'free to indulge in all the conventional manifestations of 'femininity''.¹⁴⁷ Conventional manifestations of femininity could refer to a range of behaviours and attitudes but in the context of Spark it perhaps captures appropriately those aspects that I have argued emerge from her letters to BBC producers – the deference to male expertise (even after a decade of radio-writing), the playing down of her own stresses and the juggle of work commitments, the undercutting of her own ideas (of the do-please-say-if-it-is-all-wrong variety).

These gendered experiences within the constraints of the era's sexual politics thus shaped, perhaps to a considerable degree, her BBC radio trajectory in the fifties differentiating her career arc from that of Lessing's. Spark's correspondence, and the track record of her very successful collaborations with male producers, attest to her enactment of certain aspects of conventional femininity, what we might term a non-extreme kind of womanliness that fitted in with the BBC's editorial outlook of the time. Unlike Lessing, Spark did go on to write for *Woman's Hour*, and as we see in the next section, she was able to write about embodiment, race and gender in colonial Africa for BBC Radio without much interference or objection from production or editorial staff.¹⁴⁸

Undergirding this was Spark's lack of political outspokenness, in addition to her status as a critic and then a novelist whose public image was not solely tied to her African experiences. Indeed, not many BBC staff knew of her Rhodesian connections and neither did Spark use that experience in any of her early correspondence with them to try to establish herself as a broadcast writer.¹⁴⁹ Spark was attentive to her own difficulties in writing about the politics of Rhodesia given she had only lived there for seven years. Further to this she also felt her writing did not suit, or should not be used for, explicit political engagement. In a rare comment on African politics late in life, she stressed:

¹⁴⁶ See Martin McQuillan on Spark's disavowal of feminism, *Theorizing Muriel Spark*, 2001: 6.

¹⁴⁷ 2009: 118.

¹⁴⁸ *My Favourite Villain: Heathcliff*, on *Woman's Hour*, 12 October 1960, BBC LP.

¹⁴⁹ See for example Heppenstall's memo to Third Programme Controller on 12 March 1959 regarding Spark's proposal for *The Dry River Bed*, in which he mentioned that some of her best short stories were set in Africa. The phrasing in the memo implied this was not widely known; BBC WAC RCONT1, Muriel Spark, Personal, File 1, 1951-1962.

There is a great deal to be written about colonial life in Africa,
but it is inevitably much too political for me. I don't work on
those lines. The minute you mention Rhodesia, you're into politics,
or Africa, or black and white. It's a political situation. The better
novels of Doris Lessing can achieve that; I think she's very good at it.
It's not my thing.¹⁵⁰

An avoidance of the 'black' and 'white' of the colonial settler question, in one sense meaning the racialising processes of colonialism and in another the certitudes of opposing perspectives on it, pointed to a deep discomfort with express political commitment per se. Interestingly, Spark contrasted herself with Lessing, whom she located as a, or perhaps the, prime example of literary fiction-writing on the subject of coloniality in Africa, a writer whose commitments were, to borrow Bradnum's phrase, 'apparent'.¹⁵¹ As mentioned, Spark was as unhappy as Lessing in Rhodesia and had found its racialised strictures to be evidence of the most 'ignorant society' she had ever lived in.¹⁵² This disapprobation translated not into an African oeuvre that was not overtly politicised (indeed it avoided any direct reference to politics, unlike *Before the Deluge*) but rather into a complex threading-through of cultural-political critique, encoded often through narrative techniques. These strategies were cultivated in much of her radio-writing and novelistic works through a causticity, mediated via comic modes such as wit or satire, and which characterised her writing as one imbued with a 'knowingness', as Drew Milne describes it, of its own 'satirical and witty resistance to socio-political paraphrase'.¹⁵³ Spark's writing, including the dialogue that comprised so much of her feature work, offered in this regard a pithiness, a 'kind of wit...rich with implied judgements'.¹⁵⁴ Yet its own satirical distancing from other more politically engaged strategies in turn perhaps also gave away its own conservatism, a mockingness that allied more readily with the status quo than with radical or disruptive techniques.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ 'An Interview with Dame Muriel Spark', Robert Hosmer, 2005: 137.

¹⁵¹ Memo from Bradnum to Acting Script Editor, Drama (Sound), 8 July 1953. BBC WAC, Scriptwriter, Doris Lessing File 1 1953-1962.

¹⁵² NLS 10989/209, Muriel Spark Archives.

¹⁵³ 'Muriel Spark's Crimes of Wit', 2010: 111.

¹⁵⁴ Milne, 2010: 113. It is worth considering that Lessing's dialogue was perhaps a weakness of her fifties radio-work and hence made her writing only apt for talks. Spark, as noted, was praised often for her crafting of voice in dialogic form (as evidenced by the publication of *Voices at Play*) and could therefore write more expansively in the multi-voiced genres of drama and feature.

¹⁵⁵ One of the key influences on Spark in this regard was Ivy Compton-Burnett (1884-1969), known for writing novels of dark satire set in Edwardian or Victorian domestic settings. Compton-Burnett was one of the most popular and successful female writers in the fifties in terms of BBC radio adaptation – six of her books were adapted for Third Programme alone in addition to other broadcasts on Home and Light in this decade.

As with Forster, Spark's professed distancing from the nitty gritty of politics allowed for a positionality of non-alignment that could be adapted to varying networks or slots, and which could be accommodated within the BBC's broadly cautious approach to cultural politics, and more specifically to a nuanced quietism on the issue of African (de-)colonisation. Having thought carefully about not labelling herself as an African author, and not attaching (or letting be attached) a 'she's from Africa' tag, was likely beneficial for Spark's BBC career if considered in the light of Drama Department's criticism of Lessing as having been too close to the subject of racial inequality in Rhodesia. Indeed, the very distance Spark maintained from Rhodesia in constructing her radio-writer image – a professional parallel to her keeping-at-arm's length narrative strategies – in conjunction with a close affiliation to (male) production personnel, conversely licensed her to write for the BBC about highly sensitive topics in the fifties' African colonial context including, as we now see, miscegenation, the racialised body and murder.

Dry Rivers, Tea Parties and Split Bodies

The Dry River Bed was promoted as a 'new African tale', a story as the *Radio Times* described it, of 'where water should be'.¹⁵⁶ Though there was a self-styled *newness* to this take on Africa the title, the wording of the *Radio Times* advertising suggested that perhaps things were very much as they had always been. The river bed, as in *Memories of the Vlei* some seven years earlier, had been run dry, and in the feature that followed listeners heard again of the deep need for the rains to come and for the land to become less arid.

The story centres on two disappearances which turn out to be interconnected. The first is that of Peggy, a young white settler who has vanished, presumed dead and perhaps killed by 'natives' as per the gossip of the tea party-goers.¹⁵⁷ The second is that of Borden, a male settler also of English origin though secretly mixed-race, whose attempts to pass as white and to hide his heritage result in his killing of Peggy (who knows his secret); Borden's role as murderer is uncovered by his fiancée, Marjorie, following a car crash into a dry river bed in the veld (where Peggy's body is buried).¹⁵⁸ The sombreness of the plot as detailed here belies the restraint of Spark's storytelling, concentrated as it was on the social interactions of the white settler community, with much of the tragic action conveyed off-air (off-stage in the radio setting) and instead narrated to listeners through the small, barbed comments of the women within it. These characters demonstrate varying degrees of frustration with the strictures of colonial

¹⁵⁶ 2 August, 1959.

¹⁵⁷ Script, 1959, BBC WAC: 1, line 5.

¹⁵⁸ I note briefly that *passing* refers to the 'colour line' of racialised experience and where mixed-race heritage could be denied due to skin colour and appearance. I discuss the racialised body in relation to the theories of Frantz Fanon in more detail in this chapter. In the Rhodesian context see Alois Mlambo, "Some Are More White Than Others", 2000.

society and yet they are also, explicitly, shown to be complicit in its maintenance and reproduction. Disparaging observations are made, about the 'natives' and about the onslaught of insects in the dry season, here cast not as the true inhabitants of the African soil but instead as an unending stream of invaders, returning time and again to wreck the refinements of colonial settlerdom (of the tea-party sugar or, as intimated, possibly of white femalehood). 'If the natives don't get your stuff, the ants will', notes one of the female party-set, affiliating these two constituencies (ants, natives) through a deep distaste for that which is un-Europeanised, unsubdued, not brought-to-heel.¹⁵⁹

Gender in the fifties' white African colonial context, then, in Spark's rendition, at least at the outset, is more the subject of a mocking critique (in comparison to Lessing's work), with no alignment made between womanhood and anti-coloniality. Nonetheless, beyond the surface there is more complexity in the multifarious white female experience as encoded into the plotline. Peggy, as the murder victim, is the symbol of the collateral damage of colonial masculinity, of its possession of social and sexual mores (and the attendant pressures on Borden to hide his identity), making her a casualty of another iteration of the marauding white man syndrome. Marjorie, meanwhile, the fiancée who discovers the crime and who is closest to the mould of anti-colonial white heroine as in the tradition of Lessing and Schreiner, is made to feel she is being hysterical when divulging the truth of Borden's racialised split.¹⁶⁰ These distinctions demonstrate in one sense a nuanced approach to white female coloniality, a showcasing of the complex ways in which white women occupied, as per McClintock's argument, the positionality of colonial victim and victimiser.¹⁶¹ On the other, settler women remain largely ensconced, as noted, in a world of polite back-biting and social etiquette at the end of the feature, unable (or not wanting) to challenge the hierarchies which end in an act of violence and the hiding of Peggy's dead body in the dry river bed.

The placing of the white female body in the dry landscape was itself however a bold undertaking, pushing further the trope of colonial praxis as desiccation, whereby the literal dryness of the bed masks the violent excesses of male colonial behaviour. Set against this motif, Spark demonstrated a far more imaginative engagement with the colonial male body as a site of racialised experience. Borden, whose secret parentage prompts him to kill, splits into two in the wake of the murder, his literal body appearing whole but his white half remaining in the colony to confess to the crime (an unnamed Rhodesia), whilst the black half absconds

¹⁵⁹ Script, 1959, BBC WAC: 3, line 4.

¹⁶⁰ See Marjorie's rebuke of Ticky, another English settler and to whom she narrates the story of Borden's mixed parentage and his killing of Peggy, but who urges her to speak slowly and to stay calm. 'Don't speak to me as if you were a psychiatrist' she tells him, 'I am perfectly lucid in my mind'. Script, 1959, BBC WAC: 17, line 1.

¹⁶¹ 1995.

to Kenya. This surreal, supernatural halving is mediated rather simplistically in radio feature grammar through dialogue and with minimal use of sound (the script directions only suggest one unidentified use of ‘whirlwind sound’), illustrating a technique of restraint, one that was also made audible through the sparse, almost flattened conversation between Borden and Marjorie when the details of the murder and the miscegenation embedded in his parentage is out in the open:

BORDEN: I should like to kill you.
 MARJORIE: You can’t. You’re only half here...
 BORDEN: Goodbye, then. (WHIRLWIND SOUND)
 MARJORIE: Borden, where are you going?
 BORDEN: (receding) To Mombassa to join my black blood...
 MARJORIE: Why are you spinning round and round like a dust devil?
 BORDEN: Do you know what causes a whirlwind? – Dryness.¹⁶²

In many ways this scene typifies Spark’s treatment of extremity in the African settler context (as per her published fiction), in this case the taboo of a black African heritage in white male coloniality and the killing of innocent (white) women, through a careful manipulation of narrative technique which accommodates, and restrains, the depths and complexities of the subject at hand.¹⁶³ The details of Borden’s bodily transformation, though literal in one sense (the white body drained of black blood), are also made fantastical – the blood in Mombasa, the spinning into a dust devil, the name of summer season whirlwinds in central and southern Africa – but continue to sit within the parameters of conventional realism of the dramatised feature. There is therefore little explanation offered of the hows and whys, as attested to by Marjorie’s short, pointed questions (‘where are you going’, ‘why are you spinning’), and no patchwork or mosaic-like quality to the feature-making, no undue excess or overlap of sound and voice. Some of these writing and production decisions were likely budget or time constraint-related. Yet staying within the limits of a style of realism associated with the dramatic feature also allowed Spark to extend with some nimbleness the motif of dryness as coloniality, but this time more decisively as trauma on the body and psyche of the white colonial man. In this sense she nodded to an awareness of the psychological dimensions of racialisation, in this period a concept gaining credibility especially again through the work of

¹⁶² Script, 1959, BBC WAC: 18, lines 11-19. The reference to dryness may well have also been a type of sexual innuendo in relation to white female settler sexuality.

¹⁶³ On ghostly apparition and racial mixing in Spark’s short stories see Bryan Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind*, 2013: 128.

Fanon, whose *Black Skin, White Masks* was published in 1952 (although not in English until 1967). Spark, like Lessing, was interested in issues of psychic repression and suppression, and her use of the narrative device of body splitting prefigures in some ways the disconnection, as articulated by Fanon, of the bodily schemas of black male subjectivity (and which drew on ideas of double consciousness as outlined at the turn of the century by American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois).¹⁶⁴ As Fanon wrote, there was a 'definitive structuring of the self and the world' through what the black male subject considered his corporeal schema, but the fixity of the racialising white gaze superimposed an 'epidermal schema' which alienated him from his own body.¹⁶⁵ These schemas are embodied by Borden's two halves, the racialising gaze affixing on him when Peggy recognises him for one who cannot pass as white. In this scenario he therefore assumes a positionality similar to that of the anti-colonial white woman as victim and violator (the white colonial male as killer, the black colonised male the subject of racism).

Given the charge of hysteria against Lessing's play, at least internally, it seems fairly extraordinary that Spark's feature tackled issues of race in colonial Africa so openly on BBC Radio. Yet Spark's employment of strategies of restraint, in the radio feature form and through the careful calibration of narrative framing (of barbed-but-polite tea party chatter), likely aided the feature's path to success, as did the programme's placement on the Third Programme and the backing of BBC personnel. The BBC's audience research into the broadcast (not undertaken for Lessing's talks) certainly showed a substantial proportion of the listeners surveyed had enjoyed the programme, giving it an average rating for a Tuesday night features slot on the Third.¹⁶⁶ The majority of the sample audience found the programme 'enjoyable entertainment', including the 'juxtaposition of the macabre and the matter-of-fact'.¹⁶⁷ A small minority of the sample audience did comment that the broadcast could be viewed as 'propaganda for racial hatred', terming it 'untimely and unpleasant', but the majority of the listening panel thought it handled deftly a 'compelling dramatic situation'.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, one listener went so far as to note that Spark's feature should be praised for its 'skillful evocation of the aridity of feminine colonial social life', demonstrating that the symbolism of drought (and awaited deluge) was an efficacious motif understood and appreciated by the

¹⁶⁴ Double consciousness was a term coined by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) to refer to the inward duality experienced by those categorised as *black* through the processes of racialisation. This notion was further conceptualised by subsequent authors, including Fanon but also C.L.R. James in *The Black Jacobins* (1938) and *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), and Lamming and Hall as discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁶⁵ *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952: 111; Teresa de Lauretis, 'Difference Embodied', 2002: 57.

¹⁶⁶ The programme earned 59% for its Appreciation Index rating. 59% was about average for a Third Programme feature in this slot and in this time period. Listener Research Report, *The Dry River Bed*. BBC WAC R9/6/62, Audience Research, Reports Sound, Chronological Reports, August 1959, Week 32.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Third's (relatively highbrow) listeners.¹⁶⁹ Sensitivities around race and racialisation on the BBC airwaves did not, as we see in more detail in the next chapter, disappear as the sixties commenced. Thus, these small insights into listener approval show the potency of Spark's strategies of making palatable the subject of male colonial violence, and of the racialising logic of the white-settled African state, at the juncture of the late fifties.

Conclusion

British white settler colonialism in Africa constituted a strand in the imperial project that ran largely counter to the swift movement of political decolonisation in the fifties. As such, it presented various problematic issues to the BBC (and to British public discourse more widely) in the telling of the story of Commonwealth unity and in the promotion of ideals of harmony, exchange and partnership to British publics. In this context, the role of white female African writers who articulated a broadly anti-colonial settler stance, softened through a gendered symbolism of aridity (and downpour) and mediated either via the small personal voice of the radio talk or through the restraints of realism in the radio feature, allowed for a navigation of the difficult territory of racial domination and continued coloniality. The white settler woman as a figure of alterity, either in her personal politics or within the confines of radio narrative, occupied a betwixt-and-between positionality which could be used to critique the exercise of coloniality from within, but so too could it function to displace concerns around racialisation through a predominant focus on the (white) gendered subject. Within this frame, the female subject could be shown to be both an agent of complicity in the colonial project and as (unwitting) mediator of racially intolerant or orientalisating discourses.

As with India, writers and the BBC's production departments – as mid-century cultural intermediaries – walked a tightrope in terms of avoiding direct address of the politics of the 'colour bar' of Rhodesia, especially in cultural programming. These limitations were keenly felt by Lessing, whose own personal politics (Communist and then socialist in this era) likely made her a person of concern to BBC personnel. An avowed distancing from political commitment, then, as practised by Spark and as seen with Forster (and to an extent MacNeice), was necessary for a flourishing of collaborative praxis on topics of coloniality and involving the BBC as cultural institution at-large, the individual producer (who privately may have raised concerns about the BBC's quietism on African apartheid) and the freelance female writer. In Spark's case this led to her being given a not inconsiderable latitude in writing about white settlerism, one that allowed for a certain (contained) kind of outspokenness on the violence of

¹⁶⁹ Comment from an unnamed Almoner's Clerk on the Third Programme Listening Panel, *ibid.*

coloniality, a licence which was largely denied to Lessing.

In building successful radio-writing careers as white (anti-)colonial female writers, Lessing and Spark were subject themselves to the limitations of the sexual politics of the time. These nuances were not lost on them, even in old age (when they had become friends) as they reflected on what Nonia Williams has described as the ‘continuing demands on women of the external gaze’, the expectations to look good and the concomitant pressure to bow to expectations of conventional femininity in their behaviour and in their work.¹⁷⁰ Spark’s and Lessing’s experiences at the BBC are stark reminders of the difficulties faced by women contributors both in personal terms (Spark’s self-effacement for her male producers, for example) and in creative ones (the unpleasantness, as considered by the BBC, of Lessing’s depiction of sex and race). Both women ended up moving away from radio and the BBC. Lessing never wrote substantial original radio output after her 1952 talks; Spark, after moving to New York in the early sixties, became known of as a difficult person to deal with due to her desire for, amongst other things, better remuneration.¹⁷¹ Neither of them could be persuaded to engage significantly with broadcasting again (despite producers’ efforts).

In one sense Spark’s and Lessing’s experiences can be read as indicative of the failure of the BBC to sustain long-term collaborations with ‘African’ women writers in this period (at least for longer than a decade).¹⁷² In another sense, though, it could be argued that BBC Radio provided a necessary platform through which both authors found their own voices, at one level in affirming their commitments to novel-writing, and in another in moving away from writing about African colonialism (a position that perhaps grew untenable due to the rise in black African-authored literature published in Britain from the sixties onwards). In negotiating with the BBC’s complex internal politics, more so for Lessing than Spark, and in experiencing the restraints of speaking aloud of the politics of coloniality, it perhaps crystallised to both authors the boundaries of what a white female author, connected to settlerism, ‘in her time and place, could do’.¹⁷³ The question of BBC Radio’s potentiality in addressing coloniality to British publics, and its limitations in doing so, also concerned a set of writers associated with another part of Britain’s fading-yet-unabating empire, that of the

¹⁷⁰ ‘No Hip Muffs’, 2021: 76.

¹⁷¹ By the early sixties, thanks to her growing success as a novelist, Spark began to ask the BBC outright for a higher fee for her writing and for her taxi expenses be covered. From 1962 onwards she also wanted more copyright control over her radio-writing; see for example BBC memoranda in September 1962 regarding Spark’s request that any reprints of her work in *The Listener* should only go ahead following consultation with her and with her specific consent (despite BBC contractual obligations stating the Corporation held the copyright). Although Spark still employed a pliable tone in her correspondence to Holme in 1960 (as evidenced in this chapter) by the end of 1962 this began to change noticeably. BBC WAC, Mrs. Muriel Spark, Speaker, File I, 1950-1962.

