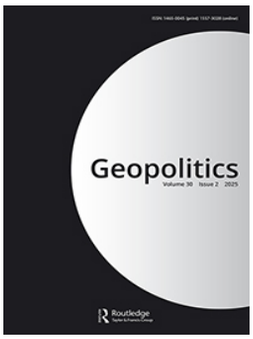

Geopolitics

ISSN: 1465-0045 (Print) 1557-3028 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/fgeo20

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To cite this article: Alice Watson (2025) Reporting on Europe's Migration 'Crisis' for BBC Radio 4: Journalists and the Geopolitics of Storytelling, Geopolitics, 30:2, 465-497, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2024.2379314

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2024.2379314

GEOPOLITICS
2025, VOL. 30, NO. 2, 465–497
https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2024.2379314

Routledge
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Reporting on Europe's Migration 'Crisis' for BBC Radio 4: Journalists and the Geopolitics of Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to critical and popular geopolitics by exploring the production of BBC Radio 4's reportage on Europe's migration 'crisis'. It draws on original interviews conducted with journalists, producers, editors, and senior commissioners at the BBC to uncover the thought-processes and practices that lie behind its diverse coverage. The paper identifies the professional codes that govern BBC journalists and documents the strategies of storytelling journalists employ to try and secure listener engagement and spark their geographical imaginations. It highlights the power and agency of journalists to construct geopolitical scripts on migration, but also points to creative room for journalists to inflect broadcasts with personal styles of witnessing and reporting. The journalists interviewed emerge as thoughtful and self-reflexive geopolitical 'agents' who are aware of their representational power and recognise the tension between objective and impartial BBC reportage and critical issues of emotion, positionality, and situated knowledge. Overall, the paper answers calls for more 'peopled' accounts of geopolitics and highlights the importance of investigating the production and practice of journalistic storytelling.

Introduction

From the beaches of Lampedusa to the borders of Hungary, the scale and impact of forced migration to Europe in 2015 turned it into one of the defining geopolitical stories of recent times. More than a million people crossed land and sea to reach European soil and seek asylum in 2015 alone from countries including Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Spindler 2015). Striking photographs, newspaper headlines, and radio bulletins depicted humanity being pushed to its limits and combined to discursively construct a 'crisis' unfolding on Europe's doorstep (Crawley et al. 2018). Few journalists paused to explain that a lack of safe and legal migration pathways, coupled with the securitisation of Europe's borders, created a vacuum in which financially lucrative smuggling networks could thrive and underpinned the fatal crossings which

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turned the Mediterranean into 'a macabre deathscape' (De Genova 2017, 2). The comparative scale of displacement in countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan was similarly left unacknowledged or was simply drowned out by political debate over refugee quotas within the European Union; a stalemate which left thousands stranded in overcrowded, makeshift camps on Europe's southern frontier (Katz 2016).

Yet journalism succeeded in bringing stories of migration into the geographical imaginations and consciences of European audiences and had the power to inspire extraordinary displays of public compassion, solidarity, and voluntarism (Maestri and Monforte 2020). Journalism also had the capacity, albeit fleetingly, to move the political needle, with Alan Kurdi's image, captured by Turkish photojournalist Nilüfer Demir, prompting the UK Prime Minister David Cameron to announce that Britain would fulfil its 'responsibilities' by resettling 20,000 Syrian refugees (Adler-Nissen, Andersen, and Hansen 2020, 76). As asylum seekers moved north and west, journalists travelled south and east to meet them. They gathered powerful testimonies of hardship, bravery, and resilience, but also slipped into ahistorical, reductive, and binary narratives which failed to situate migration within longer histories and processes of political, social, and economic change (Castles, De Haas, and Miller 2014). But how did journalists understand their role and responsibility when reporting? What practices and processes of decision-making shaped their coverage? And what strategies did they draw on to engage audiences in the geopolitical story of forced migration and displacement?

These are some of the questions that guide this paper. Whilst the representational power of media to construct narratives and imaginaries of migration has attracted significant attention (Chouliaraki and Georgiou 2019; Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017), there has been little research on the media institutions and journalistic practices out of which migration reportage emerges. This is true of popular geopolitics, which has focused on the discursive content of media at the expense of understanding how and why media are made. Critical geopolitics, as a broader field of study, seeks to problematise 'the creation of geopolitical knowledge by intellectuals, institutions, and practicing statesmen', challenging geopolitical discourses as 'a neutral and detached description of a transparent, objective reality' (Ó'Tuathail and Dalby 1998, 3). This is instructive as it underpins a critical interest in the agents who produce geopolitics and the 'institutional and cultural resources that they deploy in their daily practices' (Kuus 2008, 2062). Journalists are a key part of this picture, engaging in storytelling about distant and proximate people and places with the power to shape how audiences imagine, understand, and engage in the world (Pinkerton 2013). Journalists therefore occupy a privileged curatorial position, producing media representations which select and frame geopolitical issues and events, and have the potential to shape public perceptions of, discourse around, and emotions towards them

(Dempsey and McDowell 2019). This includes rendering people 'in' or 'out' of place, deciding which locations deserve attention and why, and amplifying and silencing voices and perspectives. Journalism, then, rests on unequal relations of power as reporters construct and perform geopolitical stories and influence public opinion. It is, however, part of a much wider geopolitical discourse on migration shaped by politicians, policymakers, think tanks, and humanitarian organisations (McDowell 2022). Multiple actors and institutions are involved in everyday communication on human mobility, reinforcing that journalists do not operate in a vacuum but are caught up in a vast representational network which mediates people on the move.

This paper makes a significant contribution to critical and popular geopolitics by examining the practices of production which shaped BBC Radio 4's reportage on Europe's migration 'crisis'. The BBC is 'one of the most important political and cultural institutions in Britain' and 'among the most influential and trusted media organisations in the world' (Mills 2020, 1). Its function as a public service broadcaster is predicated on a foundational commitment to producing accurate, trustworthy, and impartial journalism. Funding through a licence-fee, paid annually by its audience, underpins this duty to serve the public interest but also results in the corporation being 'politically exposed' (Wahl-Jorgensen et al. 2017, 784), subject to intense scrutiny and debate from across the political spectrum about whether it fulfils its mission and adheres to its editorial principles. Radio 4 is the BBC's flagship radio network and the country's most popular speech radio station, commanding a weekly audience of 10 million listeners (BBC Media Centre 2023). It therefore holds considerable power to communicate geopolitical stories to mass audiences, although it is, of course, only one corner of journalistic storytelling on migration within, and outside of, the BBC. Radio 4 is distinctive because of its broad remit spanning news, current affairs, and cultural programming, from magazine-style shows like *Woman's Hour* and documentary series such as *Crossing Continents* to news broadcasts including *The World Tonight*. This highlights the range of programme genres, formats, and lenses through which the story of migration can be approached and told.

In an analysis of Radio 4's broadcasting on Europe's migration 'crisis' between 2014 and 2019, I identified two contrasting imaginative geographies (see Watson 2023b): first, a geopolitical imaginary of 'crisis', exemplified in news broadcasts, which reports on migration from a top-down, state-centric perspective and is articulated by 'expert' voices, principally politicians; and second, a place-based, immersive, multi-sensory imaginary, exemplified in cultural and current affairs programmes, which amplifies personal stories of migration 'on the ground', and is articulated by multiple voices, most notably refugees. Across its diverse range of programming, Radio 4 therefore articulated geopolitical narratives of illegality, victimhood, and threat whilst at the same time challenging these reductive tropes in nuanced and reflexive

journalism that situated arrivals within longer histories, global geographies, and human experiences of migration and displacement. I concluded that Radio 4 is therefore 'a diverse and contradictory space of journalistic storytelling which invites multiple ways of listening to, understanding, and imagining people on the move' (see Watson 2023b, 1).

This paper builds on and develops that research by exploring how and why such disparate representations emerged. It draws on original interviews with BBC journalists, editors, producers, and senior commissioners who were involved in broadcasting Europe's migration 'crisis' and uncovers the practices and decision-making which shaped their reportage. It therefore foregrounds the site of production and is driven by an overarching interest in 'the practices and processes by which geographical information is gathered, geographical facts are ordered, and imaginative geographies are created' (Craine 2014). A disciplinary bias towards studying visual media is countered by focusing on radio as a sonic medium with the power to shape geopolitical imaginations.

