

Institution: University of Sussex		
Unit of Assessment: 34 – Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
Title of case study: Bringing the BBC's Hidden History into the Public Realm		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
David Hendy	Professor of Media and Cultural History	Sept 2012 – present
Alban Webb	Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies	Aug 2014 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Against the perception of the BBC as a monolith of narrow, middle-class and overwhelmingly white attitudes and values, Hendy and Webb have provided the public (and the BBC) with a diversity-centred account of the corporation's broadcasting history. The research, disseminated through BBC websites, collects a hidden and forgotten archive of public broadcasting that has altered institutional self-perception as well as perceptions of the BBC by the public, specifically amongst BAME groups and sexual minorities. The research has changed BBC policies and practices and altered the relations of current staff to their workplace. The websites have also been identified as a compelling resource for educators seeking a diverse history curriculum.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Hendy's and Webb's research has consistently challenged the notion of a monolithic BBC. Their research asserts the importance of human agency – of affinities, emotions, memories, values – in shaping the BBC's development. In his monograph, <i>Public Service Broadcasting</i> (2013) [R1], Hendy sought to turn away from "policy, or regulatory regimes, or funding, or technology, or even institutional structures" and explore instead "a set of ideas... an <i>ethos</i>". In several articles [R2, R3] Hendy has called specifically for a more <i>biographical</i> perspective to media history. He argues that the life-stories of individuals are relevant to their professional practices and become "the nexus through which larger structures might be revealed and understood". Hendy's 2016 45-minute documentary for BBC Radio 3, <i>Langston Hughes at the Third</i> [R5], drawing on archival sources and interviews in the US and UK, embodied this approach. As described by BBC Radio 3, the programme pieced together "for the first time" the details of an "unlikely relationship" between the Harlem poet and a BBC producer; in so doing, it shed light on how the BBC covered the '60s civil rights movement. Hendy's groundbreaking scholarship has articulated a history of the BBC where the focus on consciousness and affect, animated by attention to the biographical, has produced striking new understandings of this national institution.</p> <p>Hendy's assertion that the BBC has been "an entity strongly shaped by the individuals who created it" [R2] has underpinned the AHRC-funded 'BBC Connected Histories' project at Sussex, for which Hendy acts as PI and Webb as Co-I. The project was initially funded by an internal Research Development Fund for 'The BBC Centenary History Project', 2014 (£21,549) awarded to Hendy. The money was used to employ Webb as a Research Fellow in the period in which the AHRC bid was being prepared [Webb's previous research, undertaken at the Open</p>		

University and Queen Mary (and published as *London Calling: Britain, the BBC World Service and the Cold War*) made him a clear candidate for Co-I]. Research has been supported by contribution-in-kind from project partners: BBC, the Science Museum Group, Mass Observation, and the British Entertainment History Project (BEHP). It investigates 600+ recorded interviews with former staff, which constitute the BBC's 'Oral History Archive', hitherto only accessible to programme-makers and authorised historians of the Corporation.

Hendy and Webb have assessed the historical value of these personal testimonies and, as part of 'BBC Connected Histories', have developed an interpretative strategy which features their findings in "100 Voices that Made the BBC" [R4], a series of six public-facing BBC websites they have co-curated (each worked as chief curator on three websites). In each case, selected interviews are accompanied by a narrative text from Hendy or Webb, archive programmes (some available for the first time), documents from the BBC's Written Archives or from Mass Observation, and recordings from the BEHP archive. The project is mid-way through filming 25 new in-depth interviews with key BBC figures to plug notable absences in the official archive: those already filmed include Mike Phillips, one of the BBC's first black journalists, and Satish Jacob, an important figure in the Delhi bureau. This emphasis on personal testimonies is designed as an engaging 'way in' to BBC history and embodies Hendy's assertion that a more biographical approach allows us "to sense more clearly" the BBC's "overall fluidity and heterogeneity" [R2]. The website 'People, Nation, Empire' (2018), for instance, added nuance to popular perceptions about the BBC's history of engagement with diversity by revealing early instances of racial intolerance within TV and newsrooms, as well as more progressive attitudes within drama and documentaries, and pioneering representation of transsexuals dating back to 1973 [R4]. 'World War 2' (2019) challenged the notion of 'Britain Standing Alone' by drawing special attention to the significant role played by refugees and overseas Allies in the BBC's war-effort. It also highlighted the degree of freedom that still existed for ordinary programme-makers despite the well-known regime of official censorship [R4].

