

Working paper on Cultural Diplomacy and The British Council

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*It is necessary for the British Council to understand its own strength. The building of international and intercultural trust, expressed as the web of transnational civil society relationships, is the most powerful possible contribution that we can make to that 'safe, just and prosperous' world. It is a strong and tangible contribution to global security in the dangerous environment of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century; and it is a strong and tangible contribution to European integration as we struggle with accession, migration and instability. There is nothing soft about cultural relations.<sup>i</sup>*

### **The 'Soft Power' of Cultural Diplomacy**

Visiting a museum is not normally an activity associated with high level international politics. It might be hard to imagine that the current exhibition of ancient Chinese artefacts in the British Museum represents the modern China of exploding economic growth but, according to museum director Neil Macgregor, the mission to secure the loan of the First Emperor's treasures was carried out in the name of cultural diplomacy. Standing on a hillside above the subterranean palace of Qin Shi Huangdi and his 7,000 terracotta warriors, Macgregor told journalists that, 'So much of what modern China is can be seen as a direct consequence of what that man did. There are very few historical figures who

changed the world in such a way that we are still living with the consequences.<sup>ii</sup>

The exhibition, held in one of the UK's most important tourist attractions, is accompanied by a series of talks aimed at stimulating public interest in the country and culture that produced such extraordinary heritage. The events begin with a *Guardian* debate entitled 'The New China: What does the First Emperor's legacy mean in a globalised world?', to be followed up by an evening discussing 'Could China have discovered Europe?' at which 'prominent writers, critics and historians discuss the "rise of China" and what it might mean in the context of global politics.'

The idea of Neil Macgregor doing 'cultural diplomacy' on a trip to China to oversee the loan of their ancient artefacts makes more sense when it involves public discussion about relationships between the two countries. If diplomacy is the art of strategic communication between nations and culture involves symbols of artistic and creative endeavour then the practice of cultural diplomacy surely amounts to strategies to increase cross-cultural understanding and mutual knowledge. But as the museum's list of events suggests, the exhibition presents an opportunity to learn about China, but there is no suggestion that there will be a corresponding discussion about the UK over there. It is not clear how this form of cultural diplomacy is reciprocal or where it fits with other types of international relations involving trade, tourism or legitimising the British Museum's access to global treasures that might function as an aid to understanding human development.

Cultural diplomacy is a term that crops up more and more in a world in which governments are rapidly ceding control of the ways in which nations are represented in the global arena. Diplomats, ambassadors, consulates, attaches – these terms are still current, but they are redolent of the Cold War era, a time when Culture (with a capital C) was instrumentalised to demonstrate the superiority of either the so-called Free World or the Communist regimes led by the USSR. The field of public diplomacy – which includes its cultural variant – still refers to the highly complex management of relationships between countries, regions and political blocs, but it is inevitably determined by the changing framework of world politics, as well as influenced by the development of digital communication technologies (including satellite broadcasting) and global economic patterns in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

On this new terrain the phrase ‘cultural diplomacy’ has emerged as a new cipher for what Joseph Nye has defined as ‘soft power’. This remains a vague concept, but it has possibly never been so important to grasp, or the practices associated with it so urgently needing to be monitored as they are now when ‘hard power’ includes the spectre of nuclear annihilation. China’s relationship to the rest of the world presents a useful model for understanding the nuances of the deceptively innocuous-sounding practice of ‘soft power’. In an essay on public diplomacy in the People’s Republic of China, Ingrid d’Hooghe writes that China’s biggest assets are its (ancient) culture and its economic success, both of which are used to sell the country and to counteract suspicions of a rapidly

growing world power. But the government is unable to control the flow of ideas and cultural expression that tell outsiders far more about the conditions of life inside China, a phenomenon that also, by definition, counts as a form of diplomacy:

