

Findings

CAMRI Newsletter

Issue 5

April 2005

EastEnders 20th Anniversary: Inventing the Modern Soap

On Saturday 19th February, twenty years to the day since it was launched, Regent Street campus hosted a major one day conference on EastEnders.

This was the latest in a series of seminars and conferences forming part of Jean Seaton's BBC history project. The conference attracted a good deal of media attention and was covered in the press and on radio. To that end the day was set up to examine the programme's origins and early days, but also assessed its continuing place in broadcasting in the UK. In particular it looked at what made the programme unique.

After a welcome from Sally Feldman, Anthony McNicholas introduced the first session, which featured BBC 1 Controller Alan Hart, Drama executive Jonathan Powell and researcher Vivien Marles, described the programme's untypical top-down commissioning, the decisions which led to the location and basic outline of the programme and the part detailed audience research had to play in the process.

(continues on page 2)

Media and Society in China today

The China Media Centre of the University of Westminster, in association with the Chinese Communication Association, is proud to announce its Founding Conference, to be held at its Campus at Harrow in North London, 17-18 June 2005.

The rapid development of the Chinese economy, and the growing integration of China in to the world market, has attracted attention from politicians, business people and academics all around the world. The changes have affected all areas of economic, social and political life.

Changes to the mass media have been among the most profound and important of the many

transformations that have been going on in China over the last twenty years.

This conference represents the first large scale opportunity for scholars from inside and outside China to meet together to discuss the implications of this process.

More than 60 papers have been promised to the conference, from experts both in China and in the West. They cover many of the main areas of media and communication, and will provide a unique opportunity to learn about and discuss the nature of the changes to structure and content of the press, broadcasting and the internet, the

reasoning behind current policies, and the likely implications of their success.

Places are available for non-paper presenting participants. You can book either at the full rate, with accommodation and full board, or on a day rate including lunch and coffee.

Big reductions on the full rate are available for bookings received before 15 April. The day rate includes a very attractive discounted fee for registered students. Copies of the booking form, as well as further information about the conference, its venue, and the scheduled speakers, are all available from cmc@wmin.ac.uk.

China's Impact: The Seminars

The fourth Seminar on "China's Impact", organised by the China Media Centre, in association with AGORA and the Centre for the Study of Democracy Asia Programme, will be held at the Carlton Club (69 St James, London SW1) on the 13th April, starting at 10am .

After the first three successful events, held in the first half of March, focused on the social and political change, geopolitical issues and the cultural impact, final seminar's main theme will be its economy: will China 'keep us or kill us'? *(continues on the last page)*

*On the right:
A session of the
Seminar at the
Carlton Club,
London*



Reporting Zimbabwe Conference

On the 25th February CAMRI hosted the conference 'Reporting Zimbabwe: Before and After 2000: African and Global Perspectives', organised by Dr. Winston Mano, at the Stanhope Centre.

Delegates came from over 20 universities worldwide. A number of media professionals attended, as well as a contingent of 16 East African journalists who are Stanhope Journalist Fellows this year. A delegate from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Also attended. All in all about 80 people attended.

The day started with a presentation by Professor Terence Ranger, Oxford University, who spoke on "Patriotic Journalism in Zimbabwe and its Implications".

The second keynote was Dr. George Shire, whose paper "Racing Zimbabwe: Representing Race in the UK Media", generated a heated discussion. The third keynote was Baffour Ankomah, the Editor of the UK's magazine 'New African'.

Discussion on the various papers continued long into the evening and many of those who attended repaired to Zimbabwe House for a Zimbabwean dinner.

Among the CAMRI staff and students who made presentations were Winston Mano, Suzanne Franks and Nourredine Miladi.

Other CAMRI staff chaired panels.

Before the end of the day, we were

being asked when the next conference would be. We hope that this will be the first of a continuing series of conferences in the CAMRI Africa Media Series.

According to Winston, the success of the conference was due to teamwork: "I want to especially thank Colin Sparks, Maria Way, Paddy Scannell, Tarik Sabry, Anthony McNicholas and Jill Hills and the CAMRI doctoral students who assisted in one way or another at the conference", said Winston.

We would like to thank the Stanhope Centre for offering the use of their premises and for their assistance at the conference.

EastEnders 20th Anniversary

(continuing from page 1)

Further sessions saw writer Bill Lyons, director Antonia Bird and current BBC drama executive John Yorke in a frank and fascinating session, chaired by Jean Seaton on the week by week process of producing 52 hours of drama per year, on what works in soap opera and what does not, ie characters, (especially women characters) rather than plot or action. David Hendy chaired a very well-received session from academics Christine Geraghty and David Dunn on melodrama and place in soaps respectively. The focus on the unique features of EastEnders continued in an interview by Guardian TV critic Rupert Smith with

Cheryl Wilson, who was the first press officer the BBC had ever dedicated to a single programme. She outlined the joys and difficulties of dealing with what became a media feeding frenzy on the private lives of the actors.

