

Mapping The Al Jazeera Phenomenon Twenty Years On

Edited by

Ezzeddine Abdelmoula . Nouredine Miladi



مركز الجزيرة للدراسات
ALJAZEERA CENTRE FOR STUDIES

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This volume would not have been possible without the dedication of our contributors coming from various parts of the world. Given the tight deadlines and busy schedules during the last few months it is a truly significant accomplishment to bring this work to its final stage ready for print. So we are grateful to all our authors for their commitment and contributions which have eventually come to fruition in this distinctive volume.

The 20th anniversary of Al Jazeera's life is a significant landmark in the history of this network which started with a single satellite TV channel and has now developed into a global media phenomenon. We hope that this momentous span of twenty years is faithfully recorded in this volume, providing a valuable source for researchers, academics, educators and policy makers.

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Introduction:

Capturing the 20th Anniversary of Al Jazeera Phenomenon

Ezzeddine Abdelmoula and Nouredine Miladi

Twenty years ago, Al Jazeera inaugurated a new chapter in Arab broadcasting in a region where the media was historically under the tight control of ruling regimes. Since 1996 the broadcasting scene, as well as news reporting, have dramatically changed in the Arab World. Satellite technology followed by the development of the internet namely social media networks enabled counter hegemonic media flow to become a dominant feature. Like other parts of the world, these speedy changes have made history by reclaiming public opinion and the public sphere.

Cross boarder pan-Arab broadcasting headed by al Jazeera has also facilitated the emergence of a shared cross border Arab consciousness. Their influence cannot be missed and the increasing awareness in the Arab street about governance and the world around them has been viewed as a result of such developments. The domino effect of the Arab Spring revolutions which started off in Tunisia in December 2010 had its origin in the cultivation of Arab satellite TV in bringing viewers together in the virtual sphere and uniting their concerns/interests through investigative news reports, discussion programmes and documentaries among others.

Al Jazeera has also connected diasporic communities with their countries of origin. Arab diaspora had remained for decades in the west culturally and politically disconnected from the affairs of their

home countries. But Al Jazeera's programmes brought back people of the diaspora close to home albeit virtually. Political and human rights activists have become suddenly able to influence political processes and public opinion. The channel could not have captured all this interest had it not been for its challenging journalism culture. This success has eventually prompted various western countries to launch their own Arabic services: Al Hurra, BBC Arabic, France 24, Russia Today and Deutsche Welle among others. The objective is evidently to influence the Arab speaking market in a world dominated in large part by Al Jazeera.

Worth noting is that Al Jazeera excelled in capturing the social and political atmosphere in the Arab world. The channel would not have been top on the list of priorities of Arab viewers if it was not for its daring approach to journalism. It addressed hot issues of high concerns of the Arab street: unemployment, political and economic corruption, freedom of speech and political organisation. For instance covering the Palestinian *Intifadah* (uprising) remains one of the key areas about news reporting where Al Jazeera differs from other international broadcasters. Its narrative is one that is well-informed with historical context of a long conflict shaded by the struggle for survival under the Israeli colonisation.

The last two decades have also witnessed unprecedented turmoil in the Arab region which has shaken the very foundations of few countries. Syria, Yemen, Libya and Iraq have witnessed social and political changes unseen for over a century. Countries like Syria and Iraq are even on the verge of total disintegration, i.e. split into small regions based on ethnicity or religious sects. In this atmosphere Al Jazeera has been partly criticised for its responsiveness to rebel groups in various parts of the Arab world or sympathising with political and human rights activists. This is viewed by some as undermining its claims of impartiality and objectivity. Few of these concerns will be analysed in this book by various scholars.

If the 1990s were the CNN decade, then the last twenty years have been the Al Jazeera's decade. So far it has been brand number one in the Arab world that has earned the satisfaction of Arab audiences. What has been evident in all upheavals during the last 20 years is that any decline of Al Jazeera as a media institution would have been a decline to Arab media in general with it obfuscating of the Arab consciousness.

It certainly the case that a decisive leverage of Al Jazeera's success has been the generous financial support it receives from the Emir of Qatar. Both Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani and his successor Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani have shown unwavering backing for the network while respecting its editorial independence. However, the other significant support for the substance and growth of Al Jazeera's phenomenon has been its audiences. Al Jazeera provided a platform for Arab audiences to express their views on internal and international affairs. The possible impact of this has been putting pressure on political leaders to respond to policy change.

Furthermore the Al Jazeera phenomenon is in fact not only a reflection of a forthright leadership in Qatar who is steadfast in supporting this media enterprise without much interference in its professional conduct, but also due to the success of Al Jazeera's leadership to attract highly talented journalists from the Arab World and the West.

Through this cumulative residue of expertise Al Jazeera can be argued to have changed the rules of journalism practice around the world by introducing a fresh new culture of reporting news based on a novel understanding of impartiality, objectivity and daring reporting. It has also impacted on the global public opinion by providing alternative news reporting and analysis. What some have called the contra-flow of information has become synonymous with Al Jazeera's culture of journalism.

On a separate note, Al Jazeera has epitomized, since its appearance, a media phenomenon that has fascinated specialists in the media field. The plethora of studies, reports and MA as well as PhD theses researching Al Jazeera from various angles have become in plenty. Regardless of their conclusions vis-a-vis its performance, whether approving, skeptical or suspicious the Al Jazeera phenomenon has become a field of study in its own right.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that books are collective endeavours of an individual or a group of scholars. This shared effort in its final shape (we argue) stands as the most comprehensive volume written about the network. This volume attempts to capture the highlights of Al Jazeera's phenomenon twenty years on since its inception. It brings together key scholars and researchers in the field. But In spite of the constraints of time we attempted to encompass a wide array of academic perspectives. These standpoints reflect through their critical works the new trend of consciousness both politically and intellectually inspired by Al Jazeera effect.

The first part in this volume titled 'Al Jazeera and the Changing Arab Media Scene' addresses the significant media and communication transformations in the Arab world. This shift has become a landmark for distinguishing between two epochs in the history of Arab media: before and after Al Jazeera. After 1996 a revolution in Arab media content has taken place. This has palpable implications on Arab media and politicians in the region (Abdelmoula). Also this has signalled an increase in the benchmark of free speech, pluralism in terms of audience reception (Zran), loosening of the grip of Arab regimes on media content, increasing appearance of discussion programme which address economic corruption, unemployment, human right abuses, political participation, reforming political systems. Bu what distinguishes Al Jazeera most argues Miladi in addition to all the above taboos in Arab society has been its distinctive approach to objectivity and

impartiality in journalism practice stemming from firm rooted ethos to serve the viewer in a daring manner. The new journalism culture of Al Jazeera (Zayani) spearheaded by the channel posed a defiance to the traditional norms of reporting the world in global news works.

These transformations in the Arab media scene have their social reverberations and unmissable political ramifications. Part two titled: ‘Changing Media... Changing Politics’ accounts for the perceived effects of Al Jazeera in this area. Worthy of a note here, to avoid possible exaggeration, is that there has been a long tradition of political activism in the Arab region which paved the way to loosening the grip of Arab regimes on power in different contexts (Yahyaoui). The relationship between the Arab Spring revolutions and Al Jazeera is a distinctive relationship’ argues Mabrouki. It has facilitated the existence of this thriving public sphere. This evolving social arena became the embodiment of an increasing awareness that overwhelmed the Arab street vis-à-vis human rights, free speech, democratic reform, fighting corruption and overall releasing public frustration.

In addition to the above mentioned social and political impacts, Al Jazeera has earned overwhelming interest in the world of academic research. Part three from this book titled ‘Al Jazeera in Academia’ discusses about one hundred most significant works on Al Jazeera network. These publications range between books, book chapters and research papers in refereed academic journals in various languages. Interest in Al Jazeera argues Powers ‘was driven in large part by an effort to better understand and explain the network’s significance in shaping political discourse in the Middle East. Compounding this curiosity is the fact that Al Jazeera operates at the intersection of a number of fields of study, including media industries, journalism, public diplomacy, and deliberative democracy, to name a few’. Attention is paid to the extent to which how research on Al Jazeera has contributed to building empirically grounded theories of global

media (and mediated politics), as well as how the research contributes to building improved methods for studying global media organizations.

Part four of this book 'Al Jazeera: An Innovative Approach to Professional Journalism' highlights examples from both Al Jazeera Arabic and Al Jazeera English in terms of their editorial policy which has made its content distinctive. Figenschou analyses professional journalism by addressing aims, strategies and dilemmas in Al Jazeera English's news production. She challenges the binary models of 'alternative' versus 'mainstream' journalism, representing a professionalized Southern alternative model. An editorial line which Al Jazeera defends through investing in local reporters in reporting events. In her chapter Figenschou also questions the motto of 'Voice of the Voiceless' and the extent to which Al Jazeera opened up its platforms to marginalised voices and regions around the world.

Among the often marginalised voices in Arab media are women. Have women issues and women journalists found a platform in Al Jazeera to express their concerns and take part in this thriving media sphere? Hussain looks at the Representation of Women and their Role in the Public Domain on Al Jazeera. She analyses two of women's programmes *For Women Only* and *Pioneers*. Hussain highlights through these two programmes the gender presence and influence of women in Al Jazeera network.

This approach is followed by an attempt by Erraji to focus on a rather significant angle of Al Jazeera effect which is based on an epistemological approach. He considers Al Jazeera to be representing a new trend of thought and a novel discourse which helps viewers to better understand what happens around them. Also it provides audiences a news lens to deconstruct the media message through Al Jazeera's focus on reference to historical, cultural and political contexts.

Attempting to understand Al Jazeera's audience has been dealt with in part 5 titled 'Mapping Al Jazeera's Global Audience'. Al

Jazeera overtook other Arab broadcasters due to its unconventional journalism practice (Shigenobu). It was its stance of bold journalism that won Al Jazeera the Arab audiences' hearts and minds while other regional global broadcasters have lost their credibility especially during the last decade of covering major wars and conflicts in the region such as the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Bridges).