The paper begins by reviewing relevant literature and outlining the methodology before exploring the professional codes which govern BBC journalism and the strategies of storytelling used to broadcast migration. Throughout, the voices of journalists lead the narrative, which enables individual approaches to be compared and contrasted, and illuminates the discourse journalist construct about their profession and practice. The paper reflects on the institutional principles and guidelines which shape the BBC's geopolitical scripts on migration before identifying creative room for journalists to inflect broadcasts with personal styles of witnessing and reporting. Those interviewed emerge as thoughtful and self-reflexive geopolitical 'agents' who are aware of their representational power and recognise the tension between objective and impartial BBC journalism and issues of emotion and positionality when reporting on the plight of people journeying to Europe. Investigating journalistic storytelling uncovers three key strategies journalists employ to appeal to and secure audience engagement: first, offering new angles on the subject of migration; second, amplifying unheard voices; and third, producing multisensory broadcasts which appeal to listeners' geographical imaginations. These practices are integral to the production of broadcasts across Radio 4 and speak to the specificities of radio as a sonic medium of geopolitical storytelling.

Literature Review

Critical and Popular Geopolitics: Radio and the Site of Production

Popular geopolitics examines the role of media and popular culture in constructing geopolitical discourses and imaginaries (Dodds 2005). It is a constitutive part of critical geopolitics which challenges the objective claims, assumptions, and projections of classical geopolitics by examining the politics

of knowledge production (Ó'Tuathail, Dalby, and Routledge 1998). A three-pronged division between formal, practical, and popular geopolitics distinguishes between different institutions and actors involved in geopolitical discourse and practice: namely, researchers and think tanks, policymakers and governments, and journalists and broadcasters (Ó'Tuathail and Dalby 1998). These three spheres are closely interlinked – 'the nightly television news, for example, weaves together government statements, the opinions of pundits, and phrases and images chosen for entertainment value, hybridising formal, practical, and popular geopolitics' (Adams 2013, 267) – but despite porosity between them, they remain conceptually useful for organising academic analysis on geopolitical meaning-making. Traditional research in popular geopolitics has focused on the site of representation, exploring how geopolitical narratives are constructed in a range of media from magazines (Sharp 1993) and newspapers (McFarlane and Hay 2003) to films (Dodds 2003) and comic books (Dittmer 2007). This work has illuminated 'how the media contribute to the representation and interpretation of global political space and associated events' (Dodds 2005, 100) by producing, reinforcing, and challenging geopolitical visions and imaginaries.

Two trends stand out in popular geopolitical scholarship to date. First, visual media and 'ways of seeing' have dominated academic attention, which reflects the ocularcentrism of traditional geographical enquiry (Hughes 2013). Television footage (Gregory 2004), cartoons (Dodds 2007), and photography (Adams 2013) are just some of the media which have been analysed for their framings of people and places and the construction of geopolitical ideas, identities, and imaginings. This preoccupation with the visual has been countered in recent work on sonic mediums such as music (Liu, An, and Zhu 2015), instrumental film score (Kirby 2019), and radio broadcasting (Watson 2023a) which equally have the power to shape geographical imaginations and sensibilities. This research highlights the importance of attending to ways of listening, as well as seeing, and exploring how geopolitical knowledge is communicated through sounds, as well as written narratives and visual images. It also reinforces the value of pushing beyond the representational realm to account for the sonic and affective registers through which geopolitical ideas are transmitted and received (Carter and McCormack 2014). This means attending to soundscapes, voices, rhythms, and modulations to better understand different modes of representation and their impact on audiences.

Second and relatedly, a principal interest in the site of representation has overshadowed the site of production. In a conversational piece about the origins and evolution of popular geopolitics, Klaus Dodds, one of the field's foundational authors, notes that 'popular geopolitics hasn't talked an awful lot about production', reasoning 'it is hard to get hold of a lot of that stuff methodologically' (Dittmer 2018, 34). Dittmer and Bos (2019, 63) agree that the site of production remains underdeveloped due to 'difficulties in

contacting and communicating with media and cultural institutions'. These methodological challenges have rendered media organisations opaque 'black boxes' (Müller 2012, 3) with invisible internal structures and practices. The actors within them who are, after all, the architects of geopolitical narratives and imaginaries have similarly escaped investigation. This is not to discount work on the material infrastructures of geopolitics – 'the little things' like microphones, wires, and cables which Thrift (2000, 380) considers 'crucial to how the geopolitical is translated into being' - but to highlight a lack of rigorous analyses of the institutions, actors, and practices which produce media. A tendency to extract media out of the contexts in which they were made, and away from the people who crafted them, has meant that production, as a critical site of geopolitical enquiry, remains undertheorised.

Journalists as Geopolitical Storytellers

Unsurprisingly, then, geographers have paid little attention to journalists and journalistic practices relative to the content they have produced. This is captured by Pinkerton (2013, 440) who observes that 'while the material output of journalistic endeavour (the texts, the photographs and the audio-visuals) have provoked considerable scholarly interest, the crucial role of journalists (among others) in their production, interpretation, and circulation has been somewhat occluded behind a kaleidoscope of geopolitical "visions" and "imaginaries"'. This is surprising given the potential for journalists to influence everyday geopolitical imaginations, shaping how audiences picture nation-states and communities, and the frames of reference they use to think about and make sense of the world. It is this distinctly geographical remit which leads Gasher (2015, 127) to characterise journalists as 'cartographers' and 'map-makers' who 'forge geographies of news'. He emphasises the power and politics of representation, illuminating how journalists select 'from a constellation of current affairs which events, issues, peoples and places warrant their audiences' attention' (Gasher 2015, 127). If, as Agnew (2013, 23) contends, that 'geopolitics is about story telling', then journalists are archetypal *storytellers*, crafting bulletins, broadcasts, and newspaper columns animated by protagonists who 'play roles as parts in geopolitical scripts'.

Three notable exceptions in geography have examined journalists as important geopolitical actors (Kuus 2008). Ó'Tuathail (1996) foregrounds Maggie O'Kane, a British journalist who reported on the Bosnian War for *The Guardian* in the 1990s. He analyses her dispatches and points to her 'anti-geopolitical eye, a way of seeing that disturbs the enframing of Bosnia in Western geopolitical discourse as a place beyond our moral universe of moral responsibility' (Ó'Tuathail 1996, 171). Although the content of O'Kane's reportage – its language, tone, and imagery – is Ó'Tuathail's (1996, 179) primary focus, he reflects on her positionality

and subjectivity, occupying a 'situated and embodied view from somewhere between being an educated Western woman, an informed journalist trying to narrate a war, and a humane eyewitness to systematic human displacement and mutilating violence'. Placing a spotlight on O'Kane highlights the power of journalists to collapse distance and (in)difference between sites of war and sites of viewer/reader/listener-ship and provoke critical and moral reflection on hegemonic geopolitical discourses and (in)actions.

The role of journalists in witnessing and reporting conflict is similarly explored by Farish (2001) who examines the imaginative geographies produced by British foreign correspondents during World War I. He draws on war-time collections and subsequently written memoirs to piece together the practices of those assigned to the Western Front and reflect on their positionalities, perspectives, and geopolitical visions. Although Farish (2001) acknowledges that many journalistic accounts were filled with sweeping generalisations, nationalist sentiment, and masculinist fervour, he argues that frontline reporters experienced a profound crisis of representation when confronted by the desolate, destabilising landscapes of warfare. This placed correspondents in a precarious position, caught between 'many sites and points of view' and resulted in journalism 'characterised by the failure to fit these older narratives into the inhuman, incomprehensible spaces of modern war' (Farish 2001, 273). Adopting a historical lens reinforces the lineage of those tasked with witnessing and communicating the events which have shaped the modern world and the importance of interrogating the practices which shaped their geopolitical discourses.

Most recently, Pinkerton (2013) reflects on journalists as professionals of geopolitics who operate alongside academics, policy consultants, and political pundits, and engage in international affairs. He conceptualises journalists as 'geopolitical "agents"' who occupy 'a critical but curious position between (i) practical and popular geopolitical discourses, (ii) elites and "the everyday", (iii) geopolitical "frontline" events (wars, natural disasters, etc.) and (iv) domestic/international audiences'. Here, Pinkerton (2013) highlights the responsibilities of journalists to communicate distant events and hold intellectuals of statecraft to account, and hints at increasingly slippery distinctions between worlds of journalism and policymaking. He reaffirms that digital technologies are erasing traditional divisions between media 'producers' and 'consumers' with audiences becoming news makers, commentators, and citizen journalists in their own right. In this context, Pinkerton (2013, 456) is justified in claiming 'the fairly stable geography of the international media is facing considerable challenges', not least in terms of its competitors and changing consumer habits. Nevertheless, traditional broadcasters, such as the BBC, continue to have significant power and reach, and it is imperative that geographers investigate 'the role of journalists, and the practices of journalism, in

constructing, interpreting and challenging geopolitical discourses' (Pinkerton 2013, 455).