Looking at how China exploits its culture or 'soft power', one finds an ambiguous approach. Joseph Nye defines 'soft power' as 'the influence and attractiveness a nation acquires when others are drawn to its culture and ideas.<sup>iii</sup>' China's policy-makers certainly use the popularity of Chinese culture outside their borders to promote international relations and tourism, but mainly focus on harmless, apolitical, traditional culture...At the same time, however, a new generation of Chinese artists, writers, filmmakers and actors, combining traditional arts with modern ideas and developments, are conquering the world...Many cultural expressions, however, such as books, poems, films, visual art works as well as theatre performances are considered subversive by the regime and are subsequently denounced and domestically forbidden. This part of China's growing soft power thus seems ignored by China's leaders.<sup>iv</sup>

A recent US-based definition of cultural diplomacy describes it as 'the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding', situating it within the broader arsenal of public diplomacy which 'basically comprises all that a nation does to explain itself to the world.'<sup>v</sup> But this definition does not convey the ideological

battles that motivate and shape the particular message about culture being prepared and delivered as a corollary to other forms of ‘strategic communication’, including military action. In other words it does not account for the differences between what the US was trying to accomplish in the post 1945 era, and what it seeks to do post 9/11. The role of the CIA in directing American cultural propaganda in the Cold War has been well documented in Frances Stonor Saunders’ *Who Pays the Piper*<sup>vi</sup>? It is also worth remembering that as long ago as 1956 President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s government sponsored a jazz tour of the Middle East featuring Dizzy Gillespie’s integrated band. In her book, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, Penny van Eschen explores the extraordinary contradictions involved in using black culture to represent a particular notion of freedom at a time when the country was polarised by vicious segregation and the gathering Civil Rights Movement. She writes, ‘Intended to promote a vision of color-blind American democracy, the tours foregrounded the importance of African-American culture during the Cold War, with blackness and whiteness operating culturally to project an image of American nationhood that was more inclusive than the reality.’<sup>vii</sup>

### **The Spectrum of Public Diplomacy**

Before looking in more detail at contemporary definitions of cultural diplomacy, refined and invigorated since 2001, it is important to outline what the broader field of public diplomacy encompasses. Although this entails the sphere of

international relations, I will limit the rest of this discussion to British policy except where it is helpful to make comparisons, starting with the most recent attempts to define and rationalise government strategies that inform the new Public Diplomacy Board convened in 2002. In June 2006 the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs responded to the report on public diplomacy carried out by the Foreign Affairs Committee headed by Lord Carter in 2005. The Carter Report, as it is known, defines public diplomacy as ‘work aiming to inform and engage individuals and organisations overseas, in order to improve understanding of and influence for the United Kingdom in a manner consistent with governmental medium and long term goals.’ Indicating the wider remit of this work, the FCO response to the report welcomed the involvement of other government agencies in the new Public Diplomacy Board such as the Ministry of Defence and Dfid, as well as organisations representing trade and industry (UKTI), tourism (VisitBritain) and the private sector. However, the review of the report’s recommendations begins with a discussion of two government-funded organisations that have played enormously significant roles in influencing the UK’s relationship with the rest of the world for the best part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the British Council and the BBC World Service.

This extract conveys the necessity of maintaining an ‘arms-length’ distance between each of these two institutions and official government diplomacy in order not to jeopardise the value of their respective work.

The new Public Diplomacy Board, chaired by Lord Triesman and including senior representatives of the FCO, British Council and BBC World Service, will set the Public Diplomacy Strategy. On the Board, the BBC World Service has observer status in recognition of its editorial independence. The Board's Terms of Reference confirm the editorial independence of the BBC World Service and the operational independence of the British Council.<sup>viii</sup>

In a paper analyzing the spectrum of diplomacy work in the UK, Ali Fisher, former director of Counterpoint, the British Council cultural relations think tank, suggests that the range of official and unofficial activities interact along a line that runs from 'listening' to 'telling', or as the diplomatic jargon would have it, 'direct messaging'.<sup>ix</sup> Cultural diplomacy is placed between broadcasting (which is directly next to messaging) and cultural exchange, which is the mid point between the two extremes. Fisher explains: 'As the emphasis shifts away from listening and increasingly towards the promotion of a particular perspective, cultural diplomacy is the act of presenting a cultural good to an audience in an attempt to engage them in the ideas which the producer perceives to be represented by it.' What determines the underlying difference between diplomacy and exchange in the cultural sphere is the question of relative power among the parties involved. If there is no reciprocity there can be no genuine exchange – rather, the attempt to deliver a pointed message to a carefully targeted audience.

