



A quest for dialogue in international broadcasting

Germany's public diplomacy targeting Arab audiences

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses German public diplomacy efforts via international broadcasting to the Arab world post-9/11. After defining the field's major relevant concepts and models and pointing out the conceptual convergence of public relations and public diplomacy, the article presents a critical analysis of the requirements of dialogue drawing on Habermas's (1984) *Theory of Communicative Action*. For the time being, the question whether Germany's broadcast public diplomacy in the Arab world is based on 'dialogue', as has been posited by the main protagonists, needs to be answered cautiously. What is visible is a determination of Deutsche Welle to at least present a quest for dialogue as a projection of the country's national values, policies, self-image and underlying myth. The invocation of 'dialogue' via DW may reflect a reassertion of the very self-image Germany feels most comfortable with: that of the Open-minded Society of Consensus as the country's grand narrative.

KEY WORDS

Arab world ■ Deutsche Welle ■ dialogue ■ Germany ■ public diplomacy ■ public relations

Introduction

The terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 and their bellicose aftermath (in Afghanistan and subsequently in Iraq) have sparked, *inter alia*, an ongoing debate about how the 'Western world' and nations in North Africa and the Middle East (somewhat imprecisely called the 'Arab' or 'Muslim world') should find new ways of cultural exchange, information and dialogue for understanding each other better. International broadcasting, a long-time agent of cross-cultural exchange, became part of these efforts.

This article sets out to analyse how Germany's international radio and TV broadcaster, Deutsche Welle, has been trying to engage in some form of 'dialogue' with the Arab/Muslim world and how these efforts should be viewed in the contexts of public diplomacy and public relations – concepts that are, with the aforementioned labels attached, often met with suspicion and resentment by broadcasters themselves, and by audiences. The article shows which means have been devised by Deutsche Welle to start what that broadcasting organization calls a 'dialogue' with its Arab/Muslim audiences, what kind of dialogue this is likely to be, whether and how these efforts can be identified as public diplomacy and/or public relations, and, finally, whether these concepts allow for dialogue at all, as is desired. The underlying question is whether 'dialogue' in public diplomacy is attainable or whether it remains an abstract goal largely confined to the world of ideology (both organizational and political).

International broadcasting

The significance of international broadcasting was called to the world's attention (again) during the Gulf War of 1991 when US television station Cable News Network (CNN) played a crucial role in reporting events live from Iraq. While criticized by many for the abandonment of journalistic principles or playing to the Iraqi regime's tune, CNN International epitomized international broadcasting (at least for a while) and led one scholar to name his view of modern mediated politics and diplomacy the 'CNN effect' (Livingston, 1997). Other scholars before him had made claims that international broadcasting is an instrument of public diplomacy and/or foreign policy in general (Browne, 1983: 30).

This perceived link between international broadcasting activities and foreign policy and diplomacy points at highly diverging notions about the state of international broadcasting today. Generally speaking, international broadcasting (radio and television) stations around the world are operated or funded by:

- states/governments
- non-governmental public bodies
- commercial enterprises
- religious/political groupings.

Programming is targeted at audiences living beyond the borders of the broadcaster's host country. In many cases, but not necessarily, such

programming can be offered in several languages. Services are distributed via short and medium wave (the more traditional transmission modes of international broadcasting) and, increasingly, also via local frequency modulation (FM) rebroadcasts through partner stations abroad, cable networks, satellite, and the internet. The programming of international broadcasters may take on the following functions:

- journalistic information
- promotion of a sponsor's (national) image or other objective
- financial profit
- political or religious propaganda or campaigning
- religious proselytizing

or a combination of these. In fact, many international broadcasters which are operated or funded by states or governments of a liberal democratic type emphasize their overall journalistic mission but do, either implicitly or explicitly, welcome the promotion of their country's national image or its policies. An example of this type of international broadcaster is the government-operated Voice of America (VOA); similar stances, albeit organized as semi-autonomous state-funded public corporations, are taken by the United Kingdom's BBC World Service, France's Radio France Internationale (RFI) and Germany's Deutsche Welle (DW). There are also commercial stations that operate in the spheres of journalism and financial profit and within the confines of their host country's policies – hence the 'CNN effect' (for a critical evaluation see Gilboa, 2000, 2002). This is in line with the view quoted above that international broadcasting is an instrument of public diplomacy and/or foreign policy (Cannon, 2003) and can even assume the role of an 'instrumental actor' promoting negotiations and agreements in the context of conflict resolution – what Gilboa labels 'media diplomacy' (2000: 294–5, 2002: 733).