All three authors highlight the power and partiality of the journalistic gaze and the importance of situated knowledge to forging geographical imaginations. However, they rely on secondary sources to build a picture of journalists and their practices, which limits opportunities to probe the varying motivations, rationalities, and experiences behind their geopolitical representations. This paper makes an innovative contribution to the literature by drawing on original interviews with BBC journalists to reveal the thought-processes, decision-making, and actions which shaped Radio 4's broadcasting on Europe's migration 'crisis'. Following Rodgers (2014, 69), production is therefore defined and understood as a process 'enacted through particular practices'. It answers Kuus' (2008, 2073–2074) call for 'more "peopled" accounts of geopolitics' which investigate 'the interconnections between geopolitical practices and the agents of these practices' by foregrounding journalists and uncovering the professional codes and strategies of storytelling which govern Radio 4's reportage. This matters because it provides an empirical insight into the production of BBC radio journalism, investigates critical questions of journalistic power and agency which condition media representations, and helps explain why Radio 4 variously constructs and challenges geopolitical discourses and imaginaries of forced migration to Europe.

Methodology

This paper is part of a larger research project exploring the production, representation, and reception of BBC Radio 4's broadcasting on Europe's migration 'crisis' between January 2014 and March 2019. I have analysed narratives, soundscapes, and imaginaries of migration in broadcasts (see Watson 2023b) and examined the responses of audiences to them (see Watson 2024). This paper complements those two studies by examining the figure of the journalist and journalistic practices. To better understand the production of Radio 4 reportage, I conducted 17 semi-structured interviews in 2020 with past and present BBC journalists, producers, editors, and senior commissioners. Interviewees were selected according to a number of factors: specifically, their engagement with the subject of migration; the programmes they had presented or produced; the various ways in which journalists work, whether deployed overseas as a foreign correspondent, based in the newsroom, or working as a freelancer; and different levels of seniority, from journalists and producers to editors and commissioners.

Guided by these criteria, I took an iterative approach to recruitment and followed a process of snowball sampling. I was informed by my analysis of the broadcasts, which identified people of interest, but was also open to interviewees putting me in touch with their colleagues. Whilst aware of the

limitations of this sampling strategy, including bias, it enabled me to recruit interviewees who may otherwise have been difficult to reach. Despite the challenges researchers have encountered in accessing media organisations (Dittmer and Bos 2019), emailing journalists directly had a high response rate. In my approach emails, I demonstrated an awareness of their journalistic output on migration by citing illustrative examples, which evidenced my knowledge of their work and may have influenced their willingness to respond. I succinctly summarised my research objectives and explained the rationale behind my interview request i.e. to gain an insight into practices hidden behind the microphone. This is pertinent given that interviews aim to fill a gap in knowledge or understanding and elucidate personal experiences and reflections (Valentine 2005).

The final sample of 17 interviewees is captured in Table 1, which details their respective roles, although names have been anonymised using pseudonyms. Six interviews were held in person, principally at the BBC's Broadcasting House in London, and 11 were conducted virtually or over the phone due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic which necessitated online and remote engagement. Longhurst (2010) underlines the importance of the setting in which interviews are conducted, and Dowling (2010, 32) discusses how locations can reinforce asymmetrical relations of power between participants and researchers, leading to 'studying up' or exploitative relationships. Although aware of how meeting in Broadcasting House might have exacerbated unequal relations of power, it enabled me to situate journalists' testimonies in their place of work and offered unanticipated opportunities to recruit other participants. I remained committed to asking pre-prepared questions whilst being respectful of journalists' professional expertise, time, and contributions. Power dynamics of space exemplified in in-person interviews were overcome in video and phone interviews. The former were easier to

Table 1. Anonymised list of interviewees and their roles.

Interviewee	Role
Julie	Former Network Controller
Sarah	Former Network Controller
Jane	Senior Commissioner and Former Editor
Richard	Senior Commissioner
Grace	Editor
Fiona	Editor
Kate	Radio 4 Presenter
John	Former Radio 4 Presenter
Henry	Journalist
Charlotte	Journalist
Anna	Foreign Correspondent
Peter	Journalist
Ben	Former Foreign Correspondent
Stuart	Freelance Journalist and Former Foreign Correspondent
Lucy	Journalist
Rose	Producer
Catherine	Freelance Journalist

conduct as I was able to pick up on visual cues and body language, which gave me the confidence to ask follow-up questions and allow for longer pauses. This proved more challenging in phone conversations as line signals dipped out and it took time to gauge an interviewee's tone, pattern of speech, and receptivity to questions.

The interviews were transcribed for a thematic analysis which identified 6 'codes': processes of commissioning, producing, and editing broadcasts; varying styles of reporting; discourses around witnessing and scripting migration; thoughts on radio as a medium; reflections on the BBC; and the tone and sound of Radio 4 as a speech network. It was an iterative process of re-reading the transcripts, extracting quotations, and reflecting on questions of language, meaning, and practice. This analysis informs the structure of the following discussion into two sections: namely, professional codes and journalistic storytelling.

Journalistic Practices

The BBC is the world's largest broadcaster and employs a vast network of journalists, each with their own positionalities and programme commitments who bring multiple ways of seeing, thinking about, and reporting on migration. Some are stationed overseas as foreign correspondents, while others work in Broadcasting House or are employed on a freelance basis. Although all who work for the BBC are trained in and bound by rules around truthful, accurate, and impartial reporting, the interviews reveal that journalists have a degree of agency and creative latitude to inflect broadcasts with personal styles of witnessing and reporting. This first section examines the figure of the journalist and explores how they 'see' themselves, interpret the professional codes that guide them, and reflect on their role and responsibility when covering Europe's migration 'crisis'.

Professional Codes

There are two professional codes that guide BBC journalists and govern the production of broadcasts: the BBC's Reithian mission to inform, educate, and entertain, and the editorial imperative to produce truthful, accurate, and impartial journalism (BBC Editorial Standards n.d.). These codes are outlined in the Royal Charter, which forms the constitutional basis for the BBC. It was published in 1927 and identified the BBC as an instrument of education and entertainment, with subsequent Charters adding the dissemination of information to its remit (BBC Royal Charter Archive n.d.). It is a formal guarantee of the BBC's independence from government, secures its editorial and creative freedom, and specifies its purpose, objectives, and values. This independence is complicated by the Charter being subject to parliamentary review and

renewal every 10 years, and decisions about the licence fee and appointment of board members resting with the government. Nevertheless, Born (2005, 31) states that 'journalists and programme-makers are not simply creatures of the governors of the day, let alone of the government', which speaks to creative and editorial autonomy within the organisation to produce content aimed at informing, educating, and entertaining audiences.

This emphasis on audiences is important because both codes revolve around the BBC's purpose as a public service broadcaster aimed at serving the public interest. The BBC does not aim to meet all of its Reithian ideals and editorial values in every programme or piece of content, but rather across its range of mediums and programming 'as a whole' and 'over an appropriate timeframe' (BBC Editorial Standards n.d.). This means that the ambition to entertain, for example, has limited applicability to the production of journalism on migration. Journalists who work for the BBC are trained in and guided by a set of editorial standards upon which their claims to trust, independence, and quality depend. The BBC's editorial imperative centres around 'reporting stories of significance to our audiences and holding power to account' (BBC Editorial Standards n.d.), which translates into the production of journalism the BBC considers truthful, accurate, and impartial. There is clear slippage between these codes with the editorial imperative articulated in terms of achieving its Reithian ideals. This suggests that attempts to draw a marked distinction – to identify the dynamics governing production – are perhaps arbitrary. It does, however, reinforce the institutional power of the BBC to determine the content, tone, and framing of its coverage and highlights the centrality of audiences to the production of BBC output. That is to say, programmes are commissioned and made according to a guiding principle of securing audience engagement and winning their trust: a task that falls to journalists and governs journalistic practices.