The British Council states that its purpose is ‘to build mutually beneficial relationships between people in the UK and other countries and to increase appreciation of the UK’s creative ideas and achievements.’ Its aim then is to work at both ends of the spectrum that Fisher has identified, since representing Britain in a positive light amounts to ‘telling’ while building mutually beneficial relationships requires skills and strategies that involve a more reciprocal, listening approach that entails trust-building. The rest of this paper will outline a brief history of the British Council, starting with its inception in 1933, as a way of thinking through what the term ‘cultural diplomacy’ has meant at different times in recent history.

### **From propaganda to mutuality?**

The British Council began in 1933 as a joint committee set up by the Board of Education and Board of Trade to promote British education, culture, science and technology. According to Nicholas Cull, writing on the BC website, the organization was founded ‘as an organ of international propaganda.’ This was a term that was first used widely following the 1914-18 war, where it was introduced to demonise the ‘Hun’ and to expound the prospect of the clash of civilizations between Atlantic enlightenment and Prussian barbarism.<sup>x</sup> In 1918 a new Ministry of Information was set up by Lord Beaverbrook, for example, and Lord Northcliffe was appointed as Director of Propaganda to Enemy Countries. Beaverbrook used photography and cinema to depict war scenes, a development



much admired by Hitler, as he wrote later. After the war ended many people in Britain, and in the US too, became suspicious of the way that public opinion had been manipulated by the growing power of the media and the word 'propaganda' acquired entirely negative connotations. However, the concept was given new impetus after the publication in 1928 of Edward Bernays' pamphlet, simply entitled *Propaganda*.<sup>xi</sup> Bernays, who was Freud's nephew, later became known as 'the father of spin'. Here he proposed the simple notion that propaganda was essential in averting chaos: 'The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society'.<sup>xii</sup>

It was during the late 1920s, Cull writes, that 'an influential group of civil servants became convinced that "British" values of parliamentary democracy could be subsumed by the rising tide of fascism.' Sir Reginald Leeper, described by the Oxford Biography as a 'diplomatist', who was the founding father of the BC, was a leading figure in this group. He had become convinced of the need for what he called 'cultural propaganda' and persuaded the Foreign Office to fund lecture tours and book donations to nearly 30 countries. He promoted the organization within the Foreign Office till 1938 when he was appointed to head the Political Intelligence Department.

It is important to investigate this moment in order to appreciate the significance of this term 'cultural propaganda' and to modify the suggestion that the British Council was founded as a beacon of democracy and liberty in a

darkening world. Frances Donaldson, author of a book on the first fifty years of the institution, explained at length that the British were in fact out of step with their European counterparts because they did not promote their national culture as a matter of foreign policy.

From the nineteenth century the French Government had given subsidies to the schools of the French Roman Catholic missionaries in the Mediterranean basin, as well as to the hospitals and agricultural institutions, and in the twentieth century they extended their work by establishing lay schools and at the same time enlarging their sphere of influence to take in the countries of the West and South America.