¹⁷² I use that term with the caveat that Spark did not identify as an African writer and neither did the BBC view her as one, but by virtue of writing *The Dry River Bed* she became in this period of BBC Radio an *African* writer.

¹⁷³ Bill Schwarz, ‘The Fact of Whiteness’, 2016: 136.

Caribbean, as the next chapter investigates.

CHAPTER FOUR

Double Binds: George Lamming, Stuart Hall and Voicing Black Britain

Introduction

The late fifties brought another expanse of Britain's empire into the growing discourse of decolonisation with the political union of the West Indian islands. The West Indies Federation – a group of ten Caribbean colonies including Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad – was inaugurated in January 1958 under the aegis of the British government. The official aim was to grant greater autonomy and unity to a region that shared a colonial history but which had, until then, only been loosely affiliated as a political entity in its own right. The West Indies was still at a nascent stage of its journey into modern nationhood; its geographically and culturally disparate islands had only begun to cohere into an imagined community in earnest some two decades earlier following a spate of worker unrest and rioting in 1937-1938.¹ Thus decolonisation in the Caribbean was viewed as a more nebulous affair than in South Asia or Africa, framed not by explicit notions of freedom or independence but instead by descriptions of end-stage colonial guardianship and of Britain's role in aiding the coming-into-being of the West Indies.²

Becoming West Indian was a process also in motion at the other end of the imperial axis, namely in the metropolitan centre. A decade after the Empire Windrush had landed at Tilbury Docks, the numbers of Caribbean migrants to Britain had rocketed. By 1958 an estimated 20,000 newcomers – largely from the West Indies – came to Britain per year, a twenty-fold increase from a decade earlier.³ Here they populated London, chiefly, and encountered fellow Caribbeans who they would likely not have met in their geographically dislocated and socially stratified native homelands. Middle-class Jamaican Oxford graduate Stuart Hall recalled seeing a group of newly-arrived migrants from humbler backgrounds than his exiting Paddington station *en masse* not long after his own arrival in 1951; it was in that moment he realised he too would be viewed as one of the 'stream of black people' beginning to populate

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1983; Franklin Knight, 'The Caribbean in the 1930s', 2003: 42.

² *The Guardian*, 4 Jan 1958, p.5.

³ Chris Waters, "Dark Strangers" in *Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation, 1947-1963*, 1997: 209.

the English landscape.⁴ It was, he reminisced, as if he had come face-to-face with ‘the “real” Caribbean’ in, ‘of all places, England’.⁵

This chapter explores again the late fifties but extends into the mid-sixties to interrogate the radio voices of two writers who profoundly influenced the emergence and the shape of black British identity and cultural politics. Bajan poet and novelist George Lamming (1927-2022) and Jamaican critic and theorist Stuart Hall (1932-2014) both arrived in Britain at the start of the fifties; both were essayists and intellectuals who went on to write bodies of work contributing to the development of cultural political thought, including in this period Lamming’s collection of essays on language and decolonisation, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960). Hall became a seminal figure in the discipline of cultural studies and (co-) authored several texts that were foundational in the study of media, culture and race including *The Popular Arts* (1964), ‘Encoding/Decoding in the Television Discourse’ (1973), *Policing the Crisis* (1978) and ‘New Ethnicities’ (1988). Although their intellectual and biographical trajectories would later diverge significantly – with Hall living in London until his death and Lamming travelling to West Africa and elsewhere before returning to Barbados – in this early period of their careers they occupied a shared metropolitan space with other ground-breaking West Indian writers including V.S Naipaul, Sam Selvon and Edgar Mittelholzer. Together they contributed to the literary-cultural movement that constituted, to use James Procter’s chronology, the first main phase in the evolution of black British cultural production (c.1948 to the late 1960s).⁶

My analysis situates this first phase of black British production in the examination of domestic post-war BBC Radio in the colonial context. The medium of radio in particular, unlike other platforms and publications in this period, carried a particular resonance for diasporic West Indian writers due to their association with (and at times ambivalent affection for) the BBC’s landmark Overseas Services literary series *Caribbean Voices* (1943-1958). Conversely Caribbean literature, via the series, was woven into the warp and weft of (some of) the BBC’s radio schedules and into its External Services lineage, thus arguably placing the BBC’s relationship with a West Indian culture of decolonial coming-into-being – specifically through literary-cultural radio – on a different footing to that of other parts of the empire. As documented in various histories, through the *Caribbean Voices* brand BBC Radio served as a catalyst in the evolution of West Indian literary culture from the early forties to the late fifties.⁷ Launched under the leadership of Jamaican poet and producer Una Marson and later

⁴ *Familiar Stranger*, 2017: 168-169.

⁵ 2017: 190.

⁶ Procter defines the three main phases of black British cultural production as: i) 1948 to the late 1960s; ii) 1960s to the mid-1980s; iii) the mid-80s to 1998. *Writing black Britain: 1948-1998*, 2000: 2.

⁷ Glyne Griffith, 2016; Bill Schwarz ed., *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, 2003; James Procter, 2000; Philip Nanton, ‘What Does Mr. Swanzy Want?’, 1998.

edited most prominently by Anglo-Irishman Henry Swanzy from 1946 (until 1954), the literary magazine broadcast weekly from London to the Caribbean served as platform, patron and ‘midwife’ for a new West Indian literary culture.⁸ Writers gathered around radio sets in Kingston and elsewhere on Sunday evenings to discuss the works that had merited a coveted slot and to listen intently to any narrative directions from London – scripted sometimes into the beginnings or ends of broadcasts by Swanzy and often read by Lamming who contributed as actor as well as writer – in the hopes of shaping their writings into a coveted transmission and so to be catapulted into recognition.⁹ This popularity and prestige was a consequence of radio’s properties as a spoken medium that tapped into the dominance of orality in a region of low literacy levels. *Caribbean Voices* thus extended its reach in the West Indies in a way that was unimaginable for any literary print equivalent at the time.¹⁰ Meanwhile in its London radio studios and in Swanzy’s home another BBC contact zone was generated with Caribbean diasporic writers, including Hall and Lamming, meeting each other to discuss the shape of West Indian literature and its connections to decolonisation and culture.¹¹

Although this backstory is vital to understanding the context in which black British intellectuals operated in relation to BBC Radio, this chapter does not seek to re-tread the territory covered by scholars of *Caribbean Voices* and nor does it aim to trace in detail the contribution of Lamming and Hall to the series (although in Hall’s case this is an area that arguably merits further scrutiny). Instead my focus is on the production of notable domestic broadcasts in the late fifties to mid-sixties that have been neglected in analyses of both authors and of cultural and broadcasting history more generally. Where the involvement of West Indian diasporic writers with domestic BBC Radio in the post-*Caribbean Voices* period has been considered at some length, notably in Peter Kalliney’s work, stress has been placed on the Third Programme; specifically, situating writers’ contributions as acculturation within highbrow modernist milieus and as part of what Kalliney interprets as anti-populist or anti-American cultural strategies at the BBC.¹²

Whilst there is merit in this perspective, it has tended to overlook the importance of the sizeable output of Lamming and Hall – as indicative of diasporic West Indian literary culture in this timeframe – on the Home Service, a network enmeshed in complex ways (as discussed previously in this thesis) with notions of accessibility, the common man/woman as listener, and what in today’s terminology might be called knowledge transfer. Talks and

⁸ Hall, 2017: 181.

⁹ Nanton, 1998: 16-17.

¹⁰ Griffith, 2016: 3.

¹¹ Hall, 2017: 180-181; Nanton, 1998: 17.

¹² Kalliney, *Commonwealth of Letters*, 2013; ‘Metropolitan Modernism and Its West Indian Interlocutors: 1950s London and the Emergence of Postcolonial Literature’, 2007.

features, situated in their production ecologies, to be examined include *After A Decade* (February 1961), *Race Relations* (March 1961), *Many Islands, Many Voices* (November 1964), and *Generation of Strangers* (August 1964). As noted, these programmes form an important locus from which to glean insights into the progression of black British cultural production and politics, but so too do they offer rich insights into the BBC's own assessment of its relationship to black British culture and of Home's role in describing, critiquing and circulating a growing race relations discourse to a core and mainstream British listening public.

This is not to say that the Third Programme falls outside of this chapter's remit but rather that I locate the network, and Lamming and Hall's contributions to it, within other histories and perspectives: that of black British-centred cultural politics and of a cultural materialist approach to media. In particular, I devote serious attention to a key broadcast that aired in the same year *Caribbean Voices* came to an end and which marks a singular moment in the history of black British literary-cultural production: Third Programme's *British Caribbean Writers*, transmitted on the evening of 21 April 1958. This fifty-minute discussion was chaired by Hall and shaped at pre-production stage by Lamming in liaison with the BBC's Talks producer Leonie Cohn. It comprised a speakers' list which now reads as a who's who of West Indian diasporic literature, of writers that, in Procter's phrasing, wrote black Britain: Hall, Lamming, Selvon, Naipaul, Mittelholzer, along with Sylvia Wynter, Jan Carew, Errol John and Fernando Henriques.¹³ As far as can be ascertained this broadcast was, until the advent of the Caribbean Artists Movement in the mid to late sixties, a uniquely significant and expansive gathering of West Indian diasporic literary-cultural figures in one space.¹⁴ It was also, as far as can be determined by BBC archival evidence, the first programme of its kind on British media where the phenomenon of the birth of British Caribbean literature, tied explicitly to the federation of the West Indies, was discussed at length entirely by West Indian writers themselves (rather than with white British facilitators such as Arthur Calder-Marshall).¹⁵ As Hall himself noted in the opening, the broadcast captured a pivotal 'recorded moment in the history of a new and emerging culture'.¹⁶ As such it provides a significant resource to explore the differing and competing strands in the formation of late first-phase black British cultural politics in the context of a racialised and mediatised cultural apparatus.

¹³ *British Caribbean Writers*, programme transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 1.

¹⁴ Only one scholar has so far examined this programme in detail: Alex Fabrizio, 'V.S. Naipaul and George Lamming at the BBC', 2021. On CAM see Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972*, 1992; Rob Waters, *Thinking Black*, 2018..

¹⁵ Calder-Marshall (1910-1989) was a writer and critic who promoted West Indian literature on the BBC's Home Services, for example in *The Emigrants: Talking of Books*, 3 October 1954, BBC HS.

¹⁶ Live introduction by Hall, transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 1.

Of note are Lamming's, Hall's and Cohn's specific roles as cultural intermediaries responsible for a broadcast that allows for a nuanced questioning of how black Britishness was articulated inwards on British airwaves at a time when *Caribbean Voices* was no longer being aired outwards to the West Indies. Keeping in mind nation's formation through narration, to cite Homi Bhabha, I query what kinds of British cultural identity diasporic West Indian writers envisioned a decade after Windrush's arrival in collaboration with or as directed and framed by the BBC.¹⁷ Indeed, it was a pivotal moment given the broadcast aired only a few months before the explosion of racially-motivated violence in Notting Hill and Nottingham that drew a decisive marker in British politics, prompting parliamentarians to declare Britain was on a cliff-edge staring into a deep 'abyss' from which it would need to 'draw back at once'.¹⁸ At the same time, I probe what these mediations might reveal about the BBC's evolving and contested or contradictory attitudes towards race, culture and end-of-empire. *British Caribbean Writers* allows for these dimensions to be questioned through the lens of BBC Radio's most highbrow network at a time when the imperial mother country fast became home to many of its (once) colonised subjects, prompting the rise of race relations discourses and integrationist agendas.¹⁹

In interrogating these issues I continue to keep in mind the numerous balancing acts that underpin interplays of cultural translation and co-production. Specifically, I flag here the role of *dualisms* of various kinds. First, vis-a-vis the media intellectual as a two-sided identity, as per Nicholas Garnham's analysis: on the one hand, enmeshed in the public circulation and democratising of knowledge production yet on the other involved in the shoring up of cultural capital.²⁰ Second, in relation to the contradictory nature of post-war British public and political opinion regarding colonial legacy and race, in which the growth of race relations discourses and legislation was balanced against a continued attachment to a notion of benevolent empire. And last, as it pertains to the notion of double consciousness as a defining feature of racialised black experience in the West.²¹ In this chapter I interrogate these dualisms as a way of exploring the extent to which Lamming and Hall were aware of the dangers of co-option and essentialisation as emergent black media intellectuals (or, as in Garnham's phrase,

¹⁷ *Nation and Narration*, 1990.

¹⁸ Lord Pakenham, House of Lords, 19 November 1958, Hansard Vol. 212, cc632-633. From 29 August to 5 September 1958 Notting Hill in west London was the scene of a series of violent attacks on the Caribbean diasporic population from white residents. Along with riots in Nottingham at the same time they came to often be seen as the worst racial violence in modern Britain. In their wake, the Commonwealth Immigration Act was passed in 1962, but so too was race discrimination legislation including the Race Relations Act of 1965 (later updated in 1968).

¹⁹ Stephen Small and John Solomos, 'Race, Immigration and Politics in Britain: Changing Policy Agendas and Paradigms 1940s-2000s', 2006: 239-243.

²⁰ Nicholas Garnham, 'The Media and Narratives of the Intellectual', 1995: 383.

²¹ As referenced in the previous chapter.

of the potential to function as ‘prop[s] of the status quo’).²² My aim is to explore any disruptive or resistant tactics the authors employed, but also to question the positioning of a possible strategic quality in their approach to essentialism as they worked to establish black post- and anti-colonial cultural production through domestic media. Equally, as mentioned, I interrogate what dualisms may have been encoded in the strategies and tactics of BBC producers, and as encapsulated by some BBC policies, as a changing British cultural landscape was registered and framed for media circulation by the Corporation. As this chapter will show, on the one hand BBC Radio did reach for newer, arguably more authentic voices on certain cultural subjects as related to colonialism and race for its domestic audiences in this period (although ideas of authenticity were, and still are, full of complications as I discuss in more detail shortly). On the other hand, BBC personnel subjected newer or unusual voices to close scrutiny in line with a set of editorial-production standards that did not always move in perfect tandem with wider societal change and which were interwoven in complex ways with government policy and wider political opinion. As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis, it is at the intersection of culture and politics that writers-as-broadcasters carry particular significance and yet, as this chapter will detail, their voices were often subject to very careful monitoring and arrangement in the BBC’s programming the closer they veered towards that intersection.

In this regard, I pay attention to *voice* as a modality of critique and as a form of cultural politics praxis. Taking a cue from histories that have foregrounded the importance of the materialities of race, embodiment and voice, I aim to attend to the colonial-racialised dimensions of Lamming and Hall’s voices, both spoken and written, and to locate these more firmly within twentieth-century cultural and media historiography. Authors such as Paul Gilroy, and indeed Hall too, have traced some of the strong musical resonances of post-war black British culture.²³ But speech/voice as black cultural medium warrants deeper exploration, as Hall himself suggested in a discussion with David Scott.²⁴ Modes and registers such as accent, both written and spoken, are, as this chapter will demonstrate, useful conceptualisations through which to explore the formations of radio-mediated anti-colonial, black British culture. In attending to the nuances between textual and spoken voice and by listening via the page or where possible to extant sound archives of Lamming and Hall’s actual voices, I examine the motivations of Caribbean diasporic intellectuals – as individuals and as a

²² 1995: 359.

²³ Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, 1987; ‘Between the Blues and the Blues Dance’, 2003: 381-396. Hall, ‘Calypso Kings’, 2003: 419-426.

²⁴ Scott notes how Hall provided him with various examples of his own awareness of voice and its implications for a serious analysis of intellectual practice but the discussion was cut short by Hall’s death; *Stuart Hall’s Voice*, 2017: 1.

collective – to rise to the occasion, as the title of an early chapter in *The Pleasures of Exile* asks us to consider, and to speak.²⁵ Concurrently I also utilise these archival sources to critique the radiosphere as a form of voiced cultural apparatus, one where broadcast-as-cultivated-articulation – through processes of editorial and production shaping, *who* is allowed to speak and *how* – offers significant insights into the peculiarly knotty relationship between culture, politics and BBC Radio.

A note, finally, on periodisation in this chapter. As outlined, 1958 carries weight as the site of several important junctures (the end of *Caribbean Voices*, the broadcast of *British Caribbean Writers*, the Federation of the West Indies and the Notting Hill and Nottingham race riots). At the other end, loosely defined as mid-sixties, is the advent and growth of the Caribbean Artists Movement, the creation of the Birmingham-based Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964 by Hall (and Richard Hoggart) following on in the New Left tradition, and Lamming's departure in 1967 to take up an academic position at the University of the West Indies. The mid-sixties also saw a decisive shift towards tighter controls on immigration and the rise of race-related (and racist) politics and political discourse, including the 'white backlash' Conservative win in Smethwick in the 1964 General Election.²⁶ As a result, the media began closer interrogation of its own construction of immigrant-related programming, perhaps best symbolised by two high-profile BBC conferences held in July 1965 with representatives from Britain's migrant communities, resulting in the creation of the Corporation's first Immigrant Programmes Unit.²⁷ Conversely, in the same period, black British activism oriented itself more firmly towards a black Atlantic consciousness bound by pan-Africanism.²⁸ As Rob Waters has shown, this also signalled a shift away from earlier anti-colonial cultural politics (as encapsulated by *Caribbean Voices*), denoting instead a pivot towards Black Power and radical blackness that necessitated, to a certain extent, an embrace of more populist and radically aligned strategies and a turning back on institutions of cultural authority (as represented by the BBC).²⁹ The period in focus here is therefore defined as a key

²⁵ 'The Occasion for Speaking', *The Pleasures of Exile*, 1960: 23–50.

²⁶ The Conservative candidate, Peter Griffiths, utilised a racist slogan in his winning campaign against the Labour incumbent and 'white backlash' was the term used by BBC Television election night commentators to explain his shock win. Hendy, 'Smethwick', BBC 100.

²⁷ Under the auspices of the Director General, the BBC organised two conferences in 1965 at Broadcasting House: the first was with Pakistani and Indian communities (6 July) and the second with those from West Indian groups (13 July). West Indian cricketer-turned-diplomat Sir Learie Constantine, who was also on the BBC's General Advisory Council, had encouraged the setting up of the conferences. Following the urgent need highlighted by migrant representatives for more relevant programming on both television and radio, the BBC created the Immigrant Programmes Unit (IPU) in Birmingham in record time, with the Unit's first broadcasts airing in October 1965. *Report on Programmes for Immigrants*, a five-year lookback written by G Hynes, then-Head of the IPU, 1 October 1970, BBC WAC R34/1303 File 2.

²⁸ Gilroy, 1993.

²⁹ Rob Waters, 'Henry Swanzy', 2016. In 1968 Radio 3 broadcast an in-depth feature on Black Power, which included contributions from black nationalist leader Stokely Carmichael (who had visited the UK in July 1967). *Black Power*, 3 April 1968, BBC Radio 3.

juncture or hinge in British cultural history with regards to the development of race relations, domestic media and the early mass implosion of empire.

The BBC is situated in broad terms here as an institution going through a period of extensive change – indeed even a cultural revolution as described by some – under the leadership of Director-General Hugh Carleton Greene.³⁰ As the place of black diasporic writers-as-intellectuals within these internal culture shifts is my focus, I begin with an exploration of the dialogue between producer Leonie Cohn and George Lamming which resulted in the 1958 *British Caribbean Writers* broadcast.