Bearing witness is positioned by journalists as a precursor to the production of truthful, accurate, and impartial broadcasts. This self-characterisation of the journalist as eyewitness captures the main strategy through which they claim authority and seek trust from listeners: namely, through their physical presence in a place and '"truth-telling" as "eyewitnesses"' (Pinkerton 2013, 442). Broadcasts and the imaginative geographies of migration articulated within them are therefore products of the places journalists have observed and visited first-hand. This speaks to a 'low-flying empiricism' that disrupts a geopolitical tradition of distanced, disembodied reports through ground-level, eyewitness perspectives (Ó'Tuathail 1996, 178). John, a former Radio 4 presenter, captures how journalists see themselves as a proxy for listeners 'at home':

> I always had in my head the idea that I wanted to convey to a listener what they would have seen and heard if they were where I was, so give them a sense of what I'm seeing, give them a sense of what I've learned. One of the first producers I ever worked with in

> radio after I moved from newspapers, I remember we were walking through the shipyards in Gdansk in Poland, where the anti-communist movement had been born. And we were on our way to interview somebody, just walking through shipyards and suddenly she thrust the microphone under my nose and just said, 'Tell me what you see'. And it was a wonderful, succinct way of explaining what a reporter's job is. Tell me what you see, what's going on. You're the listener's eyes and ears, which is both very simple and very difficult.

Observations and describing sights and sounds are therefore critical to how journalists make claims to 'truth' and trustworthiness. That is, they understand truth in terms of faithfully reporting what they see without falsification, distortion, or manipulation. Ben, a former foreign correspondent, agrees that witnessing is the primary function of journalists:

> Bearing witness, just as simple as that. Everyone knows we live in a complicated world and there are good and bad reasons for things happening and right and wrong reasons for things happening. But sometimes you just need to say, 'This is what's happening', and people need to know this is what's happening, so I think that bearing witness to events is important.

Bearing witness is a moral and ethical idea that captures the privileged position journalists hold in observing events and relaying them to audiences. It speaks to the function of public service broadcasting to accurately report events and its capacity to engage audiences' potential to care for others (Chouliaraki 2013). The bare act of witnessing does, however, suggest a passivity and lack of agency which obscures the power of journalists to direct the gaze, ear, and attention of listeners by making representational choices (Gasher 2015). This is not to say that journalists are unaware of their power to construct and frame the world, particularly when linguistic categories of 'migrant', 'immigrant', 'refugee', and 'asylum seeker' are imbued with social and political connotations, popular imaginaries, and legal implications. Anna, a foreign correspondent, demonstrates an awareness of the responsibility of journalists around questions of discourse:

> I was always aware and I'm still really aware of the power of all these words and how much responsibility you have when you report on a story like this [. . .] overly simplistic narratives are really damaging, and it's really difficult as a reporter to counter those because, of course, we kind of contribute to them, but there's so much more nuance than those very simple narratives that come out at the end of the day.

Anna admits that the discursive power to frame migration makes her 'quite nervous', highlighting how linguistic dilemmas and decisions can be embodied and internalised. She explains that the BBC eventually came to an organisation-wide decision to 'use the word "migrant" as a sort of catchall for anybody who is moving countries for whatever reason'. This is evidenced in the BBC's online news articles on migration from the time that include an explanatory footnote on terminology, an institutional acknowledgement of the power of language and the politics of representation (Dempsey 2018). However, the

potential for journalists to resist and rework top-down decisions is clear when Anna admits avoiding the term 'migrant' due to her personal view it is 'dehumanising'. This sensitivity to the discursive power of language echoes Crawley and Skleparis' (2018, 48) critique of simplistic terminology in the media for failing 'to capture adequately the complex relationship between political, social and economic drivers of migration or their shifting significance for individuals over time and space'. Stuart, a freelance journalist and former foreign correspondent, shares Anna's stance:

> There's a great tendency to categorise migration and migrants either in a hostile way or a positive way as uniform groups, whereas always within them there are groups of all the mix that is humanity really, and that's part of the debate about, for example, asylum, who deserves, who is an economic migrant, who isn't, that kind of thing. But that's real and they're real human stories, which we partly ought to be reporting anyway because they give you an insight. But it's quite an important thing to get beyond those labels that are readily applied.

This shared impulse to humanise coverage of migration by resisting homogenous labels suggests that bearing witness is not a passive or neutral act, but rather shot through with discursive dilemmas and social, political, and legal implications. Whilst BBC journalists are governed by editorial rules around truthful, accurate, and impartial journalism, there is room for individuals to inflect broadcasts with personal styles of reporting, which characterises production as a flexible process that takes place within professional guidelines.

The journalists I interviewed are reflexive about the contentious nature of the three tenets of BBC journalism in theory and in practice, which supports Couldry's (2004) assessment that media production is a rationalised and reflexive process. John suggests accuracy is conditional on the positionality of journalists and production deadlines:

> The first duty always is just simply to report as accurately as you can. I think sometimes it is under appreciated by non-journalists the pressures that journalists are under, time pressure, you never know the whole story because no one person can know the whole story. And so inevitably, what you report, particularly if you're broadcasting and you're on a daily news timeframe, it is a series of snapshots. And if you're a news reporter, you're given a minute and a half, if you're making a tape report, then maybe you're given four minutes. But I mean, it's tiny, tiny, tiny, and you've got to get it all done in a couple of hours, so it's really hard. But you have a responsibility to try to be accurate.

The ambition 'to be accurate' is therefore balanced against an awareness that 'no one person can know the whole story', while tight production timescales and short narrative reports lead to coverage that only amounts to 'snapshots'. This conditionality applies to truthful reporting, which is also predicated on the embodied experiences of journalists, as Charlotte, a journalist for Radio 4, explains:

> We've got the privilege of going to see these places, going to meet people and see the truth of what's happening, and I think it is our duty to tell the truth. Sometimes, we're told, 'Oh, we're, you know, too far left', or what have you, or 'We're just reporting all the misery, these people shouldn't be coming'. I get this all the time and I always say, 'Look, I'm a journalist, I tell the truth'. If I see people in misery, I will tell you that they are in misery. I'm not making that up, I'm going to tell the truth. If you don't want to hear the truth, you don't have to hear it. But I will always tell you the truth'.

Accuracy and truth are couched by both journalists in terms of duty, signalling how BBC journalism is often positioned within moral frames of reference as a public service. The concept of truth, however, comes under strain when set against the third BBC ideal of impartiality. The BBC's success in producing impartial output is under constant scrutiny, demonstrating that BBC journalists do not operate in a vacuum, but in a highly politicised context. Contrary to Wahl-Jorgensen et al.'s (2017, 785) identification of a prevailing 'paradigm of impartiality-as-balance' at the BBC, Kate, a Radio 4 presenter, firmly rejects impartiality as a form of false balance where 'A says this, B says that', defining it instead as 'a plurality of views across a period of time'. She mirrors Anna's anxiety around terminology on migration and describes ongoing unease around achieving impartiality:

> We think about it all the time. That's what makes me really sad that people are so disparaging because it's something we worry about, we think about, we factor into everything we do. And yeah, this idea that everybody is just putting on their particular [. . .] pro this, anti that agenda, it's just not true. And I'm not saying we always get it right but it's not because we're not trying.

Kate points to a constant pressure at programme-level to factor impartiality into the discursive framing of broadcasts and the editorial choice of interviewees. She counters theories of a BBC edict or agenda by outlining how impartiality is rooted in daily decision-making by individuals and programme teams. Whilst some suggest that the BBC is structurally orientated towards 'networks of power and their shared interests' (Mills 2020, 139), which leads to 'an institutionalised preference for official and elite sources' (Wahl-Jorgensen et al. 2017), the journalists interviewed emphasise the power and agency of programme teams to shape the content and tone of broadcasts. As Kate reflects, this means that impartiality is not always 'done right', but betrays no evidence of an institutional bias towards principally featuring 'elite opinion' (Mills 2020, 207) or acquiescing to external pressure from politicians or media outlets. Catherine, a freelance journalist, corroborates and develops Kate's account, suggesting that impartiality is fundamentally challenged by subjectivity and situated knowledge:

> Impartiality is a very tricky word, right, because everything you do, every story you tell, every question you frame comes obviously from your own point of view and your own set of values and assumptions, so, no, I mean, I think a documentary can absolutely have

> a point of view, but you have to give a right of reply to people, you know, who don't agree with that point of view or to people you might be criticising in it and you have to be truthful, honest, accurate, you're not making propaganda, you're telling a story and it has to be true.