3. References to the research

R1. Hendy, D., *Public Service Broadcasting* (Palgrave, 2013) Available on request.

R2. Hendy, D., 'Biography and the Emotions as a Missing "Narrative" in Media History', *Media History* (2012) 18:3-4, pp. 361-378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688804.2012.722424>

R3. Hendy, D., 'The Great War and British Broadcasting: Emotional Life in the Creation of the BBC', *New Formations* (2014), Vol. 82, pp. 82-99. Submitted to REF2. <https://doi.org/10.3898/NewF.82.05.2014>

R4. *100 Voices that Made the BBC*: a series of websites published on BBC online (globally), March 2015 to July 2018. Except in a small number of clearly-labelled instances, all texts are written by – and all archival material selected by – Hendy and Webb:

- Elections (2015): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/elections>
- Birth of TV (2016): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/birth-of-tv>
- Radio Reinvented (2017): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/radioreinvented>
- People, Nation, Empire (2018): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/people-nation-empire>
- BBC and World War 2 (2019): <https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/100-voices/ww2>
- BBC and the Cold War (2019): <https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/100-voices/coldwar>

R5. *Sunday Feature: Langston Hughes at the Third*: 45-minute documentary, BBC Radio 3, 4 December 2016, repeated 10 June 2018. Available via BBC Radio 3 website or as a podcast: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b084cs44>. Commissioned by the BBC in 2014, receiving funding of approximately £12,000 after a competitive bidding process. The *Sunday Feature* is described by the BBC's Commissioning Guidelines as its space for "gold-standard, in-depth documentaries" with "originality and relevance".

Grant PI Hendy, Co-I Webb, 'BBC Connected Histories', AHRC Standard Research Grant (Ref. AH/P005837/1), value £787,311, 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2021.

4. Details of the impact

Alongside extensive public dissemination, research findings have been shared continuously with the BBC through regular meetings, advisory boards and user group workshops, transforming practices and perceptions inside the BBC [S1] as well in the wider public sphere [S3].

Changing BBC Practices

Robert Seatter, BBC Head of History, states Hendy and Webb's research has "made us reflect on our own practice" in oral history. Their representation-oriented selection criteria for choosing their own interviewees led to the BBC evolving "a new set of selection criteria" for its own oral history project [S1]. In 2019-20 Seatter responded specifically to the project by commissioning the creation of new 'BAME' and 'LGBTQ+' themed collections for the BBC's future oral history archive. The project's strategy of making as much of the collection as possible available for public viewing prompted the BBC to introduce "better central governance" and "strategic oversight" of its own oral history archive [S1]. In February 2019 Hendy was invited to Broadcasting House to advise a new team recording the next generation of official BBC oral history interviews on the need to embrace emerging scholarly research themes and techniques – emphasising 'whole-life' approaches and the benefits of open access combined with enhanced metadata and security standards [S1]. The BBC's interviewers "remarked on their increased perception of the professional role and application of the collection, following partnership with Sussex". Seatter reports that this has led to "more rigour re: storage and encryption" for the BBC's oral history, and that the inclusion of security information in legal contract letters to potential BBC interviewees has increased confidence in "speaking openly and honestly" [S1]. Finally, the research "provoked" a plan to rename some of the 55 meeting rooms in Broadcasting House, in 2019-20, "to reflect the more diverse personalities from the BBC's history" [S1].