Representatives of the broadcasters mentioned above are often uneasy about any attributed link of their station with their host nation's public diplomacy efforts. In the case of Deutsche Welle, this is made even more complicated by the lack of a generally agreed German technical term for what is called 'public diplomacy' in English. Equivalent terms range from direct translations ('öffentliche Diplomatie') to expressions with a slightly different emphasis such as 'diplomatic public relations' (diplomatische Öffentlichkeitsarbeit), 'foreign-policy public relations' (ausserpolitische Öffentlichkeitsarbeit) or 'auswärtige Kulturpolitik' (cultural policy abroad), the latter being the term favoured and

officially used by the German government (Bericht der Bundesregierung, 2001, 2004; Peisert, 1978; Signitzer, 1993: 200). Since public diplomacy is a concept the modern forms of which have been developed largely in the United States, German-language literature on the subject is rare and mostly covers US examples (Klößner, 1993; Ohmstedt, 1993); the definitions relevant to the field are also mostly of US origin.

The following paragraphs give an outline of what public diplomacy is, or can be, how it is linked to other professional practices of communication such as public relations, and the models of communication and dialogue underlying these practices. This is followed by an investigation of how Deutsche Welle fits in with concepts of public diplomacy and dialogue.

Definitions of diplomacy and public diplomacy

As part of a nation-state's formal enactment of its relations and negotiations with other nation-states at the government level, diplomacy for the most part takes place behind closed doors, as it were (Gilboa, 2000: 275). Apart from publicized and well-staged events that seem to be attractive to the media system's penchant for 'dateline journalism' and symbolic pictures, such as summits, official state visits and other shake-hands opportunities, the 'general population' gets to know relatively little about how its foreign office or department of state is running the country's external affairs. Traditional diplomacy is, by concept and definition, very much an elitist and highly specialized activity of the state administration. This has been the state of diplomacy ever since its development in the late 18th century (in the wake of the French Revolution) when the modern concept of the nation-state started to emerge (Gerbore, 1964).

Traditional diplomacy, as described before, continues to be the mainstay of international inter-governmental relations. The representation and promotion of a nation's values, culture and language, however, has long been part of cross-border engagements, and it was in the 1960s that this supplementary approach to managing international relations received a catchy name (in the US) that stuck: public diplomacy. The keyword 'public' hints at a fundamental difference between largely secretive 'traditional' diplomacy and its younger sibling. Broadly speaking, 'public diplomacy' denotes relations between governmental institutions on one side and publics affiliated with third-party nation-states on the other. Public diplomacy focuses on personal and/or mediated interactions in the broader cultural sphere, aiming at

generating understanding, agreement or even support for the sponsoring nation and its politics, policies and polity (Fortner, 1993: 278–82; Signitzer and Coombs, 1992: 138–40). It may use mediated and non-mediated personal communication platforms such as movies, brochures, books, radio, television, websites or cultural and academic exchange programmes, lectures, public functions and so forth.

From a systems-theory viewpoint, public diplomacy may broadly be defined as a specific communication function of a state's diplomacy system, which in turn designates the process tasks of foreign policy within international relations (based on Signitzer, 1993: 200). While the function of public diplomacy may be strategic, or reaching for pre-defined long-term objectives, the *processual* tasks may well be termed tactical, or short term.

What these long- and short-term objectives look like is subject to definitions of public diplomacy by practising entities. As public diplomacy was more or less conceived and conceptualized in the United States, most relevant definitions have their origin in that country. These run in several directions. One may identify conventional 'top-down' approaches coined by diplomacy's traditional wisdom, side by side with perhaps more daring, or 'progressive', dialogic visions of what public diplomacy could be.

In a definition veering towards a more top-down approach, the US Department of State defines public diplomacy as 'government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries; its chief instruments are publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio and television' (US Department of State, 1987: 85). What is apparent in this definition is its rootedness in one-way communication ('to inform') and persuasion ('or influence'), which fits in with its reliance primarily on mass media ('publications, motion pictures . . . radio and television'); cultural exchanges as a more personal mode of human face-to-face encounter are, however, also given a mention.

This top-down line of thought is continued, by an official US advisory council, in later (October 2003) definitions of public diplomacy as: 'the promotion of the [US] national interest by informing, engaging, and influencing people around the world' (*Changing Minds, Winning Peace*; quoted in Napoli and Fejeran, 2004: 3). Particularly striking here is this definition's bias as to which side is to benefit from public diplomacy activities promoting 'the national interest' of the United States. What we see here is a relationship structurally based on a governing influence of ideology which may also be termed hegemony. In this context it is no

wonder that public diplomacy as a term 'has been used as a euphemism for "propaganda" or "international public relations"' (Gilboa, 2000: 290; see also Miller, 2004: 81) – a linkage I discuss in more depth below.

Public relations and models of communicative behaviour

The often-held notion that public relations is principally a persuasive, one-way activity needs to be modified. In their seminal systematization Grunig and Hunt (1984: 21–4) outline four models of PR which reflect the adopted and applied values, objectives and behaviours of organizations. These are reminiscent of the evolution of public relations as a profession. The application of any of these four models is dependent on the respective relationship between the organization and its environment.