Also Al Jazeera succeeded in outreaching to the Arab diaspora mainly in Europe and USA (Hamidou). With the commercialization of Arabic television in the 1990s, and the growth of satellite television, a pan-Arab audience has emerged and changed the way that media programmers, advertisers and politicians conceived of the Arab audience. The multi-channel environment via satellite that followed Al Jazeera has expanded the choice of Arab viewers despite the tight governmental controls on what can be broadcast on local terrestrial services.

Eventually, the last part of this book looks at the 'Future of Al Jazeera and the Arab Media'. Contrary to what has been argued by some that social media networks are overtaking the production and circulation of news hence attracting more audiences, Seib argues that the Al Jazeera audience will further grow based on the ethos that Al Jazeera has established. Although the turmoil taking place in the Arab region will remain a challenge for Arab media networks in terms of abiding by the standards of journalism ethics, and remain free from political influence (Mellor) it will also remain a possible source of excellence to channels like Al Jazeera in reporting the complexities of what is taking place in the region.

On a final note Douai proposes a significant look at the Al Jazeera's future by considering that the network's role in covering and cheering the "Arab Spring" revolutions constituted a natural progression and consequence of its capitalization on new media's convergence with traditional mass media. Al Jazeera's future popularity according to him will 'remain contingent upon its

innovation and embrace of the new hybrid media ecological system in which technology, political activism and networked Arab publics have converged’.

Part I

Al Jazeera and the Changing Arab Media Scene

Al Jazeera as a Landmark for Arab Media Development

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Introduction

Media scholars may considerably differ over Arab media performance and the nature of its relation to politics, power and the general public. But they all certainly agree on the media transformation in the last two decades vis-à-vis its content, type of funding and ownership.

This transformation of the last two decades has not been accidental, but there is a conscious linkage between its “occurrence” and the “event” of launching Al Jazeera Satellite Channel in mid-1990s. Such association proves the validity of the widespread perception on Arab media history: “Before and after Al Jazeera”.

In order to grasp the nature and depth of the said transformation, it is worth discussing the Arab media scene before the emergence of satellite TV broadcasting. By then, media outlets across the Arab World were part and parcel of an overall control system and an indulgent tool for the Arab despotic regimes. The media have largely been a reflection of the ruling regimes’ policies and vision. The few national media outlets such as terrestrial TV channels, radio stations or the press were sponsored or indirectly controlled by governments.

After the advent of TV satellite broadcasting in early 1990s, the media scene began to gradually change till the inception of Al

Jazeera. The impact of this new channel, coupled with the speedy transformation in communication technologies, has brought the region into a new media era.

This chapter analyses the crucial role played by Al Jazeera in influencing the Arab media scene in the last 20 years. It will be split into three parts: (1) Characteristics of Arab media before 1996. (2) The Aljazeera effect, its context and implications on Arab media. (3) Aljazeera's impact on Arab politics.

Characteristics of Arab media before 1996The significance of Arab media transformation has been effectively manifested by the notion that we can now look at a preceding and outgoing media phase. From the outset, we should note here that the said media transformation has not eliminated the entire practices, relations or the structure that had governed Arab media in the past.

However it is worth noting that the new pattern of behaviour is not entirely different and dissociated from Arab media past. The Arab media past and present are interconnected while many aspects of that past are still prevailing in a number of Arab countries. What is meant by transformation here is that the last two decades have been marked with the emergence of a new Arab media pattern that contradicts past experiences. Within only a few years, the said pattern has turned into a general trend in which TV channels, radio stations and the press competed for reaching out to a new popular base that is far diverse from that of the past decades.

The new media outlets keep competing for delivering political and ideological messages across borders and "sovereignities" that bear different perceptions due to interaction with several factors, on top of which is the globalization trend. If Aljazeera is the launching pad for this transformation, the developments that followed, particularly in the field of information technology, communications and social media networks have widened the discrepancy between the old and the new media environment.

The general features of Arab media before Aljazeera can be summarised into four basic areas: (1) Subordination of the media to the ruling regimes. (2) Broadcasting services in the absence of recipients. (3) The unilateral message and the lack of fair competition. (4) Strength and weakness of the media and the state.

Subordination of the media to ruling regimes:

1 - With the exception of Europe-based newspapers (such as Al-Hayat, Al-Sharq al-Awsat, Al-Quds Al-Arabi) which enjoy relative freedom and opportunity to interact with the international press in large capitals such as London and Paris, all types of Arab media outlets have been closely revolving around ruling regimes. The ownership pattern is largely similar in different Arab countries where governments own media organizations and provide direct funding or indirectly by allocating public advertising opportunities. Such ownership and funding would end up in censorship and control on media content and priorities, along with selective recruitment policies to ensure editorial staff leniency and commitment to the government's policies.

This type of relations between the ruling regimes and the media in its three-pronged dimension (ownership, funding, and sponsorship) would be clearly reflected on the shape of the news story, its importance and its order of merit in the news bulletin. The media thus follows the ruler, covers his movements, improves his image and focuses on his achievements. The importance of the news story is always determined by the importance of the "official" and his position in the ruling hierarchy. News stories focus on president or leader as a priority, followed by the prime minister, ministers and top undersecretaries. What remains in the news story is used for covering the ruling regime's achievements and those of other senior officials. Under such overwhelming media presence of the ruling regimes, ordinary citizens would become entirely voiceless.

2 - Broadcasting Without Recipients

One of the results of a centralized Arab media message by the state before launching Al Jazeera is the absence of ordinary citizens from the limelight of Arab news coverage and programmes. Such absence has been exhibited in several aspects, on top of them:

- The full absence of ordinary citizens' concerns along with the effective marginalization of their serious demands such as economic development, freedom and power sharing. The structure of the news stories and the way they are displayed, is based on a vision that makes the state the centre for action and news coverage. As for ordinary citizens, they get neglected and entirely deprived of their share in the national media coverage. Their only value is vested in their position as media output recipients.
- Parallel to this marginalization on the Arab media coverage, poor images, in most cases distorted ones used to be displayed on print media depicting trifles as accidents, deaths and court proceedings. If the editorial policy allows covering certain incidents in specific occasions, such as protests and social or other functions, the persons who take part would be presented as rioters, anarchists or terrorists who have been misled or brainwashed.
- This brand of unilateral media coverage has resulted in the absence of interaction by the public, besides the stereotyping of the image of negative or "missing" media recipients. If the dominant editorial policy had played a major role in blocking recipients from the Arab media scene in the past, the limited number of interactive technology means, had also played their role in minimizing opportunities for "Arab masses" in creating a public opinion over media output.
- Under such discouraging media environment, Arab citizens and their cultural and political elites have found that foreign

media were better alternatives for receiving information and following up regional and world news.

Large segments of the Arab audiences used to listen to the BBC Arabic Radio programme “Huna London”, French “Monte Carlo”, the German “Deutsche Welle” and “Voice of America”.

In what appears to be like a media refuge, Arab elites sought the news about the Arab region on the “BBC”, then later on the “CNN”. The Egyptian writer Fahmi Howeidy captured this era when he said, “As regards important events, or even important ideas, I used to follow up news bulletins, reports and talk shows broadcast by British and US TV channels”. (Howeidy 2007: 151).

3 - The third feature of the Arab media scene before Al Jazeera has been the unilateral message and the absence of fair competition. The official media outlets, largely represented by TV and radio corporations and few local papers, used to rely on the same sources and released the same messages. This is a common feature of every government-sponsored media where “governmental” issues precede “public” concerns. This is not only because of the ownership, funding and sponsorship elements, but also because of the absence of the “public” concept and the public service culture.

Even media organizations which appear to be independent in funding and management, in most cases their message would be compatible with that of the official media organizations.

The second aspect of such compatibility and its reflection of a single attitude and point of view is the absence of diversity and fair competition in the media market.

The multiple numbers of print media for instance is in fact a multiplicity of copies, not of diverse visions that reflect the social,

political and cultural reality. Under this kind of monotony and the absence of fair competition that may pave the way for possible alternatives, the incidence of a real development in the Arab media field, was far beyond expectations.

4 - The last feature of that phase which ended up with launching Al Jazeera was the compatible power to influence the state and its media outlets. There is ample historical evidence which confirms that the power or weakness of the state is derived from the power or weakness of its media influence. The rise of states and empires, meanwhile, would usually be reflected in their media performance.

This was clearly reflected by the British and the French empires in the 19th Century and was noted to continue with the US domination in the 20th Century. The Arab world has followed the same model when Egypt's "*Sawt al-Arab*" radio station during the 1950s and 1960s portrayed a vivid example of this type of compatibility (al-Ahmad 2011). The Egyptian radio station had acquired its strength and influence from that of the Egyptian state in that period along with its outstanding influence across the Arab world and the region.

Contrary to the above, Aljazeera has introduced a new model for strong media performance that crossed its Arab and regional neighbourhood by reaching the international realm, despite its emergence from within a tiny state like Qatar. It has changed our perception of the meaning of power and its uses and has proved that influence could be detached from solid power if it was based on a sharp vision. It appears that this has occurred with Aljazeera when "vision replaced power", as stated by Mohammad Hassanain Heikal (2007: 125).

Aljazeera: Context and Implications on the Arab Media

Al Jazeera has not emerged as a natural development in the context of Arab media as we have previously stated, but has come as an unexpected event resembling “a stone thrown into the Arab media murky waters”, an expression quoted by journalist Salama Ahmed Salama (Negus 2001), or like a seed planted in the middle of a desert (Miles 2005).

This is why the reaction over its launching was marked with tension, alarm and misunderstanding at both official and political levels. Contrary to the widespread welcome shown by Arab viewers who kept yearning for an alternative Arab media, many Arab governments have cast doubts on the channel’s mission and have even fabricated stories about its establishment, its connections and its “suspicious” agenda (Ghareeb 2000: 409-410). Some Western politicians reacted in the same way and even more sharply when they accused the channel of propagating incitement, terrorism, nationalistic and religious extremism, anti-Semitism and anti-Western sentiments (Lynch 2005: 36-45).