Us Not They

Writing to Lamming in January 1958, Cohn raised for the first time the possibility of a Third Programme broadcast exploring the views of West Indian writers living in London. Lamming had been involved in the machinery of *Caribbean Voices* by then for some time, working on the series as a reader/actor not long after his arrival in Britain in 1950 and, as the decade progressed, as part of a writerly coterie that functioned as sounding board for Swanzy and his team.³¹ As a result his broadcast exposure, up to that point, had been mostly limited to the General Overseas Service with the notable exception of a 1957 Home Service feature, *Journey to An Expectation*.³² Lamming's radio experience, although not mentioned directly in the letter, would likely have been one factor in Cohn's assessment of his suitability as a talks writer-presenter for Third. Of greater significance however would have been his literary acclaim, which clearly marked him out in terms of appeal and fit for the network. Despite the fact that Third Programme now had a much-reduced schedule – having undergone several rounds of cuts in the years leading up to 1958 and, since 1957, having been split into a parallel service with Network Three which carried more generalised content akin to that of Home and Light – the network was still perceived, externally and internally, to be in command of a small but significant intellectual constituency. It remained in 1958 at the top of the pyramid of the post-war tripartite BBC Radio structure that lingered on for nearly another decade until 1967.³³

Against this background, Cohn's concise and persuasive letter – asking for Lamming's thoughts on a tentative programme idea about West Indian writers and their 'cultural relationship' with British literature – was framed implicitly by the continuing lure of the Third

³⁰ Jamie Medhurst, Siân Nicholas and Tom O'Malley ed., *Broadcasting in the UK and US in the 1950s: Historical Perspectives*, 2016; Chignell, 2011: 80-100; Peter Astley Waymark, *Television and the Cultural Revolution: The BBC Under Hugh Carleton-Greene*, unpublished PhD thesis, 2005.

³¹ *The Pleasures of Exile*, 1960: 65-67.

³² *Journey to An Expectation*, 19 March 1957, 10.15pm, produced by John Bridges, BBC HS.

³³ The Light-Home-Third pyramid was finally replaced with Radios 2, 3, 4 and the introduction of Radio 1 on 30 September 1967.

as a platform for serious writers-as-speakers, and, inversely, by a cognisance of the weight the author's profile and status would carry with the Third's commissioners and with its audiences.³⁴ Lamming's name had been propelled into the review sections of broadsheets and literary magazines some five years earlier with the publication of his debut novel, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953). Along with Edgar Mittleholzer and Sam Selvon he was, in the early to mid-fifties, one of the few authors from the Caribbean to secure a British publishing deal and to garner serious critical attention in the mainstream press. So effusive and numerous were the critical responses that *The Observer* compiled a round-up of plaudits for Lamming under the banner: 'Immediate praise for a new outstanding writer'.³⁵

In the intervening years between this stellar debut and Cohn's first correspondence Lamming published another well received novel, *The Emigrants* (1954) and worked in a freelance capacity on *Caribbean Voices*. Like Hall, he spent much of his free time in London with West Indians from diverse backgrounds, which included pioneering diasporic intellectual figures such as Trinidadian historian C.L.R. James.³⁶ Through these networks he engaged in various cultural-political initiatives, including being an invited speaker at the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1956, alongside writers and thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Langston Hughes.³⁷ The Congress's aims, to which Lamming signed up, were captured in its final resolution which argued that the promotion of (Western) culture should now be 'dependent upon the termination of such shameful practices in this twentieth century as colonialism, the oppression of weaker peoples and racialism'.³⁸

Such concerns were foregrounded in Lamming's fiction through a range of characterisations and thematics, but explicitly too through the use of terms such as *skin* in the title of his debut novel. In tandem with this his literary style, although noted for a density of prose, was acclaimed for its lyrical, rhythmic structuring.³⁹ Having originally imagined a career as a poet rather than a novelist, his techniques were rooted in the orality of his childhood and in a 'fascination with the word as sound' and 'as component of rhythm'.⁴⁰ Radio thus firmly

³⁴ Leonie Cohn to George Lamming, 29 January 1958, BBC WAC RCONT1, George Lamming, Talks File 2 1958 -1962. As far as can be determined, this was the first contact between the two.

³⁵ *The Observer*, 22 March 1953.

³⁶ *Familiar Stranger*, 2017: 181; Brett St Louis, 'The Perilous 'Pleasures of Exile': C.L.R James, Bad Faith, and the Diasporic Life', 1999; Mary Chamberlain, 'George Lamming', 2003: 178. James first moved to the UK in 1932, the same year as Una Marson and the two were key figures in what might be termed a pre-first phase of twentieth-century black British cultural production (before mass migration).

³⁷ Chamberlain, 2003: 180.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo*, 1992.

⁴⁰ 'Interview: George Lamming Talks to Caryl Phillips', 1997: 10.

captured his imagination, first as a wartime listener to *Caribbean Voices* in Barbados and then in Britain as a reader and contributor.

Cohn, a German-born producer who had been at the BBC since 1941 when she joined the German Service as a translator, was by this period one of the prime figures in the Talks Department team. Despite a reputation as a distinguished producer, amplified in the following decades through her broadcast work with art historians including Nikolaus Pevsner, Cohn's BBC archival imprint is remarkably small and offers few clues as to her motivations and strategies. Hardly any files relating to her have been prioritised in the BBC's boxing up and cataloguing of its own history (or in its own oral history records), as is the case with several female producers whose names have emerged during the course of this study (including Prudence Smith, Sunday Wilshin and others).⁴¹ Cohn's productions of Doris Lessing's very first broadcasts, discussed in the previous chapter, gesture to the fact she often worked closely with female writers (for example, with Sylvia Plath from November 1962 until Plath's death in February 1963).⁴² What is also clear is that Cohn's own cultural translator background and milieu – an internationalism she participated in and fostered within BBC Radio as one of a small but influential group of European émigrés prominent in mid-twentieth century editorial and production circles – led her to identify and nurture contributors from non-British backgrounds.⁴³ Notably she had developed a reputation in the fifties, in the BBC language of the time, for foreign talks. Within that context she produced a range of broadly current affairs-style talks, although not in the hard(er) news format that Talks would adopt throughout the sixties as it bedded down into an organisational and editorial move to the newly-created News and Current Affairs Department (instituted in the summer of 1958).⁴⁴ Rather, Cohn's production style – certainly in the early and mid-fifties and up until January 1958 when she first contacted Lamming – was emblematic of the highbrow cultured talk, often revolving around heightened writerly approaches to foreign topical subjects. This was apparent not only through the set of contributors she developed but also in the guidance she gave to up-and-coming writer-speakers, including Lamming.

Over the course of February and early March 1958 Lamming and Cohn exchanged a number of letters discussing the structure and shape of the proposed broadcast, which began

⁴¹ Cohn's staff file, for example, has not been kept in the BBC WAC records despite a 36-year BBC career. It should be noted that most BBC female producers from this period on the whole did not write – or were not asked to write – published memoirs on their broadcast careers, unlike their male counterparts (especially Features producers).

⁴² Gail Crowther and Peter K Steinberg, *These Ghostly Archives*, 2017: 232-233.

⁴³ A leading member of the European émigré group was Hungarian-born Martin Esslin, mentioned earlier, and who headed BBC Drama from 1963 to 1977.

⁴⁴ See Chignell on the creation of News and Current Affairs in August 1958 and the changes in Talks following the publication of a significant internal BBC report in January 1957 entitled *The Future of Sound Broadcasting in the Domestic Services*, 2011: 71-79. The general recommendation of the report was to move BBC Radio content away from paternalistic, Reithian modes and towards a modern, dynamic sound where news and comment were more tightly fused.

with Cohn's suggestion of a personalised account for the Third Programme regarding the West Indian writer in Britain. In her correspondence she noted that crafting a talk for the Third should require no privileging of facts but rather it should elevate the personal and offer instead a 'measure of poetic truth'.⁴⁵ In asking for a personalised and poeticised approach, Cohn highlighted two Third Programme talks as examples (from earlier in the decade), both of which were authored by speakers that hailed from the country or region they sought to dissect.⁴⁶ These broadcasts, she implied, brought much-needed authentic subjectivities to domestic British airwaves. In a tone typical of much BBC Radio production communication with writers at the time (and arguably still the case to a certain extent) Cohn hinted, rather than specified, that in these exemplars the speakers – especially Lebanese diplomat Clovis Maksoud – had signalled to audiences their lived experiences as foreigners (to mix a fifties vocabulary with today's terminology). To Lamming she wrote:

In short, I send you both her talk [by Greek writer Kay Cicellis] and the very different one by Clovis Maksoud for their moods rather than as examples to be followed closely. They have both dispensed a measure of poetic truth, rather than conveyed information. It seems to me that this is so even with Maksoud, although his script reads a little bit like a potted history of Arab political movements. What made it moving was that it was all said by a man whose own past it contained: "us" and not "they". In any case your own story, I'm sure, will be quite different from either, both in the events and in the telling.⁴⁷

Cohn's language is revealing in its opacity. 'Us' and 'they' would appear to denote cryptically a matrix of ethnic and racialised experience in which an Arab contributor speaking of his own history is framed as a welcome, possibly novel gesture. Lamming, the letter implied, would intuit why this positioning of narrative voice was so emotive, linked as it was in some unspecified way with the expression of a personalised and lived history. This vague phrasing is perhaps indicative of an alertness on Cohn's part to some of the complexities embedded in ideas of authenticity, which both acknowledge and delimit agency for the racialised subject. As Sandeep Parmar has written in relation to the poetic lyric (a genre that shares close similarities to the radio talk through the centrality of 'I' as principal subject), any challenge to

⁴⁵ Cohn to Lamming, 14 February 1958, BBC WAC RCONT1, George Lamming, Talks File 2 1958 -1962. Cohn's emphasis on the personal contains echoes of the production approaches demonstrated towards E.M. Forster and as discussed earlier in this thesis.

⁴⁶ *The Unresolved Past*, about post-war Greek culture, written and presented by Greek novelist Kay Cicellis, 30 August 1951, BBC TP; *The Future of Arab Politics*, about cultural influences on the modern Arab mind, written and presented by Lebanese journalist and diplomat Clovis Maksoud, 27 August 1955, BBC TP.

⁴⁷ 14 February 1958, BBC WAC RCONT1, George Lamming, Talks File 2 1958 -1962.

dominant white culture through a foregrounding of personal experience of racial and cultural difference deemed as 'authentic' also risks locking in the colonised subject into an othered, marginalised status (give the mainstream un-racialised subject, imbued with an unspoken universality, does not need to invoke cultural authenticity).⁴⁸ The very notion of authentic subjectivity in the context of race and ethnicity is therefore highly fraught, and as noted Cohn's avoidance of any explicit definition of the references to 'us' and 'they' may have demonstrated a limited awareness of this (given her own experiences as a Jewish émigré).

From another perspective, however, the care in the use of language here also showcases how the role of the producer was mediated to contributors in opaque terms. The positioning of speakers as 'us' was likely to have been carefully arranged to some degree by production staff but, as Cohn was at pains to point out, the writer would have a considerable amount of agency in fashioning his own narrative. In itself this avoidance of direct comment was as expected given the customary Talks practice of drawing in writer-contributors by offering a semi-idealised notion of free rein in regards to content creation (epitomised by Forster's *I Speak for Myself*, 1949). Moreover, as seen through the examples of Forster and Lessing, Talks producers generally encouraged writers where possible to privilege the personal over the explicitly political. Cohn's use of us and they, therefore, was in many ways standard practice and not tied to any specifically innovative BBC editorial policy or strategy (as confirmed by the archival materials).

In further nuancing this assessment, though, it is productive to locate Cohn's comments within a wider spectrum of changing and at times contradictory approaches to the subject of race or 'colour' at the BBC and within British cultural politics at large. By the late fifties the BBC had, to an extent, moved on from the internal contestations that had marked the previous decade. In wartime in particular the Colonial Office (CO) had strongly interjected in planning discussions on programming related to issues of racism, maintaining that 'the colour bar' as such did not exist in Britain; despite this, the CO admitted that colonial migrants were keen to hear discussion of race in Britain on domestic BBC Radio, and Talks producers such as B.C. Horton had proposed ideas to do so, centring on the voices of migrants themselves.⁴⁹ But such initiatives generated a series of heated debates involving an array of senior personnel and in one notable case ending in an aborted recorded Home Service broadcast in 1943 in which three black contributors had spoken of their experiences including

⁴⁸ 'Still Not a British Subject', 2020: 1-4.

⁴⁹ Darrell Newton, *Paving the Empire Road*, 2011: 39-43.

the difficulties of obtaining tenancy and accommodation.⁵⁰ The BBC justified its decision internally by arguing, broadly in line with the CO, that the subject needed more gravitas and intellectual expertise instead of the voices of ‘real people’, and that this approach would do little to change the habits and minds of ordinary Britons.⁵¹ A decade later, with mass migration unfolding, there was growing acceptance amongst BBC Radio editors that the colour bar needed to be debated critically on air not only as a function of state-mandated oppression (in countries abroad such as South Africa or America) but also in the unofficial yet culturally sanctioned forms it took on British shores. A detailed series finally aired domestically, chiefly on the Home Service but also on the Light Programme, although it remained mostly within the frame of intellectual or journalistic analysis (and as such voiced mainly by white Britons), exemplified by Wynford Vaughan Thomas’ *Reporting on the Colour Bar in Britain* (17 June 1952, BBC LP).

The BBC attachment to heavyweight, expert critique of the ‘difficult’ and ‘deep’ causes and manifestations of the informal colour bar in Britain was counterpoised by a wider public disavowal of racism as a British problem.⁵² As Christine Grandy has shown, even in the late fifties post-war public opinion held that Britain was not a country of ‘race problems’ (in contrast to America), hinging on conceptions of Britain’s role in decolonisation as primarily altruistic, its goodwill enshrined by the Commonwealth ideal and epitomised by its attractiveness to migrants from its former colonies (who came voluntarily rather than through forced means as in America’s past).⁵³ Grandy has argued that this repudiation was central to the BBC’s decision to launch *The Black and White Minstrel Show* on television in 1958 – adapted from earlier iterations on radio and seemingly out-of-step with the changing cultural-political climate – and to the Corporation’s later defence of it as a product of British music hall tradition (and as a show, the BBC insisted, that was ‘not’ about ‘race’).⁵⁴ Political discourse and public policy, too, often adhered to the line that Britain was in many ways colour blind, despite growing evidence to the contrary and alongside developments such as the creation of the Institute of Race Relations (IRR).⁵⁵ This doubleness in the late fifties’ approach to race and

⁵⁰ See Newton on the shelved programme recording of a 1943 Home Service broadcast on the colour bar in Britain in which three relatively ordinary black migrant speakers, ‘real people’, spoke of their experiences, 2011: 32.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Maconachie used the words ‘difficult’ and ‘lie deep’ in relation to the reasons behind the existence of an informal British colour bar, but did not specify what they might be; memo to the Director General, 28 June 1943, BBC WAC R51/324/1.

⁵³ “‘The Show Is Not About Race’”, 2020: 863. See Thomas Hajkowski on the BBC’s Janus-faced empire-related policy in the forties, in which imperial nostalgia was aired as entertainment alongside serious promotions of the new Commonwealth ideal, 2010: 53.

⁵⁴ Ibid. The precursor to the BBC’s television show was blackface/voice on its radio networks, chiefly *The Kentucky Minstrels* which ran from 1933 until 1950 on the National Programme and the Home Service. The two shows were linked through various personnel including Eric Maschwitz, a producer in the thirties on *The Kentucky Minstrels* who became Head of Television Light Entertainment in 1958. Waymark, 2005: 184.

⁵⁵ On colour blindness as a feature of the post-war British political lexicon see Huw Thomas, ‘Race, public policy and planning in Britain’, 1995.

racism – a denial of British culture as systemically racist co-synchronous with a growth in the race relations industry – turned, as noted, on the general assessment of colonial legacy as benign and benevolent.

On BBC Radio this duality was in evidence in several ways. First, through the continued framing of serious, weighty discussion of decolonisation and race largely through the voices of (white British) experts. Although the BBC's wartime proximity with the Colonial Office had by then receded to a certain degree, there remained an intimacy with the official and quasi-official arms of the colonial and emergent Commonwealth project, demonstrated by the many so-called race experts on BBC Radio who had direct colonial affiliations and, in the main, were imperial nostalgists. They included the IRR's first Director Philip Mason, who asserted Britain would rise to the challenge of healing any racial divisions by remembering the examples of its military and political heroes and by honouring what he contended was the British public's inherent right-thinking nature.⁵⁶ Second, it was also apparent through the ecology of the *Caribbean Voices* brand and its legacy, idealised and promoted by the BBC via paternalistic conceptualisations of benevolence and patronage in which Caribbean literature, through its links to the series, was described by one Director of External Broadcasting as a child reaching maturity.⁵⁷ It was therefore the Corporation's publicly held belief that even in times of changed colonial structures there would remain a bond between Britain and the Caribbean through radio and literature, and that within that dynamic the BBC would still assume a pseudo-parental role of authority.

At the same time however, it was undoubtedly the case that black voices from (former) colonies did begin to filter through more prominently to domestic networks although not, on the whole, to chair or lead broadcasts (especially discussions) on the topic nor to graphically discuss lived experiences of racism. Rather their function was as testimonials of migration, marking the diasporic arc unfolding within Britain and addressing the subject of colonial and post-colonial racialisation obliquely and, on some rare occasions, somewhat more emphatically.

A primary example was Lamming's own first outing on the Home Service on March 1957 as the writer-narrator of the feature *Journey to an Expectation*. His scripted links documented the disorientation experienced by the Caribbean migrant as s/he came to realise

⁵⁶ 'An Approach to Race Relations', 1959. Mason presented a number of talks and discussions on domestic networks in the fifties including *Race and Science*, 19 February 1959, BBC HS and *The Vote in Africa*, 11 February 1956, BBC TP. Although he viewed racism (or the potential for racism) in fifties Britain as a serious societal problem, his policy recommendations relied on evoking a sense of Britain's glorious past and of skirting around the horrors or oppressions of the colonial project. For Mason's imperial nostalgia see his fiction and non-fiction, *The Men Who Ruled India*, 1953; *A Matter of Honour*, 1974; *A Shaft of Sunlight*, 1978.

⁵⁷ See Director of External Broadcasting Edward Tangye Lean's comments regarding the *child* outgrowing the *parent* in relation to *Caribbean Voices* and the BBC (child and parent respectively). Lean spoke at a ceremony to hand over programme scripts to the University of the West Indies in 1966; ceremony recorded as *Perspective: Caribbean Voices*, 16 May 1966, BBC SA.

that Britain was not the home-from-home portrayed by colonial education but instead, as Lamming described it, a troubled paradise.⁵⁸ Intercut with this narrative were real-life examples – including from trade unionists, from those turned away by landlords or those concerned with miscegenation – in the actuality clips of contributions from both white British and West Indian speakers, ‘real people’ in this case offering positive and negative views on mass migration around which Lamming wove his narration.⁵⁹ The clips thus carried a charge of racialised and ethnic authenticity, similar in many ways to the real (black) voices of lived experience that had been axed by Maconachie and Barnes in the proposed 1943 Home Service broadcast. Moreover, as they took the form of tape-recorded inserts of real people and not in-studio actors (as part of the new production standards in *Features* by 1957), the actuality clips enacted another type of authenticity in the features vernacular, one noted by the radio critic of *The Observer* as a definite shift away from the old (MacNeicean) style of feature-making in which the BBC constructed a ‘mock realism’ where actors voiced fictionalised actuality (drawn from real interviews).⁶⁰ *The Observer* remained wary of making any definitive pronouncements about the benefits of this new mode of features-authenticity versus the old one, but with hindsight scholarly opinion has broadly agreed that greater opportunities for ordinary voices to be heard through BBC airwaves were instituted by the development of tape-recorded speech actuality.⁶¹

In this move to what could be termed a ‘real’ realism, *Journey to an Expectation* tackled the subject of race and migration by adhering to BBC principles of balance and also airing the fears and concerns of white Britons who felt immigrants were arriving in droves ‘without being checked in any shape or form’ and to be ‘allowed to wander all over the country’.⁶² In a featurised format these clips were intercut with vignettes of prejudice and racial othering offered by Caribbean migrants. These included, significantly, Jamaican author Sylvia Wynter’s reflection on the very disavowal of racism identified by Grandy and others. Wynter described her encounters with what she termed the British custom of ‘double-talk’, the culturally embedded system of dealing with difficult situations, in particular as pertaining to race, via

⁵⁸ Script, *Journey to an Expectation*, 1957, BBC WAC: 3.