Jean Seaton then closed the day with an examination of the place of EastEnders in public service broadcasting using the example of an early story of teenage pregnancy, followed by a general discussion. Throughout the day, the sessions were illustrated by clips both from EastEnders itself and programmes made about it or related to it.

All was enthusiastically received by an audience made up in the main of academ-

ics but also of media professionals, was recorded in sound by the BBC and in sound and vision (very professionally) by a crew of BAMS students organised by Geoffrey Davies.



Professor Jean Seaton chairing at the Conference
(Photo courtesy of John Bunyan)

Research round-up.... Research round-up...

Tabloid Culture and Media Spectacle: A Symposium

A symposium that will explore the evolution, parameters and new directions of tabloid culture in order to think through its cultural and political implications will be held on Saturday 21st May at the Southlands College, Roehampton University, in London.

At the event, that will address issues including politics and the popular, celebrity culture, media spectacle, tabloid news, journalism and factual programming, three speakers from CAMRI were invited.

Professor Colin Sparks will deliver a presentation on 'Popular journalism and tabloid journalism: an historical sketch', third year doctoral student Sofia Johansson will present findings on her research 'Tabloids from an audience per-

spective: Experiences of The Sun and The Daily Mirror' and, finally, first year doctoral student Mascha Brichta, will present her research project on 'Tabloid Readers in Germany and Great Britain'.

Further information on the event could be requested to Henrik Örnebring (h.ornebring@roehampton.ac.uk) at the Centre for Research in Film and Audio-visual Cultures School of Arts, Roehampton University.

Fifth Arab Media Seminar

On Saturday, 12th March, the fifth in the *Arab Media Seminar* series was held in the Cayley Room at the Regent Campus of the University.

The series of seminars has been organised by Dr. Tarik Sabry and Dr. Naomi Sakr on behalf of CAMRI.

The seminars are intended to be small and quite intimate, but over 30 people attended the day's six papers and lively discussion.

The seminar debated whether and how access to alternative information sources in the Arab world, including: satellite TV, the Internet and other actors in the public

realm, such as the press and NGOs

(involved in media freedom advocacy), are pushing the boundaries of what can be said in public, for example in other media or public meetings.

The rationale for the seminar's theme was based on the view that "*even when alternative information sources are accessed only by a minority, they lead to modifications of the policies and practices of the mainstream*".

Delegates came from various countries in the Middle East and North Africa and there were speakers from London universi-

ties, the Sorbonne and the Media Observatory of the University of Pavia.

The morning session was chaired by Maria Way and the afternoon by Nourredine Miladi, both members of CAMRI's staff. Discussion continued through the evening at a social event.

The sixth of this series of seminars will take place on the 11th of June in the Boardroom at the Regent Street Campus. For further information on this upcoming event, please get in touch with Dr. Tarik Sabry.

Contact address:
T.Sabry02@wmin.ac.uk

CAMRI Doctoral Students pages online

Since March there is a new page available on CAMRI's website, containing pictures, brief of the research projects and contact details of the Doctoral Students.

The page can be viewed at the address <http://www.wmin.ac.uk/mad/page-962>.

Those students that have still not submitted their details, that want to

be inserted on the page, can send their pictures (in jpeg format) at their information at the Students Representatives Burcu Sumer and Mascha Brichta.

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Some info on this issue...

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Research round-up... Research round-up...

Doctoral Symposia

The next CAMRI doctoral symposium will be held on **Friday 29th April**, and again it will be a joint event with doctoral students from the London School of Economics and Goldsmiths College. The symposium will feature presentations especially from the first year PhD students that started last Autumn

Radio Studies Network Conference in Birmingham

The annual national conference of the Radio Studies Network will be held at the University of Central England in Birmingham on Thursday 7th April.

Two members of CAMRI will deliver a presentation at the event.

Dr Winston Mano will speak on Radio Zimbabwe scheduling and everyday life.

First year PhD student Salvatore Scifo presentations' topic will be Toward a common agenda for community radio research in the UK

In this occasion the network will held also is Annual General Meeting.

Researching BBC History

Second year PhD student Daniel Day tells us about his fieldwork

'So what made you decide to take a PhD', an eminent member of CAMRI asked me one morning in the Garden Room, 'I hope you realise what you've let yourself in for you must be mad plain mad!'

Since starting my doctorate last March it's a sentiment, although admittedly not from other academics, I've encountered on more than one occasion. On paper they may have a point.

It can take as long to become a PhD as it does to become a doctor of brain surgery, but without the concomitant societal and financial rewards.