- The first model may be called the 'press agency/publicity' model (Grunig and Hunt, 1984: 22). PR of this type aims at producing 'propaganda' for an institution or service; it is asymmetrically or one-way, top-down structured.
- The second model of PR is based on 'public information' (p. 22). Its objective is to reduce uncertainty by supplying truthful information, albeit by leaving out unfavourable copy. Structurally, this model is similar to the first one: it is one-way, communicator-centred and 'de facto asymmetrical' (Grunig, 1989: 30).
- The third model is characterized by Grunig and Hunt (1984: 22) as 'two-way asymmetric'. Public relations of this type seeks to persuade the publics it addresses scientifically, that is, by way of evaluation research and feedback. It aims at identifying 'the messages most likely to produce the support of publics without having to change the behavior of the organization' (Grunig, 1989: 29). By way of taking into account the publics mainly as a source of feedback, PR of this type remains 'imbalanced' (Grunig and Hunt, 1984: 22) and in effect communicator-centred; 'the hoped-for behavioural change benefits the organization and not publics' (Grunig, 1989: 29).
- The (in evolutionary terms) most advanced form of PR is Grunig and Hunt's (1984: 22) fourth model which they call 'two-way symmetric'. Public relations of this type aims at mutual understanding. 'Organizations practicing *two-way symmetrical* public relations use bargaining, negotiating, and strategies of conflict resolution to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both the organization and its publics' (Grunig, 1989: 29; italics in original). Publics and organizations practising PR of this type therefore benefit equally from possible impacts of their communication; if evaluation research is carried out, it serves 'to determine the level of "mutual understanding" that exists between an organization and its publics' (Pavlik, 1987: 129). This kind of two-way communication is balanced and regards both sides as being on equal footing. In principle, the roles of 'source' and 'destination' may be interchanged.

Grunig (1989: 30) remarks that organizations employ public relations of any of the four models described above alongside each other. However, PR following the first model (press agency/publicity) seems to be most popular. The most advanced, fourth model (two-way symmetric) is generally said to be followed only rarely, or perhaps temporarily, by some institutions, 'but it is seldom the dominant model practiced' (p. 30). Public relations of this orientation is constantly threatened by failure as it needs to adapt to new situations and challenges all the time; results cannot be predetermined. In this view, therefore, 'success' poses a risk.

In summarizing, one may call Grunig and Hunt's (1984) PR models 1–3 teleologically oriented to success, persuasive and short term, or functionalist, while the fourth model, in a long-term approach, appears as oriented to reaching understanding, or, to use a more recent term, 'cocreational' (Botan and Taylor, 2004: 651). In a cocreational perspective of PR, publics 'are not instrumentalized but instead are partners in the meaning-making process' (p. 652).

Public diplomacy and public relations: similarities and convergences

Based on a broad discussion of diplomacy and PR definitions and practices, Signitzer and Coombs argue that 'public relations and public diplomacy share similar objectives', use similar tools, and are in 'a natural process of convergence' (Signitzer and Coombs, 1992: 140, 145, 146). They discern two schools of thought (and action) in public diplomacy: a tough-minded and a tender-minded one. The former holds 'that the purpose of public diplomacy is to exert an influence on attitudes of foreign audiences using persuasion and propaganda' for 'fairly short-term policy ends' (p. 140). One may also call this a tactical line of thought. The tender-minded school sees public diplomacy 'as a predominantly cultural function' and argues that its goal 'is to create a climate of mutual understanding' where truth and veracity are essential and 'much more than a mere persuasive tactic' (p. 140). While both stances share the goals of explaining government policies and portraying the respective nation-state's society, they differ in their modes: one-way political information in the tough-minded school, two-way cultural communication in the tender-minded school of public diplomacy (see Signitzer and Coombs, 1992: 141). The authors subsequently identify the tender-minded line of public diplomacy as a variation of PR termed 'cultural relations' – an activity not necessarily looking for unilateral advantage (p. 142).

Comparing Peisert's (1978: 62–6) models of cultural communication and Grunig and Hunt's (1984) modelling of PR discussed above, Signitzer and Coombs conclude that their concept of cultural relations fits best with models of two-way communication (both asymmetric and symmetric) in Grunig and Hunt's terminology, and the information and exchange/cooperation approach as taken by Peisert (Signitzer and Coombs, 1992: 145).

What remains somewhat unclear in this analysis is Signitzer and Coombs's view of persuasion. According to their synthesis of 'cultural relations' this activity is two-way symmetric and aims at mutual understanding and exchange, that is, it belongs to the 'tender-minded' school of public diplomacy, and yet it is still clearly marked as 'persuasive' (Signitzer and Coombs, 1992: 145). 'Cultural relations', one may argue, follow a kind of persuasive approach – one, however, that is not 'tactical' as in this case it would need to be labeled short-term and 'tough-minded' (see above). So if it is persuasive, but not tactical, as is implied here, is the concept of the 'cultural relations' approach of public diplomacy a strategic one? This question has some fundamental implications for an assessment of how far public diplomacy of this seemingly most advanced kind, in evolutionary terms, may justifiably be called dialogic – something I scrutinize below with a reference to a comprehensive theoretical framework of communication.