⁵⁹ The contributors appear from the script to have been genuine speakers (as opposed to actors voicing scripted inserts drawing on real-life interviews), as further confirmed by reviews of the programme in the press, although the speakers’ names do not appear in the actual broadcast. Two of the speakers were from the wider *Caribbean Voices* contact zone, writers Sam Selvon and Sylvia Wynter, so there may have been an element of garnering *real people* from direct contacts of Lamming, of the production team (including producer John Bridges) as well as from wider sources (including the Mayor of West Bromwich whom the BBC paid for assistance via fees given to his charity of choice).

⁶⁰ Paul Ferris, *The Observer*, 24 March 1957, p.12.

⁶¹ Peter Lewis, “‘A Claim to Be Heard’: Voices of Ordinary People in BBC Radio Features”, 2021: 4-9.

⁶² Speaker identified only as Mr. Trow, insert 2; script, 1957, BBC WAC: 3.

the use of euphemistic language or the sidestepping of explicit discussion.⁶³ The colonial migrant, she argued, had to learn a new mode of indirect expression:

In England, the West Indian has to learn this trick of double-talk – the double-think...At home, we are direct, we say what we are thinking. Here, one has to learn how to use words so that a situation – although it exists – is never admitted.⁶⁴

These contrasting viewpoints, framed by Lamming's narration in the feature, demonstrate the degrees of complexity in BBC Radio's responses to decolonisation, migratory influxes and culture in this period. It is undoubtedly the case that *Journey to an Expectation* foregrounded what could be termed authentic black voices (as far as can be evidenced by the script) in a way that was considered not fit for broadcast a decade and a half earlier, and which called attention to lived experiences of racialisation both through original testimony and through juxtaposition with opposing statements (expressed by white, non-expert voices).⁶⁵ Further, in amongst the Philip Mason-style presenters on the Home Service it was notable that Lamming, a West Indian migrant himself, was leading the broadcast.

Yet given *Journey* was a feature and not a discussion nor a hard-hitting current affairs programme it did not (or could not, given production and editorial contexts and norms) proffer direct criticism of those speakers who, in Lamming's words, troubled paradise. It is entirely plausible that in any BBC radio format in 1957 – talks, discussion – no black speaker-narrator could have directly critiqued the racialisation of migration occurring at a systemic level through government and public policy. Nonetheless it remains the case that a featurised format made it harder to do so given its distance from explicit current affairs comment.⁶⁶

Lamming's script, in writerly fashion, therefore tended towards broader, indeed poeticised statements (as per Cohn's language in her correspondence to him a year later). In his scripted links this meant a careful utilisation of metaphor and lyricism to subtly critique processes of

⁶³ Wynter recalled an episode in which a former landlady of hers pretended a thief had stolen Wynter's watch in order to avoid a confrontation regarding housekeeping rules. The avoidance of direct conflict, the related untruths and the unspoken subtext of racial dynamics were an accepted part of interracial relations, Wynter argued: '...this was her [the landlady's] method. I knew this, she knew I knew it, and knew that I knew that she knew I knew'. Miss Wynter, inserts 1 & 3; script, 1957, BBC WAC: 10.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ There were roughly equal numbers of white and black speakers in the actuality contributions in the programme although the overall focus through Lamming's narration favoured the migrant viewpoint given the feature was about the expectations and disappointments experienced by colonial migrants. Hence, there was no direct parity or equivalence between the two strands of voices; the migrant perspective was the dominant one. The programme ended with the story of a mixed-race couple discussing their child's place in British society and Lamming's script using this image to articulate hopes for a better future.

⁶⁶ See Bob Carter, Clive Harris and Shirley Joshi on the myth of the invisible state in fifties Britain as related to race alongside the synchronous racialisation of migration through government and public policy, 'The 1951-1955 Conservative Government and the Racialisation of Black Immigration', 1987.

racialisation and as rooted in British imperialism. It was, he noted, the 'treachery of the skin' that alerted the migrant to his predicament; the racialising dynamics of the imperial metropole meant for Lamming that *colour* functioned as a 'cage which betrays the bird within it'.⁶⁷

The tropes of caged bird and treacherous skin were forceful, impassioned and undoubtedly representative of anti-colonial discursive strategy in this era given their echoes of Fanon. Yet they simultaneously served to highlight the gulf on-air at BBC Radio between (white) expert, analytical voice and that of (black) lived experience.⁶⁸ Expert opinion on race and culture, in the shape of talks and discussions by Philip Mason and other former colonial servants, was not in the main transmitted through the use of poetics or symbolism. Meanwhile authentic experience from those who had been colonised erred (or was directed) towards it, in part due to the sequestering of such experience largely within featurised treatments of the subject if we locate *Journey* as a key example of authentic programming addressing culture, colonialism and migration in this period.

The broadcast certainly garnered critical attention precisely because of its use of metaphor. For *The Observer's* Paul Ferris it was Lamming's 'lyrical' and somewhat 'far-fetched' language, as encapsulated by the caged bird image, that made for an 'impressive' and 'moving' programme rather than the contributions of the feature's cast of real people whose 'angry, puzzled prejudiced voices' were, he contended, less likely to leave an impact on listeners.⁶⁹ Lamming's metaphorisation of the subject was therefore a successful anti-racist and anti-colonial tactic on one level, injecting heightened emotion through a similar method to the mock realism of old-style features where lived experience was brought to life through fictionalised script and actorly voice. But so too could this figuration become another dimension of the double-speak identified by Wynter, a lyricising that in its far-fetchedness could work to flatten or gloss over the ugliest aspects of British racism (expressed in the anger or prejudice of 'real' voices). In writing and speaking metaphorically Lamming therefore made significant inroads in reversing or disrupting British colonial-nostalgia as circulated by the BBC and yet, paradoxically, in so doing he also arguably reproduced the status quo by reaffirming the constitutive double-speak of colonial discourse.

⁶⁷ Narrator, link 2; script, 1957, BBC WAC: 4.

⁶⁸ Fanon's meditation on the colonial white gaze and the consequent entrapment of black (male) subjectivity had made a profound impression on a number of Caribbean writers, and was centred in *Black Skin, White Masks* on his own real-life experience. In a chapter headlined 'The Lived Experience of the Black Man', Fanon described his first experience of being racialised not long after arriving in the imperial metropole and a white child pointed at him publicly and shouted: 'Look, a Negro!', 1952: 89. On the Manichean (dualistic) aesthetic of colonial discourse and the uses of reversal and inversion to form anti-racist narrative strategies see Procter, 2000: 269.

⁶⁹ 24 March 1957: 12.

Journey to an Expectation thus encapsulated some of the contradictions at play in (post-)colonial writers' attempts to navigate voice, authenticity, race and culture via BBC Radio, and in the BBC's mediation of race and culture in the end-of-empire period. In this dualistic paradigm, where the changing cultural make-up of Britain as related to empire was affirmatively acknowledged (through the use of real or authentic voices, in a marked change from the forties) and synchronously where systemic racism was largely disavowed, Cohn's offer to Lamming to speak in a poeticised mode, coded as 'us' and not 'they', resonates with renewed significance. Had Cohn meant to indicate to Lamming he continue to write in the heightened metaphorical mode so welcomed in critical circles? And did this in turn imply he not write more explicitly or polemically about West Indian writers living in London? Archival evidence does not point in one firm direction here but it is clear that Lamming's responses to Cohn, which I now discuss, demonstrate an astute awareness of the BBC's production strategies and his desire to move away – at least in this broadcast – from a poeticised, figurative approach. Lamming's suggestions to Cohn, in conjunction with his idea for Hall's involvement in the proposed output, evidence a strategic manoeuvring in relation to 'us', 'they', black voices and positionality on the BBC's domestic airwaves in 1958.

A War of Position

Lamming's initial replies to Cohn did not contain a ready agreement to take part in any future broadcast. Rather, the general tone was one of a seasoned contributor au fait with the BBC's inner workings and the challenges in angling a programme so it would resonate with both commissioners and audiences. In response to Cohn's suggestions that he read previous Third Programme talk scripts (in preparedness for a proposed talk on West Indian writers in Britain), Lamming suggested the producer herself become acquainted with different perspectives on the topic. It was, in particular, the reshaping of the contours of the English language to which he wanted to draw attention as denoted by two recommendations he made. The first was to listen to an Overseas Service series broadcast the previous year (to which he had contributed) about English globally and in its spoken forms. To Cohn he wrote:

Some months ago the B.B.C. Overseas did a series called, English As She Is Spoke, in which Sam Selvon and I gave some examples with comments of passages from our work to show the different ways the English language was being used by two writers from different islands... with the same heritage of language and education. You might find this

script a starting ground for discussion on the aspect of language in the West Indian novels. The programme was produced by Rosemary Jellis, and I'm sure she would be glad to let you have some copies.⁷⁰

The precise details of *English as She is Spoke* remain unclear (due to lack of access to programme files) but the series title – along with the reference to Jellis, a producer known for programmes on language, accent and dialect – clue us in to Lamming's objectives to hone in on language, literature and speech as a focus.⁷¹ At this juncture it should also be stressed that Lamming had adeptly inserted the use of the term 'discussion' as a possibility into the conversation, when Cohn's original proposition had implied a single talk authored and voiced by him (in the mould of Maksoud and Cicellis). Connected to this, Lamming's second suggestion to Cohn was to bring in a greater number of voices in addition to his including that of a new critic, Stuart Hall. Hall had recently authored an article on the growth of the West Indian novel and Lamming believed him to be the 'best [critic] the West Indies has yet produced'.⁷² Moreover, he noted that a crop of Caribbean fiction writers resident in Britain were shortly due to have books published and they too, he advocated, could be included in a broadcast that addressed the role of writers in reshaping the English language.⁷³ Specifically, Lamming urged, the focus should be to:

...try to find out what kind of contribution the West Indian writers have made, or are likely to make, to the development of language in the literature of the English speaking world...Here they [the writers with forthcoming publications] would have to talk about their work: the way it is organised, what they are trying to do with situations and characters, and the particular moral concern which demands that they write the way they do. All this would be by implication.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Lamming to Cohn, 18 February 1958, BBC WAC RCONT1, George Lamming, Talks File 2 1958 -1962. Commas as per the original.

⁷¹ Jellis produced a number of domestic network broadcasts on speech and language in the sixties including *Language and Languages* and *Changing English*, both transmitted over August and September 1965, HS; also, *Dialects in England*, 14, 21, 28 December 1967, Radio 3.

⁷² Hall's essay, 'Lamming, Selvon and Some Trends in the West Indian Novel', was published in *BIM*, vol. 6, no. 23, December 1955: 172-178. *BIM* was at the time one of a handful of literary journals published in the Caribbean region itself, and had been founded by Lamming's former English teacher and mentor, Frank Collymore (1893-1980). Hall had tried experimenting with fiction writing when at Oxford but had given up soon after. He wrote some literary criticism in the years before joining the *Universities and Left Review* in 1957 (later the *New Left Review*) and moving into more explicitly political writing.

⁷³ Lamming noted the publishing trade magazine *The Bookseller* had recently identified six West Indian novels due to be published in Britain between January and May 1958. The books included V.S. Naipaul's *The Suffrage of Elvira*, Jan Carew's *Black Midas* and *The Wild Coast*, and Edgar Mittleholzer's *The Weather Family* and *With A Carib Eye* (a travel book). Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

In playing back to Cohn her own technique, as it were, Lamming's approach alludes to a self-appointed co-production role that demonstrates a subtle but significant reshaping of the traditional producer-contributor dynamic (as seen by the lack of ready agreement to her ideas and the alternative opinions on how to shape the broadcast instead). An elegantly worded but determined strategy was at play, one encoded in the modalities of voice – via the references to *English as She is Spoke* and through the suggestions of new voices in the shape of a burgeoning Caribbean intellectual (Hall) and the numerous contemporary Caribbean writers who might discuss the techniques they utilised to modify literary language in an 'English-speaking world'.⁷⁵ They would, Lamming stressed in the same letter, provide a range of West Indian experiences and would 'give you' (i.e. Third Programme) voices from 'Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados and British Guiana, among them two East Indians and four negroes, whatever that means'.⁷⁶

This correspondence, I argue, is a key document that reveals many of the cornerstones in black British cultural anti-colonial strategy as a Gramscian war of position, one mediated by a subtle reversal of production control to reposition black voice(s) on the BBC's domestic radio services.⁷⁷ Although it was Hall who would go on to be a theorist of Antonio Gramsci's relevance to analyses of race and culture – specifically in his theorisations that dominant power structures could be challenged or given new meanings through the conjuncture of historical moments and the relational dimensions of social, cultural and political forces (as opposed to traditional Marxist definitions of base and superstructure) – Lamming's letter demonstrates the practice of what Gramsci had described as the careful manoeuvring of culture into a position where it could function as counter-hegemony.⁷⁸ This orchestration is evident through the mechanisms of Lamming's subtle directions and caveats: a push in terms of a foregrounding of the affiliations between the English language and speech (English as spoken), and an insistence on the plurality of British Caribbean literary production (different uses of language by writers) and of West Indian identity itself (different islands and diverse ethnic origins); balanced against this, a pull away from explicit political comment through the double-edged references to ethnicity ('whatever that means'), and the reticently worded suggestion of an implicit discussion of an unspecified moral imperative (components which I discuss in more detail shortly). Lamming thus showcased a set of carefully calibrated counter-

⁷⁵ Ibid; italics are mine.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Gramsci, 1971.

⁷⁸ *The Prison Notebooks* were first published in Italy in 1947 and excerpts were translated into English and published from 1957 onwards, although Gramsci's work did not gain widespread recognition until the 1971 edition. There was nonetheless a strong Marxist influence from the thirties onwards on Caribbean writers and theorists, especially as espoused by C.L.R. James who wrote and spoke on Marxism's relevance to anti-colonialism from 1935 onwards until the early 1980s.

hegemonic tactics to position colonised voices into the dominant British cultural- and mediascape, specifically onto Third Programme and through a discussion rather than a feature. In arguing for a plurality of voice(s), in connection to language and speech, Lamming's simultaneous nod towards an implicit mode of address functioned to pre-empt or assuage any concerns Cohn or the Third may have regarding political outspokenness on British colonial legacy. Such calibrations in the context of the domestic radiosphere formed, I would contend, a significant but often overlooked strand in the early evolution of black British cultural politics and production.⁷⁹

Before delving in more depth it should be noted, at the broadest level, that Lamming's approach to negotiation worked given the final transmitted programme, *British Caribbean Writers*, did turn into a discussion chaired by Hall and featured all the writers suggested by Lamming. Cohn's first response had been lukewarm regarding a discussion (in addition to a talk by Lamming); there was 'no real basis' for one as the Third Programme, she asserted, would want more 'sharply divided views' than what was evident from Lamming's letter.⁸⁰ Conversely, she argued that Lamming's suggestions also alerted her to a dangerous emphasis on the conveying of information (and, by implication, not her preference for a poetics-driven approach); this would, in her view, be 'fatal' to a good discussion programme.⁸¹ The exception, she noted, would be if there was a 'rumpus' of some kind in a talk delivered by Lamming which may provide the basis for a further discussion.⁸² Cohn's terminology, offered to Lamming without deeper explanation, gestured again towards the tight editorial control over the shaping of cultural content as personalised and not information-driven, especially where content veered towards the sensitive subjects of race and empire. This control was however balanced against BBC Radio's desire for review and publicity, and a need for divergent viewpoint-driven material (a 'rumpus'), which was perhaps growing in significance as a stronger news and current affairs agenda took hold on network radio.⁸³

Here, then, was another iteration of the tussle or contradiction between BBC values and practice as regards to end-of-empire and culture in this period, in which a simultaneous pull and push could be performed towards (and away from) concepts of authenticity, conflict, brouhaha, information, personalisation and poeticisation in an effort to shape programming in the desired format and tone (talk versus discussion, one voice of narrative storytelling

⁷⁹ Procter, 2000, touches on the Gramscian dynamics of black British cultural resistance but voice and radio do not feature in that aspect of his analysis. More generally, as noted earlier, most critical studies have not interrogated the subject through the post-*Caribbean Voices* context or the domestic networks of BBC Radio.

⁸⁰ Cohn to Lamming, 21 February 1958, WAC RCONT1, George Lamming, Talks File 2 1958 -1962.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Chignell, 2011.

versus a heated debate). In the end, there was no separate talk broadcast and hence no 'rumpus' was required. In the absence of conclusive evidence, we can assume Cohn felt there was enough balance in the final discussion between these competing strands, particularly in the divergence of perspectives given the transmitted programme included many sharp divisions on the relationship between culture, language and politics, as framed by Hall and conducted especially between Lamming, Naipaul, Mittleholzer, Wynter and Selvon.⁸⁴

These balancing acts attest again to the complex interrelations between the BBC and the formation of a black literary-intellectual culture rooted in a desire to move into what Jamaican writer Andrew Salkey described as the 'domestic machinery' of radio.⁸⁵ As *Caribbean Voices* came to an end, there was clearly an impulse from black British writers, as represented by Lamming, to make – with great care and with some degree of agency – much-needed space within domestic radio schedules and to speak back in many voices to a 'pan-Britain' listenership rather than to what might be termed ghettoised audiences.⁸⁶ For Lamming and others in his generation of diasporic Caribbean writers there were mixed feelings about Swanzy's departure (in 1954 when he left to take up a broadcasting director role in newly independent Ghana), and about the closure of *Caribbean Voices*. On the one hand it was a welcome sign that Caribbean literature was breaking free of the influences of the BBC and colonial patronage. Yet on the other hand it left a gap, signalling the removal of a space that had functioned as an important contact zone and as a vital conduit into the British publishing industry, and to an extent the intellectual and cultural sectors, at large.⁸⁷

The BBC had, as Salkey had noted, enormous reach across British publics and thus for Caribbean writers the need to mediate their work via its domestic platforms was seen as a priority.⁸⁸ This was underscored by the fact that in the late fifties Caribbean readerships remained at only a tiny fraction of what they were in Britain. When *British Caribbean Writers* did eventually air on the Third Programme several of its participants confirmed this to be the case; in the words of Jamaican anthropologist Fernando Henriques, there 'was no getting away from the fact' that the extremely limited circulation of printed literature in the Caribbean meant 'you might as well not write at all'.⁸⁹ The asymmetric familial bonds between Caribbean literature and BBC Radio as cited by Lean were also, it would appear, a strong factor. Decades

⁸⁴ One example is the disagreement between Naipaul and Lamming regarding British critical reception of West Indian literature. Lamming criticised much critical evaluation of Caribbean writing as restrictive and lacking nuance. Naipaul disagreed, asserting that Lamming lacked generosity and that Caribbean writers' existence depended on the 'suffrage' of these very critics; Lamming argued back: 'I do not depend on that'. Transcript, *British Caribbean Writers*, 1958, BBC WAC: 8.

⁸⁵ Andrew Salkey recalling the fifties in an interview with Anne Walmsley, 20 March 1986, quoted in Kalliney, 2007: 100.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Nanton, 1998: 17.

⁸⁸ Kalliney, 2007: 100.