Changing Perceptions within the BBC

Seatter states that Hendy and Webb's research has had "a profound impact" within the BBC: their work in *People, Nation, Empire (PNE)* (2018) for example is a "revelation" concerning the early appearance of black voices on the BBC [S1]. It provided "useful" input for "DG [Director-General] briefings/speeches, where we are often called upon for historical precedent", and gave the BBC's Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Tunde Ogungbesan, "a strengthened narrative and a confidence in articulating a more diverse future for the BBC" (examples of Hendy and Webb's research were cited in Ogungbesan's corporate strategy paper) [S1]. The BBC's newly-established Creative Diversity team were so "bowled over" with *PNE* and the sense of "a BBC history they had no prior knowledge of" that the Director of Creative Diversity, June Sarpong, consequently decided to integrate *PNE* material "directly into her strategic presentations to management" [S1]. It also prompted the decision by Creative Diversity to include extra historical sections concerning race on their own website. *PNE* has since been made accessible, not just as part of 100 Voices, but elsewhere on BBC Online as 'History of BAME at the BBC'. The changed perceptions among staff are evidenced in the reactions of two prominent BBC figures. The presenter Samira Ahmed said of *PNE* that learning about Olive Shapley's work revealed a BBC that did "semi-revolutionary things" even before the war [S2]. The BBC News Correspondent Lyse Doucet said that the World War 2 website "reminds us again and again that even though we remember ...Dimbleby... Eisenhower... Churchill... there's so many 'Mary Lewis's' and others, the technicians, the electricians, the engineers" [S2]. Ahmed and Radio 4 announcer Neil Nunes tweeted threads linked to *PNE*'s story on Una Marson (the BBC's first black producer) and the pioneering TV series for immigrants, *Make Yourself at Home*. Nunes drew attention to the "troubling evidence" of Marson dealing with "racial intolerance from colleagues" [S2]. Sabbiyah Pervez, Communities Reporter for BBC Look North, stated the resource was "much needed" [S2]. Seatter adds that 100 Voices' "new versions of our corporate history" have been "reflected" in the BBC's Written Archives Centre, through the naming of a

meeting room after Una Marson, whose story was highlighted by Hendy and Webb [S1]. In providing “new perspectives on our corporate evolution”, 100 Voices has given senior staff such as Seatter “a better understanding of how we got to where we are and how that... fitted into a national/international story”. Its “diverse narratives” have “stopped us from being so isolationist” and demonstrated that “there are more ways of seeing than our oft framed one” [S1].

Changing Public Perceptions and Value for Educators

Through *PNE*, Hendy and Webb’s research altered the perceptions of marginalised communities who previously had felt they had been excluded from BBC history. For example, a ‘key discovery’ – a 1973 *Open Door* documentary featuring transsexuals – generated coverage in the mainstream and LGBTQ+ press focusing on David Attenborough’s role in commissioning the series. It was then discussed on Twitter by several ‘influencer’ accounts, including LGBT History Month, Trans Media Watch, and ‘ManchParentsGroup’ (a support group for parents of LGBTQ+ children) [S3]. One activist, who runs the Scots Queer International Film Festival, noted the website showed “what progress had been made” but also “saddening” evidence that “there’s still issues today that seem to have made little to no progress” [S3]. One response referred to the research as “A real tangible record of our history” and another (Leanne Troye) tweeted that the archival material was “a real historical eye opener” [S3]. The BBC estimated the immediate response to coverage of the research (especially in the LGBTQ+ press) included tweets with “a total reach of 2.47m” [S4]. It also drew attention to the ‘hidden’ history of the BBC’s struggle to reflect and report on Britain’s multicultural identity. Threads tweeted by ‘Black British Bulletin’ drew their followers’ attention to the website’s material on Marson and *Make Yourself at Home* [S3]. Comments from a British Library event showcasing the research included: “loads today was new to me! I didn’t know about the first female BBC black producer”; “It is a bit of hidden history”; “I think it is going to be a very valuable resource... particularly for someone like my husband who didn’t grow up here...” [S5].

The research has also had an impact on education and curricula development. History teachers at Aylesbury High School tweeted that it was “an amazing resource” for their “migration to Britain unit and a huge help as we rewrite diversity into our KS3 curriculum” [S6]. The Royal Historical Society report on *Race, Ethnicity & Equality in UK History: a Report and Resource for Change*, recommended *PNE* as one of the key “Primary source guides and datasets that illuminate BME histories” [S7].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. Robert Seatter (Head of BBC History) testimony via email 3 February 2021.

S2. BBC Staff reflect on Hendy and Webb’s 100 Voices websites (transcriptions of testimony and copies of tweets). <https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/100-voices/ww2/background>

S3. Social Media Responses to *People, Nation, Empire* (July 2018).

S4. BBC Evidence of broad public engagement with research: quantitative data (provided on slide 4).

S5. British Library interviews on *People, Nation, Empire* (transcripts of interviews). (July 2018)

S6. Evidence from Educators (July 2018).

S7. Royal Historical Society Report *Race, Ethnicity and Equality in UK History*. The reference to 100 Voices that Made the BBC is on p. 117. https://files.royalhistsoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/17205337/RHS_race_report_EMBARGO_0001_18Oct.pdf