



Transnational TV News and Media Diplomacy: Al Jazeera English in Context

22 November 2007
Workshop 9:00 – 12:30

King's College London, Dept. of War Studies, Seminar Room Floor 6

We have recently witnessed the launch of a host of transnational English language television channels, including Al Jazeera English, Press TV (Iran), CCTV9 (China), France 24 and Russia Today. These join existing channels such as CNN International, Voice of America and BBC World TV. What are the purposes of these channels? Who are they for and who is watching them? What is their relation to other channels in the global television market? Do they constitute a global *Anglosphere* public? Is English the global language for media diplomacy? Is the main purpose of these channels to augment national prestige and/or to assert an alternative political perspective in an increasingly crowded but politically uniform news marketplace?

These channels are professional news providers and part of profit-making organisations, of course, but several other rationales for these channels are evident:

- A vehicle for public and cultural diplomacy, or soft power, in world politics. These channels appear to offer nation-states a means to project their voice, their policies and their interpretations of events onto polyphonic global media publics – to assert and maintain a presence in the global *Anglosphere*.
- A means to reach diasporic audiences. First generation diaspora often sustain close attachments to their country of origin through satellite television, but as the mother tongue becomes hard to maintain for second and third generations, so new ways are being found to reach them and create a sense of diasporic nationhood and belonging across geographical distance.
- A tool for development. Arguably, the line between diplomacy and development is becoming increasingly blurred in UK and US foreign policy. To what extent do transnational English language channels like Al Jazeera English and Press TV challenge UK/US foreign policy and development goals?

It is both timely and important to understand and question the assumptions underlying these rationales. Do governments have coherent messages that could be communicated through mediated diplomacy? Do these channels operate with models of media 'effects' which are difficult to substantiate? Does the proliferation of channels mean that they are popular or that people are watching them? In their

struggle for salience, credibility and legitimacy, questions can also be raised about the independence of such channels from, and accountability to, home governments.

This workshop offers the chance to address these questions, and will be informed by the latest major research on transnational news media.

9:30 – 10:45

Panel 1: Al-Jazeera English: Clash of Civilizations or Cross Cultural Dialogue?

A study of how Al-Jazeera English operates, editorializes and presents information about international events to a range of international audiences, based on forthcoming research in the US, UK, Malaysia, Indonesia and Qatar. The study is led by Mohammed el-Nawawy of the Queens University of Charlotte and Shawn Powers of the University of Southern California.

11:00 – 12.15

Panel 2: Shifting Securities: News Cultures Before and Beyond Iraq 2003.

A discussion of findings from the recent ESRC New Security Challenges research by Marie Gillespie, James Gow, Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin. The pioneering methodology of integrated, iterative ethnographies of audiences, news texts, and newsmakers and policy elites has led to a series of large scale funded programmes investigating (i) International Broadcasting: Public Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange, (ii) Mediating and Commemorating the 2005 London Bombings, and (iii) Media, Web 2.0 and Radicalisation: Legitimizing the Discourses of Jihad.

Finally, over lunch guests will be able to discuss future research, trends and scenarios for transnational media.

To confirm your attendance or for further information please contact Ben O'Loughlin on Ben.OLoughlin@rhul.ac.uk or call him on 01784 443153.

Yours sincerely,

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The event has been organised by Marie Gillespie at the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC) and Ben O'Loughlin at the New Political Communication Unit at Royal Holloway College. The event is sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) New Security Challenges programme, and hosted by King's College London.