⁸⁹ Transcription, *British Caribbean Writers*, 1958, BBC WAC: 18.

later Lamming framed the BBC in this period as possessing a kind of ‘magic’ hold over Caribbean writers, one that could simultaneously ‘encourage and dissolve all forms of colonial dissent’.⁹⁰ It was therefore the case that Caribbean writers’ criticisms of the BBC could not be entirely disentangled from their huge affection for it too, and despite its many failings (on which more shortly) it was, wrote Lamming in 1960, a force for ‘good’ and a ‘remarkable public service, by any standards’.⁹¹

These tensions undergirded the proactive approach made by Lamming – as emblematic figurehead of one iteration of the Caribbean diasporic literary-political movement – towards domestic radio programming. *Caribbean Voices* had not been re-broadcast to British audiences (airing only on the General Overseas Service), and thus its demise posed a novel question for those British-based diasporic writers who had been closely associated with it: would there now be more opportunity to speak on the BBC’s domestic radio services? Moreover, could this be done through a discussion comprised *only* of Caribbean diasporic voices? In this context it is clear again that Lamming’s strategies were calibrated to gain greater positionality on domestic BBC Radio, but to fully understand the import of his emphasis on voice(s), language and speech we need to look back at the interplays between his emerging theorisations on race, class and politics, as he himself formulated them, through the prism of BBC Radio.

A Back Door Steeplechase and Branded on the Tongue

Concerns about access to the full range of British radio airwaves were uppermost in Lamming’s mind when negotiating with the BBC, including with Cohn in 1958, as evidenced in his collection of essays *The Pleasures of Exile*, published only two years later. In the opening to the collection’s second essay, ‘The Occasion for Speaking’, Lamming laid bare the Corporation’s internal machinations, including Radio’s tripartite structure, the control over speakers, constituencies and the links to intellectual culture as shaped by class and race. It is worth quoting from Lamming’s essay in depth here as it provides vital context from which to understand the mechanisms at play in his responses to Cohn’s offer.

In detailing the BBC’s racialised and class-based terrain Lamming positions the (typically male) diasporic writer not at the bottom of the radio pyramid but in fact outside the ‘back door’ from where he enters the Corporation ‘via the Colonial Service’.⁹² With some luck

⁹⁰ Lamming, ‘Sea of Stories’, *The Guardian*, 24 October 2002.

⁹¹ *The Pleasures of Exile*, 1960: 45.

⁹² 1960: 44. In another section, Lamming describes the Colonial Service as seen by those inside the BBC as the ‘arse-hole’ of the Corporation, 1960: 51.

and some well-managed PR skills, he notes, the writer moves up (akin to the tiers of the passenger ship) through various classes: across the External Services and then, via a 'steeplechase', higher up to the tricky landscape of the domestic services and the three Home Networks (Light, Home, and the Third).⁹³ This is where the journey becomes problematic because, as Lamming writes, each network is a foreign country 'requiring a separate and certified visa'; each caters to a specific constituency and is moulded by vowels and rhythms that the West Indian writer struggles to decode.⁹⁴ At the top of the hierarchy is of course the Third where entry is reserved for imposing intellectuals. All of this makes for an 'obsolete and bewildering process' that requires West Indian writers to sculpt themselves to the BBC's A-B-C formula and which unsurprisingly results (to reach for the passenger ship metaphor again) in very few of them making it up to first class.⁹⁵

For Lamming, therefore, radio as practised by the BBC was not – as claimed by some earlier radio practitioners and as declared by certain scholars decades later – a (colour) blind medium.⁹⁶ In the complex structures within which BBC microphones were embedded the black diasporic writer-speaker would find that both colour and class were influential, possibly decisive, factors in determining access to the Corporation's separate networks and publics. Gaining these insights into the BBC's internal construction and its links to British colonised cultural hierarchy in the 1950s – through his experiences with *Journey to an Expectation* and *British Caribbean Writers* afterwards – was a major formative experience for Lamming, as indicated perhaps most powerfully by the fact he returned time and again to this analysis in his writing and in public discourse.⁹⁷

Crucially these insights were also wedded, as he would discuss explicitly in 1961 in a Home Service talk, to his understanding of the British class system as mediated by the cadences and rhythms of voice, speech and accent. In *After A Decade* Lamming described the surprise felt by West Indian migrants, as outsiders to British socio-cultural norms, when they learned of the ways in which domestic British speech patterns registered class and socio-economic differences. Britons were, he noted in a particularly arresting phrase, in their own way, 'branded on the tongue'.⁹⁸ A BBC producer's secretary, he contended, would not ask for a glass of water in the same way as a factory girl; their syllables and vowels would register their

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ 1960: 45.

⁹⁶ See Jennifer Lynn Stoeber on American producer Norman Corwin's white-centric proposition in the forties that the microphone, as emblematic of radio as a whole, was an inclusive technology as it was *colour blind*. *The Sonic Color Line*, 2016: 233-240.

⁹⁷ For example, in his 2002 article for *The Guardian*, 2002.

⁹⁸ Script, *After A Decade*, 1961, BBC WAC: 1. 21 February 1961, 9.45pm, BBC HS.

education, their backstories and perhaps their future trajectories.⁹⁹ As in *Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming's talk pointed to the BBC's role in creating, cementing and circulating these tongue-branded 'signatures'; specifically, by recounting time spent with working class Britons who informed him they did not feel they could be at home on the Home, let alone the Third.¹⁰⁰ The working-class man belonged to the Light Programme, he told the Home Service audience, 'as a black man belongs to a race, called Negro'.¹⁰¹

In jumping ahead to this Home Service broadcast of 1961 my aims are twofold. First, to demonstrate Lamming's shift into a Home presenter role in which he was able to dissect more explicitly the subject of race (in comparison to 1957's figurative *Journey to an Expectation*), and further in which he could yoke his critique directly to an analysis of the very broadcaster through which he mediated his discourse (again in sharp contrast to *Journey*). This arguably serves to mark a post-Notting Hill and Nottingham shift in the early sixties Home Service schedule – reflecting a move both within the BBC and perhaps in wider society – when the Corporation could air such a (broadly) critical portrait of its own role in class-based societal structures and the possible affiliations or parallels to racialised strictures. In the immediate years after the riots, Britain's *colour problem* – hitherto, as discussed, presented as minor and non-systemic in relation to America – began to be addressed in slightly more explicit terms on domestic airwaves. On the Third Programme American sociologist Franklin Frazier – notably, a black speaker – spoke of how the average 'Britisher simply does not want to admit that he is prejudiced against coloured people', and pointed to the 'deeper cause' behind the riots as rooted in a schism that stemmed from 'the structure of British society'.¹⁰² The episodes of violence had caused, wrote Lamming, 'utter stupefaction' amongst members of the Caribbean diaspora (including Lamming himself), who had mistakenly believed that the kinds of racist violence seen in America's southern states could never happen in Britain.¹⁰³ In the pages of *The Listener* contrasting and vociferous views were aired by ordinary (white) members of the public writing in, some raising objections to strands of the BBC's coverage, including Frazier's talk, with others defending the urgent need for such programming.¹⁰⁴

After A Decade's files were out of reach at the time of writing, so this assessment cannot at this stage be further contextualised in terms of BBC memoranda or correspondence related to the broadcast; neither did the programme appear to have been reviewed (favourably

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ 1961, BBC WAC: 3.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. It is interesting that Lamming interpreted the Light as the natural home of working-class audiences and not the Home, which too had a substantial working-class listening public.

¹⁰² Frazier, *Britain's Colour Problem*, 14 December 1960; text quoted from *The Listener* reprint of talk, 22 December 1960.

¹⁰³ *Pleasures*, 1960: 81.

¹⁰⁴ Letters to the Editor under the heading 'Britain's Colour Problem' from T.C. Walster, H. Russell Wakefield, Kenneth Leech and Betty Jalley; *The Listener*, 12 January 1961.

or otherwise) in the broadsheet or tabloid press, and nor did the BBC promote it via *The Listener*.¹⁰⁵ This latter point could possibly demonstrate a desire by the BBC not to shine too strong a light on the broadcast, but equally the lack of critical response may also indicate that the content itself was not perhaps considered to be as potentially explosive as it might have been a few years earlier. In a much broader context, the change in Lamming's tone could also be an indicator of what has been heralded as the cultural revolution within sixties broadcasting (and more generally across the cultural industries). Although this 'golden age' at the BBC – associated with a loosening of editorial restrictions and some undoing of conservative attitudes both on and off-air – has largely been situated within histories of television and particularly television drama, it remains the case that by 1961 Hugh Carleton Greene had taken over the reins of the BBC's leadership, ushering in a much more liberal or 'radical' ethos than his predecessor Ian Jacob.¹⁰⁶ A filtering down of this radicality may have had some bearing on Lamming's ability to speak more openly about the BBC's role in constructing socio-cultural hierarchies.

I would nonetheless contend that Lamming's 1958 war of position approach comes to light again as a successful strategy (and as arguably representative of one version of black British cultural production) if we take *After A Decade* into account. The 1961 broadcast highlights an embodied voicing, through the Home Service, of some of the key ideas Lamming had only previously been able to express via the relative safety of textual voice in *The Pleasures of Exile*. Bearing in mind the caveats noted above, which may demonstrate a societal or internal BBC shift towards a greater ease with talks content focused on race, class and British culture, it remains the case that speaking provocatively on such matters, in one's own voice and through the BBC, undoubtedly carried a far greater disruptive potential than writing polemically (and arguably still does to an extent). Some of the graphic language of *Pleasures* ('arse-hole of the Corporation') if set in talks form – as opposed to fictionalised or dramatised treatments – would go against broadcast standards even today (but not necessarily publishing regulations).¹⁰⁷ *After A Decade* did therefore demonstrate a moderate closing of the gap between textual and spoken voice, between a charged embodied enactment of a challenge to the strictures of race and class (via a platform embedded in the very processes of hierarchical structuring of social relations) and the more shielded textual production of such

¹⁰⁵ Covid restrictions impacted on the access to some of the archival material for this chapter.

¹⁰⁶ On television and the cultural revolution of the sixties see Tony Garnett, 'Contexts', 2014; Jeremy Ridgman, 'Inside the Liberal Heartland: Television and the Popular Imagination in the 1960s', 1992. Hugh Chignell referred to Carleton Greene as the most 'radical' of all BBC Director-Generals, 2011: 78.

¹⁰⁷ See David Hendy on the tensions later that decade in BBC Radio regarding speech as related to taste and decency, and the BBC's guardianship of the English language overall, 'Bad Language and BBC Radio Four in the 1960s and 1970s', 2006.

provocation.¹⁰⁸ Could it have been aired in the late fifties, before the outbreak of widespread racist violence and before Lamming had established himself at the BBC as a contributor whose cultural-political strategic aims could effectively negotiate with the BBC's complex editorial and production apparatus? A definitive answer is impossible but in light of BBC Radio's complicated relationship to race and culture as sketched out above it would seem unlikely.

After A Decade again called attention to the spoken attributes identified by Lamming as definitive of the strictures of fifties and early sixties Britain ('branded on the tongue') but in this case by drawing an explicit link between classed and racialised experiences – indeed, in a proto-Hallsian way – and of the role of culture, as purveyed by the media, in constituting and perpetuating these barriers.¹⁰⁹ How much Lamming and Hall influenced each other in regards to their theorisations of race and class is outside the scope of this study. But their shared interactions with the BBC in the late fifties attest to the interrelations in their broadly Marxist (anti-colonial, anti-racist, anti-classist) practices in this period, and on an emphasis on the construction and mediation of resistance through the re-making of (often highbrow) mass media, a strategy that, from the perspective of black British cultural politics, came by the seventies to seem somewhat out-of-date.¹¹⁰

In 1958 however, and before Notting Hill, the landscape was significantly different.¹¹¹ Lamming had already experienced much of the BBC steeplechase that contributed to his formulation of BBC Radio as a voiced cultural apparatus, given he had made the leap in 1957 from the Overseas to the Home Service. In the light of his later comments, his war of position strategy served as a direct challenge to the institutional parameters of the Third, and BBC Radio at large. This re-positioning was conjoined, as he would write in *Pleasures*, to a notion of Caribbean literature as Caliban's reinvention of Prospero's language.¹¹² For it was Caliban's dilemma (and the West Indian's dilemma too), or his moral concern as stressed by Lamming, that he had no other language having only been taught to speak by Prospero. Nonetheless he could assert control, especially in the modern West Indian literary iteration, by 'christen[ing] language afresh' through fashioning narrative strategies that incorporated his own (creolised) dialects.¹¹³ For Lamming this remaking was forged through an interplay between individual and collective voice(s) – as spoken, as heard and as written – and which in his novels was

¹⁰⁸ On performative and bodily challenges to inequity in this regard see Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality*, 2009. For wider context on the relations between spoken and textual voice see Garrett Stewart, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext*, 1990; Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 1982.

¹⁰⁹ Hall's famous line on the parallels and intersections between class and race, 'race is the modality in which class is lived', was written in 1978. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, co-authored by Hall and Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clark and Brian Roberts.

¹¹⁰ Waters, *Thinking Black*, 2019.

¹¹¹ *Pleasures*, 1960: 80-81.

¹¹² 1960: 118-150.

¹¹³ Chamberlain, 2003: 189.

comprised of an interweaving of creole dialogue, folkloric singing or colloquial banter with that of conventional literary prose (often dense and modernist).¹¹⁴ This interweaving, or a written ‘interlinguality’, positioned the peasant or folk voice, especially in its spoken form, as the authentic voice of cultural-political resistance.¹¹⁵ Yet in reshaping Prospero’s language, as Lamming asserted in *Pleasures*, the role of the educated intellectual – one who speaks like the coloniser – was also key, as it elevated peasant voices through textual and cultural production to a high status within a half-new language, one that would submit Prospero to the ‘remorseless logic’ of his linguistic colonisation and force him to confront a changing power dynamic.¹¹⁶

The moral imperative for Caribbean writers, therefore, which Lamming had hinted at in his letter to Cohn and had reassured would only be ‘implicit’ in the Third Programme discussion, was to remake the English language – through peasant or authentic *and* intellectual voice(s) – as an articulation of the struggle to express an emergent post-colonial identity in the very language of colonisation itself.¹¹⁷ As literary or intellectual authors at the vanguard of a new movement, the group of *British Caribbean* writers carried an acute sense of an added dimension to their experiences of double consciousness of racialisation given the West Indies’ dislocation from African and Asian linguistic cultures and the predominance of English as mother tongue.¹¹⁸ To speak back as post-colonial Calibans with a range of different Englishes via the Prospero-shaped machinery of domestic BBC Radio was thus, for Lamming at least, a constituent element of an anti-colonial cultural-political praxis. Speaking back effectively to challenge the racialised and classed dimensions of linguistic colonisation meant speaking, pluralistically, in the language(s) of the peasant (through examples of varied literary expression) but, crucially, doing so by framing – to BBC producers and then on-air – an authentic language of the masses with the language of spoken intellectual practice (through an off-air production strategy and on-air analytical critique). It was a praxis that would allow

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid; see also Supriya Nair, *Caliban’s Curse*, 1996: 59. The use of dialect was most prominently associated in Caribbean writing at the time with Sam Selvon. *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) broke new ground as an English-language novel composed entirely in written dialect. Selvon created a new written Caribbean dialect by amalgamating spoken English traditions from a range of West Indian countries. See Susheila Nasta ed., *Critical Perspectives on Sam Selvon*, 1988, and her Introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Lonely Londoners*.

¹¹⁶ 1960: 85.

¹¹⁷ See Hall on the boldness of this move; 2017: 137.

¹¹⁸ This was evident, for example, in the broadcast of *British Caribbean Writers*. In keeping with the promise to be implicit the programme did not delve in detail into the links between colonialism and language, but Sylvia Wynter described how the Caribbean region was comprised of peoples from Asia, Africa and Europe mixing for hundreds of years with only one tradition in place: ‘the European tradition’. Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 6. *British Caribbean* in the use of the programme title was arguably double-edged as it referred primarily to the writers’ hailing from those parts of the region colonised by the British (as opposed to the French or the Dutch).

the subaltern to speak aloud, to use Gayatri Spivak's formulation, and to do so polyvocally in the mediated and oral/aural-sphere of mid-century Britain.¹¹⁹

Calibans on the Radio

Unfortunately no extant recording exists of *British Caribbean Writers* to allow us to judge the oral/aural impact of the speaking aloud of so many literary Caribbean diasporic voices on the Third Programme (Calibans on Prospero's airwaves in Lamming's paradigm). The recorded transmission as captured via transcript however does certainly demonstrate a plurality of black and Asian voices as related to a representation of the plurality of Caribbean diasporic experience, identity and literary-cultural production, no doubt down to Cohn's careful production and as shaped by Hall's astute questioning (as primary intellectual voice) with Lamming in the role of chief discussant and provocateur (second lead intellectual).¹²⁰ Plurality from the BBC's perspective can in this context be seen as a characteristic that was arguably welcomed given the need, expressed by Cohn, for conflicting viewpoints in a discussion (and despite her original preference for a single-voiced personalised talk on the subject perhaps a reconceptualised link to the notion of 'us' not 'they').

In discerning voice(s) through the programme transcript on paper in broad production terms, it is clear there was certainly a prompting of dissension as shaped by Hall's questions and Lamming's statements on the political objectives of literary writing.¹²¹ One example centred on the authors' conceptualisations of audiences for their literary works. For Lamming, who spoke up about the links between his writing and politics from the outset, his notion of an audience was rooted in what he described as a 'political conception', one that Lamming's 'us' aimed to speak to and of a West Indian constituency primarily.¹²² Hall interrogated this briefly but then took it forward as provocation to what he termed 'two very different writers', Edgar Mittleholzer and Sam Selvon.¹²³ In Hall's analysis, Mittleholzer wrote in contrast to Lamming given he wrote both novels 'with West Indian settings and West Indian themes and novels with characters and settings that are entirely English'.¹²⁴ Selvon on the other hand, he

¹¹⁹ Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', 1988.

¹²⁰ Recorded 9 April 1958 and edited by Cohn for broadcast on 21 April 1958. The entire transmission was recorded except for a short introduction by Hall which was delivered live and in which he referenced the broadcast, as mentioned at the outset of this chapter, as a 'recorded moment in the history of a new and emerging culture'. Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 1.

¹²¹ It must be noted that Sylvia Wynter's contributions to the discussion were also significant in terms of linking racialised experience to the cultural politics of Caribbean diasporic writing. The limitations of this study do not allow for an in-depth analysis of her contributions, but Wynter's role, perhaps foregrounded by Cohn who was noted for her work with female writers, should be scrutinised further, not least given her later emergence as a key theorist of race and culture. Katherine McKittrick ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, 2015.

¹²² Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 3.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

noted, was ‘still different from Lamming and Mittleholzer’ as he wrote of almost entirely West Indian characters and settings and by making ‘very forceful and creative use of West Indian idioms and rhythms of speech’.¹²⁵ In juxtaposing Lamming’s statement of intent regarding audiences in this way Hall managed to elicit considerable disagreement from the participants that segued into a wider discussion on cultural and political identity. Mittleholzer rejected any easy patriotism, arguing that unlike Lamming he did not feel obliged to owe ‘loyalties to any part of the world’.¹²⁶ Meanwhile Selvon, as a Trinidadian of Asian origin, was troubled by the role of ethnicity in cultural identification and by the dislocations effected by colonialism in the Caribbean. He had, he stressed, never found a complete identity given he felt he was not ‘West Indian in the true sense of the word’ (those ethnically considered black) and neither had he ‘been accepted as an Indian’.¹²⁷ For fellow Trinidadian and playwright Errol John, however, the ethnic multiplicity affirmed a belief in the cosmopolitan nature of the West Indies and an affinity between those of African and Asian origin (what in the following decade would cohere in the British activist context as political blackness).¹²⁸

Throughout *British Caribbean Writers* Hall’s presence serves a similar interlocutor-intellectual function, one that encourages dissent and divergence (in the vocalising of authentic experiences and literary expressions) but also encompasses these variances as part of a newly emergent cultural politics and collective identity. In so doing Hall (with Lamming and Cohn as co-agents), stressed the emergence of a new collective, one ostensibly tied to the new political federation in the West Indies but also unfurling at the same time within Britain itself. In addressing this issue, Hall melded intellectual voice with that of personalised expression, utilising an ‘us’ mode that may have been encouraged or shaped by Cohn. Near the programme’s beginning, which had already been framed by the *Radio Times* as airing on the eve of the first parliament of the West Indies Federation, Hall asserted that the discussion would focus on ‘the sort of society to which we are all as writers intimately related’.¹²⁹ He continued:

We speak and write as West Indians, this is in a sense always our subject matter, and one of the problems is that a nation which is emerging into consciousness...may not actually take form and shape

¹²⁵ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 4.