Questioning the dialogue: strategic persuasion vs negotiated understanding

According to Habermas's 'Theory of Communicative Action', strategic action presupposes a world of:

at least two goal-directed acting subjects who achieve their ends by way of an orientation to, and influence on, the decisions of other actors. Success in action is also dependent on other actors, each of whom is oriented to his own success and behaves cooperatively only to the degree that this fits with his egocentric calculus of utility. (1984: 87–8)

In contrast to this action concept, communicative actors seek a 'framework of interpretation within which they can reach an understanding', which leads them to 'relativize their utterances against the possibility that their validity will be contested by other actors' (Habermas, 1984: 98, 99). Therefore, the notion of communicative action is based on processes of understanding during which actors may make mutual

claims of validity of their utterances that can subsequently be accepted and rejected (based on Habermas, 1984: 99). This action model implies that actors mobilize with their utterances three relations to the world within the cooperatively pursued objective of reaching understanding, namely the validity claims:

- that the statements made are true,
- that the speech act, with respect to an existing normative context, is right (and that this normative context is legitimate),
- that the manifest intention of the speaker is meant as it is expressed (based on Habermas, 1984: 99).

The speaker thus claims: *truth* for statements or presuppositions of existence (a claim corresponding to the *objective world* of all entities about which true statements are possible); *rightness* for legitimately administered interpersonal actions and their normative context (a claim that the act of speaking is right in relation to legitimately regulated norms and rules in the *social world*); and *truthfulness*, or *sincerity*, of the speaker's utterances of subjective experiences, that is, the speaker's expressed intention corresponds exactly to what he or she thinks (a claim related to the totality of the speaker's experiences to which he or she, in the *subjective world*, has privileged access). It is therefore 'the actors themselves who seek consensus and measure it against truth, rightness, and sincerity' of speech acts vis-a-vis the three worlds to which actors take up relations with their utterances (Habermas, 1984: 100).

Communicative action thus presupposes that actors, finding themselves on equal footing, are capable of mutual criticism. It is action in which the actors seek to reach an understanding about the situation and their action plans in order to coordinate their actions by way of an agreement or negotiation.

In order to understand an utterance in the paradigm case of a speech act oriented to reaching understanding, the interpreter has to be familiar with the conditions of its validity; he has to know under what conditions the validity claim linked with it is acceptable. (Habermas, 1984: 115)

These acts of accepting, or criticizing and rejecting, symbolic expressions and the validity claims associated with them, and the coordinating or falling apart of action plans by way of consensus, or lack thereof, are observed by the interpreting actor. This kind of rational discourse clearly is an ideal model type and may even be counterfactual. Truthfulness as a key element of such a discourse may not necessarily be a predisposition

of an actor 'nor can truthfulness be animated or promoted by way of a discourse or its substitutes' (Jourdan, 1993: 39; trans.). It seems to be, and will remain, attached to the morality of personal action, and therefore be something continually to be questioned and contested.

In summarizing, one may adopt Habermas's typology of action situations and action orientations (1984: 279–88). The author distinguishes two types of action situations, non-social and social ones, and two types of action orientations, one leaning towards success and the other leaning towards understanding. A non-social type of action oriented to success would, according to this typology, be called 'instrumental action'; in such a nonsocial action situation there is no alternative orientation such as seeking understanding. In social action situations, however, we may find 'strategic' action and 'communicative' action, the former being 'oriented to success', the latter, 'oriented to reaching understanding' as described above (p. 285). This fits in rather well with the models of both public relations and public diplomacy, overlapping and converging as they are, which have been outlined and discussed earlier. Rationally negotiated, non-egocentric understanding seems to be (theoretically) possible but it takes considerable efforts, and needs considerable mental resources, on the part of all actors involved to follow the rules of such an endeavour without a predefined outcome. Dialogue of this kind is indeed a risk and an adventure.

Despite these difficult conditions for two-way, symmetric dialogue on equal footing, 'dialogue' seems to be the buzzword not only in public relations (Hiebert, 1992: 124) and public diplomacy (Public Diplomacy Council, 2005), but also in international broadcasting – a public-communication practice that touches on both the aforementioned professional fields. Under such circumstances claims of 'dialogue' may easily remain in the sphere of institutional ideology. If it does indeed, as is posited here and is argued in greater detail later, one needs to look closer at whom this institutional ideology is likely to benefit.

As any ideology needs to be preformulated (at least on the basis of continuous reassertion, by way of definitions, that it still holds true), it cannot be identified as a 'communicative', discursive process in Habermasian terms: ideology's truth, rightness or truthfulness cannot be questioned without losing its characteristics of being an ideology in the first place. Any ideology is strategic by nature; speech acts and behaviour taking place within ideological contexts are therefore instrumental.