Some explanatory elements for the emergence of Al Jazeera could be found in the State of Qatar in mid-1990s of the last century, both at the level of internal policy when a new leadership that took over power, had a different perception of the role to be played by Qatar along with its policies inside and outside its contentious regional parameters (Powers 2009: 87). There are other factors that made the launching of Al Jazeera a media event with landmark implications that have overstepped its role as a TV news channel. Some of these factors are closely related to the Arab media and the political environment; others belong to the nature of the unprecedented content broadcast by the channel that attracted transnational viewers after sidestepping narrow nationalistic tendencies.

The 1990s’ decade began with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait that resulted in dividing Arab ranks and causing a second war in the Gulf. While the US forces and its allies were stationed in the region in

preparation for war, the CNN TV staff and satellite equipment for news broadcasting were stationed in Baghdad as well for directly airing live events.

As the second Gulf war had exalted the pioneer role of CNN in the area of live news coverage, it has also reaffirmed the pivotal role that satellite TV channels can play in propagating a “specific story” about the war, broadcast via selective news parameters to ensure that public opinion would be developed accordingly.

At the Arab level, the second Gulf war and the accompanying rise of the CNN and its serious influence (Livingstone 1997) had created an urgent need among Arab countries for developing their own global media outlets, whether for justifying their attitudes over the war, or for promoting their visions on internal and foreign policies.

After the end of the war, competition became high for launching Arab satellite TV channels by governments and the private sector. Then the frequency of change in the Middle Eastern media scene began to intensify, including capacity expansions of satellite channels directed to the region, a huge rise in the number of TV channels, coupled with a similar growth in the number of viewers (Saqr 2001: 11).

It was true that the media field grew sharply at the level of TV satellite broadcasting in the first half of the 1990s, but the rise was simply quantitative rather than qualitative. Most TV channels launched at that time were government-sponsored which changed their land-based airing into satellite TV broadcasting. For instance, between 1990 to 1996, Egypt, Kuwait, the UAE (Dubai), Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Lebanon, Sudan, Yemen, Bahrain, Tunisia and Libya launched their Satellite TV services. Alongside these government-sponsored channels some private channels and networks were also launched (such as Orbit, ART, MBC, Future) which air mainly entertainment programmes.

Amid this politically changing and crowded regional media environment, Al Jazeera was launched. The channel rapidly proved its uniqueness and diversity from other channels when it turned in a very short time into a “phenomenal” media outlet, as branded by Zayani (2006). The new channel attracted scholars and researchers from across the world (Abdelmoula and Nasr 2013). The research work was mainly directed to the content of Al Jazeera media output which is viewed as its major turning point and an element of its uniqueness and distinction.

The first distinction attributed to Al Jazeera, compared to other Arab satellite TV channels, was its focus on news broadcasting and the live talk show programmes. Its news content from the beginning has been different from what Arab viewers used to watch. The channel has changed the order of its news bulletin priorities by placing ordinary people and events on its top priority and relegating government officials to the sidelines of its priority list. The value of a news story will determine its position in the news bulletins, irrespective of any other factors.

This new trend on the news airing by Al Jazeera could not be reached had it not been for the nature of the relation between the channel and the host state which provides the necessary funding. This relation is entirely different from the norm of relations prevailing between Arab countries and their news media outlets operating within state borders.

The said relation is the second element for distinction enjoyed by the channel including an unprecedented level of freedom that enabled its newsroom to determine its priorities, and to control its news agenda and programmes in full independence from any external authority. The State that hosts the channel has decided, since its inception, not to interfere with its affairs. This attitude has been motivated by the perception that any interference would strip the channel of its distinct role by turning it into a mere figure on the Arab

TV channels' list which fills the stratosphere without producing anything useful on the ground.

This level of freedom, which is lacking in other Arab media outlets, has surprised many observers, including those coming from the most renowned international media organizations such as the BBC (Al-Qasim 2005: 93-104); Krishan 2007: 61). This degree of freedom has enabled Al Jazeera producers to succeed in covering the news with no official censorship by the authorities or pressure exerted by advertising privileges. The channel's news coverage has been much closer to the ordinary citizens' concerns and those of the Arab public concerns and grievances.

The third element behind the added value achieved by the emergence of Al Jazeera is represented by the combination of freedom in covering the news and the high degree of courage in discussing current issues in its live talk shows such as "al-Ittijah al-Muaakis" (Opposite Direction), "More than one view" and "Bila Hudood", (Across the Borders). These programmes have their open platforms for debating issues that used to be forbidden on Arab media outlets, such as corruption, dictatorship, personal liberties, women's rights, political power sharing, accountability and relations with Israel.

The channel has often hosted public figures that used to be denied access to media coverage or openly expressing their views and attitudes, such as political opposition figures, social and civil rights activists, minorities' representatives and those facing social and political marginalization.

More ordinary people have been hosted by the channel for taking part in public discussions and live interaction with guests in debating controversial issues.

Queries and comments cast by respondents raising accusations and sometimes sharp criticism to the authorities, used to be broadcast live on air without any censorship or supervision. For many years, Al

Jazeera channel has allocated an open programme for the public without guests or preplanned agenda, titled “Al Jazeera Platform”.

The widespread viewership attracted by Al Jazeera channel, have become an effective body that suggests topics for debate, puts pressure on governments, and exercise vigilance over government operations. This blend of professionalism combined with boldness in discussing issues under high levels of freedom, is the secret behind the recipe for Al Jazeera’s success. The channel has thus retrieved the alienated viewers who were forced to seek foreign media outlets, as well as attracting Arab immigrants in Western Europe and the USA for reintegrating them once more into their countries and their original cultural heritage.

Aljazeera’s Impact on Media and Politics

Probably, no media organization in history has ever gained such media, political and academic acclaim as accorded to Al Jazeera Media Network. Hundreds of research papers have been prepared about the channel across the world, in different languages. This has been motivated by the “Al Jazeera phenomenon” that has maintained its overwhelming global impact.

This impact was manifested in the Arab media which has experienced new media practices that appeared to be peculiar in the first instance, such as those mentioned above, including live and bold political talk shows, news coverage that focuses on ordinary citizens and their grievances, rather than the ruling regime and their policies. Other new practices involve on live and extended field news coverage, thanks to the proliferation of Al Jazeera correspondents and bureaus in around 50 countries which help produce accurate, rapid and credible news coverage. The new practices have also paved the way for open competition resulting in launching numerous Arab language news channels based in the region such as the Saudi Al-Arabiya channel or others based in other parts of the world such as

France 24, US's Al-Hurra, the BBC Arabic, Germany's Deutsche Welle, Russia's al-Yom and China's CCTV.

Even government owned TV channels that have been abandoned by their viewers began developing their media content and changed their news and programmes display in an attempt to cope with the rapid changes in the Arab media field. Since the launching of Al Jazeera, the resulting competition and its subsequent new regional impact, has paved the way for Arab viewers in diversifying their options on the freedom of choice among an unprecedented variety of programmes at all local, regional and international media outlets. This has helped creating a new political awareness in the region (Lynch 2005: 40).

That cultural-political element in the Aljazeera media content and other TV news channels that emerged under the Al Jazeera spell (Seib 2008), has created a base for an enlightenment among very wide public stratum that has its influence on the Arab political field. The exchange of influence between the media and politics, on which many articles were written, we see in the Arab region an applied model case (Abdelmoula 2012).

What the Arab world has experienced from political change propelled by the so-called "Arab Spring" is not dissociated from the deep changes that hit the media field since the mid-1990s. The "new Arab masses" as branded by Lynch (2005) that had effected redeployment across the borders of the "nationalistic state," was engaged for several years in an open discussion on its political affairs, has acquired an open armed protest awareness via revealing the magnitude of repression and corruption that used to be concealed by the former media organizations. The "new masses" which have liberated themselves from government control and censorship on media news and information have been in the middle of the Arab Spring revolutions. These new masses have used Al Jazeera platform, of which they are fully aware and confident, has added a new experience in dealing with communications technology and the social communications networks.

If attributing the political change that prevailed in the region for the last six years to Al Jazeera and other media outlets would be viewed as an exaggeration and misinformation, denying this role or demeaning it, would be incredible as well. The new political awareness that kept growing within the few past years, could not have been quickly transformed into a social protest movement, unless free media platforms led by Al Jazeera, were readily available.

Such protest movements that broke out locally, could not have proliferated at the national, then regional levels, unless it found an open platform in the media that would convey its image and voice to the world.

Conclusion

The change experienced by Arab media since the inception of Al Jazeera, could be deep and influential as cited earlier, though the Arab media is not all Al Jazeera. The resistance against change is still embraced by many media organizations as well as haunting the minds of many politicians in the region. Despite the fact that inter-relations between the political field and the Arab new media field have experienced significant transformations, there are still upcoming changes, neither the range of which, nor the nature of their impact on the media and politics, could be anticipated.

On the one hand, the integration between the conventional and the electronic and digital media is still in its early stages, despite the huge and rapid developments taking place. These developments indicate that a hybrid media environment that would look entirely different from what we have known nowadays is in the making. On the other hand, the motion of political change witnessed by the Arab World is still in its early years.

Whether we looked into the future from the angle of either media or politics, or the relation between them, expanding the area of cohesion between the two fields, along with intensifying interaction

between them, would bring more change and more uncertainty at the same time. The impact of political change on the media in some Arab Spring countries for instance, is not less significant than the impact of the media on the political field.

The experience gained in the last six years has indicated that the tendency for an open political field towards more democracy and political partnership would also push the media organizations towards more diversity and vigor. Such change could affect the domination by Arab and regional satellite industry on the media networks, on top of them Al Jazeera channel. The dose of freedom channeled by the Arab Spring into the Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan, and Yemeni media organizations, has freed these organizations from many restrictions that used to impede their performance in the past. That dose of freedom made them more daring in handling people's grievances and debating public affairs. Moreover, this was notably reflected on the freedom of choice availed to viewers in these countries, whereby Al Jazeera, Al-Arabiya or France 24 TV channels no longer enjoy absolute priority, particularly with respect to covering local news.