Catherine rearticulates the BBC's central tenets of accurate and truthful journalism but explains how impartiality is embroiled in questions of positionality and perspective, which means imaginative geographies of migration are always partial and situated. This echoes Haraway's (1988) work and highlights an awareness among some journalists about the importance of subject position and authorship, which complicates a straightforward understanding of truth as objective reality. Less clear is the extent to which journalists consider the relative weight of an opinion or point of view before its inclusion (Wahl-Jorgensen et al. 2017), privileging the 'right of reply' perhaps irrespective of its representativeness. Whilst radio production is governed by editorial guidelines that are theoretical cornerstones of BBC journalism, set out in its constitutional Charter, it emerges as a process which is shaped by journalistic practices on the ground.

Forced migration to Europe stretched the BBC's editorial imperative, which governs production, to its limits. The scale of human suffering and precarity posed a challenge to journalists torn between a need to be impartial and distanced, and a human instinct to connect with, and intervene in, the story and its protagonists: what Chouliaraki (2013, 138) describes as a 'tension between an ethics of the profession and an ethics of human life'. The struggle between observation and participation is not new. The Bosnian War was a juncture at which the moral and ethical dilemmas of journalism rose to the surface (McLaughlin 2016; Ó'Tuathail 1996). The BBC's Martin Bell declared he could not be impartial in the face of atrocity and proposed a 'journalism of attachment' that proclaimed a moral duty to tell the truth over a professional obligation to remain impartial. This echoed Christiane Amanpour, a news anchor for CNN, who famously coined the phrase 'to be truthful, not neutral', calling into question objectivity and moral equivalence in journalism. Critics, including the BBC's John Simpson, suggest journalism of attachment risks 'look at me journalism', a style of reporting that runs counter to a BBC ambition to focus 'not on the storyteller but on telling the story' (McLaughlin 2016, 52).

'Old' debates around the role and responsibility of journalists are therefore revived by Europe's migration 'crisis' as a humanitarian story that lays bare asymmetrical relations of power. Olsson (2017, 1) argues that many European journalists found themselves 'reporting from a position of safety about people in very difficult circumstances in their own "back yard"'. Its proximity scrambled geographies of distance and detachment, posed a challenge to objectivity and dispassionate journalism, and raised questions in the minds

of journalists about the place of emotion in reportage. Charlotte suggests emotion has a place in order to speak truth to audiences. That is, BBC journalists have a duty to be honest and transparent about their personal capacity to be moved by what they see:

> Obviously, we have to be impartial, but I will never apologise for being moved by the things I see, because we're also human beings. What we're trying to tell are human stories and crikey, if we're not moved by the human condition I don't think we should be journalists really. I do not mean that we should be sobbing on the 10 o'clock news, nobody wants to see somebody not in control, but I do think it's perfectly okay to, to tell it as it is, to tell the brutal truth [. . .] I'm not going to lie, I come home regularly and cry my eyes out. But again, I think that the day you've become desensitised to it is the day you want to stop really. Because what you're trying to tell people is, the people we're telling you about are real human beings like you and me and they matter, they matter as much as you, they matter as much as me, they matter as much as your child, so if it doesn't affect me, it's not going to affect anybody else.

Here, Charlotte articulates the delicate line BBC journalists tread between revealing the emotional impact of reporting but not distracting from the story. A professional obligation to remain objective is therefore balanced against a human instinct to show feeling, and the straitjacket of impartiality arguably finds its release when Catherine admits to crying behind closed doors. It calls to mind Maillet, Mountz, and Williams' (2017, 942) observation about 'interpersonal encounters' with marginalised groups, including asylum seekers, whereby proximate and extended exposure to traumatic events or traumatised people can leave researchers 'permeable to emotions experienced by informants'. Dempsey (2018, 103) agrees, suggesting it is 'inconceivable to forget what one hears or witnesses while conducting fieldwork, particularly with vulnerable individuals'. These reflections on the geopolitics of working with marginalised populations are equally applicable to journalists as Charlotte describes her sensitivity to the sights, stories, and people she observes, gathers, and meets. Although not quite an advocate of Bell's 'journalism of attachment', she leans towards a style of reporting that seeks to engage listeners through emotional connection. This is not to say that affect is used strategically by journalists but rather to highlight a consciousness around the place of emotion when broadcasting live and producing 'truthful' broadcasts. It also recalls O'Kane's dispatches from Bosnia which made 'the experience of ordinary selves [. . .] the central register for recording the story of the war' (Ó'Tuathail 1996, 176). Just as Charlotte seeks to make her audience aware of the humanity of the migration story, O'Kane's writing 'relentlessly personalises the people she meets, naming them and describing their age, colour, and look' (Ó'Tuathail 1996, 176). This personal style of reporting was derided by critics for being 'overly emotional', but Ó'Tuathail (1996, 179) argues it enacted a feminist objectivity 'that is never neutral and naïve but pointed, moral and, in many cases, justly angry'. Whilst Charlotte's journalism for the BBC stops short of being 'justly angry', it

communicates why audiences should be interested in and care about the people she witnesses and encounters. These reflections on O'Kane's positionality resonate with Charlotte's sensitivity towards how best to report human stories of migration within the editorial frame of BBC journalism. Interestingly, Charlotte's stance is echoed by Peter, another Radio 4 journalist:

> I didn't want to be a person on camera hugging people or crying or being involved in a way that I didn't think would help the audience, that's not why they sent me there. So I didn't want to get in the way, but on the other hand, no journalist gets a pass as a human being. We are all human beings, and the question is, I think, how you process that [. . .] how do you keep your editorial standards where a journalist might want to say, 'I am impartial, but I felt like crying' [. . .] where should that boundary be put? The answer is, I don't think anyone in the world, even if they're Matteo Salvini, would not want to find compassion for children arriving on a boat. I just don't think you cannot have compassion for children surviving a boat journey and whether I needed to show that on camera? I don't think I did because I didn't want every piece to be about me [. . .] I wanted on camera to be as sympathetic, as compassionate as I could be, and off camera as well, to people without being a campaigner either way, without letting that get in the way of journalism but also knowing that speaking to people who are crying is, if that doesn't elicit a human reaction, you are probably not doing your job. But the question is, I think, not whether one feels affected, it's how you channel that.

Peter makes clear that BBC journalists wrestle with the place of compassion in reportage and how values around a common humanity rub up against unequal relations of power in journalism. He settles the debate by suggesting that how journalists 'channel' emotion supersedes the question of whether they are affected in the first place. This stems from a reluctance to cross from journalist to campaigner on and behind the microphone. Whilst Charlotte and Peter might not strategically use 'pathos and scripted sentimentalism to evoke [. . .] emotion' like O'Kane did in her dispatches (Ó'Tuathail 1996, 177), they articulate an impulse to be compassionate and 'human' when reporting on air and off it. Their observations speak to the affective dimensions of storytelling and reaffirm that geopolitics is not only about what journalists 'say, know, and represent [. . .] but also emerge from the felt, embodied, and ontological' (Cameron 2012, 588). Both accounts speak to the emotional challenges of reporting and hint at the 'vicarious trauma' journalists can experience when engaging with vulnerable people (Maillet, Mountz, and Williams 2017, 941). What is clear is that BBC journalists embody a precarious position torn between a professional duty to remain impartial and distanced and a human instinct to care and intervene: a moral and ethical quandary that pulls at the seams of the BBC's editorial standards and influences the production of journalism on migration.

In summary, Radio 4 broadcasts on migration are produced according to an editorial code around truthful, accurate, and impartial reportage. This is predicated, in part, upon the journalist being an eyewitness on the ground and guided by an organisational mission to engage audiences and win their

trust. Both reinforce the institutional power of the BBC to govern the overall style, content, and tone of its journalism. Interrogating journalistic practices, however, reveals an awareness among journalists about how the BBC's editorial standards are challenged by questions of positionality and emotion, and strained by the geographical proximity of Europe's migration 'crisis'. It also suggests that professional guidelines bind journalists together through a shared editorial imperative, while at the same time allowing personal styles of reporting to seep into the production of broadcasts. This space for journalists to imprint broadcasts, albeit within editorial constraints, helps to explain the divergent geopolitical discourses and imaginaries on migration constructed across Radio 4 by highlighting room for individual agency and power (Watson 2023b).

Journalistic Storytelling

The centrality of the BBC's Reithian mission to serve and engage audiences reinforces that production is a process driven by an ambition to secure radio listenership. Journalists seek to engage listeners in broadcasts by offering new angles on the subject of migration, including voices often silenced in the media, and appealing to their geographical imaginations. These three strategies are instances of journalistic storytelling; techniques journalists employ to solicit audience engagement in the geopolitical story of migration. They speak to the representational power of journalists and the ways in which geopolitical issues, ideas, and events are selected, framed, and communicated (Dempsey and McDowell 2019). Radio is consistently characterised by journalists as a storytelling medium exceptional in its ability to connect with listeners and spark their geographical imaginations. This second section, then, discusses the practices journalists engage in and uncovers the discourse journalists articulate about radio that produces it as a distinctive space of storytelling.