This view is challenged when the performance of speech acts or the process of communication as such, and not any outcome of this process, develops into a strategy. Communication, or dialogue, can indeed be

applied as a strategy in its own right – which is a paradox in terms of Habermas's formulation of 'discourse'. When dialogue is an institutional ideology, then it may be a self-serving activity.

International broadcasting and Germany's public diplomacy

Germany's public diplomacy activities include the usual array of lectures, youth, academic and sport exchanges, cultural and art exhibitions, language training, etc., that are typical of Western-style democracies (Bericht der Bundesregierung, 2004; for a British perspective see Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2003). International broadcasting is also part of these activities. Deutsche Welle (DW) was founded in 1953 as a radio service to inform audiences abroad about the new, post-Nazi Germany. It does not target domestic German audiences. Today, DW offers radio, television and online services in 30 languages and claims a global audience of some 65 million weekly listeners and 28 million weekly viewers (Bettermann, 2005: 10).¹

All programmes are produced at facilities in Bonn and Berlin and studios in Brussels, Moscow and Washington, DC, and with additional input from local stringers in various countries. Deutsche Welle is clearly identified as part of Germany's public diplomacy efforts by the German federal government (see, for example, Auswärtiges Amt, 1997: 60–1; Bericht der Bundesregierung, 2001: 20, 2004: 31–2), which fully funds DW with a public budget of 261 million euros per year (as of 2005). Some other joint projects (for example, in Afghanistan or in the Balkans) receive additional funding from the German Foreign Office. The station's journalistic mission is a credible and serious one (see, for example, its newsroom guidelines: Deutsche Welle, 2001; Kleinsteuber, 2002: 355). In many countries where media are censored by the authorities and where unbiased reporting of domestic or international news is a rarity, Deutsche Welle and other international broadcasters play an important role as a reliable 'voice of freedom'. Reflecting its journalistic mission, DW is designed to remain editorially independent; a status which is ensured by an elaborate system of regular parliamentary accords (Niepalla, 2005: 8). The broadcaster is therefore not institutionalized as a government agency (VOA type) but as an autonomous public corporation (BBC model), which of course implies a well-established practice of autonomy limited by and within the overlapping societal subsystems of media and politics.

However, while Deutsche Welle is an actor in the domain of professional journalism, it does not operate exclusively on its own terms.

Its objective, as defined by the DW Act, is to 'convey a comprehensive image of Germany's political, cultural and economic affairs and to outline and explain German views on important issues' (Deutsche Welle, 2000: 10), recently expanded and brought up to date in a new legislation to include 'German and other views on essential topics' and 'to promote understanding and exchange of cultures and nations', thereby 'firmly establishing Deutsche Welle's position as a significant instrument of [Germany's] public diplomacy' ('Neues Deutsche-Welle-Gesetz', 2004: 4; see also Niepalla, 2005: 3). A commentary on an earlier version of the Act summarizes that Deutsche Welle is 'the most important factor of Germany's mediated external representation' (Niepalla, 2003: 108; trans.). The DW legislation thus clearly identifies the broadcaster as part of the host country's public diplomacy (*auswärtige Kulturpolitik*).

The station's chief executive, the director-general, has expressed some concern about this linkage since any non-journalistic performance of DW might be detrimental to its credibility. This results in a preferred reading, by the organization itself, of not being an immediate public-relations tool or mouthpiece of the German government. At the same time, however, the director-general links the station with additional official German agendas:

In a way it is all of this [part of German foreign policy, German public diplomacy, and German international development and aid policy]. [DW] conveys a part of the Federal Republic of Germany's significance and all her social and political positions. Not in terms of a PR agency of the Federal Republic, but of course [DW] indirectly supports German corporate economy abroad and the activities of [German] cultural representatives. (Bettermann, 2002: 46; trans.)

In a later article, the director-general describes one of DW's objectives being '... to paint a likable picture of our country. No colouring, no cheap substitute for global governmental public relations. Instead, an obvious part of a much wider concept of "*public diplomacy*"' (Bettermann, 2005: 12; trans.).

These *ex officio* statements clearly depict Deutsche Welle as an integral part of Germany's (public) diplomacy and the country's political agenda – which is in turn strongly linked with economic aspects, Germany being one of the world's major economies.

It fits the picture that in such a context of invoked values, images, ideologies and agendas at work, the broadcaster is also producing and disseminating certain national myths, as Silcock (2002) argues in his study of DW television news. According to his study, Deutsche Welle frames news stories in accordance with its (mythified) Past narrative,

which reflects the country's violent Nazi history. 'Common themes of this myth are war and guilt' (Silcock, 2002: 341). It 'helps distinguish German cultural identity in the global marketplace of ideas, especially in news' (Silcock, 2002: 349). According to this analysis, one may identify this myth as DW's background narrative that paves the way for its institutional ideology: with the Nazi-era past being the opposite of the contemporary image of Germany that Deutsche Welle seeks to present through her journalistic services, the station aspires to focus on the desired image and values of being an open-minded broker of inter-cultural understanding and democracy, and also act the same. In a nutshell, it is this brokering, this search-for-dialogue which can be regarded as DW's institutional ideology. This whole complex of national image-framing and story-telling may be interpreted as 'a self-serving globalization expression of cultural identity' (Silcock, 2002: 349). It is easy to see how such an institutional cultural/media ideology is beneficial to the host country's hegemonic interests in the economic sphere.

