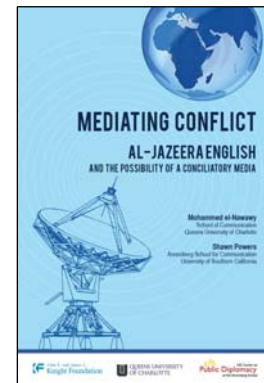


Mohammed el-Nawawy and Shawn Powers, **Mediating Conflict: Al-Jazeera English and the Possibility of a Conciliatory Media**, Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2008, 93 pp. Available at: <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/projects/AJERP%20el%20Nawawy%20&%20Powers%20Nov%205.2.pdf>

Reviewed by
Tawakalitu T. Balogun
University of Southern California



Mohammed el-Nawawy and Shawn Powers' *Mediating Conflict: Al-Jazeera English and the Possibility of a Conciliatory Media* focuses on the Middle East's first global English language news channel and its conciliatory potential in international conflicts, as well as its influence on its audience and even on the Middle Eastern and U.S. governments. The two authors examine Al-Jazeera English (AJE) in conjunction with the role of satellite news in mediating today's international conflicts (p. 7). The authors note that Al-Jazeera English functions as a conciliatory medium by giving voice to the weak, voiceless, unreported, and under-reported. It covers contentious issues in a manner that leads to ways to help heal relationships in conflict and that also foster an environment more conducive to negotiation and reconciliation. AJE has emerged as a trusted reference for accessing unbiased information in today's media environment.

Mediating Conflict examines the expanded role of today's media and how new challenges relating to international relations between countries emerged. The new and increasing number of media technologies used to transmit information during conflicts has tied the news media tightly to global events. Access to global information and intense competition among news media has led to different ways in which the mass media televise international events. The 1991 Gulf War was something of a counter example. CNN dominated the coverage and was highly praised for its presentation style and live broadcast technique. Its access to U.S. military information encouraged public support of the war (p. 12). Over time, though, different news outlets began presenting international news differently, battling to control the flow of information and making it easier for the audience to find news that supports their opinions and worldviews.

Chapter 2, titled "War Journalism and a Clash of Civilizations," analyzes how a "war journalism" news style became the emblem of mass media, targeting an audience that depends on cultural, political, and historical myths to interpret international conflicts. War journalists and their audiences often develop biases and opinions toward a particular conflict. For example, during the 2003 war in Iraq, the American media relied on a narrative of the breaching of national security to justify the invasion, while Arab news broadcasters presented the invasion as another instance of Western imperialism and colonialism (p. 14). The authors argue that today's news media tend to present their news oriented toward a specific audience, especially during global conflicts.

According to el-Nawawy and Powers, the mass media play an important role in influencing public attitudes toward war and political negotiations that guide how wars are resolved, thereby creating "peace

journalism." Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick believe that peace journalism occurs in time of war, when both editors and reporters decide what news to report and how it should be reported (p. 19). Peace journalism focuses on peace and cooperation, as well as on the description and exposure of political, economic, and social violence in an existing conflict.

The concept of conciliatory media emerged because satellite news media use the war journalism style to report international conflicts, rather than employ a peace-journalism style to curb violent tensions. The writers coined the term "conciliatory media" to describe how news media cover injustices in the world, give a voice to politically under-represented groups, work toward conflict resolutions, and cite firsthand accounts from eyewitnesses in international conflicts in "covering issues of collective social importance" (p. 23). Both authors argue that, although AJE faced much controversy about its independence, the news media from the "global south" continued to act as a conciliatory media by leveraging its resources, a qualified news staff, and numerous news outlets in under-represented countries in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia, as well as its independence from geopolitics and commercial markets.

Finally, el-Nawawy and Powers explain how AJE challenges the mainstream news discourse and how its online news coverage compares to BBC World and CNN International. The authors provide a clear discussion of the news channel's main objectives, the extent to which it takes a stand when viewing the news from a southern and Muslim perspective, and how it uses a conciliatory approach in its reports. As the first English language news media to be tagged as the "voice of the voiceless," AJE challenges the dominant satellite news networks to provide the public with an alternative view of world wars. It also tries to influence the Western idea of the Arab world and represent democracy in the Middle East.

The authors provide a good introduction to how narratives play a role in the audience's understanding of international conflicts, making it easier for viewers to identify with the news media that share their worldviews and opinions. The creation of AJE created a new direction for global news and a unique style of news reporting. Their research findings were based on a cross-sectional survey of viewers from the United States, the United Kingdom, Qatar, Kuwait, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Employees of the English language news channel itself were also surveyed. Building on the results from the questionnaires and research, the authors are able to measure the cognitive dogmatism, cultural ethnocentrism, political tolerance, and civic engagement of satellite news network viewers. Powers and el-Nawawy use their data on media credibility to provide external validity of the "success or failure" of AJE. Its role as a conciliatory media helped pave the way for cooperation, negotiation, and reconciliation. Today's viewers tune into international news on AJE for affirmation, rather than for information.

It is always somewhat unfair to criticize authors for what they did not attempt to do. Nonetheless, despite its strengths, *Mediating Conflict* could have provided more evidence of Al-Jazeera English's coverage of global conflicts. Do its news reports really examine issues not covered by the other satellite news media, and are its background investigations thorough? More evidence of AJE's intensive focus on the developing world would have been welcome. Most of the authors' research questions focused on favorability toward the United States regarding its war on terror, cultural values, and war in Iraq, rather than on the public's opinion about the level of international wars coverage. Emphasis on AJE's coverage of Third World conflicts and controversial topics, and how it impacts the audience is also thin.

Still, *Mediating Conflict* is illuminating because it focuses on AJE's goals and objectives, what it represents, and why the public can count on getting real news and not just propaganda from it.