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Perceptions of Al Jazeera: Pluralism, reception and the public sphere

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Introduction

The launch of Al Jazeera, which provoked and still provokes an unprecedented debate in Arab media, announced the birth of the question of reception by an Arab viewership as an entry point to the question of the emergence of mass public opinion. When we raise this problematic on an intellectual level, we face the question of pluralism as one of the most important manifestations of public debate carried out by the elite through the means of mass communication. After the emergence of Al Jazeera satellite channel in 1996, most Arab regimes have realized that their elites, together with the general population, were ‘betraying’ them under their very noses and watching Al Jazeera without ‘permission’. They had thought that the public, or the “eternal nation”, were loyal to them, obedient, their subconscious shaped by decades of consuming a single, uniform media message that they believed represented a pure and patriotic discourse.

The birth of Al Jazeera, which media and communications specialists in the Arab world have incorrectly called “an intellectual experiment”, could represent a new gateway to tracing the development of television viewership in the Arab world. The Al Jazeera phenomenon has become an area of competing interest by

researchers in the West, whose contents are closely analyzed by Western decision-makers (Ezzeddine Abdelmoula, 2011). Al Jazeera has become a measure for understanding public opinion and the political concerns of the “Arab street” and the mentality of Arab citizens and their psyche in many research centers. In the past, Western politicians did not give much importance to Arab media, which could be described as state or presidential media. However, with the rise of Al Jazeera and the emergence of a new type of viewership, it appears that the West pays significant attention to the structuring of Arab media, training of journalists and the teaching of journalism to Arab students and establishment of partnerships (American Program to Promote Media in North Africa and the Middle East, known as MEPI, under the supervision of the US State Department, and other programs funded by the European Union). Before Al Jazeera channel, understanding the functioning of Arab regimes was enough to understand their media. However, after 1996 Arab media outputs gradually began to go beyond the perspectives of political power and citizens began to be exposed to more than one discourse, internal or newcomer, driven by new technologies that were difficult to control, which called for greater monitoring, both on the research and political levels.

If we consider the process of communication as more than merely the availability of communication means and their variety, we can make an important assumption that we theoretically cannot speak about Arab media without mentioning the Arab viewer receiving multi-content media messages. It is as if the new Arab media, theoretically and in its modern form, has become more prominent with Al Jazeera due to the fact that Al Jazeera introduced viewers to new elements - a plurality of discourses and issues around which national public debate has become possible, such as local public affairs, political pluralism, resistance, foreign intervention, the opposition and freedom. This is evidenced by Al Jazeera's impact on

the Arab media landscape, the Arab state system and relations between the West and the Arab world.

There have been hundreds of complaints against Al Jazeera, mostly from Arab states, with many going so far as to ban the channel from broadcasting. Al Jazeera's presence has also provoked sharp political and diplomatic crises, with the withdrawal of ambassadors and the imprisoning and targeting of the channel's journalists. These events have been dealt with not as a media issue but more as political crises within the framework of ideology or conspiracy theory.

We make these statements far from the emotional and ideological discourse prevalent in cafes, workplaces and seminars and recounted by intelligence services about Al Jazeera and its pros and cons. Such discourse is far from scientific research and corresponds more to a conspiratorial and ideological discourse, which has lured many elites to fall into its trap. If this ideological and conspiratorial discourse seeks to analyze, it should adopt a scientific approach to framing Al Jazeera as a media source with its own message and audience.

To reject Al Jazeera is to reject the viewer in the communication process and prohibiting the broadcasting of Al Jazeera is also a ban on television not only as a means of communication but as the first mass communication means for decades and as a common public communicative platform contributing to the legitimation of difference and the formation of the public sphere. Approaching Al Jazeera as a matter of being either with or against the channel is a misguided approach intellectually and cognitively because it means rejecting or accepting television or rejecting the most important means of mass communication in shaping public opinion.

This hypothesis requires us to trace the history of television's emergence in Arab countries, the political, economic and cultural context that catalyzed this, and the controversy it sparked between opponents and supporters, which went so far as the issuing of fatwas

labeling it a non-accepted innovation (*bid'a*), a tool of Western invasion and a device to corrupt society. It seems that Arabs have dealt with television as they want it to be and not as a communication phenomenon in which the viewer is one of the main elements, having his own opinions independent of opinion makers, which must emerge one day despite all attempts to suppress them and manipulate them for personal, political, sectarian or technical purposes.

When Al Jazeera appeared, and with it came a new type of viewer, many Arab states discovered that another type of television, different from national state television, could be initiated. The most serious challenge it posed, intellectually, was the potential of this new television from abroad to attract domestic viewers and provide them with representations that differ from the usual representations of their political reality. Through our analysis of how all actors dealt with Al Jazeera at the national level, we can understand how some Arab regimes individually and separately deal with local television.

This research addresses all of these interrelations produced by Al Jazeera since its launch up until the start of the Arab Spring and tries to answer the following question: to what extent did Al Jazeera contribute to the elaboration of a new Arab media based on the principle of pluralism, the role of the elite and the presence of the viewer? This will be examined through an analysis of the following themes:

- Al Jazeera, the new Arab media and the nature of their relationship
- Arab media and Al Jazeera: from identity to development to pluralism
- Al Jazeera, pluralism and the silent majority
- The elite, Al Jazeera and the public sphere
- Al Jazeera's viewership

1. Al Jazeera and the New Arab Media

The new Arab media is mainly found today on digital media, particularly the Internet and Social Media Networks, although this is an optimistic statement, intellectually and technically. The new media is new content in new packaging - this is how we define new media. New media is not only new on the technical level but its novelty lies also in the ideas it carries and the new formats that are likely to have a sociological impact on society. Despite the presence of social media expressions in the Arab Spring mobilizations in 2011, and the entry of this term into elitist academic and media discourse, we affirm that social media and their networks are only one of the outcomes of new media and its manifestations (Zran 2015).

If we follow the emergence of the signs of new media in the Arab world, it was - before the internet - closely associated with the phenomenon of cable television technologies that emerged in the early nineties and boosted by the launch of the private satellite channel Al Jazeera in 1996. This is on the technological level; concerning the content, satellite channels and especially Al Jazeera introduced new content to the Arab public crystallized in the phenomenon of reception, pluralism, the elite and the public sphere (Dahlgren et al. 1994). The emergence of new cable television has allowed a new type of reception to emerge, a new pluralism different from the mainstream, and especially a new Arab elite, part of which is traditionally supportive of the ruling regimes and another part politically and intellectually in opposition to it.

Al Jazeera, followed by other Arab and Western channels, has opened the public space to Arab viewers to find something different on television from local state television. They have found a new television with new content, presenting differences of opinion in society and putting forward new faces other than the redundant prevailing names from the Arab official regime in each country. The television set has changed, as have the broadcasting tools, not in

search of novelty in broadcasting techniques but rather new content through broadcasting techniques. The latter are only gateways to more pluralistic content and the production of a new elite and have produced a new form of reception, which can be seen in the transfer of what is reported in television shows today to public debate in cafes, councils or governing institutions, or even in the corridors of international relations.

Many Arab public and private channels raced to embrace cable television since 1990 - the year the Egyptian cable television was launched, followed by the launch in 1991 of the first private Arab satellite channel MBC. This new broadcasting outlet did not produce new outputs apart from some leisure and entertainment programs, advertising and more elaborate production, scenery and presentation (Guaaybess 2005). It was necessary to wait until 1996 for Al Jazeera to emerge and utilize the same technology available to other Arab private and public channels to offer the Arab viewer high quality media and journalistic content presented by a distinguished intellectual, cultured journalistic elite with new production, all within a framework of debate and diversity.

Table: Sample of some Arab public and private cable TV channels starting dates: 1989 to 1996 (the date of the launch of Al Jazeera)

Channel	Date of satellite broadcast	Country	Public Private	Specialization
Channel 2	March 1989	Morocco	Private then public	General
Egyptian Channel	December 1990	Egypt	Public	General
MBC	End of 1991	London	Private	General (Entertainment and Drama)
Kuwait Television	October 1992	Kuwait	Public	General
Dubai Television	October 1992	Dubai	Public	General
Jordanian Television	January 1993	Amman	Public	General
Moroccan Television	March 1993	Casa Blanca	Public	General
Future TV	September 1993	Lebanon Beirut	Public	General
ORBIT TV	1994	London	Private	Entertainment
ART Arab Radio and Television	January 1994	Roma	Private	General
Syrian Television	6 January 1995	Damascus	Public	General
Sudan Television	November 1995	Khartoum	Public	General
Yemeni Television	November 1995	Aden	Public	General
LBC	April 1996	Lebanon Beirut	Private	General
Bahrain TV	September 1996	Qatar	Public	News
Al Jazeera	November 1996	Manama	Public	General
TV7 previously and national Tunisian TV currently	9 December 1996	Tunis	Public	General
Libya TV	9 December 1996	Tripoli	Public	General

The table above shows us that most local channels preceded Al Jazeera in satellite television broadcasting and their programs were available to all the Arab public. Satellite broadcasting was a new technology adopted by existing channels, so the names of the channels were simply changed from, for example, the Moroccan or Tunisian channel to the Moroccan or Tunisian or Egyptian satellite channel. We did not witness a radical change in the content of these channels. Instead, satellite television gave national channels the opportunity to further instill the same one-sided discourse they had promoted for decades and even to seek greater legitimacy with foreign public opinion, especially among diaspora communities in Europe or America. We find this model in North African, Egyptian and Lebanese private channels. Thus, new media is not only a technology but a combination of technology, content and new visions in which Al Jazeera was a pioneer. What was important in the Al Jazeera project was not the technical or financial value but political values, as argued by Guaaybess (2005).

2. Arab Media and Al Jazeera Channel: From identity to the development of pluralism

A quick scrutiny of the literature on information and communication sciences in the West and especially in the United States, unveils a special relationship between communication in its abstract theoretical sense, and its practical and functional manifestations. The media has been used to push for progress in development and civilization. Some studies seek to determine the nature of society in view of the relationship between development and communication and the process of transition from "traditional" society to "modern" society and that it is not possible for developing or traditional societies to advance other than by taking inspiration from and following the Western model (Matlar et al. 2006: 112). The period after the Second World War, which was characterized by the

division of the world into two opposing camps of East and West, witnessed a new trend in Western communication studies introducing the vocabulary of international media and international relations to promote modernization theory. This theory was revived after the events of September 11, 2001 and the war on Iraq using the concept of democracy, which cannot be exported without the media.