A report by a local news agency on the official launch of DW television's Arabic service in Kuwait summarizes this linkage:

Speaking at the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development prior to the official launch of the German television station Deutsche Welle's (DW) new Arabic TV programme, [German head of government Gerhard] Schroeder added that his country was closely watching regional media transformations. The chancellor also stressed the importance of economic cooperation with the Arab region in light of globalization. (Kuwait News Agency, 2005)

A DW press release on the same occasion states that:

The Arabic-anchored news on DW-TV is one element of Deutsche Welle's long-term strategy for the Arabic world. In addition to the Arabic language services on DW-Radio and dw-world.de, DW-TV has been broadcasting news with Arabic subtitles since 2002. . . . 'The Arabic-language news further expands the presence of Deutsche Welle in an important market and intensifies our dialogue with the Arabic world,' [DW director-general Erik] Bettermann said. (Deutsche Welle, 2005)

The linkage of an important regional market and a proposed 'dialogue' is, again, stressed in this hint at DW's, and Germany's, institutional ideology, the 'search-for-dialogue'. Deutsche Welle, it may be argued, acts as part of a comprehensive political/economic strategy in the region.

Deutsche Welle and the Islamic world

On a wider scale, traces of DW's institutional ideology can be found in Germany's foreign policy (or vice versa). Engaging in a dialogue with the Arabic-speaking world has been a critical feature of Germany's foreign policy since the 1970s when, on the occasion of several terrorism-related events in the context of the Middle East conflict, the country tried to position itself as a credible mediator and unbiased broker between the West, Arab countries and Israel. These efforts had been stepped up even before 11 September 2001: in April 1999 the federal president's office formally issued a declaration on the 'Dialogue of Cultures' – with a high priority given to the Arab world – which some commentators view as a 'new paradigm' of German public diplomacy (Kleinstauber, 2002: 350).

In all of this mediating and brokering (now to a large part within a European Union context), Germany's position, however, has always been a precarious one due to the country's responsibility for the shoa/holocaust genocide during the Nazi dictatorship (part of the overall 'background narrative' described above) – an historical fact sometimes viewed with a certain ambiguity in the Arab world, attributing Germany some kind of peculiar status. One may argue, therefore, that the proposition of brokering a 'dialogue' with the Islamic world is a kind of a way-out for Germany permitting German foreign policy to present itself as a neutral player in the Middle East. Whether Germany is in fact 'neutral' in the wider Middle East conflict and everything that is at stake there (geopolitical influence, natural reserves such as oil and gas, trade agreements, marketplaces), is possibly as much to be doubted as any 'neutral' role of the United States or the United Kingdom in the area.²

As an outlet of German public diplomacy in the Middle East region, Deutsche Welle has been producing an Arabic radio service since 1959 (transmission times total 5 hours per day, as of 2005), an extensive Arabic website (www.dw-world.de/arabic) since 1996 (considerably expanded and relaunched in 2004), and some Arabic-language slots (3 hours daily) on its tri-lingual television service DW-TV introduced in 2002 (Lucassen and Zöllner, 2004: 89) and further expanded three years later. DW target groups in the Arab world are broadly defined as 'mainly decision makers, opinion leaders and info élites' who are to receive 'first-hand information on the reality of life in Germany as well as German and European values' (Bettermann, 2005: 11; trans.).³

Deutsche Welle's Arabic radio service focuses on world, regional and German news, and reports on politics, business and economy, culture and the arts, technology and research, and sports, and also contains

some musical, women's, and youth programmes as well as German language courses, a 'mailbag' programme (where listeners' letters are read and their queries answered), and – in line with the new paradigm of German public diplomacy – a once-weekly programme called 'Dialogue of Cultures' where intellectuals, writers and other commentators of public life discuss topical issues (for example, the pros and cons of a war against Iraq).⁴ The Arabic version of DW-TV features mainly news and political, economic and cultural affairs along with sports, and shows documentaries that cover German and global culture, tourism in Germany, topical issues and trends, and depict life in contemporary Germany.⁵ Deutsche Welle's Arabic website displays numerous articles on all the above topics and features audio and video download and streaming options; in some sections, users are invited to mail in comments and suggestions to the station, some of which are subsequently featured online. Since 2003, the broadcaster has been co-producing, jointly with other institutions of German public diplomacy, the website Qantara (bridge), offered in Arabic, English, and German (www.qantara.de).⁶