New Angles on Migration

Offering a new angle on the story of migration is the first strategy journalists use to try and capture audience attention. This stems not only from a commercial imperative to reach the largest listenership but also from an awareness of fragile audience engagement with the geopolitical story of migration over time. In an essay on compassion fatigue, Gabbert (2018) cites the war in Syria as an example of an ongoing news story that makes daily demands on audience attention and their capacity to care. Moeller's (1999, 9) definition of compassion fatigue rests on a presumed exhaustion among audiences driven by repetitive, formulaic, and sensationalised media coverage that leaves them 'overstimulated and bored all at once'. Interview responses suggest that BBC editors and journalists recognised and feared a similar exhaustion among listeners, which drove them to produce

broadcasts aimed at countering 'switch off' journalism. Richard, a senior commissioner in BBC Radio, describes an editorial ambition to complement the BBC's television news coverage:

> One particular problem is we don't want to do just what the news is doing, so the daily news was doing some very, very good reportage on what was happening on the boats, what was happening at the borders, what was happening in the [. . .] refugee camps in Jordan and so on while this crisis was going on, and I think our issue was how to cover this huge global phenomenon in a way that was really distinctive, so we were always trying to look for a different way of telling the story, a more individual way, a counterintuitive way, or maybe going back to a story once it's been forgotten.

Although Richard praises BBC News for focusing on 'boats', 'borders', and 'camps', De Genova (2013) critiques a journalistic preoccupation with sites/sights that enact spectacles of illegality, crisis, and emergency and justify exclusionary migration policies. Nevertheless, Richard reveals an editorial impulse to commission and produce broadcasts that are 'different', 'distinctive', and 'counterintuitive'. This resonates with longform documentaries on Radio 4 that engage in more nuanced storytelling than news and resist geopolitical narratives of chaos and threat (see Watson 2023b). The selection of programme themes and topics is therefore guided by a range of factors, including wider BBC news coverage and media output, specially commissioned pieces by senior editors, and stories pitched by journalists. An awareness of compassion fatigue further drives the production of broadcasts which consciously challenge discourses and soundscapes of boat arrivals and border clashes because as Richard reflects, 'just doing stories of misery is really, really hard to get the audience to take in'. Stuart corroborates this, describing an ambition in his documentary reporting for Radio 4 'to make it sound different from the news bulletins, to feel different, to get the different characters'. Similarly, Catherine suggests a fresh perspective was critical to engaging audiences and commissioners in her documentaries:

> Here's a story about something that's got hope in it and pleasure [. . .] something different because that's the other thing is, you get this kind of, 'Oh, we've done refugees, we've done refugees', it's like, how do you tell a different story, a story that's going to make people listen and not go, 'Oh, here's another' [. . .] it's that horrible phrase 'compassion fatigue' and I'm very aware of that now in Greece because things are, as you probably know, really terrible on the islands and partly I can't bear to go back and do it again because it's that you just get really . . . worn down by these terrible situations and stories, but also it's very hard to get anyone to pay attention.

The need to ensure that editors and commissioners at Radio 4 do not reject a programme pitch on the assumption 'we've done refugees' drives journalists to seek out 'different' stories with narratives containing 'hope' and 'pleasure', rather than despair and misery. Ironically, Catherine hints at her own fatigue from witnessing 'terrible situations

and stories' and the constant need to attract audience attention. The protracted temporality of displacement and migration therefore poses a creative challenge to journalists who must delve into different genres of radio, such as documentaries, and experiment with different styles of reporting, like long-form storytelling, to ensure broadcasts are commissioned and heard.

Including Unheard Voices

The inclusion of voices often erased from and silenced in media coverage of migration is a second strategy of storytelling that journalists use to try and engage disinterested, desensitised audiences. Contrary to an ambivalence around the media's tendency to amplify politicians over refugees (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017), these journalists are acutely aware of the imbalance of voices and strive to include those often rendered silent, undifferentiated Others in geopolitical discourses (Malkki 1996). Charlotte points to waning public interest in migration as a prime motivation behind the production of her radio journalism:

> The whole point was to stop this compassion fatigue for me. I was getting very, very, very disheartened as a correspondent [. . .] people were just switching off. You know, people just became, the migrants got lost in numbers. And you know, everybody was saturated with those images on television of boats flipping over and people in the water [. . .] it had lost its impact. So, this was a way of turning the whole thing on its head and saying, this is why it matters and should matter to you.

Jane, a senior commissioner and former editor who worked with Charlotte, reflects 'you're always asking yourself [. . .] who are the missing voices, what don't I know about this, what are the interesting questions, who can tell me?', questions which drove her commissioning of Radio 4 programmes on migration. This speaks to the curatorial power and reflexivity of journalists to assess whose stories and voices are absent from public discourse and decide which experiences and testimonies are worthy of broadcasting (Huizinga 2024). The ambition to combat audience fatigue through the inclusion of rarely heard voices is realised when Charlotte reveals that many listeners wrote to her saying her reportage 'made them see the migration crisis for the first time'. Recording different, unheard voices in the migration debate resonates with O'Kane's dispatches from Bosnia which included 'many voices giving testimony to many different perspectives and experiences' and made clear that 'the personal is geopolitical' (Ó'Tuathail 1996, 176). This approach subverted hegemonic geopolitical representations of Bosnia by drawing readers' attention to 'ordinary' experiences on the ground. Charlotte's journalism seeks to do the same; amplify everyday encounters between asylum seekers and citizens to resist the numbing geopolitical discourses in news which rely on a politics of counting and 'spectacle of statistics' (De Genova and Tazzioli 2016, 22).

The technological simplicity of radio, reliant on only a microphone and recorder, means that journalists can easily access and record people and places that are more challenging for technology-laden media. Journalists in radio can quietly and discreetly approach interviewees for conversation without fear of intimidation or creating an atmosphere of performance, as Ben explains:

> As you're making radio it feels more intimate because you don't have this clunky thing with a camera and making television is just more complicated. Radio, you can just [. . .] sidle up to somebody and we can just have a chat, and whereas with television, 'have we got the angles right . . . ', so it's more intimate, and I think, sometimes you can therefore tell sort of personal stories better on the radio than on television, you don't have to be thinking about, 'are these pictures going to edit together and . . . ', it just doesn't matter [. . .] you're just there, so I think it gives you a bit more freedom.

This potential to tell 'personal stories better' is corroborated by Lucy, a journalist, who suggests 'people will talk to you much more easily without a TV camera in their face, and they will give you a much more natural interview'. Rose, a Radio 4 producer, agrees:

> The minute you start filming you get a crowd [. . .] so that then changes what's going on because whoever you're interviewing is aware of this huge crowd [. . .] so it's much harder to get reality and true kind of feeling and for the person you're interviewing to forget they're being interviewed, for them just to chat and talk.

Whilst ambitions to capture 'reality' obscure how radio scripts and curates the world, it illustrates that the medium's simplicity lends itself to storytelling through voice. Although radio's technological subtlety raises ethical questions about how interviewees could be manipulated into speaking to journalists, it highlights the potential for interviewing asylum seekers who may be anxious about articulating their experiences due to trauma or fear of identification (Crawley, McMahon, and Jones 2016). This opportunity to be heard without being seen further reinforces radio's potential to include voices often absent in media coverage.

The counter effort to personalise, name, and give voice to people on the move raises interesting questions for radio as a medium predicated on the spoken word. Catherine, who has spent most of her career in print journalism, describes a 'lightbulb moment' when she recognised the power of radio relative to print:

> The point is to hear from people who you don't hear from [. . .] the voice is such a powerful thing [. . .] you hear so much. That was, for me, the great revelation of radio, it's like if you're doing print, you write down what they said, but it's just black and white [. . .] But when you hear the timbre of the voice and the place where people choke up or where they pause, it's very emotional, it's a very emotional medium.

Rather than reading 'black and white' quotations on the page, listeners can hear voices spoken over the airwaves, detecting when people's voices crack in

sadness or anger, or when emphasis is placed on particular words or phrases. Catherine highlights a clear intention 'to disarticulate discourses on the "other"' (Huizinga 2024, 635) by amplifying the voices of individuals with the power to elicit an emotional response. Journalists are therefore aware of and strategically include voices in broadcasts based on their capacity to engage and affectively 'move' audiences (McCormack 2013).