¹²⁶ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 3, 6.

¹²⁷ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 16.

¹²⁸ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 17. Political blackness emerged prominently in Britain the late sixties and early seventies, spurred in part by activists such as Ambalavaner Sivanandan who at the time led the Institute of Race Relations. Two decades later Hall wrote about the move away from political blackness into more ethnically-defined cultural-political solidarities; ‘New Ethnicities’, 1988.

¹²⁹ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 2. My italics. Billing, *Radio Times*, accessed via BBC Genome 20 March 2021.

until it's written and spoken about by its creative artists and people of imagination. In a sense one can look for the very emergence of a consciousness of this kind in the writing almost before it begins to take shape as a political entity.¹³⁰

Hall's presenter-chair contributions throughout the broadcast, like the one above, demonstrate his fluency in and adaptability to the role of media intellectual as per Garnham's analysis (and which I discuss in more detail at the chapter's end). The use of 'we' in this instance, worn lightly but affirmatively in the yoking together of colonial legacy to culture and politics ('always our subject matter'), was well encased within conceptualisations that spoke to the needs and demands of the Third Programme (proffering intellectual ideas such as a nation emerging into consciousness, the role of the creative in imagining a new national identity and so on). As an Oxford graduate and soon to become the first editor of the *New Left Review*, Hall was certainly able to address the core listening constituencies of the Third Programme in the content and tone of his speech.

Within this address, though, the nuances are significant. Hall aligned himself with a collective West Indian identity, with a new conjuncture in history and a corresponding emerging cultural-political consciousness. 'Right through this programme we have been making connections', he told listeners, 'between culture and politics'.¹³¹ The highlighting of these connections, and Hall's framing of the broad spectrum of British Caribbean writerly voices as one with which he had a foundational solidarity, thus functioned effectively as the beginning of an important remaking of the parameters of BBC Radio, a reshaping of the ways in which those colonised in the Caribbean had been, in Lamming's words, branded on the tongue.

Certainly the strategy worked, not only in having Hall as discussion chair but also in terms of contouring the discussion to generate critical interest in the multi-accentualities embedded within the programme as a whole. Paul Ferris of *The Observer*, although not referencing Lamming or Hall directly, titled his discussion of the programme 'Incendiary Voices' and described the 'West Indian voices' of the discussion as 'arguing like mad' in a 'politico-literary' broadcast that 'crackl[ed] like a grass fire'.¹³² Thus Caribbean literary (post-) colonial expression and experience as vocalised in *British Caribbean Writers* was, in one

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 18.

¹³² *The Observer*, 1 June 1958: 15. Ferris used the forthcoming repeat transmission of *British Caribbean Writers* (6 June 1958) to review a broadcast of Errol John's *Small Island Moon* (17 May 1958, TP), given John had been one of the contributors to the discussion programme.

important critical quarter at least and as Lamming's war of position had intended, recognised as a vociferous articulation of politicised, divergent and pluralistic voice(s). Moreover, it was welcomed for being so. Incendiary, pre-Notting Hill, for Ferris meant keeping the programme content 'burning', as he wrote, and not allusive of any proto-violence.¹³³

This was, as far as can be ascertained, Stuart Hall's first appearance on BBC Radio, one that would preface a number of roles as contributor, discussant, reviewer or presenter-narrator in a host of different programmes ranging across all three networks – Third, Home and Light – on subjects including advertising, pop culture, mixed marriages, meditation and the education of children.¹³⁴ The sheer breadth and range of these appearances – unlike any other Caribbean diasporic figure of this period – went hand-in-hand with his development as a key figure in the British New Left and in the growth of cultural studies as an academic discipline.¹³⁵ What Hall's precise motivations were in agreeing to chair his first broadcast, and to what extent he and Lamming, and indeed Cohn, had off-air discussions to shape the final transmission, remain unknown.¹³⁶ Certainly Hall was not centred on the issue of language as a core decolonial mechanism in the same way as Lamming. But media-as-culture, and its interrelations with the remaking of colonial power dynamics, did intrigue him. What began to take shape at this juncture for Hall was a deep engagement with the mass media not simply as a representation of society but, as he would later argue, a constitutive force in determining social and political relations.¹³⁷

In his later theorising of concepts such as encoding/decoding or in his analysis of the racism in the media, Hall would enunciate with granularity the ways in which the conjunction of historical specificity could cohere with wider structural formations to reproduce or challenge systems of media meanings.¹³⁸ Further, as a defining feature of his New Left politics, Hall argued that popular culture – from pulp fiction to advertisements – was another key conjunctural element in the formation of society and an important site of political

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ In the sixties alone Hall appeared numerous times on BBC Radio, as follows. BBC TP: as discussant *Social Philosophy*, 30 March 1962 and *Equality*, 15 April 1962; as contributor to *The Young Affluents*, 24 April 1963; as contributor to *Instant Salvation*, 18 July 1964. BBC HS: as discussant, *Dead or Alive*, 30 July 1958 (included here as the only other fifties radio programme in which Hall appeared); as discussant, *The Role of Advertising in Modern Society*, 29 September 1963; as contributor, discussant and reviewer, *The World of Books*, 17 October 1964, 19 December 1964, 26 December 1964; as narrator, *Generation of Strangers*, 23 August 1964; as writer-presenter, *Who Are The Immigrants*, in *Talks for Sixth Forms*, 18 November 1966; as discussant, *Education and Admass*, in *A Second Start: Education and Society*, 1 December 1966; as narrator, *Asian Teenager*, 21 February 1968; as narrator, *Peace of Mind*, 19 December 1968. BBC LP: as discussant or contributor to *Woman's Hour*, 6 November 1964, 9 March 1965.

¹³⁵ Wade Matthews, *The New Left: National Identity, and the Break-Up of Britain*, 2013: 155-196.

¹³⁶ Lamming had suggested to Cohn she speak to Hall in his attempts to win her over with his discussion proposal; 5 March 1958, BBC WAC RCONT1, George Lamming, Talks File 2 1958-1962. The full range of Stuart Hall's correspondence was not accessible at the time of writing, and the BBC's archives did not contain a trail of any correspondence between Hall and Cohn when examined, so a meeting cannot be confirmed.

¹³⁷ Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding in the Television Discourse', 1973; *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 1997.

¹³⁸ 'Encoding/Decoding', 1973, 'Black Men, White Media', 1974; 'The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media', 1981.

contestation.¹³⁹ This focus was not, as Hall wrote in the first issue of the *New Left Review* (NLR), a reflection of a modish interest in mass culture but rather an emphasis aimed at 'giv[ing] the socialist movement some *direct* sense of the times'.¹⁴⁰ As Colin Sparks has noted, much of this emphasis was already visible in Hall's work as co-founder of one of the precursors of NLR, the *Universities and Left Review* (1957-1959) which in its issues had carried analyses of the role of mass communication in examining the fragmentations of modern life and the sites in which culture, identity and resistance were formed.¹⁴¹ This was, stressed Sparks, a remarkably far-sighted approach by Hall in comparison to many British Marxist theorists of the time, demonstrating the earliest iterations of cultural studies as a discipline.¹⁴²

In the late fifties, then, Hall's media theorisations were very much in development, although subsidiary to his overarching interests in the British left and articulated through a stress on the interrogation of popular culture.¹⁴³ Radio as expressed through the Third Programme could not strictly be defined as popular culture, but its role in mediating culture-at-large to a mass audience, and as one strand in the tripartite formation of BBC Radio in which networks did have mass popular appeal, was no doubt of significance and interest to him. Behind an interest in radio's links with popular culture(s) lay the usual colonial affiliations to the BBC – as with many middle-class Jamaicans, the imprint of BBC Radio through *Caribbean Voices* had also shaped Hall.¹⁴⁴ But with Lamming's suggestion to take part in an actual broadcast it would allow him to observe at close quarters, in the first instance, media's intersections with society; moreover, as a presenter-interlocutor it would also give him the opportunity to participate actively in reshaping, and to make explicit, the making of connections between culture and politics, as he described it to listeners. In the role of discussion chair, Hall would simultaneously engage publicly in a dialogical model that would also underpin his intellectual style in the decades ahead – one founded on a role as a listener as well as a speaker, and that prioritised the public sphere over academic prestige.¹⁴⁵

British Caribbean Writers thus allows us not only to see the very early emergence of Hall as a media intellectual but also the nascent formulations of some of his most important conceptualisations as related to race, culture and the media. As noted, I will assess his role, and that of Lamming's, in relation to the double bind of the media intellectual nearer the close

¹³⁹ Hall, editorial for first edition of *New Left Review*, 'Introducing NLR', *NLR*, 1/1, Jan-Feb 1960; *The Popular Arts* (with Paddy Whannel), 1964; 'Notes on Deconstructing the Popular', 1981.

¹⁴⁰ *NLR*, 1960: 1.

¹⁴¹ Colin Sparks, 'Stuart Hall, Cultural Studies and Marxism', 1996: 77-78.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Procter, *Stuart Hall*, 2004: 11-34.

¹⁴⁴ Although Hall did not work on the programme (unlike Lamming) he spent a great deal of time in its contact zone of writers once he arrived in London. *Familiar Stranger*, 2017: 163-164.

¹⁴⁵ On Hall as listener see David Scott, 2017, 23-51; on Hall's concentration on the public role of the intellectual see Ien Ang, 'Stuart Hall and the tension between academic and intellectual work', 2016.

of this chapter. At this stage however, I want to draw attention to two aspects of Hall's theory – the notion of the conjunctural and particularly that of multi-accentuality – and their significance in understanding Hall's own engagements with BBC Radio.

We Are/Them Is West Indians

Moments of conjuncture, and their role in reconfiguring British and West Indian society, were made prominent by Hall in his framing of *British Caribbean Writers* from the outset.

Introducing the programme, he told listeners that what they would hear was 'not so much a discussion' but rather 'a recorded moment in the history of a new and emerging culture'.¹⁴⁶

Ostensibly this new culture was tied to the Federation of the West Indies, but the nuances of Hall's words allowed for the inference to be made that the emergence was very much taking place within Britain, not least within the landscape of the BBC itself given that the Caribbean writer-discussants themselves were in one sense representative of a new, emergent voiced culture in a post-*Caribbean Voices* radiosphere. Such references to the intersections between old and new, between transitions and reconfigurations, crop up repeatedly throughout Hall's interjections as discussion chair. Later in the broadcast he interrogated the conjunction of migration, Caribbean colonial identity and writing; surely, argued Hall, the writers could not have 'sharpened' their sense of identities 'without ever having taken the first step of emigration'.¹⁴⁷ Was it not the very 'strangeness', he asked, of the colonial experience of coming to Britain, a home that was not quite home, that had unlocked new formulations of writing and senses of self?¹⁴⁸

Hall's questioning reveals an emphasis on the double consciousness of racialised colonial experience (the *strangeness* of colonised subjectivity, which would become a keyword in his critical vocabulary) but also nods towards the conjunction of this strangeness with cultural creation, the making of new meanings and identities within the overall juncture of diminishing imperial might and an influx of colonised peoples. Indeed, the outwards-inwards movement of colonised figures was, he implied, a necessary element in new kinds of identity and cultural production. Years later these conjunctural cultural locations would be variously theorised by Hall, Gilroy and Bhabha as syncretism, liminality, hybridity.¹⁴⁹ In 1958 and in the language of Third Programme interlocation, however, these specific conceptualisations were of course not at play but we can see in Hall's words the marking out of cultural positionalities

¹⁴⁶ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 1.

¹⁴⁷ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 17.

¹⁴⁸ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 15.

¹⁴⁹ Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', 1990; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 1993; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994.

and identities that he already sensed would re-shape and re-orient colonial relations, and British society, in the years ahead. Although racism-as-rooted-in-colonial-legacy remained, again, a subject to some extent framed through implication (the strangeness for the migrant encountering the imperial homeland), Hall's consistent foregrounding throughout the programme of the importance of migration to cultural creation demonstrated an attempt to bring to air the deep historical interrelation of coloniser and colonised in the context of first-phase black British cultural production, and to demarcate the turning point at which British culture now found itself in the age of decolonisation.

Crucially, *British Caribbean Writers* and the platform of the BBC allowed Hall to make public this interrelation at a time when such links were overlooked even within the progressive Leftist circles in which Hall spent much of his time. Writing in his memoir he recalled how many of his New Left friends and colleagues in the fifties and sixties, although committed anti-imperialists and anti-racists, simply did not conceive of Hall 'as a raced, colonial subject'.¹⁵⁰ Thus the dangers of 'forgetfulness, disavowal, misrecognition, amnesia' as regards British colonialism, argued Hall, were pervasive (and not simply confined to conservative or public policy-related sectors as discussed earlier in this chapter).¹⁵¹ A key imperative for the Caribbean anti-colonial and leftist intellectual in late-fifties Britain therefore, as he saw it, was to inscribe 'the prolonged historical entanglements of the Caribbean and Britain' into both intellectual and popular collective memory.¹⁵² In *Familiar Stranger* he asserted:

Britons needed to be reminded of this inconvenient fact. Once the post-colonial amnesia enveloped Britain after the war, very few people, including those on the Left, had – indeed, still have – much clue about the colonial history of their nation...*this* history...[of] organic connections and dissonances between the colonial and the post-colonial...[and] the long, tortuous and never-concluded journey out of colonial subalternhood.¹⁵³

The late-fifties amnesia or disavowal that Hall sought to challenge was thus neatly aligned in many ways to Lamming's war of position project to speak back in a language also formed out of subaltern-commander conjunctures. Further, the Third Programme served as a suitable

¹⁵⁰ *Familiar Stranger*, 2017: 11.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ 2017: 12.

platform given its entanglements with the Leftist intellectual circles cited by Hall and its position at the top of the tongue-branding pyramid as identified by Lamming.¹⁵⁴ It could also serve as a possible gateway for Hall to other networks or media with mass appeal (as confirmed by later appearances on BBC Radio and on BBC Television).

Notably, in speaking aloud and speaking back, both writers would enact a multi-accentual model that again pre-dated a theoretical paradigm outlined by Hall many years later. Hall's interest in Valentin Vološinov's theory of multi-accentuality grew out of his readings of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (published in Russian in 1929 but translated into English in 1973), in which Vološinov delineated how the values of language could change depending on who spoke it (textually as well as in actual speech) and how, socially and ideologically, it was *accented*. In Hall's interpretation, multi-accentuality offered a model in which to view language as a system in which meanings could be reclaimed or renegotiated by being articulated and re-accented at new historical conjunctures and by varied social groups.¹⁵⁵ Thus for Hall in the sixties and seventies a word such as *black*, as James Procter has shown, would be 'dis-articulated from its derogatory, negative connotations and re-articulated as a positive, empowering sign – black is beautiful – by African Americans and black Britons'.¹⁵⁶

At the time of the *British Caribbean Writers* transmission, as with the notion of a Gramscian war of position, multi-accentuality was not a framework yet elucidated by Hall. But in tracking back to the programme as a foundational broadcast text, and as a key marker of the cultural mediation of empire's-end and the rise of black British culture, it is evident that both Hall and Lamming were engaged in acts of re-accenting. In suturing the conjuncture of colonial experience and identity to British cultural production through the domestic airwaves of BBC Radio, Hall's stress on the strangeness of the colonial encounter on the terrain of the decolonising imperial motherland served to re-orient the socio-cultural accents of concepts such as metropole and home. Through Hall's voicing of a new cultural moment rooted in the uneasy intimacy of colonial relations, the imperial metropole, and by extension the BBC, accent-shifted from the familial and the familiar to the strange and the emergent.

Meanwhile Lamming's commitment to showcasing a range of (literal) written and spoken accents through the suggestion of fellow Caribbean writers for the Third Programme, whose practices combined what he thought of as authentic languages of the Caribbean with

¹⁵⁴ BBC TP and BBC HS carried a number of broadcasts in this period with prominent thinkers associated with culture and the Left including Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams.

¹⁵⁵ Procter, 2000: 30. For Hall on Vološinov see 'For Allon White', 1992: 295.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

the acceptable highbrow speech of the Third (or of standard literary textual practices as demonstrated in their fiction, including his own), also functioned as a strategic form of multi-accentuality. As he asserted in *British Caribbean Writers*, the purpose of conjoining language to cultural politics in this way was to show that by 1958, in the fallout of imperial endings and post-colonial beginnings, 'the English language... [did] not belong to the English people any longer'.¹⁵⁷ Prospero's culture, exemplified for Lamming by the BBC, would now have to submit to an array of hybridised, and variously accented, written and spoken Caliban-Englishes on its own shores and on its own airwaves. Again, therefore, we can see how Hall's and Lamming's different approaches to the cultural politics of anti-colonialism, in a broadcasting context, cohered to form key strands of a praxis that could later be theorised as significant in challenging cultural hegemony through an emphasis on pluralistic and collective voice, and via the conjunctural and the multi-accentual.

In the absence of further detailed correspondence between Cohn, Hall and Lamming it is difficult to draw conclusions about accentuality in relation to any relevant production decisions, but in the broadcast version of *British Caribbean Writers* multi-accentuality, in both the literal and the social relational sense, was certainly made explicit by framing the discussion at either end with two contrastingly accented readings. At the end of the programme Naipaul read a passage from his new novel *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), written in standard English but including dialogue incorporating characteristics of West Indian speech of Asian origin. Naipaul's own iteration of the Trinidadian accent, mainly RP with hints of Indian middle-class intonations, framed his reading out on air of a scene from the novel in which the plot revolved around a fictional West Indian election. His reading, as it appears on the page, with heightened Indianised speech patterns (used partly for comedic effect) highlighted the pluralism of British Caribbean literary expression as comprised of multi-ethnic and dialect-inflected components, and as an amalgamation of the vernacular with the cultivated tones of a colonial education.¹⁵⁸ In a wider context, given Hall's framing of the broadcast as the conjunctural moment of an emerging post-colonial culture, it also hinted at a tipping point in the re-shaping and re-speaking of a language that, as Lamming contented, no longer belonged to the English.

At the other end of the broadcast, near its beginning, Lamming too read an excerpt from his novel *The Emigrants* (1954) in which multi-accentuality was spoken and writ large. In

¹⁵⁷ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 9.

¹⁵⁸ For example, Naipaul's character Baksh, overseeing the election of a corrupt official, tries to quieten down an angry crowd by asking them to *corporate* with the police (the Indianised spoken version of *cooperate*). Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 18. No extant BBC sound recording of Naipaul's voice on the radio in the fifties and sixties could be located but in later recordings his speech patterns, broadly RP with some Indianised modulations, were largely unchanging. For example, *Desert Island Discs*, 5 July 1980, R4; *The Late Show: Face to Face*, 16 May 1994, BBC Two.

the passage Lamming's character, domiciled in the Caribbean, describes in a West Indian dialect how mass migration to Britain has birthed a new name for a new national identity:

“[W]hen them go ‘broad...them get tol’ w’at is w’at, an’ them start to prove, an’ them give w’at them provin’ a name. A good name. Them is West Indians. Not Jamaicans or Trinidadians. Cause the bigger the better. Them is West Indians...”¹⁵⁹

Lamming's excerpt was a strong example of the use of dialect in the modern British Caribbean novel, one in which the rhythms, cadences, pitches and phonological patterns of Caribbean speech as well as the textual writing of the vernacular showcased the remaking of colonial language by an anti- and post-colonial sensibility. It also exhibited an embodiment of a literal multiplicity of accents, with Lamming speaking broadly in a received pronunciation as himself and then in a creolised accent during the reading. Although again there is no extant sound recording, Lamming's other contributions to BBC Radio allow us to hear for ourselves this multi-accentual embodiment, for example in a broadcast like *Many Islands, Many Voices*, in which Lamming read some poems in his own usual mix of near-RP (with notes of a Barbadian register), some in a more heightened Shakespearean-acting voice (as formulated in the sixties so rather overdramatised to modern ears), and others still in an amplified creolised dialect.¹⁶⁰ This code-switching of voice had been refined by Lamming in the years of working on *Caribbean Voices* and demonstrated a capability to utilise a very real form of multi-accentuality to varied purposes.