Splendidly equipped institutes for higher education were established in Florence, Rome, Athens, Cairo and Damascus.<sup>xiii</sup>

Both the Italians and the Germans were also intent on asserting their respective contributions to civilization and to the richness of the culture of the world, she wrote. By the early 1930s it was becoming clear that their agendas, shaped by fascist governments in both countries, were becoming increasingly dangerous to British interests, particularly in the East and in South America. 'In the atmosphere of the time,' she continued, 'the idea that a truer understanding of Great Britain might be contributed to by a non-political, educational programme, specifically designed to spread knowledge of the English language and of British arts, science, parliamentary institutions, technological achievements and way of life held out some, if only a small, attraction.'<sup>xiv</sup>

British reluctance to promote its national culture abroad was judged to be partly a result of a kind of a trenchant form of philistinism. Donaldson wrote that, 'Alone among leading European nations, England had no national theatre or state opera company, gave no state subsidy to the arts, while Shakespeare was seldom performed in the capital city of his own country for fear of emptying the theatre.' The British did not reach for a revolver at the mention of the word culture, she commented, 'but they turned off the radio and shut their books.'<sup>xv</sup> But it was more than that. It also stemmed from a refusal to believe that 'organised publicity' was a necessary component of foreign policy, especially since the idea of propaganda was associated with the deeply unpopular Beaverbrook. Leeper's belief in the importance of 'cultural propaganda', and his impatience with what he saw as a peculiar mixture of British superiority and ignorance, took on the form of a personal mission to persuade the government that national interests would be harmed if they failed to act.

In 1935 Lord Lloyd was appointed as chairman of the British Council, and he oversaw its development during the years leading up to the outbreak of war. As Germany and Italy stepped up their own aggressive propaganda campaigns, Lloyd worked hard to raise funds, although he insisted that it was better to build up the Council's work gradually rather than engage in a propaganda war with the enemy. One extract from a speech he made at this time is worth quoting because it conveys a belief in the long term importance of culture as a diplomatic tool while retaining a tone of imperial superiority:

Our cultural influence is, in fact, the effect of our personality on the outside world ... What most interests the outside world, beyond the fact of our power, is the use to which that power will be put. The answer to that question lies deep in our national character – a character which many, even of our friends, have misunderstood, and our opponents have been concerned to misinterpret. All the more reason that we should give the world free access to our civilization, and free opportunity to form its own judgement on our outlook and motives ... everywhere we find people turning with relief from the harshly dominant note of totalitarian propaganda to the less insistent and more reasonable cadences of Britain. We do not force them to ‘think British’, we offer them the opportunity of learning what the British think.<sup>xvi</sup>

The BC’s first overseas representatives were appointed in 1938 in Egypt, Portugal, Romania and Poland. The following year the organisation successfully resisted being incorporated into the Ministry of Information, but withdrew from Poland. The official history of the BC during the war is described on the website:

British Council work seen as massive part of British war effort. Offices closed in Europe, but organization opens new bases in Middle East. At the request of the Government, centres were set up across the country to provide educational and cultural support to refugees and Allied service personnel and many of these stayed open after 1945. European operations were reopened and expanded. Uncertainty about the British Council’s

long-term future led to the closure of operations in many countries in other parts of the world.

Throughout the second half of the century, the Council expanded its realm of operation unevenly, always sensitive to – or victim of – the dictates of a broader diplomacy. Its priorities consistently included the Middle East, but a timeline showing the opening and closing of national and regional offices seems to follow the contours of foreign policy, whether this entailed conflict or a decrease in interest. Relations with countries in the USSR were developed where openings could be glimpsed, often through the auspices of the British embassies.

Decolonisation and the granting of independence to former colonies are barely mentioned on the website as important factors either in the expansion of new locations or in determining shifts in policy, although 1947 marked the opening of offices in ‘independent India and Pakistan’. Interestingly Cull notes that early on the Foreign Office forbade Council operations in the US, ‘for fear of antagonizing the Americans whose sensitivity towards propaganda had been sharpened by similar British activities in the Second World War.’ It was not until 1973 that the first BC office was opened in the US, with its first office linked to the embassy in Washington.