In a (mainly qualitative) field study looking into the performance of DW's radio, TV and online services in Egypt, Morocco and Syria, Lucassen and Zöllner (2004: 99) point out that there is a great interest in, and a need for, the news and views of international (Western) broadcasters in the Arab world, particularly in times of crisis and conflict. This is not surprising given the delicate situation of media freedom in these three countries (and most others in the Arab region; see Ayish, 2003; Berenger, 2006; Reporters Without Borders, 2002). Interviewees actually praise Deutsche Welle for its efforts to promote democratic values and to establish dialogues between the West and the Arab world. In the words of three interviewees:

- I think that Deutsche Welle and its news reports and other programmes are a representation of free expression of opinion and democracy as [DW] broadcasts news without preferring one side over the other. (*27-year-old male Syrian*)
- [DW is] a German newscaster that tries to establish a friendly relationship with Arab nations. (*35-year-old male Egyptian*)
- [DW is] a good means for communication between Europe and Arab countries. (*28-year-old male Egyptian*) (cited in Lucassen and Zöllner, 2004: 99)

While some interviewees in that study accepted that DW or other international stations are entitled to voice criticism of shortcomings in Arab societies 'in an appropriate manner', as a 27-year-old female Syrian

phrased it, the majority of interviewees rejected this notion, sometimes stating reasons of national independence and pride: 'I will not accept any foreign broadcaster coming to my country and criticising us, no matter what that criticism is about' (28-year-old male Moroccan, in Lucassen and Zöllner, 2004: 100).

So while efforts by Deutsche Welle to feature dialogues in its services are clearly observable, remarks like this one indicate that there are limitations to such dialogues. Some are rooted in cultural and political circumstances that are detrimental to a climate of openness which is needed in any true dialogue. Other limitations are inherent in the technical nature of the one-way medium that broadcasting mostly is. Reading excerpts from listeners' letters on-air or quoting from website users' email responses is feedback (and possibly highly valuable as such) but does of course not permit audience members to take on the role of respondent in true dialogic fashion. It is the broadcaster, after all, who decides on his own terms which feedback material will be used on programmes while other parts of it will be mostly ignored. On the other hand DW broadcasts some discussion forums which, judging from audience reactions to them, feature serious debate on sometimes controversial issues. These may indeed be performances of dialogue that go as far as the technically mostly unidirectional nature of the media that are employed allows.

One contributor to the 'letters to the editor' section of Qantara.de voiced additional concern:

I have been a regular reader of Qantara for the past few months. I am very impressed by its content and diversification. But one thing I still find lacking is that the majority of articles give an outsider's view, even though the articles are o[b]jective, of the challenges faced by the Muslim world. I have one suggestion that if the content in the webzine is written by eminent Muslim writers it would then really act as a bridge between east and the west as the western audience will get to know the thoughts and the actual situation in the Islamic world. (Sial, 2005)

While the reproach that an insufficient number of Muslim writers, eminent or not, contribute to Qantara.de would probably be refuted by its editors, this is in every way a highly critical assessment of such efforts of public diplomacy to engage in true dialogue ('act as a bridge') with publics in the Islamic world. Without detailed content analyses of DW programmes or of Qantara, however, we cannot judge for ourselves. But the audience comment cited above is well in line with interviewee statements from the qualitative audience study mentioned earlier (Lucassen and Zöllner, 2004). Participants in that study expressed their

information needs and also indicated that they do not simply want to listen but to be heard as well. The questions of 'voice', 'respect' and 'face' certainly come into play here. These are important factors of all intercultural communication. An important question in this context is, how do German public diplomacy broadcasts approach their audiences: does DW merely talk *about*, talk *at*, or indeed talk *with* its listeners (Lucassen and Zöllner, 2004: 100), or alternatively, does the station employ dialogues *in front of* its audience?⁷

For the time being, the question of whether Germany's broadcast public diplomacy in the Arab world is based on 'dialogue', as has been posited by the station, remains unresolved. What it does show, however, is a determination of Germany's public diplomacy broadcaster to at least present – and publicize – a quest for dialogue as a projection of its own national values, policies, self-image and underlying myth. These attempts at dialogue with foreign target groups may latently be saying more about Germany than they do in terms of manifest broadcast content. In any event, they make for excellent public relations copy.

Dialogue via international broadcasting: a functionalist strategy?

This article has introduced the basic features of public relations, public diplomacy and its basic underlying concept, dialogue. In summarizing, Deutsche Welle's efforts to broker a 'dialogue' with the Islamic world may be identified as:

- being based on a particular German-centred ideology (within a mythical background narrative);
- being challenged by cultural and political circumstances pertaining to target nations in the Islamic world;
- being pursued for a good part via one-way media that, by their technically unidirectional nature, allow only for feedback acceptable within the rules of the sponsor;
- a 'two-way asymmetric' type of public relations where the sponsoring organization seeks the stability of its own behaviour options and values, and its publics are not on equal footing;
- a 'tender-minded', yet persuasive branch of public diplomacy that uses claims of 'dialogue' strategically (in terms of its ideology and political/economic interests in the region).