Before attending to this in more detail, I note here that Lamming's excerpt also evidenced another strand of multi-accentuality around the very naming of West Indians. For Lamming's character, migrants were gifted a new moniker (by white Britons) for 'provin' a name' (doing well in British society). The bestowal of a new name and identity – 'Them is West Indians' – thus carried a double charge, nodding again to Lamming's Prospero-Caliban paradigm in which a new name was at the gift of the coloniser, but which simultaneously functioned as a gateway to an emergent post-colonial collective ('the bigger the better'). This doubleness demonstrates again the intricacies of the interrelations between an emergent West Indian collective identity in Britain and anti-colonial politics, language, broadcasting and the notion of accenting. As with black, the term West Indian carried different accents, literal and

¹⁵⁹ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 2.

¹⁶⁰ Readings by John Figueroa and George Lamming, produced by Douglas Cleverdon. 30 November 1964, BBC TP, BBC SA. Lamming read poems by various writers including Frank Collymore and Derek Walcott.

ideological, dependent on who spoke it and how. Within the programme itself this was made clearer by the counterpoising of Lamming's reading against Hall's own unapologetic and unambiguous use of the term (which immediately preceded it), when he told listeners: 'We speak and write as West Indians'.¹⁶¹

At the risk of overdoing the analogy, Hall's and Lamming's differing accents on the term West Indian – one as fictionalised and creolised voice speaking about the cultural-linguistic processes of West Indianisation from afar, the other from within the imperial metropole embodying those very processes – mirrored their own distinct accents on the praxis of cultural politics-as-broadcasting. As noted, for Hall, as the upcoming intellectual, speaking aloud on the BBC was part of a wider project to make explicit the connections between culture, anti-colonialism and British Leftist politics. For Lamming meanwhile, broadcasting on the Home and the Third made an important (post-*Caribbean Voices*) cultural claim to the English language at-large and its spoken idioms in particular through the domestic radiosphere. Speaking through BBC Radio was therefore for both writers constitutive, in quite distinct ways, of a decolonising of British culture.

Multi-Accentalities

These distinctions were likely audible to BBC producers and editors given the different ways in which Hall and Lamming's voices functioned in *British Caribbean Writers* (as intellectual-interlocutor versus provocateur-discussant-reader). In their subsequent broadcasts for BBC Radio, as noted earlier, Hall became a frequent contributor to programmes across networks and ranging across topics unconfined to race or colonialism or the West Indies. His actual voice, as can be heard through his other broadcasts such as *Generation of Strangers*, was one that inhabited relatively comfortably the tensions or contradictions of an Oxford education and a racialised, colonised subjectivity (which Hall had referred to as un-noticed by his New Left peers in the fifties).¹⁶² Lamming did not, instead contributing to programming largely concerned with the Caribbean diaspora and switching registers, idioms and accents between what he had described in *Pleasures* as authentic, *peasant* language/speech (when reading fiction or poetry) and the voice of the colonised intellectual (his own).

Given the limits of this study it is not possible to interrogate here in depth the ways in which their speech patterns and actual accents combined or clashed with the BBC's complex

¹⁶¹ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 2.

¹⁶² 23 August 1964, BBC SA.

set of on-air codes as the nation's regulator of spoken voice.¹⁶³ What can be asserted is that this was no doubt a territory of contestation given the BBC's adherence to received pronunciation on its domestic services and the listening public's complaints regarding deviations from it (with one notable example as recently as 2011 when the Jamaican continuity announcer Neil Nunes began to broadcast on Radio 4 rather than only on the World Service).¹⁶⁴ In broad terms, on domestic networks in this period the accents of those with some kind of on-air authoritative stature (presenters, chairs of discussions, announcers and so on), remained subject to tight policy control – mediated in part via the BBC Pronunciation Unit set up in the 1940s – and to more informal regulation by production cultures. On the Third – home to writer-actors like Dylan Thomas who had un-anchored themselves from childhood pronunciations and instead polished their BBC 'cut-glass' accents – there was also, as noted, a cultivated sound of intellectual cosmopolitanism given the network's pro-Europeanist ethos but set within firm boundaries of what producers and editors deemed to be aurally comprehensible.¹⁶⁵

British Caribbean Writers, as far as can be determined, did not prompt a raft of complaints about accents or spoken voice, perhaps precisely because of Hall's ease with inhabiting and voicing the role of presenter-interlocutor. In searching the archives for the audible materiality of Hall's voice, the introduction to *Generation of Strangers* stands out as a good example of the nature of this ease. For David Scott, Hall's voice carried the inflections and the 'seawater sounds' of his original island home.¹⁶⁶ But in listening to the timbre and the modulation of Hall's delivery in *Generation*, it is clear that only the very subtle cadences of his Jamaican upbringing could be heard in pronunciations, modulations and stress patterns, underlining his own assertion that he no longer belonged to the West Indies in the way he once did and yet neither was his relationship with Britain as home an uncomplicated one. Hall told listeners at the start of the programme (essentially a feature about young immigrant children learning to speak English in Birmingham):

There comes a time in everybody's life when they have, in a sense,
to accept themselves, not just what nationality they belong to and

¹⁶³ On the dominance of received pronunciation in twentieth-century radio and the role of the BBC in its construction see Anne Fabricus, 'Twentieth Century Received Pronunciation', 2017: 40-41; Av Bente R. Hannisdal, 'From Public School Accent to BBC English: Defining Received Pronunciation', 2005: 191-202.

¹⁶⁴ Terry Kirby, 'Voice from Jamaica divides Radio 4 listeners', *The Independent*, 17 September 2011. On the BBC and voice as related to its overseas services, where it was arguably less strictly controlled, see Andrew Hill, 'The BBC Empire Service: the voice, the discourse of the master and ventriloquism', 2010; Gordon Johnston and Emma Robertson, *BBC World Service: Overseas Broadcasting*, 2019: 223-279.

¹⁶⁵ William Christie, *Dylan Thomas*, Chapter 8, 'Radio's a Building in the Air: Lord Cut-Glass, Poet of the Airwaves', 2014: 126-139.

¹⁶⁶ 2017: 29.

what colour they are, but what they are in themselves.¹⁶⁷

Hall's embodied composure in this state of imprecise post-colonial belonging was of course, unlike the Birmingham schoolchildren, shaped by the contours of class or to what Terry Eagleton described uncompromisingly as a rather privileged move from 'the Caribbean to the Cowley Road'.¹⁶⁸ Hall himself noted in the programme that his cultural roots were unlike many of the West Indian migrants in sixties Birmingham and that his education had made him British (but not English).¹⁶⁹ This comfortable habitation of voice was thus, as David Scott has contended, not naïve.¹⁷⁰ But as such it allowed for a relatively effortless alignment of Hall's anti-colonial intellectual praxis with the Third's cosmopolitanism (or at the very least it was not a significant barrier), and more broadly with BBC Radio's 'cultural third mission' of mediating and making public academic knowledge.¹⁷¹

Lamming's voice, like Dylan Thomas, had also been cut-glass trained through his experiences on *Caribbean Voices*. But his own origins, as a working-class boy born to an unmarried mother in a small Barbadian village, were nothing like Hall's. I do not wish to suggest here that there was a palpable or audible unease in Lamming's voice, but rather that the plurality of his (literal) accents, captured by the readings he did on air in a mixture of RP and creolised dialects, attest to the more pronounced socially-constructed or classed multi-accentualities he embodied (in contrast to Hall).

These multi-accentualities did not always sit easily within the oral/aural ecology of BBC Radio, especially on its Overseas Service. One of the core West Indian actor-readers on *Caribbean Voices*, Lamming had been indirectly included in criticism by Caribbean listeners who made it known they preferred English-sounding voices to speak to them. As Gladys Lindo, the programme liaison in Jamaica told editor Henry Swanzy in the late forties, 'West Indian listeners of all classes' wanted only to hear the tones of 'educated West Indian[s]' on the BBC, warning that in straining for authenticity the BBC should not aim for the equivalent of a Jamaican cockney accent and neither should it privilege those of West Indian origin over the 'English' (white Britons).¹⁷² Although Swanzy was defensive of his editorial decisions in this regard, believing too like Lamming in the authenticity of 'peasant' rhythms and cadences, it

¹⁶⁷ Programme recording, *Generation of Strangers*, BBC SA, time code: 02'43-02'57. One example of Hall's audible Jamaican cadence is in his pronunciation of 'curls' (in a reference he makes to *the way your hair curls*) and 'anywhere' (*I don't belong anywhere any longer*); the roll of the 'r' and the general intonation are indicative of Jamaicanised pronunciations and markedly different to the RP version. See Fabricus, 2017.

¹⁶⁸ 'The Hippest', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 18, No. 5, 7 March 1996: 3.

¹⁶⁹ Programme recording, *Generation of Strangers*, BBC SA, time code: 02'22-02'40.

¹⁷⁰ 2017: 29.

¹⁷¹ David N. Smith, 'Academics, 'the cultural third mission' and the BBC: forgotten histories of knowledge creation, transformation and impact', 2011.

¹⁷² Lindo to Henry Swanzy, 10 November 1947. Henry Swanzy Papers, UBL, GB 150 MS 42/1/3.

remained the case that phonologically-colonised hierarchies were firmly embedded in the region's listening publics and, to an extent, in the production ecologies of *Caribbean Voices*, with 'Oxford English voices' at the top.¹⁷³

Glyne Griffith has given a detailed account of the many nuances and contestations around dialect and accent in the context of the series (with writers sending in pieces making heightened usage of dialect and writer-readers like Lamming, who were West Indian, being recruited by Swanzy).¹⁷⁴ These arguments do not need rehearsing as what concerns us is the post-*Caribbean Voices* migration of Lamming's voice from Overseas to Home and the interrelations of class and race across networks. What is salient is that for the listeners of the programme, or for Gladys Lindo who may have played a fairly decisive role in constructing or mediating their concerns, accent and voice on the Overseas Services were largely conceptualised through the same mechanisms as those of the domestic services and as identified by Lamming in *Pleasures*. Lindo's comments spotlight and distil the longstanding difficulties of un-anchoring BBC English(es) from racialised and classed dimensions (as Oxford English) and of the direct implications this must have had for Lamming as a BBC speaker, first on *Caribbean Voices* and then on Home Services. Although well-educated through a scholarship to Combermere School in Barbados, Lamming had not been to university and unlike Hall had worked in a factory when he first migrated to Britain to help finance his literary career.

In listening, then, to the 'grain' of Hall and Lamming's voices it is evident that their subsequent trajectories within the BBC fell broadly into line with the audible materialities of their social and class positionalities.¹⁷⁵ Hall's ease in inhabiting one voice and accent – smoothly modulated, part-Caribbean and part-Cowley Road – sat in contrast to Lamming's variegated spoken multi-accentualities. Even when Lamming spoke in an approximation of Oxford English, which he certainly could do proficiently – as heard on *Many Islands, Many Voices* and in his first major television appearance in which he was described as a West Indian writer who enjoyed the company of 'Hampstead sink-talkers' – he consistently drew attention, self-reflexively, to the artifices and hierarchies of language and speech construction.¹⁷⁶ The language of the British middle classes, he told Huw Wheldon (and whilst speaking that very language), was a 'strange invention' and at several removes from 'the mechanics of feeling'.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ John Figueroa, 'The Flaming Faith of These First Years: Caribbean Voices', 1989: 61.

¹⁷⁴ 2016: 37–41.

¹⁷⁵ Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', 1977.

¹⁷⁶ *Monitor: A Profile of West Indian Writers*, by Huw Wheldon (with Lamming and Edgar Mittleholzer), 11 March 1960, BBC TV. Time code: 00'59–01'01, accessed via *History of the BBC*, 10 May 2021: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06d19hz>

¹⁷⁷ Time code: 05'35–05'44, 1960, BBC TV.

As this chapter has demonstrated, Lamming aimed in voice and speech for a mechanics of anti-colonial and anti-classist feeling – and to break through the BBC’s on-air hierarchies – by vocalising both the creolised dialects of the Caribbean *and* the Oxford tones of Hampstead and the BBC. To have enacted the latter effortlessly (as I argue Hall was able to do more readily), and to do so without the interweaving of authentic accents and speech patterns, would for Lamming have meant a significant compromise in his praxis of culture-as-politics. But conversely this also meant that the challenges he faced in making inroads into domestic BBC Radio networks, through his own embodied (post-)colonial multi-accentualities, were much greater.

Lamming, I contend, was entirely cognisant of these challenges given what he later wrote in *Pleasures* and given the time he spent with Swanzy on *Caribbean Voices*. And it was this awareness, of how his and Hall’s voices would be differently situated by BBC producers and editors, that undergirded his suggestion of Hall’s name (within a careful war of position of strategy) to Leonie Cohn in 1958. This strategic positioning of voice(s) did not however go unmentioned within the broadcast of *British Caribbean Writers* itself. Guyanese novelist Jan Carew spoke up about what he thought was an evasion inherent in the discussion given its focus on the use of dialect and the importance of the idea of the masses to the West Indian novel.¹⁷⁸ There was, he noted, a lack of explicit comment regarding the need for the West Indian migrant to wear ‘a façade’ of middle-class British pretention as a ‘shield to protect himself.’¹⁷⁹ Carew’s comments struck implicitly at the heart of the transmission’s *modus operandi*, pointing to the way in which diasporic anti- or post-colonial literary voices had made headway into the BBC’s domestic machinery by utilising the shield of Hall’s (and to an extent Lamming’s) accentualities. Although on a granular level the experience of donning of middle-class façades, as such, for the writers were various and distinct, the overall programme strategy, as a campaign of persuasion advanced by Lamming, had been donned in middle-class intellectual voice in order to make more radical, polemical or mass voice(s) more appealing and admissible to Cohn and the Third Programme.

Media Intellectuals and A Touch of Essentialism

This shielding technique, to borrow Carew’s phraseology, brings to light two central elements at play in the roles assumed by Lamming and Hall as diasporic or black British media intellectuals in this period. Assessing them both as intellectuals in the BBC context, albeit in

¹⁷⁸ Transcript, 1958, BBC WAC: 15.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

differing modes (Lamming more as backstage co-producer and Hall as on-air interlocutor), reveals what Garnham described as the process of social maintenance through the double bind of the media intellectual, one in which the intellectual's attempts to resist or subvert the status quo are concomitant with an intrinsic role in circulating and maintaining it. For Garnham, drawing on Jean-Paul Sartre, Edward Said and others, intellectuals entangled with mass media were caught between a duty to challenge cultural-political-social orthodoxies and institutional hierarchies (and crucially to do so by democratising cultural production and facilitating knowledge exchange) and their own simultaneous embodiment and enabling of hierarchal and institutional structures that constructed and circulated those very orthodoxies.¹⁸⁰ This tension, as Garnham saw it, was one that would remain unresolved and thus any analysis of the disruptive agency of the intellectual-as-media-producer, although evident in the nuances of the interaction between the individual intellectual and the media's institutional ecologies, would also ultimately be encased by it.¹⁸¹

In the case of *British Caribbean Writers* this double bind was discernible through the framing of more 'authentic' – and also more polemical or outspoken – West Indian literary voices in the overarching codes, or pretensions to echo Carew, of middle-class intellect (as spoken by Hall and backstage-managed by Lamming). One notable case of radical, outspoken voice lay in Sylvia Wynter's arresting description in the programme of the struggle to be seen in Britain as 'an equal human being', a struggle she noted that remained 'every day...and at every level' and which had the power to tip the colonial migrant into 'destructive period[s] of hatred'.¹⁸² Although Hall facilitated a short discussion on this, by and large Wynter's comments were sublimated to a wider discussion of the subject which ensued largely by implication (as per Lamming's correspondence to Cohn). Of course, it remains the case that without a record of the edits carried out by Cohn it is difficult to make conclusive judgements on what was actually said and what was cut out. But if we read *British Caribbean Writers* as emblematic of a certain anti- or post-colonial war of position strategy then it is also clear that a necessary use of intellectual voice had to be made to secure a place for more extreme 'incendiary' voices on the platform of the Third Programme (and to 'shield' them). In so doing, Hall and Lamming paradoxically underlined the very status, significance and socio-political meanings of BBC Oxford English, and its branding of tongues, that their project sought to destabilise.

¹⁸⁰ 2000: 86-88.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Transcript, *British Caribbean Writers*, 1958, BBC WAC: 16.

Garnham's analysis did not extend to specific considerations of media intellectuals in the sphere of race and culture. In re-situating his conceptual paradigm into the history of black British cultural production we can also see a close interconnection between the intellectual double-bind and the adoption, in this period, by black intellectuals of a kind of strategic essentialism. As Hall would write many years later, it was (again) a balancing act: the fight for a space for black culture within mainstream media relied on disrupting cultural hegemony by rejecting crude stereotypes and othering through the representation of a single essentialised or authentic experience; yet such a fight, especially in its early phases, could also be dependent paradoxically on also distilling plurality into 'strategic essentialism'.¹⁸³ To make inroads into domestic media culture, Hall argued, black diasporic cultural formation had had to rely to an extent on a self-conscious harnessing of a collective identity and modes of expression represented as black, a process that hinged on 'a touch of essentialism'.¹⁸⁴

Although Hall's insights, particularly in his 1993 essay 'What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?' were sited at different conjunctures of popular culture and from the vantage point of the postmodern moment, it is worth re-locating them in the context of the struggle for admission into the domestic machinery and ecology of late-fifties BBC Radio (and thinking back to Cohn's hints at modes of authenticity in the phrasing of us/they). Hall contends in the essay that he has always been invested in cultural strategies that 'can make a difference and that can shift the dispositions of power', and yet he also writes:

I acknowledge that the spaces "won" for difference are few and far between, that they are very carefully policed and regulated. I believe they are limited. I know, to my cost...that there is always a price of incorporation to be paid when the cutting edge of difference and transgression is blunted into spectacularization.¹⁸⁵

The particularities of the price of incorporation remain unnamed, and indeed Hall's analysis here and elsewhere in his writings did not interrogate in great detail the milieu of production

¹⁸³ Hall uses Gayatri Spivak's term *strategic essentialism* in the context of black culture 'win[ning] some space' in the 'dominated field of mainstream popular culture'; 'What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?', 1993: 110.

¹⁸⁴ Hall borrowed the term *a touch of essentialism* from bell hooks, who used it in her analysis of cultural representation and black lesbian feminism; 'States of Desire' and 'Essentialism and Experience', 1991. To clarify, Hall refers here to the popular usage of *black* in cultural terms rather than as a term of political solidarity, which in Britain came into prominence in the late sixties and seventies (linked to the movement embodied by Sivanandan and the IRR); in this context *Black* referred to black and Asian communities united against systemic racism and class bias.

¹⁸⁵ 1993: 107. Although Hall discusses Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque in positive terms in the essay, *spectacularization* here is used in a pejorative sense (of a spectacle shorn of radicalism).

per se.¹⁸⁶ Still, we need to ask how far Hall and Lamming's experiences as the representative voices of diasporic Caribbean intellectual culture within domestic BBC Radio, both on and off-air and at the decisive moment when *Caribbean Voices* ended, involved a degree of (self-aware) incorporation. Might the verbalised spectacle of a discussion comprised of 'incendiary voices' have been one of the few spaces that could be won at that juncture? And in order to deliver it might it have been necessary to vocalise but not dwell on ethnic, class and regional differences, and further to take the imperial moniker as given and to adopt it based on a strategic essentialism? ('We speak and write as West Indians').