Based on the above, the major stages experienced by the Arab media can be divided into three phases summarized as follows: (1) pre-independence, (2) construction of the modern state, also called post-independence nation state or as termed by some Arab intellectuals, the regional state, (3) finally the stage of globalization or the post-Cold War phase characterized by transnational and transcontinental cable television and the multiplicity of its messages and weakness of the national state (Zran 2007: 256). The pre-colonial phase can be described as that of oral media and the written press. Television had not yet entered Arab countries and radio was under the control of colonial authorities and its broadcast was limited and irregular. Only the written press had taken root in the cultural and intellectual heritage of traditional elites to produce trends and currents to address the other and demand national rights and independence through the local press in Arabic or the language of the colonizer. The main media messages, embodied in the press, were focused on identity, with the defense of Arab-Islamic identity as its main slogan.

The press was then in the service of the national cause, namely, reform and liberation. The main slogan was a call for a conscious media committed to the demands raised by liberationist and reformist movements in most Arab colonized countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Tunisia, etc.). The Arab journalistic experience during the colonial period was significantly influenced by the behavior and ethics of the local colonial press and the press in the colonizing country (France, England, Italy, etc.). Despite all the constraints imposed on the Arab press, it remained pluralistic in terms of political orientation and

intellectual tendencies and was influenced by liberal colonial journalism. In the colonial era, there were trade unionist, communist, Islamic and a few liberal newspapers in addition to few newspapers representing the interests of colonial settlers. All these nuances were a reflection of the colonial press. It could be argued, for example, that the golden era of Maghreb journalism was during the rule of the leftist Popular Front, which rose to power in France in 1936. However, this relative pluralism would not leave any trace in several Arab states after independence. We shall examine why this was the case.

With the independence of most Arab countries, the construction of the state rose as a central and paramount slogan beyond dispute. That cause became entrenched in most countries based on a consensus among the elite, the aristocracy and of course the ruling circles (the party, family, clan, king, armed forces, etc.). No one was able to challenge the push for state-building after the struggle for independence and expulsion of the colonizer. State-building was embodied exclusively in development projects in education, the national economy, sovereign management of agricultural production, building the army and strengthening national unity through national identity. The mission of the media, which was of paramount importance in that critical phase of the history of the Arab world, was to contribute to the development process, one of the battles of the modern state and the most important pillar for building a free and developed society. The only obstacle to building a modern and contemporary state was colonialism, and achieving it was only a matter of time given the end of colonialism. We were all required to be on the same side and to reject any one who wanted to cause disagreement in the name of such causes as party pluralism, diversity and democracy. These would only distract us from state-building and achieving development and transformation into an advanced country. However, these noble aims and the role given to the media could not

be fulfilled by the new post-independence state because they did not have the communication and media infrastructure required. The apparent consensus was nothing but media propaganda and cover for state repression.

Decades after independence, everyone can see that the development project has failed. The question posed now is, why have we failed? The signs of failure appeared with the setback in 1967 with the rise in unemployment rates, which propelled masses of young people to emigrate to the West. This was in addition to the absence of infrastructure, the spread of rampant bribery, nepotism, political and economic corruption and misuse of public money. A consensus has developed that social and economic development have no future in the absence of reform of the political process - meaning democracy - via transfer of power through political participation. However, this political participation cannot be achieved and guaranteed in the absence of democratic spaces for free expression, which are called in democratic countries means of mass communication. Means of mass communication are not available in most Arab countries, and if available, are merely propaganda channels for the Baath Party or the Liberation Front or the ruling family. In practice, we cannot speak of means of mass communication in the absence of pluralism in the ownership of those means and pluralism in the speech produced by these institutions. We say this despite the winds of change in Eastern Europe with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, while the Arab region remained excluded from democracy, pluralism and public freedoms (Kent **et al.** 2005).

One of the basic characteristics of mass communication is the ability to send a heterogeneous message because the audience does not have uniform ideas and visions about the management of public affairs and state governance. This can be seen after the Arab spring through the disintegration of many nation states and their descent into civil war, as seen in Libya, Yemen and Syria. Belief in the existence

of the ethos of mass communication necessarily leads to belief in the existence of public opinion and pluralism. Among the prerequisites for the existence of popular or elite public opinion is freedom of choice and difference and the right to vote through exposure to a multitude of ideas. All these elements combined were and are still absent in Arab political practice, resulting in Arabs being considered an "exception" in their relationship with democracy. In this international and Arab context charged with paradoxes, Al Jazeera grasped the desire by Arab public opinion for pluralism and rapidly gained an instant following, highlighting the existence of pluralism and of a silent majority in Arab public opinion that has been repressed for decades.

3. Al Jazeera, Pluralism and the Silent Majority

A legitimate question can be asked at this stage, why is there an urgent need to talk about the issue of media pluralism whenever we study the field of public communications in the Arab world? Perhaps the answer lies in the need to protect public opinion from submission to the spiral of silence on the one hand and the need to find a state of permanent equilibrium within the media field on the other (Zran 2013: 25). The absence of pluralism will gradually lead to the domination of society by certain ideologies or forces through the media. Those who believe that they represent the majority opinion have a tendency to seek to maintain stability, because people do not want to be isolated. However, those who embrace what they think is a minority view often assume that their opinion is wrong. When few speak and others remain silent, a spiral-shaped process increasingly portrays certain views as the dominant ones (Noëlle-Neumann 1989). This impression is strengthened by our tendency to underestimate the number of people who share our view and overestimate the number of people who oppose it. It is clear that the media plays an important role in the formation of opinion, because what we read in the

newspapers and see on television, on the news and on talk shows has an impact on what we believe is the prevailing opinion on many different issues. The theory of the spiral of silence by Noelle-Neumann suggests that the media helps shape public opinion rather than reflect it.

Thus, pluralism should ensure that the media reflect public opinion and not shape it according to partisan, ideological or other interests. Silence of the majority is a precursor to the withdrawal of the citizen from engaging in and contributing to public affairs, which in turn will reflect negatively on democracy. The monopoly of media ownership contributes to the formation of public opinion by those who have the means, which makes diversified media ownership critical to guaranteeing pluralism of opinions and ideas presented in society. Thus, the concept of pluralism becomes a "pluralistic media offer through independent and pluralistic media ownership reflecting the diversity and pluralism of ideas and opinions in a fair way (Zran 2012: 20).

When answering the question "why pluralism?" we can use the concept of new media environment, as it has been called theoretically and empirically. We note here that the Arab media landscape lives within its own environment, represented in the need for a balance between the medium and the message. The idea of an environmental balance comes from the citizen's right to access information and the right also to its interpretation and analysis. Pluralism is one of the guarantees for providing a balanced media field in terms of quantitative and qualitative standards of media institutions. There is no environmental balance if the citizen is not provided with multiple images and ideas of the society to which he belongs. To achieve this, the media should be pluralistic both in terms of media ownership and in its messages. How? This is what Al Jazeera attempted to answer throughout:

- The emergence of satellite channels competing with Al Jazeera, whether public or private, Arab or foreign, changed the classical media forms of ownership and the nature of

their messages in the Arab world. Thus, Al Jazeera became a catalyst for the crystallization of pluralism within other channels as well as internally.

- On-the-ground news coverage drawing on more than one source in the formulation of the news, even using Israeli leaders as sources of information to report on the Palestinian cause and Israeli domestic affairs.
- A range of discussion programs, the best known of which since the start of Al Jazeera are "The Opposite Direction" and "More than One Opinion" among other programs.

News reporting has entered into a new era of pluralism of sources. Traditional news coverage on official Arab satellite channels was based on end-to-end official sources. Al Jazeera abandoned this approach and we saw, during coverage of an event in Lebanon for example, the use of an official source, another from Hezbollah and a Sunni one. In Palestine, coverage was of Hamas, Fatah and other Palestinian forces. Yet before this breakthrough, displaying the images of many Arab political opposition leaders in Arab newspapers or TV channels, such as Saddam Hussein during a certain period or Hassan Nasrallah or Rashed Ghannouchi was forbidden.

In addition to the above, what is new with regards to Arab public opinion is the pluralism of views and perspectives offered by leftists and secularist, nationalists and Islamists which was up until recently absent from all Arab satellite channels. Al Jazeera has responded to the thirst of the Arab citizen to see pluralism in society reflected on television in debates and discussions. The intellectual, ideological and political pluralism that traverses Arab societies became visible to the eye and public, while the opposition appeared on television to denounce domestic policies on television. Many ideas that had been expressed in secret are now open to scrutiny, interaction, exchange and reception by little-known elite and without the need for prior permission from ruling regimes.

4. The Elite, Al Jazeera and the Public Sphere

The dream of any opposition group before the emergence of Al Jazeera was to obtain authorization from the ruling regime to issue a newspaper or have access to the state broadcaster. This was considered a triumph so they could communicate with their grassroots and send messages to internal and external public opinion. In more than one Arab country, many daily or weekly newspapers with a limited circulation have been banned because they published the statement of an opposition party criticizing, even lightly, one of the regime's policies. Punishment is usually harsh - depriving the newspaper of the right to publish adverts, preventing them from printing, preventing readers from buying the paper and other cruel violations of freedom of opinion and expression. This occurred in Egypt under Mubarak and in Tunisia under Ben Ali. We can mention few examples of the Tunisian model where the state had the power to prohibit writing about topics or events it did not wish to be revealed. For instance the Tunisian media ignored the press conference in March 2003 by the Secretary General of the Democratic Progressive Party, Mr. Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, in which he announced his candidacy for the 2004 presidential elections, and Tunisian television refused to cover demonstrations by civil society organizations and the Tunisian General Labour Union on 24 and 25 March 2003 in support of the Iraqi people, although it covered the protest held one day before called by the Constitutional Democratic Rally, the ruling party at that time (Tunisian League for the Defense of Human Rights, 2004).