The list of offices opened and withdrawn needs also to be read alongside efforts both to expand the operations of the BC and to close it down. The 1970’s-80’s saw a growth in educational functions and English language teaching, while in 1970 the Joint Working Party of the British Council, the Foreign &

Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Overseas Development Administration (ODA – the successor to the Department of Technical Cooperation) agreed to cooperate on educational and technical assistance programmes in developing countries. In the 1980s the BC merged with Technical Education and Training Organisation for Overseas Countries (TETOC), which provided advice on technical education, industrial training, agricultural education, management and public administration.

The 1970s also saw an attempt to close it down when Callaghan's review of foreign policy resulted in the Berrill Report (1977) which recommended abolition of the BC. This was rejected by a government review of overseas representation the following year.

After the break up of the USSR there was a huge expansion of English language teaching, and in 1995 English 2000 was launched – a project to study the use of English worldwide and to develop new teaching and learning methods. The rapid expansion of the global tourist industry in 1999, which demands to be taken into account in any history of intercultural relations, resulted in an agreement with the British Tourist Authority to open British Visitor centres in 12 offices worldwide. In 2007 there are offices in 110 countries, including Burma and Zimbabwe, and the organization justifies its presence in less than democratic nations by stating: "We enhance awareness of the UK's democratic values and processes by working in partnership with other countries to strengthen good government and human rights...We work with both

government and civil society to advance debate, knowledge and skills and seek to create a wider appreciation of the UK as a valued partner in tackling key reform agendas and promoting sustainable development.”

Cull’s assessment of the BC’s contribution to public diplomacy is that it has helped present the West as culturally diverse, in particular in the way that it has demonstrated that Britain and British culture is distinct from the US. He also suggests that the BC has helped to secure English as an international lingua franca through its promotion of language education.

Elsewhere on the official website Richard Weight discusses the question: does the work of the British Council amount to propaganda? He reminds readers that the Council has attempted to walk a thin line throughout its history, sensitive to the accusation that cultural propaganda is inextricably part of the government of the day’s foreign policy. The early years of the Second World War were a particularly testing time for the organization which only survived due to the stubbornness of Lord Lloyd. For many in government, not least those running the Ministry of Information, the idea that ‘cultural relations’ could be allowed to develop outside the realm of government controlled propaganda was not only unthinkable, it was also a waste of money. In 1940 Lloyd exchanged letters with the founder of the BBC, Sir John Reith, then head of the Ministry of Information, on what the wartime role of the organisation should be. Despite the crisis then enveloping the world, Lloyd was uneasy about placing the Council in the hands of propagandists. In reply, Reith wrote, ‘who can say where cultural

activity ends and propaganda begins?’ Lloyd refused to give any ground, insisting that the BC should remain with the Foreign Office and continue its work unhindered, much to the annoyance of Reith and others in government. Referring to Reith’s question, Weight concludes, ‘There is and must be a distinction between the two. But throughout almost seventy years of activity, the Council has proved that cultural propaganda, sensitively managed, can help to create international understanding, and with it, a more peaceful world.’

Since 2001 the British Council has attempted to refine its role further, and to maintain the distinction between the work it does in particular regions and British foreign policy. Hence the attention that the Carter Report pays to the ‘arms-length’ relationship between BC and government, despite the fact that it is funded by the Foreign Office. The BC website announces: ‘In the US and elsewhere, people recognised the importance of the work of organisations such as the British Council in building the necessary bridges of understanding and trust. The British Council itself gave priority to its new project Connecting Futures, which brings together young people from the UK with those from countries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe.’