Radio's predication on voice, as well as sound, speaks to the potential for listeners to recognise vulnerable others through the act of speaking as part of 'our' shared and common humanity (Chouliaraki and Georgiou 2019). Similarly, it demonstrates how some radio journalism can answer calls for reportage that amplifies the voices and stories of refugees who are re-cast 'as a speaking and acting subject' (Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017, 1174). Important issues of translation, however, are raised by Catherine, who reveals that because Radio 4 is an English language station, she gravitates towards people who can speak English to avoid the need for voiceovers: 'I came to realise how people who are more educated, who speak English, who have that kind of confidence to speak, are in a much better position to get out, to make it, know how to manage more easily than the people who are even more vulnerable'. This points to a possible stratification of voice in radio journalism on migration according to linguistic fluency and skill, and raises questions around who gets heard in the media, and why.

Nevertheless, storytelling through the inclusion of refugee voices comes from a recognition among some journalists about the power they hold to humanise the story of migration and connect interpersonally with listeners. Ben argues that people 'deserve to have their own voice' and journalists should work to include their testimonies to highlight the diversity of migratory experiences. This idea of deservingness suggests Ben is aware of a journalistic responsibility to record the protagonists of Europe's migration story. It also calls to mind Chouliaraki and Stolic's (2017, 3) hope that media stories 'may enable us to recognise those different from "us" as worthy to be listened to and thus encourage "us" to stretch the imaginary boundaries of "our" community in order to include "them"'. The journalistic instinct to humanise migration, however, appears to be at odds with editorial scepticism about the extent to which refugee testimonies can be trusted, as Richard explains:

> There is something about the nature of reporting about refugees that is very difficult for journalism, which is actually knowing whether anybody is actually telling you the truth. I think there's an inbuilt structural reason that people won't tell you the truth, and it's difficult to really get round I think [. . .] people rarely have any documentation to back up any of their stories and there are lots of inbuilt reasons for them to lie, so I think, I don't know what the answer is to that, but it's a problem.

This temptation to distrust refugees re-enacts Orientalist imaginaries of the deceitful Other (Said 1978) and obscures how refugees by definition are people forced to flee their country due to conflict, persecution, or natural disaster, meaning documents are often forgotten, lost, or destroyed. Their vulnerability relative to the state as a gatekeeper to asylum and citizenship rests in part upon the absence of written identity authentication. Richard therefore positions editors as adjudicators of trust who, not unlike the performative actions of the state, must verify and validate voices before they appear on air (Scott 1998). Whilst not corroborated by other interviewees, it suggests that a journalistic imperative to include refugee voices on moral grounds of deservingness and commercial grounds of listenership, might be discordant with editorial scepticism about their trustworthiness. These differing perspectives provide essential context and explanation to the production of Radio 4 reportage on migration, demonstrating why it is a diverse and contradictory, rather than singular and uniform, space of journalistic storytelling which simultaneously amplifies and silences people on the move (Watson 2023b).

Appealing to Geographical Imaginations

The third and final characteristic of journalistic storytelling on migration in radio is the recording of place-based sounds and voices that appeal to audiences' geographical imaginations. Journalists seek to imaginatively transport listeners over the airwaves and engage in methods of production aimed at maximising the imaginative value of broadcasts. This is particularly pertinent to media representations of migration because it reveals radio's potential for encouraging imaginative identification with those usually rendered spectral Others (Chouliaraki and Georgiou 2019). It also speaks to the specificities of radio as a sonic medium of storytelling which uses sounds and voices to craft geopolitical scripts, engage the listener's ear, and activate their mind's eye (Watson 2024).

Radio's predication on the spoken word and appeal to the imagination echoes oral traditions of storytelling. Biewen (2017, 2) argues that radio harnesses 'humanity's oldest and best storytelling tool: the voice. Long before film, photography, even the quill pen, people told stories to one another, the pictures conjured in the listener's imagination. The best audio storytellers spark vivid movies in the mind's eye'. The interwoven acts of speaking, listening, and imagining capture how radio encourages listeners to translate voices heard in broadcasts into pictures 'seen' in the mind's eye. As Allison (2017, 2) observes, 'we are blind listening to the radio. Our imaginations are in play. We create the characters and envision the settings [. . .] we participate in their creation'. Journalists at Radio 4, including Ben, rearticulate these characterisations of radio as an imaginative, storytelling medium:

> Radio is a more effective way of telling a story because [. . .] you're having an image painted inside your head, so the image is not something you're looking at with your eyes, the image is inside your brain, almost, that's what radio does to you [. . .] it's the geography of your imagination and good radio paints those pictures.

Charlotte suggests that radio's capacity to humanise the abstract and intangible rests on its appeal to the imagination through storytelling:

> Radio is just so much a more delightful medium than television to play to the imagination because you are telling people stories and storytelling is an ancient art, we know that from the time people could speak they told stories, people gathered around campfires and listened to stories. And people still want stories because stories make people think and it puts human faces on numbers.

Of course, voices can enact division as easily as they can establish connection and they are not always used to tell stories, but the critical point for radio is 'the prejudicial eye is not involved' (Allison 2017, 6). John suggests that the power of voice, which radio harnesses, has early origins: 'the human voice is, you know, it is the first communication medium that a baby responds to even in the womb [. . .] the human voice is absolutely the key form of communication, it's incredibly powerful and very intimate'. Sound is framed in similarly corporeal terms by Peter, who describes it as our earliest and last remaining sense:

> Radio is the most primal of all mediums. Of all it is the only medium of journalism that can be consumed in a room in the dark with your eyes closed. Sound is the most primal of all the senses, it's the last sense to go when a person is dying [. . .] there's something about sound which is so primal actually, that radio connects to and is more intimate with a connection to another human being than sight.

This capacity to tap into senses which begin and end the human lifecycle speaks to radio's stripped back reliance on voices and sounds as 'primal' tools of storytelling. Journalists are aware of and use these tools to engage and imaginatively transport listeners, as Ben explains:

> One of the really important things, if you're somewhere dramatic, is just tell people what you can see, you're their eyes and ears [. . .] what you can see, what you can hear and what you can taste as well [. . .] just try and take them there as much as possible [. . .] and obviously sound can help you, sound can take [. . .] somebody somewhere.

Ben combines the journalistic impulse to bear witness with a creative desire to transport listeners through sights and sounds. Anna agrees:

> You want to make sure you create a bit of a soundscape, so there's nothing duller than just listening to someone talking on the radio, of course, so you want to try and recreate the atmosphere of where you are for the piece. So obviously if you're at a march or something like that, then it's easy to pick up the sound, people chanting, footsteps moving along [. . .] rain coming down if it's a nasty night. And if you're not actually somewhere where there's obvious atmosphere, then you would try to think about how

> you could make your radio package sound interesting. So, you might, for example, think to record the church bells, if the march is gathering near a church.

Here, Anna describes the importance of recreating the 'atmosphere' and 'soundscape' of a place to capture its acoustics and create an immersive listening experience. This resonates with McCormack (2013) and Closs Stephens' (2016) work on affective atmospheres and demonstrates how journalists actively record place-based sounds to help listeners envision people and places and situate themselves in the landscape. This methodological approach to producing radio reportage is corroborated by Henry, another journalist:

> You travel around and try and construct a narrative, that particular story. So I always try to decide what the story is that I want to tell [. . .] I think of the cue which is what the presenter reads [. . .] start to think about the sort of cast list of people I want in the piece [. . .] As you go along, you're coming up with the story arc and how it fits together, rather than going out with a set idea from here say [. . .] So I think about the cue and then you want to start off with a sound, so you try and get people into the atmosphere, so you know, it's somebody cooking stew or whether it's somebody singing in a church, a makeshift church, you want to get people in there and describe [. . .] pieces to mic.

Henry highlights the crafted and performative nature of journalistic storytelling, ensuring broadcasts have a 'cue', 'story arc', and 'cast list'. It resonates with Gasher's (2015, 134) portrait of news as a 'compilation of stories' with their own 'setting in a specific time and place, a clearly identified cast of characters, a narrative trajectory pulling these ingredients together and a vantage point from which the story is told'. Just like a storyteller, Henry includes sounds and voices to evoke a sense of place and an immersive atmosphere. This characterises geopolitical storytelling in radio as a creative practice of 'staging the unseen' (VanCour 2018, 1), encouraging listeners to imagine the sights and scenes of migration unfolding before him.