After 1996 and until the Arab Spring events, those opposition parties found themselves broadcasting their message on Al Jazeera to almost 70 million Arabs. Viewers discovered new names such as the Democratic Party, the Islamic Front, and progressive, Islamic and leftist movements. Beyond these bodies, we also began to hear about Tunisian opposition figures in Paris and Egyptian opposition in

London, Iraqis in Jordan and Libyans in America, all of them talking about freedoms, public affairs, democracy, underdevelopment, opposition parties and corruption. Local public opinion, and even leaders from within the ruling regimes, wondered why these figures were not permitted to appear on their local television channels. With such a model in broadcasting, Al Jazeera contributed to instilling new terms, ideas and insights into the Arab political scene that had been absent for decades from the Arab public sphere. Between its news and opinion reporting, the criticisms of Al Jazeera focused on its news coverage more than its analysis and discussions. This is understandable in terms of media theory, as news coverage is never to everyone's satisfaction. However, programs such as "The Opposing Direction", "Witness on History" and "More than One Opinion" on Al Jazeera and the appearance of a new elite free from repression gave Al Jazeera a great deal of credibility. The elite are what manufactures sophisticated media and create messages and markets them. In this sense Al Jazeera knew how to deal with the viewer in a changing Arab world (El Oifi 2013).

In this context, one can partly argue that Al Jazeera's broadcasting model is unidirectional like the passive consumer or the recipient of media, who finds himself between two choices - either acceptance or rejection. Technological tools become black boxes whose function and technical characteristics we cannot change, and which require sociological translation for society by the elite (Flechy 1991: 12). Here we recall former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's description of Al Jazeera as a "matchbox", which refers to how this institution, in spite of its limited resources, could have such a huge impact while Egyptian television benefits from much greater financial and human resources and was unable to compete with Al Jazeera (Statement by Hosni Mubarak on his visit to Al Jazeera in Doha).

In receiving technology, intellectuals and opinion leaders usually play a central role in convincing the rest of the public to adopt the

new communication technology product embodied in cable television, due to their openness to the world and their cultural and intellectual abilities in foreseeing the potential of this technique to strengthen their legitimacy and status. In many cases, the Arab elites, characterized by the dominance of their culture, religious background and traditional references, were an obstacle to the adoption of communications technology and persuading the public and rulers of its cultural and social efficiency for the country and the people. Examples of this include the objection by some to the printing press, television and even the Internet, which was not the case with Western culture's response to traditional or modern media. Opinion leaders and intellectuals thus turn into defenders and official spokesmen with the appearance of every new communications or media technology. This explains the immense interest by Western social scientists in studying human networks in the context of their interest in electronic networks, announcing the convergence of sociology and technology to humanize the technical, as there is no value in what is produced by the engineer if it is not accompanied by the interpretation of the sociologist and the humanities expert of this new product. In the Arab world, reactions to media and communications tools remain trapped in the dialectic of "haram" and "halal" and discussions of the danger of the Internet for children and the impact of satellite television on identity. With the emergence of Al Jazeera, it became clear to ruling elites that this channel represented a threat to regimes in every Arab country (see fatwas by few scholars on the printing press, television, the Internet and mobile phones).

The Arabs experienced a new intellectual shock with the emergence of television coinciding with the technological revolution of cable television, which broke the limits on viewership. The Internet then followed, fragmenting the official Arab media landscape and confirming to Arab regimes that there is no media without the viewer and a multiplicity of media discourses, and that such multiplicity

requires diversified media ownership, opening the media landscape suddenly to new horizons (Hroub 2014). The media sector has entered a new era of reception while politicians find themselves completely unprepared. The media has also become uncontrollable by any one party, escaping from the grip of the "one public" theory, even in the view of those who were behind this slogan. Intellectuals were not far from this process, and we began to hear Arab intellectuals say for the first time, through the multiplicity of receiving spaces: this is my opinion, this is my vision, this is my idea, this is my position and this is my choice, and I am free in what I assume and in how I think. The intellectual became close to the people, sharing his analysis in the modest space provided in newspaper columns and in a short space of time, he became concerned with the size of the television audience, analyzing the latest events in light of people's concerns. This emerged especially after the events of 9/11 and the war on Iraq in 2003. For the first time, we discovered that there were Arab intellectuals studying at American universities, conducting research and working at Western research institutions, who possessed a courage not seen among local intellectuals who were part of the Arab regimes. These intellectuals contributed to transforming the way Arabs deal with Western societies politically and culturally through debating official policy positions and public opinion. This was all thanks to the convergence of television with the intellectual through Al Jazeera.

5. Reception of Al Jazeera

The French researcher Dominique Wolton who specializes in communications indicates that we are often interested in the broadcasting message and neglect the element of reception, possibly due to that books, radio, film and television have always had an audience (Wolton 1993: 11). Our analysis of the reception of Al Jazeera is not numerical; this channel has occupied the number one

spot in terms of viewership since the early years of its inception until the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011. Reception here is also not analyzed in terms of how the Arab public receives Al Jazeera - collectively or individually, at home or at a coffee shop. How can we examine the phenomenon of Al Jazeera's reception and measure it scientifically and what is the most effective research approach? What is needed is a review of the intellectual framing, a definition of the contexts of this channel's reception and what representations it transmits to the recipient and how the relationship between the recipient and Al Jazeera becomes one of appropriation.

While cultures and civilizations have media as a technique in common, there is always a difference in the way it is received by virtue of the different cultural and historical background and identity of each society. The cultural dimension of this technique is highlighted through the collision between communication tools and local national culture, with all its permanent and changing symbols such as religion, values, beliefs and rituals, which we can call the receiving environment. Culture, values, customs and traditions shape the effects of communications tools on society, independently of the functions of the communications tool set by the engineer, shaping their qualities and effects and defining their identity as Arab, Indian, French, etc. This question of reception is all the more relevant in relation to Arab societies with an Arab-Islamic culture and a particular history, in which the question of reception was neglected until it became, with the Arab Spring, one of the main issues of communication and social research in Arab and Western media fields. We evoke the question of reception to understand the media issue on the intellectual level through a dual approach:

- First, the historical reception of media as a form of technology and as a culture in the Arab world, which requires us to trace the history of communications and media tools and to conduct what we can call archeology of media tools and of the relationship between them.

- Second, reception of the content of the media message by the target audience - what we call the classical meaning of reception - which specifically looks at the diverse viewership. This approach leads us to the need to review whether the public is an active sociological factor in shaping the message and in the receiving process or a passive factor. We can reformulate this question as follows: What do the media do to people or what do people do with the media? If we translate this in our research, what does Al Jazeera do to people or what do people do with Al Jazeera?

The most important element in the receiving process as a social phenomenon that has become autonomous from all other elements of the communication process in its comprehensive meaning is the multiplicity of contents and outputs of the media process, which is a natural product of the multiplicity of means of mass communication, not only in terms of ownership, but especially in terms of discourse and content of the message. There is no such thing as a homogeneous audience in any society; the audience is a combination of cultural, social, political and ethnic backgrounds as Segur (2008) puts it. Thus, we must ask whether the multiplicity of media sources in the Arab world at the beginning of the 21st century has led to a multiplicity of messages or of forms of receiving media?

It is difficult to speak historically of a receiving element in its functional sense in the Arab media, whether during the colonial period or with the emergence of the nation state or post-independence state. The media discourse was homogeneous, dealing with the recipient as an integrated and homogeneous whole. During the era of colonialism, the colonizer sought to spread his dominant superior Western culture through the written press to an ignorant and backward society. Other national voices that were allowed to use some spaces for expression argued that the people could govern themselves away from guardianship or tutelage. The discourse of a

‘Renaissance’ among Arab national movements was directed mostly to a small well-educated rich Arab aristocracy or sympathizers from colonial circles.

This was a typical discourse that was frequently repeated, targeted at preserving identity from a defensive position, raising slogans to conserve indigenous elements such as the religion of Islam, the Arabic language, and Arab customs, traditions and identity. After independence, the independent modern Arab states were bereft of state institutions, so the task of establishing and building the state was the central goal. Thus, the media discourse sought to communicate uniformly with a public that was afflicted by illiteracy, ignorance, poverty and unemployment in order to achieve the vision of a modern nation state, which had to prove that it was able to efficiently manage society without colonial tutelage. This approach led to absolute domination over the media due to the lack of diversity of the audience and the fact that the media were unilaterally exploited in the process of building a modern state, despite the emergence of many dissenting voices. This continuing approach, based on a paternalistic attitude to media content and on the grounds that the audience are the people and that the people are the audience and society continued until the birth of Al Jazeera television in the mid-nineties. Here we ask how Al Jazeera’s reception was perceived. In fact receptivity to media messages by the general public has no value if not followed by receptivity to this complex sociological phenomenon by political officials on the one hand and by academic and governing elites on the other hand, a theme which has been researched by Khalil Ahmed Khalil (Zran 2014: 25).

Evidence of the entry of Arabs into the sphere of media reception with the launch of Al Jazeera can be seen in the trend by most Arab countries to launch their own channels, directly or indirectly, such as "Al Arabiyya", "Al Ikhbariyya", "Arra’y", "Al Manar", "Al Mayadeen" and "Al ‘Alam" and other channels in response to the way

their publics received Al Jazeera and other foreign satellite channels and in order to provide a local alternative to those exotic foreign channels, bringing the number of Arab satellite channels in a very short time to almost 300. This was not limited to states only, but was even undertaken by few ethnic groups (Kurds), religious sects (Shia) and some opposition movements (Al Mustakilla), which sought to provide their own spaces in response to their exclusion and in an attempt to provide their own media outlets to viewers seeking an alternative discourse to that on national TV. Al Jazeera then led to a realization that there are more than 70 million Arabs who watch the channel, which means, as Mohammed Krichen argued, that Al Jazeera is the largest Arab party (Mohammed Krichen, one of the first journalists in Al Jazeera). Arabs entered the war of media viewership, the battle to win the public and the war over viewer numbers, which was previously unheard of and had no value for politicians, academics and even the public.