### **Diplomacy in an ‘Age of Schisms’**

Since the US-UK invasion of Iraq and the subsequent aftermath, the British Council has been active in developing concepts and strategies intended to move operations towards the listening end of the spectrum, away from the direct



messaging function associated with a particularly clumsy, US style of cultural diplomacy. In another paper written while he was director of Counterpoint, the British Council's first cultural relations think tank, Fisher elaborates on this by suggesting that the range of diplomatic approaches employed by different governments fall within two models that are increasingly diverging. He cites Brian Hocking's analysis:

The reality is that there are in a sense 'two worlds' of public diplomacy that intersect, overlap, collide and cooperate in a variety of contexts. On the one hand we have a traditional, 'hierarchical' image of diplomatic systems, and, on the other, what has come to be termed a 'network' model.<sup>xvii</sup>

Fisher focuses on the network-based approach which characterises the British Council's contribution to the hierarchical structure of UK Public Diplomacy. The notion of 'mutual benefit' is central to the creation of live networks, and he defines this term as stemming from 'the identification of potential projects in which other groups can engage for their own benefit, rather than from benefit which is gained through merely being a conduit for the prescribed message of a dominant collaborator.'<sup>xviii</sup> Whether or not this counts as cultural diplomacy, the goal of mutual benefit entails the prior recognition of such conditions as 'interconnectedness between civil societies', 'transnational cooperation', and interdependent regions. Interestingly the example that Fisher gives of a British Council product demonstrating mutual benefit - *British Muslims: Media Guide*,

2006 – is intercultural but does not overtly concern conventionally diplomatic relationships between the UK and any one country or region. The book's preface, written by joint publishers Martin Rose, director of Counterpoint, and Dr. Anas Al-Shaikh Ali, Chair, Association of Muslim Social Scientists, states:

This book addresses those who write, and speak, about British Muslims whether in our own country or abroad. The editorial process has thrown up many issues, some predictable, some surprising, some tricky – but all of them constructive. We ourselves feel that we understand better than at the beginning of the project how our partners think, what they hope for and what they fear. Mutual knowledge and friendship has paid dividends in a book that neither of us could have published, in this form, without the other.<sup>xix</sup>

The concept of mutuality is explored at some length in a pamphlet written by foreign policy 'thinker' Mark Leonard<sup>xx</sup> and Andrew Small,<sup>xxi</sup> in collaboration with Martin Rose. First the writers analyse the changed setting in which current Public Diplomacy takes place. One of their starting points is the stark fact that fallout from Iraq has had 'a corrosive effect on general, non-specific, trust in the UK in many parts of the world.' Writing about the world after Iraq, they summarise how the world can be seen to have 'plunged into disorder'.<sup>xxii</sup> After listing the various conflicts, or 'global schisms', that threaten the stability the post Cold War world, they propose that an understanding of the role of culture is essential if the practice of public diplomacy is to meet the new challenges:

Although many of the new divides have economic and political interests at their heart, the way they are expressed is often through culture, and owing to the lack of trust, it will often be impossible to address underlying economic and social differences before progress is made in the cultural sphere.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Later in their report they write: 'In broad terms, the UK now confronts two major public diplomacy goals: advocacy – the presentation of the UK and its policies in ways that are genuinely convincing and attractive to international audiences; and trust-building – the creation of a climate of mutual respect, understanding and trust, which permits and anticipates disagreement.'<sup>xxiv</sup> It is this concept of mutuality that characterizes the different approach towards 'strategic communication', one that involves trust-building and dialogue as opposed to intercultural 'shouting'. But this is not the most significant change of emphasis. The report states that public diplomacy of this variety should move away from short-term aims towards the strategy of long-term trust, 'through long-term consistently managed relationships, and doing so in advance of, not in response to, short term political needs.'<sup>xxv</sup> Significantly this emphasis on the importance of looking to the future echoes the earliest arguments of the advocates of British cultural relations work, faced with comparable demands to line up with the immediate aims of foreign policy.