The documentary is a specific programme genre in radio in which journalists turn to storytellers. Grace, an editor, describes documentary series on Radio 4 as a 'storytelling vehicle' and illustration of 'long-form storytelling', which offers listeners in-depth, nuanced insights into people and places. Grace values documentaries in which 'you get taken into people's lives and hear their stories in a way that you just don't in the normal news and current affairs output because, you know, you've got the space to do that'. The extended length of documentaries, around 30 minutes, is therefore fundamental to explaining radio that privileges long-form storytelling over fleeting, issue-driven news coverage. Like Henry, she uses theatre as a performative metaphor for radio production:

> I always say to people who come to me who've never made this kind of thing before [. . .] try and imagine when you go to the theatre [. . .] and the curtain goes up and usually

> there's one or two people on the stage and those are the main protagonists, and the curtain might come down, the scenes might change, you know, three or four times during the course of the play but those one or two characters are always going to be on stage. And that is what you're trying to do with long-form storytelling. So, you have your core narrative or narrative hook, which is usually a person, sometimes it's a thing, sometimes it's a place, and [. . .] that is your narrative spine. And you could go off in little directions and discover things around and about the place, but you're always coming back to that central person, that central story.

These references to 'stages', 'scenes', and 'protagonists' highlight a creative process distinct from the production of news journalism characterised by short narrative reports. Whilst a 'hook' is reminiscent of headlines designed to grab audience attention, the comparative time and space in documentaries to 'discover' is striking. It highlights their capacity to resist reductive stereotypes and simplifications of migration by exploring stories of people and places 'on the ground'. Contrary to expectations that theatrical metaphors of storytelling might describe methods of production that lead to ear-catching spectacles of crisis, documentaries stand out for amplifying personal stories and voices, and situating migration within longer histories and global geographies of displacement (Watson 2023b).

In summary, storytelling emerges as a practice journalists engage in to secure listener engagement. Three key characteristics emerge: offering new angles on the subject of migration, amplifying voices that are often silenced in the media, and appealing to listeners' geographical imaginations through multi-sensory reportage. These strategies shape the production of broadcasts across Radio 4 but are particularly pertinent to explaining why feature programmes enact an immersive, place-based, multi-sensory imaginary of migration amplified by refugee voices (Watson 2023b). These strategies of journalistic communication move beyond a commercial imperative to attract the largest audience and speak to the specificity of radio as a sonic medium of geopolitics. Journalists point to radio's predication on sounds and voices as evidence of its continuation of an oral tradition of storytelling and use this to support a discursive framing of radio as a space of knowledge production exceptional in its ability to connect with listeners and spark geographical imaginations. Whilst political geographers have pointed to radio's *potential* to shape how listeners imagine people and places (Pinkerton and Dodds 2009), no studies in popular geopolitics have revealed the specific practices of production that journalists engage in to appeal to the listener's mind's eye. Together, then, these firsthand accounts provide rich empirical evidence of the power and agency of journalists to craft geopolitical scripts and, through their representational choices, influence audiences' '"mental maps" of the world' (Gasher 2015, 132).

Conclusion

This paper advances critical and popular geopolitics by exploring the journalistic practices behind BBC Radio 4's reportage on migration. It responds to Kuus' (2008, 2074) invitation to investigate journalists as professionals of geopolitics and 'examine not just the content of various arguments, but also the processes of their production'. It pushes beyond previous studies, which have relied on secondary sources to understand journalistic practices, by drawing on original interviews with BBC journalists who were at the forefront of broadcasting Europe's migration 'crisis'. This offers a rich insight into the thought-processes, decision-making, and actions which produce BBC radio journalism and evidences that geopolitics is a 'practice by which intellectuals of statecraft "spatialise" international politics and represent it as a "world" characterised by particular types of places, peoples and dramas' (Ó'Tuathail and Agnew 1992, 190). Uncovering the careful crafting of broadcasts unsettles journalistic claims to be projecting a disembodied or neutral description of global affairs and instead reaffirms them to be highly constructed geopolitical scripts which 'emerge from somewhere'.

Although professional codes guide and shape programme production, journalists occupy different positionalities and perspectives which, together with the geographical proximity of Europe's migration 'crisis', pose an epistemological challenge to the BBC's Reithian mission and editorial values. This begins to explain Radio 4's diversity of output on migration by highlighting creative room for journalists to inflect broadcasts with personal styles of witnessing and reporting. As a geopolitical story unfolding on 'our' doorstep, forced migration to Europe reignites old debates around the journalist as an embodied eyewitness and communicator, the place of emotion in BBC reportage, and the delicate line journalists tread between their personal and professional selves. Examining production therefore delves into deeper questions about claims to truth, impartiality, and objectivity and complicates the BBC's institutional power by demonstrating that its foundational principles and guidelines rely on journalists to interpret, perform, and enact them in the everyday.

This finding must be coupled with an awareness of the contemporary politics of the BBC and the context in which journalists are embedded. Debates around impartiality reached fever pitch when former presenter of *Newsnight*, Emily Maitlis, was reprimanded by bosses for allegedly failing to meet editorial standards in an introduction about then government aide, Dominic Cummings, during the COVID-19 pandemic; a decision she firmly rejected (Sherwin 2021). They also surfaced in controversy around BBC journalists' personal social media use and the extent to which it complicates or breaches the corporation's impartiality commitments (Waterson 2020b). Both examples came in the wake of mounting pressure

from a Conservative government which questioned the BBC's value and stature, resulting in journalistic practices being closely scrutinised by politicians, Fleet Street editors, and BBC managers and board members (Rusbridger 2020). They underline the importance of researching how public service journalism is produced and debated, on and off air, and the power relations which condition and contextualise geopolitical discourses. This paper has developed Pinkerton's (2013) conceptualisation of journalists as geopolitical 'agents' by revealing those interviewed to be thoughtful and reflexive about these tensions and dilemmas and aware of their representational power to shape how audiences understand and imagine the world. Empirical accounts of journalism therefore have a vital role to play in examining the site of production in critical and popular geopolitics.

Storytelling emerges as a key technique through which journalists seek to engage listeners in radio broadcasts and the geopolitical story of migration. Uncovering a strategic appeal to listeners' geographical imaginations suggests that radio's 'propensity to stimulate its audience's imagination' is no accident (Shingler and Wieringa 1998, 77); rather, journalists draw on specific devices to produce immersive, evocative, and multi-sensory reportage aimed at eliciting imaginative and affective responses. This goes beyond a straightforward attempt to secure the largest listenership and reflects a desire to counter audience fatigue and secure their interest in the protagonists of Europe's migration 'crisis'. Multi-media demands on journalists in a digital age and extensive job cuts at the BBC (Waterson 2020a, 2022) raise questions about whether this carefully crafted style of radio journalism – filled with nuanced and multi-vocal narratives which challenge reductive stereotypes – may become a rare or lost 'art'. The fact that some of those interviewed in this study have already left Radio 4 is a timely reminder to heed Dittmer and Bos' (2019) call to engage with media organisations and the actors within them to understand – and at the very least document – the journalistic practices that shape geopolitical representations.

The next step is to situate these journalistic practices within specific geographies of BBC radio production and capture the organisational structures and material settings out of which geopolitical scripts emerge. This is vital to investigate the hierarchical relationships between different levels of seniority in the BBC, uncover the internal divisions and departments to which journalists belong, and illuminate the varying commissioning and production cycles within them. It is also a key part of the effort to unpack how geopolitical narratives are conditioned by the locations in which they were produced and how radio as a sonic medium of geopolitical storytelling is 'spatially situated and rooted "in place"' (Pinkerton 2014, 58). As Kuus (2008, 2074) observes, this is a quintessentially 'geographical task because it concerns the geography of

knowledge production' and is another essential prerequisite to understanding how, why, and from where geopolitical discourses and imaginaries emerge.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the interviewees for giving up their time to speak to me about my research and providing insights into their profession and craft. Thank you to the ESRC for funding my doctoral thesis on which this paper is based. Special thanks to Gillian Rose, Fiona McConnell, Derek McCormack, Ruben Andersson, and Alasdair Pinkerton for their help and support with my research. Finally, thank you to the editor and anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful engagements with, and constructive feedback on, my paper which were gratefully received.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) under Grant [ES/P000649/1].

Data Availability Statement

Research data are not shared due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Ethics Statement

This research received ethical approval from the School of Geography and the Environment's CUREC committee at the University of Oxford. Consent was obtained from all interviewees.

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