The evidence presented thus far in this chapter would suggest so. An answer was perhaps also alluded to in Hall's own articulation a few years later on in *Generation of Strangers*, in which he told listeners he was *not* West Indian in the way many migrants in Birmingham were. Those particularities, nodded to on-air in 1964 and as I have tried to show, could not in all likelihood have been made in 1958 when the positionality of Caribbean diasporic voices on the domestic services was still very much at the back door. The nuances gestured to by Hall did begin to emerge, slowly, in the decades ahead on BBC Radio and TV and more widely in the political lexicon (although they are still the subject of contestation as can be seen by the current debates over the term BAME). But in 1958, the need to speak as a strategically aligned collective of West Indians, an arguably self-essentialising one, was a vital mechanism in staking a claim to the British cultural landscape, and one that should be more firmly inscribed into evaluations of the BBC's production relationships with race and culture as well as wider histories of black British cultural formation.

Conclusion

In exploring critical moments in the ingress of Caribbean diasporic voices into the BBC's domestic radio airwaves, the recurrent themes that have emerged have shown up the compromises, limits and contradictions that were involved both from the BBC's side and from that of the colonised writer-intellectuals. For the BBC, given its own representations of race and culture and the interrelation with wider public discourses, there was a growing consensus that it needed to include more colonised-migrant perspectives which could be mediated through voices that spoke of 'us' (not 'they'); yet these affirmative actions were tempered by the production-editorial imperative to personalise and soften cultural-political comment and to steer clear of yoking race explicitly with colonial legacy and British culture. For Lamming

¹⁸⁶ Re. Hall's lack of attention to culture-making in the context of production industry practices see Anamik Saha, *Race and the Cultural Industries*, 2017.

and Hall, whose trajectories would diverge significantly after the mid-sixties, the impulse to speak back via the BBC's domestic machinery was shot through with contradictions regarding the social and ideological accents that could be placed on their attempts to subvert the BBC's racialised and classed branding of tongues.

Lamming in particular appears to have found these contradictions overwhelming given he eventually returned to the West Indies feeling a 'gradual disengagement from the domestic politics of the United Kingdom'.¹⁸⁷ The burdens of forging Prospero's language anew through the BBC, which had to be done by implication and through the adoption of a strategic essentialism, reinforced the double bind of the Caribbean colonial experience in which the only language was that of the coloniser. In 1972, Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (then James Ngũgĩ) would write in *Homecomings* of the enormous influence that Lamming's work had on his conceptualisation of linguistic decolonisation, and which later culminated in his own farewell to the English language as a vehicle for literary writing in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986).¹⁸⁸ Lamming's engagements with the BBC were a vital part of a praxis that set such decolonisations in motion, although of course for him, as a Barbadian, a Ngũgĩ-like decisive break with English writing (and speaking) could not take shape in the same way. Nonetheless, in turning away from the terrain of the imperial metropole and that of the BBC perhaps Lamming enacted a different iteration of a post-colonial homecoming in the context of the Caribbean diaspora.

The question remains why Hall and Lamming, and others of their generation in the late fifties, were so drawn to re-shaping the domestic cultural landscape through the BBC. As noted at the outset of this chapter, by the late sixties black British activism had pivoted away from a focus on admission to prestigious cultural institutions like the BBC. Perhaps one answer lies in the continued strong influence of earlier diasporic thinkers in the late-fifties moment, especially that of C.L.R. James. As Stephen Howe has shown, the essential values of Britishness on British soil itself were largely viewed positively by James (in contrast to how Britishness was manifested in the colonies). There was, for James, an 'intimate enmity of Britain' (not least through a devotion to cricket), one 'shot through with love'.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, an intimate enmity shaped too the relationship between Caribbean diasporic literature and the BBC, enfolded in a magic that was difficult to disentangle from the cold hard facts of colonial legacy. The resulting ambivalence and affection for all that the BBC stood for made it an urgent task, as Lamming had written, to christen language afresh through its networks and in

¹⁸⁷ *The Guardian*, 2002.

¹⁸⁸ Ngũgĩ began a PhD on Lamming at Leeds University in the mid-sixties but later abandoned it.

¹⁸⁹ 'C.L.R. James: Visions of History, Visions of Britain', 2003: 170.

addresses to its publics. As *Caribbean Voices* was extinguished, there was a moment in which the balance of intimacy versus enmity, from the perspective of anti-colonial diasporic writers, still tilted in the BBC's favour. In the post-1958 moment, following on from the Notting Hill and Nottingham riots and with a gradual hardening of immigration policy and racialised political rhetoric from the mid-sixties onwards, that affection, in terms of radical black cultural politics, seemed increasingly misplaced.

At the BBC, by the late sixties there began to emerge a re-configured positionality for a range of (mainstream) black and Asian voices given the setting up of the Immigrant Programmes Unit, although many of these voices were arranged in tailored broadcasting aimed directly at encouraging integrationist agendas.¹⁹⁰ In highbrow cultural programming, analysis of race (sometimes explicit and sometimes not) came into view through broadcasts like Charles Parker's Home Service features on migrant culture in Birmingham (to which Hall also contributed) and in D.G. Bridson's Third Programme series *The Negro in America* (1964). In such programmes, especially on the Third, the line between us and they remained in the balance. Bridson's series was voiced in part by Langston Hughes but framed by an opening talk by Bridson himself, his voice distanced from the lived experiences captured in the programme through the sounds of the civil rights movement (and as heard by members of the Third Programme's Listening Panel).¹⁹¹ Meanwhile, other black American voices recorded for the series, including musician Charles Mingus, nearly ended up on the cutting room floor as Bridson felt their voices suited the Home or the Light, but were trickier for the Third where there remained 'very particular standards'.¹⁹² Thus, despite the growing plurality of voices on BBC Radio and the appearance of Hall in some of its schedules, there remained, at least in the sixties, a deep-seated attachment to white British expertise on what the BBC considered the very serious subject of race.

Meanwhile the links between British colonialism and race also remained mostly opaque on-air, although the BBC as a Corporation would utilise a greater plurality of voice as evidence of its commitment to the Commonwealth ideal and of Britain's well-executed role in granting former colonies freedom. Set against the dominant narrative of the Cold War, in which 'imperial Russia' was cast as a country that clamped 'new fetters on subject peoples', Britain, through the BBC's example and in its own words in 1958, was associated with confidence, emancipation and the 'free association of a voluntary Commonwealth'.¹⁹³ This tone

¹⁹⁰ For example, *Apna Hi Ghar Samajhiye (Make Yourself at Home)*, which began on the Home Service in October 1965 with a broadcast aimed at improving the language skills of Indian and Pakistani migrants.

¹⁹¹ Listener Research Report on the introductory talk to the series by Geoffrey Bridson, 28 September 1964. BBC WAC R19/2211/3, Entertainment: The Negro in America.

¹⁹² Bridson letter to American journalist Nat Hentoff, 8 September 1964. BBC WAC *ibid*.

¹⁹³ *BBC Handbook*, 1958: 152-153, and as discussed in Johnston and Robertson, 2019: 235.

and position remained largely in place, on and off-air, in the decade ahead, showing how the BBC's engagement with decolonisation was also inextricably linked to a projection of Britain in the Cold War context. Thus it should not be forgotten that the role of literature on the BBC in this period, or more particularly of colonised writers' voices in speaking aloud of race, colonialism and culture, was subject, always, to an overriding and expansive geopolitical double bind that would on a macro level shape agency, co-option and instrumentalisation of voice.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

In considering the mediation of empire's end through the collaborations between six mid-century writers and BBC Radio, this thesis has shown how a disavowal of the darkest aspects of colonial rule and legacy was embedded, broadly and not uncomplicatedly, in post-war cultural broadcasting. This was a disavowal that largely sidestepped the realities of colonialism as brutish violence or as flagrant racism and which contributed to Britain's self-image as the home of a 'moral empire'.¹ At three key historical moments in the wave of political decolonisation that swept across three core regions of the British empire the BBC and its associated writers shaped and circulated, to varying degrees and sometimes from positions of dissension, softened images of British colonialism. Indeed, empire's very dismantling was depicted as a kind of benignity, making a 'powerful national myth' of righteousness audible to Britons tuning in to the radio, the medium of 'mass immediacy' in this period.²

My analysis has illustrated the role of BBC literary-cultural broadcasting in questioning but ultimately cementing, domestically, notions of empire as an exemplar of fair play and as the progenitor of a familial affection between coloniser and colonised, one that could be used to extend colonial influence into the new age of the Commonwealth. At the start of official decolonisation with India's independence in 1947, the promotion of idealised tropes of friendship and partnership (as constructed in Britain's favour), the staff of BBC Radio and the writers who worked with them across the post-war tripartite network system but especially the Home and the Third, aided in nurturing consent to the idea of Britishness as a kindly imperialising and decolonising force. As such, these mediators played an important part in the formation of the 'sedimented histories' of culture's intersection with the ideology of colonial benevolence and with which we contend today.³ The major contribution of this thesis, then, is its exposition of the manufacture of a post-war domestic consensus on the moral and gentle nature of the British empire (and its legacy) and as constituted by a particular mechanism of the 'cultural apparatus', that is, BBC literary-cultural radio programming and the editorial and literary decision-making that undergirded it.⁴

¹ Gopal, 2005.

² Alan Lester, *Deny and Disavow*, 2021: 2; Kumar, 1975: 72.

³ Gargi Bhattacharya, *Rethinking Racial Capitalism*, 2018: 5. Bhattacharya uses this phrase in specific relation to imperialism and racialised economic dispossession today, but her conceptualisation of a sedimentation of colonial historical force is productive in the context of assessing contemporary culture and heritage.

⁴ Sinfield, 1997; Althusser, 1970.

Within this overarching argument, however, *Empire's End?* has revealed tensions and counter-positions. First, in relation to the BBC, which has been shown as an organisation subject to internal disagreements or even contradictions over policy or editorial norms and production praxis in relation to cultural programming on colonial legacy. Though the BBC's image as the nation's broadcaster remains powerful and has been revived recently by the celebrations of its centenary year (amidst a campaign to secure its future), entrenched in this portrait is a sense of the BBC always moving as one, charged by a unified set of Reithian-Arnoldian ideals. This thesis has made a new contribution to a strand of historiography that challenges this monolithic reading and highlights how the BBC's habitus was formed of discrepancies and challenges, at individual and department level, and which sat within strategies of survival that moulded the Corporation's overall 'middle ground' cultural politics in relation to coloniality.⁵ My study has brought to light examples of personnel (such as Prudence Smith who questioned the BBC's 'quietism' on apartheid) and of decision-making (including Gilliam's approval of MacNeice's revised Indian independence Features series) which illustrate 'that the apparent constancy of the BBC's character', as Stefan Collini has recently asserted, is largely 'an illusion'.⁶

This lack of constancy has been situated here in a close periodisation of political decolonisation, from the forties to the sixties, revealing that chronological progression was not always straightforwardly aligned with a more pronounced criticism of colonial legacy. The appearance of Caribbean literary voices, for example, on domestic radio in the late fifties and early sixties, as discussed in Chapter Four, sat alongside a continued disavowal of racism as embedded elsewhere in BBC programming (notably with *The Black and White Minstrel Show*). In the same period, this also meant a bypassing of very explicit discussion or representation of the racialised injustices of British colonial settler Africa, as discussed in Chapter Three on Doris Lessing and Muriel Spark. And yet some senior staff, as in the case of Third Programme Controller P.H. Newby, felt a 'bolder treatment' of the subject was called for.⁷ These seemingly contradictory aspects of the BBC's attitude to colonialism, especially in relation to race and racism, at one level have showcased the Corporation functioning as intended, accommodating variance and discord whilst aiming for neutral ground. At another, though, this study has shown how the production of colonial ideology through cultural media in the post-war and decolonial moment was subject to contestations and challenges from within the BBC itself.

⁶ Kumar, 1975.

⁷ Collini, 'Beebology', 2022. On quietism, memo from Smith to Controller, Talks, 10 June 1952, BBC WAC R51/11/2, Talks, Africa File 2, 1947-1954.

⁸ P.H. Newby to Louis MacNeice, 6 October 1959, BBC WAC RCONT1, MacNeice, Louis, Scriptwriter, 1941-1961.

Empire's End? has also substantiated the ways in which writers negotiated with the BBC on coloniality not only in terms of harmonisation but also through pushbacks and provocations. Chapter Four's examination of a 'war of position' strategy used by George Lamming, and his collaborator Stuart Hall – in fashioning a discussion of Caribbean literature by Caribbean writers themselves on Third Programme and at the moment of West Indian federation – exemplifies the contribution made by this thesis in bringing to light the histories of power formation in British colonial cultural politics which took place off-air and at the 'back door' of the BBC.⁸ Utilising Hall's iteration of conjunctural analysis, which drew on Gramsci's conceptualisation of hegemonic culture as constituted by historical 'moments of rupture and settlement', this thesis has followed Hall's method to determine how his own tactics and positioning in relation to BBC Radio in the late fifties and early sixties (and that of Lamming) show conjunctural moments as ones of potential opportunity for disruption of the *status quo* (as much as a reproduction of dominant forces).⁹ In paying close attention, as Hall urged, to how specific historical-political conjunctures 'arise, what sets them in motion and what sometimes resolves them, and what doesn't resolve them', this thesis has uncovered some of the significant tussles between writers and mid-century BBC Radio with regards to positionality in terms of *who* can speak, and *how*, on cultural matters related to colonialism.¹⁰ This was especially the case with Chapter Three's examination of Doris Lessing's somewhat unsuccessful trajectory at BBC Radio, in contrast to that of Muriel Spark, and the role played by fifties gendered norms in shaping the careers of writers at the BBC in this period.

Though the writers in focus here contributed to the BBC from very different positions of stature and repute (from Bloomsbury intellectual to newly published novelist to New Left thinker), they were located within a highly regulated frame of talent denoting renown and acclaim, or a potentiality for it. What their contexts and trajectories have therefore also demonstrated is how writers-as-talent (as deemed by reviewers, critics or by BBC staff) were manoeuvred into broadcast schedules and onto the pages of printed promotional material – by the BBC in conjunction with the writers themselves or by their publishers and agents – to mediate empire's end to domestic publics. This symbiotic usage and generation of cultural capital – for writers the opportunity to create output or speak through the BBC's platforms and to reach wide-ranging audiences, for the BBC a chance to function as patron and nurturer of writers who were 'distinguished' – was of course not confined to the subject of coloniality in the mid-century era. But in considering the colonial context and these six major (and now

⁹ Lamming, 1960: 44.

¹⁰ Sut Jhally, 2016: 334.

¹¹ Ibid.

canonical) writers, this thesis has presented a granular account of the place and position of literary-cultural privilege in mediating Britain's difficult transition from colonial ruler to post-imperial state. Writers of some standing, even when newly published, brought a certain cachet and substance to the subject, marking it out to listeners (or readers) as culturally and historically significant as it unfolded in real time. The examples in this study, but especially in Chapter Two on E.M. Forster and Louis MacNeice, have evidenced therefore – in the Gramscian and Bordieuan senses – the means by which a cultural-political consent on colonial legacy was cultivated via literary prestige on mid- to highbrow BBC Radio networks, which were structured broadly along class lines in the post-war era. Or, put another way, these examples show how the 'hegemony' of colonial ideology was forged and reproduced (even when questioned or pushed against) by writers of 'distinction' on the radio, and through a cultural institution considered to be at 'arm's length' from political interference but which was affiliated to elements of imperial power (through networks such as the Indian Civil Service).¹¹

This study has additionally contributed to a greater understanding of the intersections between the forms and techniques of mid-century literature and mid-century radio in rendering sympathetically, and sometimes more critically, a series of imperial endings (and of Commonwealth or Federated beginnings). It has done so by interrogating the programming written, spoken, produced and contributed to by six major writers whose domestic radio output, to varying extents, had never before been examined through a close focus on decolonisation and in some cases not been explored at all (as in the case of Lessing). In investigating three pairs of writers through three specific historical junctures in the period of empire's dismantling, my analysis has shown how certain tropes and motifs (some recurrent) were utilised to portray the legacy of British colonialism, often but not always, as a broad force for good. Indeed, sometimes these very motifs were utilised to criticise British imperial rule, albeit in limited or restrained ways. This was especially the case with gendered and paternalistic ideas of British coloniality, from Forster's English avuncular amity to MacNeice's critique of it from an Irish perspective, from Lessing's and Spark's portraits of marauding colonial settler men, and a resulting suffocating aridity for white settler women, to Lamming's and Hall's strategic moves to speak back to Britain of an emergent West Indian post-colonial consciousness as the BBC's own paternalistic hold over Caribbean literary broadcasting was loosened. In tracing these tropes and themes, this study has shown the mechanisms of restraint, and sometimes of excess, that characterised the radio-literary narrative on coloniality in the mid-century moment.

⁵ Gramsci, 1971; Bourdieu, 1984; Raymond Williams, 'The Arts Council', 1979.

I have, in considering literary restraint and excess in the colonial context, scrutinised the affordances of mid-century radio forms, particularly of the talk, the dramatised feature and the discussion programme. Radio's elasticity as a vocalised medium was well suited in some ways to a softened treatment of colonial legacy, allowing for both an intimate personalisation of ideals of amity as well as for multi-voicings (in fictionalised feature or discussion form) which could dilute or diminish overt, explicit critique. Nonetheless, as the analysis of Lamming and Hall best demonstrated, the power of speaking directly to British publics (in one's own voice or through others') held the potentiality for a limited form of anti-colonial expression, one that could – in small ways at this historical juncture – reshape ideas of coloniality-as-morality through the very use of voice.

Whether radio's formal qualities, or the BBC's institutional patronage, afforded (or restricted) these six writers the chance to speak out, as it were, on colonialism in contrast to their efforts on the (non-BBC) printed page is not a judgement that can easily be made given the very different outputs and political alignments of each author. What can be concluded is that the entanglements with domestic BBC Radio, at decolonial moments and via programming related to empire, did propel the career of each writer – sometimes synergising with other factors – in very specific directions. In Forster's case it led to a re-connection with domestic audiences and Third Programme after a wartime commitment to the Eastern Service; for MacNeice, a stronger engagement in radio-making with the politics of coloniality; for Lessing in contrast, and to an extent for Spark too, it heralded a move away from radio as a conduit for explorations of colonial settlerdom (ahead of a shift away from the subject as a whole); and two very different trajectories for Lamming and Hall, one involving a severance of ties to the BBC and a return to the West Indies, the other a media career as iconic British leftist intellectual. Despite the variegated biographical and cultural-political backdrops to these career evolutions, these brief summaries in one sense attest to the power and influence of BBC Radio on mid-century writers. In another, they also evidence the strong pull of empire as radio-literary subject at home, challenging scholarly consensus on both the 'inwards turn' of British literature in the mid-century period and on an inwards-outwards imperial alignment in post-war domestic and external British broadcasting (where empire has been shown largely as a concern for the BBC's international radio services and not its domestic ones).¹²

In making its contributions and in drawing its conclusions, this thesis has had to contend with archival erasure and lacunae, especially as related to the role of gender in determining whose voices have been preserved. Additionally, race, class, status and the

¹² Esty, 2003.

politics of dissension have also shaped the written records and sound archives of this period, contributing to a wider problem that besets many a historian attending to the exercise and withdrawal of British imperial power. Indeed, prime documents relating to the actual end of colonial rule have only very recently come to light after it was discovered they had been secretly removed during transfers of power more than half a century ago and hidden in England, at Hanslope Park.¹³ In taking a small step towards a ‘decolonising’ of British literary and broadcasting history, then, through an examination of the connections between colonial ideology, the domestic BBC, radio and literature, it is hoped that this thesis will prompt scholars to mine the rich seams of BBC and literary archives and to work against, or around, the gaps they encounter to patch together a fuller understanding of colonialism’s cultural reach. History, as Charlotte Lydia Riley has noted, is always ‘framed by the moment in which historians are working’, and in the current moment a deeper assessment of coloniality’s impact on our cultural history has never been more urgent.¹⁴

¹³ These documents have recently, and slowly, started to become accessible to researchers via the National Archives following the discovery in 2011; Charlotte Lydia Riley, ‘Why History Should Always Be Rewritten’, 2021: 271.

¹⁴ 2021: 278.

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