

Ideas of public service broadcasting media essay



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The development of both public service broadcasting and commercial TV has been a long - lasting movement. This made British broadcasting become unsurpassed and distinctive when compared to that from any other country (Buscombe, 2000). Public service broadcasting and commercial TV are different in many ways, especially when it comes to the types of programmes, aims and financing sources. This essay will discuss the values of British broadcasting and reference to some flagship television programmes that distinguish particular British channels.

It is important to notice that public service broadcasting has been often identified with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), launched in 1922 by the government and funded by the license fee. According to Scannel (2000), John Reith is believed to be the most influential person in terms of public service development. Indeed, Reith presented his own beliefs, regarding British broadcasting, in an impartial statement in 1925. He claimed that broadcasting should become a public utility and be used not only for entertainment purposes, but also to inform and educate the society. This would result in the integration of all the classes, building the national family and the democracy improvement. In addition, broadcasting was responsible for bringing human knowledge and achievement (Scannel, 2000).

Throughout the years, the BBC has created many different programmes, which aim was to highlight the values of public service broadcasting. An excellent example of such a programme can be " Blue Peter" - a highly regarded children`s programme, which was closely linked to the British navy. In each episode, the presenters act as if they were a family and occupy the same domestic space as the audience. This may indicate the BBC`s mission

to create the national family, with the channel being a parent and the viewer playing the role of a child. The child is being systematically educated and informed since the programme always offers a range of historic, geographical and culture lessons. Although the programme does not directly tell the viewer to be patriotic, it selects some significant examples that make the audience respect the country and its achievements (for instance the Queen Elizabeth that was shown in the 1972/3 review of the year). Moreover, “Blue Peter” tries to introduce representations of regions, for example by inviting a “Yorkshireman”, John Noakes, to be a presenter and playing a football match in Leicester (the 1972/3 review of the year). However, it should be noticed that there are also some negative aspects of public service broadcasting, presented in “Blue Peter”, such as international wars and colonialism (Smith, 2012).

Furthermore, “Doctor Who” is another key example which tests Reithian mantra. The main character is believed to act in a paternalistic way and personify the values of Britishness. Indeed, he is a tolerant teacher, traveling through time with his companions in a blue police box (TARDIS), committed to the process of education. The story is a moral lesson about totalitarianism, which is a connotation of the Daleks (Melia, 2012). It demonstrates that all the totalitarian regimes will always destroy people who have created them, and postulates for the democracy as well as social integration. In terms of the Britishness, not only does the programme offer a historic lesson, but also highlights the technological and scientific progress. It is said that this progress began in 1953 with the New Elizabethan Age. According to Melia

(2012), “ Doctor Who”, as the science – fiction genre, “ deals quite specifically with the issues and anxieties of post war age”.

On the contrary to public service broadcasting, another significant part of broadcasting is commercial TV, represented by ITV from 1955. The creation of ITV ended the monopoly of the BBC. Commercial TV is funded by advertisers and partly subscribes the values of public service broadcasting as a condition of its existence. However, it is ideologically constructed to signify the market values and has more emphasis on entertainment rather than education. Scannel (2000) points out that ITV was often criticized for its low cultural status, lack of educational value and Americanization of British television (The Pilkington Report 1960).

Quiz shows appear to be formats, developed by commercial TV. They highlight the idea of competition for cash prizes and do not provide any self – improvement. “ Who Wants To Be A Millionaire”, as an example of a commercial quiz show, offers elements of working class entertainment and financial self betterment. On the other hand, public service broadcasting also produces game shows, but they significantly differ from commercial games. For instance, BBC`s “ Mastermind” is embedded in ideologies of building the national family. “ Mastermind” does not offer any cash prizes, but the Vase and prestige of winning the programme. The audience is invited to learn from questions, which follows Reithian mantra (Melia, 2012).

While discussing the values of public service broadcasting and commercial TV, an ideological hybrid (a combination of public service and market forces), should also be considered. Harvey (2000) says that Channel 4 was launched

in 1982, signaling the beginning of a new decade. This was related to the values of the new Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. " Channel 4 was funded by advertising, but remained part of the public service project. Written into the broadcasting act that established it was a commitment to ' innovation and experiment', and to the provision of service for minority groups" (Smith, 2012). Its aim was to promote diversity and integrate the multicultural. The coming of Channel 4 is clearly illustrated in " Desmond`s", a family comedy show that had entirely black team. This led to a discussion about the blackness in British TV, multiculturalism and integration. The programme is set in Desmond`s barbershop, a place of the cultivation of black history and tradition. The main character supports the values of the Caribbean Community, while his son, Michael, prefers European, white culture. Therefore, Desmond and his son are ideologically in a conflict. The show is produced by politics and culture of 1980s, which makes it become a " strategic polysemy". In fact, the viewer can see the relationship between the programme and affairs of 1980s, such as Thatcherism and feminism debates (Shirley`s role as a wife). In addition, 1980s can be linked to privatization, marketization and deregulation of public services, which happened under the power of Margaret Thatcher.

This paper has discussed different values of public service broadcasting and commercial TV, basing on the three main British channels: BBC, ITV and Channel 4. The analysis of several programmes has showed that all the programmes are shaped by history, culture and values of particular channels. Although public service broadcasting and commercial TV appear to

be contrasting in many aspects, there are elements of public service in all types of broadcasting.

Biography

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