It is easy to identify Deutsche Welle's activities as belonging to the converging arena of both public diplomacy and public relations. On the whole, the 'dialogue' proposed and performed by Deutsche Welle towards the Islamic world may seem like a unilateral, self-serving,

functionalist strategy that seeks to accumulate some form of 'social capital' (to borrow a term from Bourdieu, 1979: 128). However, the depth and sincerity of those dialogical programme/content elements that have been identified above still need to be evaluated, so any premature conclusion should be avoided. Under no circumstances should even a critical analysis overlook Deutsche Welle's merits in delivering credible and reliable news and information to a world region where media censorship is still the norm.

Deutsche Welle's and Germany's joint activities should be regarded as a positive first step in the direction of starting dialogues. To reach this stage of public diplomacy action, the broadcaster (or its sponsoring nation-state) would have to start negotiations with its target publics abroad in the realm of the three worlds and their implied relations as ideally proposed by Habermas (1984; see above). What is needed then is a transparency of premises on both sides. Negotiations of this kind would possibly include, in part or in whole, refutations of those positions by actors on the side of the targeted publics, and subsequent counter-refutations of those claims by actors on the side of the public diplomacy institution, before any agreement or understanding can be reached in the first place. This cocreational, discursive effort of mutual listening and learning for the benefit of both sides would, in short, be very much a long-term process of building trust. Whether it can be fully realized through a considerable reliance on the technical media and channels that international broadcasting entities offer at present is doubtful.

From all of this, however, one may gather that the invocation of 'dialogue' through DW may reflect a reassertion of the self-image Germany feels most comfortable with: that of the Open-minded Society of Consensus. Against the background of DW's (and, in a wider angle, Germany's) mythified Past narrative (that is, its institutional ideology), this 'preferred reading' and its underlying concept of reconciliation may be interpreted as a strategy of redemption. The efforts labelled 'dialogue' paint a positive picture of a Germany far removed from its Nazi past. This process is based on a societal accord, or a grand narrative of that country indeed, not by way of direct instructions to the broadcaster from the German government.

Outlook: future research

This article's objective was to point at the overlap of public relations and public diplomacy, and to position international broadcasting within this

context by drawing on a German example. The article does not attempt to provide answers to the questions that this raises but to indicate an agenda for further research, which could include the following:

- to systematically review and analyse the DW Arabic programme output's manifest and latent messages by way of detailed (quantitative and qualitative) content analysis, aiming to analyse the broadcaster's inclinations to discourse;
- to employ on-site ethnographic management research to analyse in detail editorial decision-making processes at DW's Arabic-language services;
- to look into the possible long-term impacts of publicized striving-for-dialogue on the broadcaster's organizational behaviour;
- to assess the character of Germany's image and reputation, and their development over time in Arab countries on a regular basis through a long-term series of opinion surveys (either with nationally representative samples or those drawn from relevant target groups);
- and from a cultural psychology perspective: to review whether the concept of dialogue as formulated by German public diplomacy for the Arab world is appropriate at all in view of possible different systems of perception and thought – that is, worldviews and cognitive processes – between the West and the Arab world.⁸

Such research may provide insights into the (theoretical) concepts of truth, rightness and sincerity of the broadcaster's utterances as introduced by Habermas, which are fundamental to the idea of dialogue and intercultural understanding. The author would like to invite other scholars with additional or alternative perspectives to join forces on this project and shed some light on the nature of public diplomacy and dialogue as performed by international broadcasting, a highly ambiguous terrain in need of further exploration.

Notes

- 1 The article does not disclose details as to how these global audience estimates have been calculated.
- 2 For highly critical commentary and analysis see Miller, 2004; Sefsaf, 2004; Snow, 2004.
- 3 Audiences for DW programmes in the Arab world are very small in quantitative terms. No data were available for publication.
- 4 'Dialogue of Cultures' runs for 15 minutes and is repeated three times.
- 5 In the August 2004 edition of its external PR magazine, DW advertised the first airing of a new, one-hour talk show format on DW-TV, *Dialogue between East and West*, co-produced with *Abu Dhabi TV*. According to the article, in that programme Arab and European experts have debated differences and commonalities between their countries in the spheres of politics, business and culture ('Talk für den interkulturellen Dialog', 2004: 10). The format has been discontinued.

- 6 The internet portal Qantara.de represents the concerted effort of the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Federal Center for Political Education), Deutsche Welle, the Goethe Institut [Germany's international cultural institute] and the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Institute for Foreign Relations) to promote dialogue with the Islamic world. The project is funded by the German Foreign Office. (Qantara, 2005)
- In addition, the German Foreign Office (through its German Information Centre based in Cairo, Egypt) offers, since early 2005, an Arabic-language internet portal to Germany of its own, Almanian Info (www.almanian-info.diplo.de) (Almanian Info, 2005). Almanian Info is mainly a link list enabling web users to retrieve all sorts of information about Germany and German foreign-policy documents.
- 7 The author would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this idea.
- 8 See Nisbett, 2003, for a discussion of posited differences between Western and East Asian thought.

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