It's a process which can lead to periods of introspection and self doubt; and an undertaking that requires the stamina of the long distance runner, but with the recurring fear that by the time you cross the finishing line there'll be no-one but a group of hard core followers to share your success with.

Yet these reservations, in my view at least, deny one simple truth. History is sexy. It's certainly in fashion if the nightly output on our TV Screens is anything to go by, and at least as far as the academic world is concerned, media history, for the moment anyway, is definitely the new black.

BBC Regional broadcasting in the 1970's and 80's – the subject of my dissertation – what's sexy about that, you might say. The answer is a lot. As part of the team researching into volume six of the official history of the BBC, currently being written by Professor Jean Seaton, it's a project with an amazing number of opportunities.

At the BBC Written Archive Centre in Caversham it's not difficult to be engulfed by the pioneering spirit as you prise open dust covered boxes, the contents some of which have not been seen for nigh on thirty years.

Of course there are moments of tedium as you grapple with convoluted economics and technical terminology, but the letters you read, the reminiscences you run into and the strange sense of humour you frequently encounter are not just by-products of your research, but are absolutely fundamental to it.

In trying to recapture the mood of the times and the characters responsible for developing the broadcasting services of the period, you are transported back to an exciting era when smoke filled rooms were not simply metaphors and our contemporary media landscape was yet to be fully formed.

Combine this with oral history interviews, conference presentations, the knowledge that your research is contributing to a larger project, and you are filled with both a sense of exhilaration and trepidation. George Santayana's oft quoted dictum that those who choose to ignore history are doomed to repeat may have become something of cliché. But when looking at the history of institutions in particular that of the BBC, it seems to me at least, that there is a real need for those taking decisions in the present to be informed about their past.

And if being in the middle of all this isn't sexy history, then I don't know what is.

European Doctoral Summer School

CAMRI is a member of the consortium organising the European Doctoral Summer School and as such it can nominate two doctoral students to attend.

This year, the Summer School will be held in Tartu, in Estonia on 23rd-28th of August 2005.

The overall theme for the programme will be "Media in Everyday Life".

The European Doctoral Summer School in Communication 2005 brings together members of the European research community to summer schools in order to debate contemporary issues in media, communication and cultural studies.

The programme combines contributions from international experts and junior scholars, and takes the form of lectures, seminars, presentations, and workshops.

The summer school aims to provide a supportive international setting where doctoral students can present their ongoing work and meet students and academics from other countries, establishing valuable contacts for the future.

It also presents the international landscape of communication and media research, helping the students situate themselves on it.

Each interested student will be expected to send an abstract of the work (no more than 400

words) and a one-page summary of the PhD project covering following information:

- 1) Which is the main paradigm
- 2) Which is the theoretical framework
- 3) Which are the methods that will be used
- 4) Which the main objective
- 5) How much time have been used and how much time is left in the research project

To be considered, please send to Erica Spindler (E.Spindler@westminster.ac.uk) the requested documentation by 10 April 2005

Towards Completion

Sofia Johansson on the low-down from a third year PhD student

When first I considered doing a PhD, a friend suggested this would be 'a nice, easy existence'.

Having lived to tell the tale in my third year of doctoral studies, it is clear that was a sugar-coated fantasy of what being a PhD student means.

It is not nice.

Unless working stupendous hours, chained to a spine-deforming computer on minimal pay conform to an idea of a pleasant life.

Add to that the emotionally all-consuming aspect of the research project, the constant voice in your ear: *you could have done more*, and you have a frayed, at times exhausting, experience.

The misconception about doctoral studies as 'easy' must be down to the fact that the studies in themselves are perceived to be the only thing we do. However, teaching, conferences, possible publications and ad-hoc employments to supplement a meagre income are of course all part of being a PhD student. In fact, it can sometimes be a struggle to get time for the research.

Yet, while doing a PhD is neither nice nor easy, it is also far from dull. For me, it has been incredibly inspiring. In spite of some agony, I consider myself lucky for having had the chance to do something so challenging – in a greatly supportive environment thanks to the wonderful students and staff at CAMRI. You make it worth it.

This is a feeling that grows as it is finally time to concentrate on the best and most important part of these three years: finishing the thesis.

Starting Off with Obstacles

Impressions from a First-Year PhD Student

Mascha Brichta started doctoral research in CAMRI in September 2004. Her research project is a cross-cultural reception study of British and German tabloid Newspaper Readers.

'Wow!' my friends back home would whoop, *'you are actually doing a PhD in London?!?! That is brilliant!!!'* Oh yes, it is. And it isn't.

I have been in this country for six months now, and my experience so far has ranged from exceptionally inspiring to utterly frustrating.