On the other hand, Al Jazeera represented an intellectual shock to Western media and governments. The West capitalized politically on the 'backwardness' of regional Arab media, which was pushing Arab citizens to resort to Western media in order to view the world, its cultures and its news, giving such media soft power. This trend was confirmed with the spread of the cable television phenomenon, with CNN, BBC and France 2 gaining more Arab viewers. Al Jazeera came to tip this balance and steal Western media's top spot in terms of credibility, boldness, and direct and live coverage of the news. The Arab citizen found himself consuming his own news and images and able to compare between Al Jazeera and Western channels. Al Jazeera provided him with a kind of protection and sentiment that he could not find in national media, which excluded him, marginalized his problems and dreams, and corrupted his taste for listening to and watching the news and exchanging views on various issues. Western cultural centers in the Arab world quickly moved to encourage the

establishment of polling institutes to measure public opinion due to their complete absence, and gave attractive offers of support to those who could provide statistics on the most watched channels among the Egyptian, Tunisian or Moroccan public, etc. Opinion polls were conducted in some cases in complete secrecy and sent to foreign ministries abroad to analyze, in order to adjust political discourse and tactics in dealing with any issue related to Arabs and Muslims. The results were disastrous - after years of occupying the top spots in terms of viewership numbers, Western channels found themselves at the bottom, replaced in a very short space of time by Al Jazeera, Al Arabiyya, Al Manar, MBC and other governmental or private channels.

The emergence of a domestic audience has aroused the interest of external parties in the question of reception by Arabs. Western researchers, governments and institutions have become interested in Arab media because it has become an independent actor in creating an Arab public opinion. This is what Ezzeddine Abdelmoula argues, "The pivotal role played by Al Jazeera in reshaping the Arab media landscape has affected to varying degrees the internal politics of a number of Arab countries and to an even greater degree the relations between the countries of the region in general" (Abdelmoula 2015: 144). Nations and states give great importance to external public opinion in the formulation of their strategies, especially when it comes to Arabs, Muslims and the Middle East, which are all of great interest to many foreign powers. The question of reception does not concern only Arab receptivity to a new and different media message, but also receptivity by the West, where Al Jazeera's broadcasts have come to be deconstructed and analyzed in major research centers. The question of receptivity is not limited to the birth of Al Jazeera but also the refusal to broadcast Al Manar TV in France, provoking a large controversy that is an example of the question of receptivity, ending years of Western indifference to Arab media (Al Manar channel, part

of Hezbollah, was given permission to broadcast by cable in France but after a short time and under the pressure of the French Jewish lobby, the Higher Authority on Audiovisual Media intervened to halt broadcasting on the basis that the channel promoted anti-Semitism, violence and terrorism). Domestic media pluralism and the birth of the Arab viewer have led to receptivity by the West. Pluralism at home has created receptivity abroad, and Western media now deals differently with Arab media because the broadcast does not just stop at the borders of the state, but also reaches Arab communities living in Western countries, which have become a part of Western public opinion in influencing the conduct of some elections in more than one country (Guaaybess 2011).

Conclusion: Al Jazeera and the Arab Public Sphere

It is difficult, after all the years of independence and attempts to establish national media in almost all Arab countries, to speak of Arab media as a subject. What is meant by “subject” is for it to have shaped outlooks on the other as much as the other has formed an outlook on it. Thus, Arab media remained an object, dominated by others’ representations, which are essentially representations of international political forces regarding the general nature of the official Arab system and the nature of the national Arab regimes separately. It seems that with Al Jazeera, Arab media became a subject and object at the same time - subject through the lens of Al Jazeera, which became a space for providing Arabs with a view on international and local events. CNN’s coverage of the second Gulf War in 1991 after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait is often given an example of how Arabs were outside the circle of coverage. With the Iraq war in 2003, the equilibrium changed as there was now more than one source filming and disseminating events to domestic and foreign public opinion, among whom was Al Jazeera as well as other satellite channels. Arab media was also an object in terms of the

coverage Al Jazeera provided of the Arab reality, both national and regional, becoming the object of monitoring by Arab regimes and especially by major international powers that are well aware of the strategic value of this region and aware that controlling people has become harder than controlling regimes - this is what occurred with the Arab Spring of 2011 to the surprise of all actors (Abdalla 2012).

The object, in all of this is no longer, as was traditionally the case in the West, the governing system and how it manages public affairs, but the people and how they see their governing system compared to those of other developed nations. It is the Arab public sphere in a new form. Jurgen Habermas, in the introduction to the 1990 edition of his book on the public sphere, emphasizes that the value of the presence of the individual in the public sphere is not sufficient in itself but its value lies in that this physical presence is disseminated and presented by the media and transmitted (Dacheux 2015). The public sphere, as a space to mediate between the state and society, contains within it the public media sphere, which has the role of presenting pluralism, debate and the conflict of ideas within society. Why? It is enough to return to what Kant said in his discussion of freedom - that freedom has its limits and that the social and political system is threatened if each individual does what seems right to him. Kant defined a new special space where ideas can be expressed freely through the distinction between public and private use of reason, which became known with Habermas as the public sphere (Cathaudrey 2011).

In conclusion, it is not possible after raising all these questions not to recognize the relative transformations that the media has experienced, due to the impact of satellite television, the influence of Al Jazeera or the spread of the Internet, in its relationship with the public sphere. In this context, we can recall a statement by Philip Seeb, "Even if we get close to achieving technological equality and Arab progress towards global levels in the use of new media, we

should be very cautious not to be too optimistic about the possibility of reform led by the media." He cites Jon Alterman's argument that most of the debates that we see on Arab satellite channels "are still largely centered on the situation and not on participation" (Seeb 2011: 197). The value of democracy and public debate lies in political participation and not in being immersed in the thrill of the virtual. Change and participation are achieved if television or the Internet provides the chance to transmit them. Is it possible to say that the Arab public sphere has become hostage to the media, which in turn is shaped by politics and money, and that the other components of the Arab public sphere, from traditional and non-technological spaces, are absent, excluded or extinct? Must we, in addition to the political liberalization of the Arab public sphere with the Arab Spring, ensure its liberation from the domination of media, to which Al Jazeera has contributed?

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Reporting news in a Turbulent World: Is Al Jazeera re-writing the rules of global journalism?

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Introduction:

Al Jazeera ascended to global fame soon after its inception in 1996. In the last twenty years the Al Jazeera project has exponentially grown from the original Arabic channel into a sophisticated network of TV channels, online platforms, research and training centres. Whether in praise or criticism, Al Jazeera network has received since then overwhelming interest and caught international attention. However among the plethora of studies and reports analysing the network from various angles what can be of immense interest to the world of journalism is its challenging new norms and values of reporting news. This chapter analyses the daring news values introduced by Al Jazeera. It will not therefore delve into theoretical discussions about impartiality and objectivity per se. But it will analyse these values on a practical level vis-à-vis Al Jazeera's journalism practice.

The Al Jazeera's stance of news reporting is best seen when reporting wars and conflicts, reporting corruption in parts of Arab politics namely the Arab Spring countries. The last two decades have been packed with events in which the network showed high level of professional journalism standards. But it has also been criticized by

some on various instances. Covering the War in Afghanistan in 1992 onwards, the War on Iraq 2003, the War on Gaza in 2009, the Arab Spring revolutions in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Syria from 2011 onward, all have been significant historical moments for the network. So diverse these events have been, in terms of their geographical spaces, types of conflicts and their developments and challenges, that they have marked unprecedented opportunities for any global news corporation to either excel or totally fail. In a way these events stood as challenging tests for Al Jazeera's impartiality, objectivity and independence.

However, before analyzing what can be regarded as Al Jazeera's novel aspects of news reporting it is worth putting this stance in its historical and geographical context. This will probably help illustrate the benchmark set by the channel concerning free speech, breaking taboos, and an overall serious journalism stance the Arab media and the Arab street were not familiar with. By doing this I will be briefly talking about the Arab journalism scene before the advent of the original channel, Al Jazeera Arabic.

Television broadcasting in the Arab world prior to Al Jazeera's inception

After twenty years of broadcasting, one may argue that Al Jazeera has become an emblem of distinction in Arab broadcasting. It seems hard not to historically situate the channel as inaugurating a new era in Arab broadcasting. The benchmark it set and the professionalism norms and news values have been raised high by the channel. Journalists from various media outlets yearn to work in Al Jazeera and cherish it highly.

Broadcasting systems in the Arab region suffered from various constraints before the appearance of satellite technology. Most of its poor content input was due to the tight editorial control placed by Ministries of media and communication in the region (Miladi 2003). Lavish funding used to be geared towards political propaganda and

less on in-depth diverse programme content such as news, current affairs programs and documentaries.

Namely before the fast growth of Arab satellite TV across the region and in diaspora, TV and radio broadcasting used to be state controlled and much of its content was pure government propaganda. Very limited room for discussion programs, educational or current affairs content existed.

That is why Al Jazeera dominated Arab broadcasting soon after its appearance and for the last 20 years attracting interest from around the globe well-beyond the 9/11, 2001 attacks in USA when it became the eyes and ears of the world and broadcasting from the midst of the war in Afghanistan. So from the outset Al Jazeera was at odds with the mainstream television broadcasters in the Arab region. It started off with a completely different editorial policy and programme content in that it constituted an immense challenge to Arab regimes and Arab media outlets alike.

As a result, for many years Al Jazeera remained banned from few Arab countries. For instance in Tunisia up until the revolution of 14 January 2011 Al Jazeera was denied an office in the capital Tunis. The Ben Ali regime saw in the channel a challenge to its communication strategies which tended to paint a flowery picture about his regime's 'success story' in bringing economic prosperity, freedom and social justice. But it was this stance of bold journalism that won Al Jazeera the Arab audiences' hearts and mind while other global broadcasters have lost it especially during the subsequent decade of covering major wars and conflicts in the region such as the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Tatham 2006).

New perspective of impartiality and objectivity

The advent of Al Jazeera introduced a new culture in Arab broadcasting. From the outset the Arabic channel (Al Jazeera Arabic) came up with new defining values for impartiality challenging not

only to local and regional media outlets but to international journalism. Its daring and sometimes too critical stance of Arab and global politics had never been seen before and not upheld by the well-established global news players. In what follows I will discuss the way Al Jazeera editors defined and understood impartiality in news reporting whether in world news or reporting about the Arab World and the Middle East.