For the purposes of this paper, two aspects of the argument are significant. The first is the suggestion that the new Public Diplomacy will involve

the participation of organizations that are not only resolutely non-governmental, but also culturally suspicious of or even hostile to official foreign policy. The report lists NGOs, diasporas, political parties and brands. 'Links to diasporas can provide much needed language skills, cultural knowledge, political insight and human intelligence,' although, the report adds, they can also provide 'partisan views, dated interpretations and political engagements – all of which need to be carefully taken into account.'<sup>xxvi</sup> While NGOs are often able to distance themselves from government and therefore well suited to long-term trust building exercises, those organizations funded by government such as The British Council and the BBC that have a more ambiguous status are poised to play a particularly useful role. They 'are able to be "inside-outside" – to be non-governmental in their approach to public diplomacy, while understanding and sharing its overarching goals.'<sup>xxvii</sup> As the authors explain, the British Council can represent the non-governmental voices of Britain at the same time as 'de-emphasising' official UK policy. In other words the work of the BC is able to reflect the side of the country that opposed the invasion of Iraq in regions where British foreign policy is deeply unpopular.

The second aspect of the paper that is relevant here is that in developing the theme of mutuality as an integral principle of its work, the British Council is able to position itself as an essential ingredient of the new Public Diplomacy. Added to their ambiguous position in relation to the government, the institution has developed long term work programmes that deal precisely with the areas

identified at the heart of global schisms. 'Work in education , the arts, information, governance, science and language is largely distanced from short-term policy shifts because in most cases it is concerned with fairly uncontroversial long-term processes. This is not because culture is neutral. It is not. But organizations like the British Council systematically eschew the Political while embracing the political.'<sup>xxviii</sup>

### **Conclusion: the cultural is political**

The British Council was founded at a time when other European powers still entertained the idea that their own civilisational bloodlines –rooted as they were in ideas about ancient Rome, the glorious legacy of Louis XIV's reign or the spirit of Germanism (*deutschtum*) – were not only distinct from one another but also intrinsic to their relations with other countries, whether colonies, trading partners, foes or allies. Britain was evidently convinced of its own superiority, but unlike its neighbours did not place any value on the notion of culture as a mediating device either because it was assumed that the nation's achievements spoke for themselves, or because it was simply not important in terms of foreign policy. The concept of 'cultural propaganda' was badly received when first proposed in the late 1920s because for many people, members of the public as well as politicians, the term reeked of the new media techniques of manipulation, lies and fabrications following Lord Beaverbrook's efforts to mould public opinion during the 1914-18 war. The history of the British Council, from these

early days of persuading the Foreign Office to fund programmes that promoted British culture (in the form of arts, science, technology, language teaching and 'way of life') to its contemporary status as a prestigious world-wide institution with networks in 13 regions, provides the opportunity to trace the changing interpretations of culture as a diplomatic tool, whether it has been used for making peace or justifying war.

Today there are few who would dispute the role that culture plays in current geopolitical conflict: it is absolutely central to the US-led battle for 'hearts and minds' of the Islamic world, just as it is implicated in local varieties of racism, fundamentalism and persecution of migrants throughout Europe. The term 'cultural diplomacy' does not adequately cover the range of strategies to manage intercultural relations since it does not reveal the balance between a 'listening' and 'telling' approach. The development of intercultural networks built on the theory of mutuality is just one area of official Public Diplomacy, and its long term effects will be tested in the future. It rests on a strategic method that is both complementary to and in competition with many other factors affecting Britain's relationship to the rest of the world: other government agencies (the Department of International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department of Trade and Industry), organisations representing tourism and other aspects of UK commercial interests, both public and private, as well as an array of highly competitive broadcasting outlets and internet-based forms of communication. And as with the example of China's 'soft power'

mentioned earlier, this is augmented by a vast number of cultural expressions in the form of films, art works, literature and so on, whose dispersal in the wider world is beyond the control of any organization or policy.