I have spent the majority of my first months here trying to sort out my everyday life, and lived for the moment when I would become a 'real' member of this society: someone with a bank account. And someone with a permanent address.

When I started looking for a room I wondered how previous tenants had succeeded in turning around in those tiny cells they lived in, and it occurred to me that British people must be much smaller than people from Northern Europe.

I did find a place to stay eventually; well, it was a start. It was nice, if I don't count the fact that my landlady's friend was holding psychotherapeutic sessions in the living room every day, and that she was the one in control of the central heating (I own two electric blankets now), and if I do not think about the 'guidelines' she presented to me the day I moved in (stating that I should use the kitchen before she came home from work, and that I should avoid taking a shower or bath when her friend saw a client, which was from 8 to 8).

Well, I thought to myself, this must be London life...

However, what I really enjoyed and still enjoy about doing a PhD here in London at CAMRI are the supportive and helpful colleagues and environment.

I can't think of any time in my life with similarly strong and colourful intellectual stimulation from so many different people from all over the world. It is great to be here, and even if I have no idea yet as to how.

I will manage to climb up that Mount Everest called PhD, doing research here has been an inspiring and positive experience so far, which makes it all worthwhile.

China's Impact: The Seminars

(continuing from the first page)

Its economy is being rapidly transformed, and may transform the world economy in the process, so great is its impact predicted to be.

Will China soon own the USA and dominate the economies of its suppliers and customers worldwide? Or collapse from corruption and rotten banking, bringing down the world economy? What's the state of our knowledge about these possibilities?

Peter Batey, Chairman of the Great Britain-China Centre will be the Chair in this occasion, hosting also Dominic Ziegler of The Economist, and Dr Linda Yueh of the London School of Economics.

Further information on the event could be requested to: Anja Sonksen (CMC@wmin.ac.uk)



Westminister Papers in Communication and Culture (WPCC) is a peer-reviewed journal, published twice a year in hard copy and PDF format. WPCC recognises the interdisciplinary nature of the field of Media and Cultural Studies, and therefore deliberately encourages diverse methods, contexts and themes. Particular interests include, but are not limited to, work related to Popular Culture, Media Audiences, Political Economy, Promotional Culture, New Media, Political communication, Migration and Diasporic Studies.

A major goal of the WPCC is to help develop a de-westernised and transcultural sphere that engages both young and established scholars from different parts of the world in a critical debate about the relationship between communication, culture and society in the 21st Century.

WPCC invites contributions from all scholars; particularly those at the beginning of their careers.

The articles of the first issue on 'Media and Migration', published in November 2004, are available at the webpage <http://www.wmin.ac.uk/mad/page-881>.

The focus of the second issue, that will be published in Autumn/Winter 2005, is 'Media and Celebrity'. The editor of this issue is Sofia Johansson.

Further information on the Call for Papers for the issue on 'Media in China' are shown below.

WPCC Call for Papers: Media in China

The transformation of Chinese society over the last quarter of century, particularly in the last decade, has been accompanied by a legitimisation of the importance of the market in economic and social life within the existing political system, along with a gradual integration into the global economy.

This has had a huge impact on the mass media in China. The rise of market-orientated media has made the field, which originated from an old command model and was monopolized by Party organs, more diversified and competitive.

On the other hand, there are still political and social constraints, which undermine the full development of the market-driven model.

In addition, the chaotic journalistic practices and business operations caused by the rush to enter the market by both old and new model practitioners since the mid-1990s has also revived concerns amongst some

scholars over the impact of marketization on the media and Chinese society. With the segmentation of Chinese society in terms of social stratification, more uncertainties have emerged: What are the mainstream media in China today, and what will they be like tomorrow? What are the target audiences of the media today, and how will they change in the future? What values are represented in the media?

Within this general framework, WPCC is particularly interested in articles that address the following topics:

1. New vehicles of Chinese media (for example, Caijing, Nanfang-zhoumo, Beijing Qingnianbao)
2. The new trends in journalism (for example, the rise of Yidijiandu) and new business practices (for example, the involvement of foreign and private capital)
3. Regulation of Chinese media in a market environment
4. Social changes and the media

5. Social functions of Chinese journalists
6. The impact of new media, particularly the Internet
7. Politics and the media
8. The economics and management of Chinese media
9. Chinese media and public opinion in China
10. Chinese media representations of China, of other countries, and of international issues
11. Chinese media's international impact
12. The "diasporic" or "Greater Chinese" media

Potential contributors to this issue of the journal should submit abstracts of about 500 words, which should be sent electronically to the editor, Xin Xin (x.xin@wmin.ac.uk).

The deadline for abstracts is 18th April 2005. For more information about Westminister Papers in Communication and Culture, and to view current issues, visit the webpage <http://www.wmin.ac.uk/mad/page-880>