Finally, it is important to link contemporary debates about national identity and the parameters of Gordon Brown's 'Britishness' to this discussion of the role of culture in Public Diplomacy. The palpable confusion about the cultural content of Britishness - as opposed to the robust contributions of the various ethnic and regional entities that make up Britain, whether Scottish, South Asian, Polish or Welsh - has made the concept almost impossible to define outside the narrowest terms of citizenship. Organisations like the British Council have demonstrated that presenting an array of cultural symbols as a way of engaging in inter-national communication is not the same as trying to draw lines around what is British and what is not. But there is also a fundamental problem with trying to sum up a modern country as a kind of brand, whether designed for internal consumption or intended to impress outsiders. Asking the public to suggest suitable mottos or mission statements for the country as a whole reflects this short-sighted thinking. The sudden shift from trying to identify a list of *British values*, to a call to debate a *British statement of values* echoes the uncertainties that plagued the country during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The gap between those two formulations refers us back to the quandary faced by Leeper and his allies in the Foreign Office in the 1920s. It speaks to the ambivalence about whether the UK really is a unique civilization destined to be a world leader or

whether those days are well and truly over. As the science and practice of Public Diplomacy develops, it is clear that, from outside at least, the values of any country will be largely expressed by the way that its government acts in the world. The semi-autonomous status of the British Council and the BBC will continue to ensure that there is a usable tension between what Britishness sounds like and what stories it tells.

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<sup>i</sup> Martin Rose and Nick Wadham-Smith *Mutuality, Trust and Cultural Relations* (London: British Council/Counterpoint, 2004), p. 6.

<sup>ii</sup> John Wilson 'Mortal Combat' *New Statesman* 10 September 2007, pp. 38-41.

<sup>iii</sup> Joseph S. Nye *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Cambridge MA: Perseus Publishing, 2004)

<sup>iv</sup> Ingrid d'Hooghe 'Public Diplomacy in the People's Republic of China' in Jan Melissen ed. *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007) pp. 94-5.

<sup>v</sup> Milton C. Cummings quoted in Cynthia P. Schneider 'Culture Communicates: US Diplomacy That Works' in Jan Melissen ed. *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007) p. 147.

<sup>vi</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders *Who Pays the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999)

<sup>vii</sup> Penny M. Von Eschen *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) p. 4.

<sup>viii</sup> Third Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee, Session 2005–06, Public Diplomacy Response of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, p. 3.  
[http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/FAC\\_Report\\_PublicDiplomacy06.pdf](http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/FAC_Report_PublicDiplomacy06.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> Ali Fisher 'Four Seasons in One Day: The Crowded House of Public Diplomacy in the UK (forthcoming)

<sup>x</sup> Edward Bernays *Propaganda* (1928) (Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 2005), p. 37.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

<sup>xiii</sup> Frances Donaldson *The British Council: The First Fifty Years* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), p. 3.

<sup>xiv</sup> Pp. 4-5.

<sup>xv</sup> P. 12.

<sup>xvi</sup> Pp. 57-8.

<sup>xvii</sup> Brian Hocking 'Rethinking the "New" Public Diplomacy' in Melissen, 2007, op cit, p. 35, quoted in Ali Fisher 'Public Diplomacy in the UK,' paper based on presentation given at Escuela Diplomática, Madrid, October 2006.

<sup>xviii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xix</sup> Ehsan Masood *British Muslims: Media Guide* London: British Council, 2006.



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<sup>xx</sup> Leonard was former Director of the Foreign Policy Centre. He describes himself on his website as Executive Director of a new pan-European initiative for policy development, advocacy and communications: the European Council on Foreign Relations. It will be launched later in the year with backing from the Soros Foundations Network, Fride and the Sigrid Rausing Trust.

<sup>xxi</sup> Andrew Small is researcher for the Foreign Policy Centre and has worked on 'Public Diplomacy' and 'China and Globalisation' programmes.

<sup>xxii</sup> Mark Leonard and Andrew Small with Martin Rose *British Public Diplomacy in the 'Age of Schisms'* London: The Foreign Policy Centre and Counterpoint, 2005.

<sup>xxiii</sup> P. 4

<sup>xxiv</sup> p. 36

<sup>xxv</sup> p. 44

<sup>xxvi</sup> p. 45

<sup>xxvii</sup> p. 45

<sup>xxviii</sup> p. 51