Impartiality in the news is a complex value to apply in news reports. Sometimes it differs depending on the cultural or ideological baggage of any journalist. It can also be defined as the worldview which a journalist upholds and the environment in which his/her institution operates. Abundant literature has been written on this area, but the fact is that this field of study remains debatable with astounding discrepancies when scrutinizing journalism practice around the world. Even the BBC governors as suggested by Robin Marsh (former editor of the BBC radio program *The World This Weekend*) ‘...didn’t quite understand it and found it difficult to apply in practice’ (2012: 70). No wonder than that in reporting one single event there exist sometimes profound differences between media organizations. For example reporting the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the war in Syria, and other global conflicts can be a point of contention. The culture of reporting varies across the world depending on the news culture and editorial policy that defines the journalists' frame of mind.

Nevertheless, and in spite of these differences in news reporting across channels, ‘...values such as impartiality - however described or characterized - could be and are emerging as important markers that distinguish deliberate acts of serious journalism from the noise out on the web’. (Marsh 2012: 71)

During the last two decades and in its pursuit for impartiality Al Jazeera guaranteed large room of independence from the government of Qatar albeit its critics would argue that it systematically steers

away from criticizing the Qatari government affairs or its foreign policy. Overall Al Jazeera managed to maintain an editorial independence in spite of the fact that its main funding comes from Qatar's large corporations such as Qatar Petroleum, Qatar Gas, Cafco, Qatar Airways and its deficit is paid off directly by the State of Qatar.

Also, in attempting to reflect the opposite opinion Al Jazeera has been heavily criticized for instance for incitement of activism against Arab regimes, spreading friction in Arab societies and lobbying Arab public opinion against the US and Israel. It is evidently very simplistic to subscribe to the above view or to argue that the channel aligns itself with political movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or pandering to Qatar's foreign policy objectives.

One may argue that both Arab regimes and critics of Al Jazeera's journalism in the West have not been able to grasp its challenging new culture of reporting the world. They also have not been open enough to consider it as a possible alternative to the mainstream western global broadcasters. For instance the fact that Al Jazeera provided a platform for Bin Laden and other Al Qaida leaders to voice their opinion does not make it "Bin Laden's mouthpiece". Or giving voice to opposition leaders does not at all make it as if attempting to destabilize Arab regimes. In the same way as we assume that giving George W. Bush and his administration ample air time to explain their rationale for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 does not make the channel a mouthpiece of the American administration or one that condones the American foreign policy in Iraq. Nor does it make any other channel a tool for the Israeli government or Hamas when key figures from both sides appear on its screen defending their viewpoints.

Moreover, although Al Jazeera's news values as explained in its code of journalistic ethics (Al Jazeera 2016b) have little dissimilarity with major global broadcasters, in practice Al Jazeera's news

reporting is plentifully different. Any analysis of a news broadcast by Al Jazeera compared to that of CNN or the BBC for instance will find ample discrepancies, to the extent that sometimes you may think that what is being reported in the three channels is a completely different event in a different context (Miladi 2006; Barkho 2011).

Free speech and the Al Jazeera's editorial policy:

A key brand value that Al Jazeera acquired for itself over the last 20 years is being 'The voice of the voiceless'. Its approach to impartiality is simply being accountable to its audiences. Since 1996 the Arabic channel followed by its sister channels promised the disenfranchised Arab public to be its voice. Before the emergence of Al Jazeera and the advent of the internet revolution, a key characteristic of the Arab broadcasting market, as noted earlier, was the tight control on free speech by Arab regimes. Little room was available in the Arab street for the opposite opinion. In the Arab public sphere, notably coffee houses and university venues stood at the time as uncensored places for free debates and sometimes close discussions.

However the Al Jazeera phenomenon unleashed the potential of the Arab Public sphere and has given it a new life (Abdelmoula 2015). Being the voice of the voiceless in the Arab region meant a channel providing large room of freedom of opinion to its audiences; a channel that represented the concerns, aspirations and reflects the struggle that the Arab public go through in their daily lives. As a result, Al Jazeera's discussion programmes have become the alternative to coffee houses, clubs, and private spaces where people let loose their frustrations on various burning issues in the region. The 'Opposite Direction', for instance a fiery discussion programme led by Faisal Al Qasim, has remained the attraction of millions of Arab audiences across the region and in diaspora due to the timeliness and critical approach of its discussions.

Language of the news and Al Jazeera's discourse on 'terrorism'

Terminology and use of vocabulary in news making is another sophisticated bundle of debates to the ethics and values of journalism. An integral component of Al Jazeera's reporting is the unique choice of culturally specific vocabulary when reporting for instance from various parts of the Middle East. The alternative value that underlies its news coverage is therefore a commitment to the local voices it aims to represent while embedded in their daily reality.

An obvious strategic approach is to capitalize on native reporters. In its various offices around the world Al Jazeera employs mainly locals who understand the language, dialect as well cultural specificities of the region they report from. But also more importantly those local reporters understand well the target audience of Al Jazeera and their concerns. Often global broadcasters are criticized of what some call 'parachute' journalism. Where reporters simply come from the metropolis of global centres and report about a land they know nothing about. News reporting of the war in Afghanistan since 2001, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is a case in point (Miladi 2006). For instance, various journalists working for global news channels tend to report the Palestinian Israeli conflict from their comfort zones in a hotel somewhere in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. The War on Gaza in 2009 or 2014 has been the latest case were scores of westerns journalists have never been to Gaza while they reported daily news on the day to day aerial bombardment and the destruction of the city by the Israeli air force. The advance of the Israeli army artillery was remotely viewed and reported from tens of miles away on global channels like CNN.

The vocabulary of news reporting is another tricky area related to measuring bias in the news. The terms 'terrorism'/'terrorist' for instance have become one of the very controversial terminologies to be employed by the media in their news reporting. A longitudinal

analysis of Al Jazeera's news reporting of the past twenty years tells that it is not hard to notice that the channel has always steered away from the beginning to adopt such labels to describe rebel groups, freedom fighters or even groups who use force as a means for social change like Al Qaida and Daesh (ISIS/IS). In news stories as well as other documentary or discussion programs the editorial line sticks to the name by which any given group is known or presents itself. Instead of saying for example '*tandheem al Qaida al irhabi*' (Al Qaida terrorist group) or *Tandheem al dawla al Islamia al irhabi* (the Islamic State terrorist group), Al Jazeera would call them 'Al Qaida' and 'The Islamic State group'. In the same way and in covering the Palestinian Israeli conflict Al Jazeera does not associate the various Palestinian groups such as *Hamas*, *Al Jihad Al Islami (Islamic Jihad)*, *Fatah*, *Kataib Al Qassam* (the Al Qassam Brigades) and *Al Jibha Al Sha'bia* (the Popular Front) with terrorism. Such groups are always reported as legitimate Palestinian freedom fighter groups who are struggling against the Israeli colonisation of the Palestinian land.

Capitalising on digital and online services

The Al-Jazeera's news culture in reporting the world has become significantly influential internationally firstly through Al Jazeera Arabic and then its sister Al Jazeera International (later named Al Jazeera English). However its online provision of news content has also been equally important and has been developing side by side with the speedy technological developments in terms of diverse internet platforms.

Like other global news organisations Al Jazeera network has capitalised on the fast advances in internet technology. Al Jazeera Arabic homepage (Aljazeera.net) marked since 2001 a new platform of innovative provision with growing outreach to audiences around the world. In addition to news reports, the homepage provides live broadcasting and opportunity for audiences' interactivity. It's Al

Jazeera Arabic (the original news outlet of Al Jazeera network) has harnessed online technologies to the full. Its obvious success to break the barriers of censorship especially in countries where the channels did not have offices or their signal was barred meant a new chapter of influence had opened for the nascent Arab media outlet.

An early initiative in integrating social media in its news gathering and dissemination was the launch of Al Jazeera talk in 2005. The initiative aimed at involving youth activists from around the Arab region to report news on the ground. Bloggers from the Arab Spring countries and beyond were given space in Al Jazeera's digital platforms and their news sometimes referred to as significant sources for Al Jazeera's news reports. A dedicated page was launched and remained for few years a buzzing platform for citizen journalists. Few of the active participants in this blog became later reporters for Al Jazeera. Other services pioneered by Al Jazeera included Sharek (sharek.aljazeera.net) launched in 2008 which contained about 100000 videos uploaded by activists in the region. Participation included exclusive news coverage, commentary, interviews, unedited breaking news, cultural events and celebrations, demonstrations and protests.

Probably the peak of influence for Al Jazeera's online media outlets has been during the Arab Spring events. The revolution in social media has embodied a new dynamic in the flow of information around the world where Social media harnessed for news reporting. The Arab world and Middle East region was no exception. During the Tunisian, Egyptian, and Libyan revolutions Al Jazeera was entrusted to authenticate the news stories especially coming from social media activists. The channel became a mediator between activists on the ground and international public opinion. El-Nawawy and Khamis 2014 reported on significance of social media networks as decisive tools for protesters in the lead up to the Egyptian revolution. Their study points to the great potential of harnessing such new

technologies in reporting from the midst of conflict when other media were obscured by the Mubarak regime.

Moreover, Al Jazeera Plus (AJ+) (<http://ajplus.net/english>) or (<http://ajplus.net/arabi>) the recent addition to Al Jazeera's platforms constitutes a significant initiative to overhaul its failed project Al Jazeera America and outreach to the American public especially the youth and professionals. Although Al Jazeera America was unsuccessful due to its untenable business model, the network introduced in 2015 a new strategy to increase its share in the US market. This strategy has been about the increase of its content distribution through diverse digital channels. The development of AJ+ in addition to its vibrant English website (Aljazeera.com) has formed the network's new source of influence and penetration to a traditionally closed market. However, worthy of a mention here is that AJ+ has proven influential not only in USA but globally. Only after two years of its launch, AJ+ has won the distinctive journalism award from the American Internet Society. Its viewership in September 2016 bypassed 5 billion and has gained the seventh position among media platforms on Facebook and second position among online news sources globally.

The Arab Spring revolutions and the power of live broadcasting

In addition to Al Jazeera Arabic, two key players in Al Jazeera network have been decisive in reporting the Arab Spring events which are Al Jazeera English and Al Jazeera Mubasher. Al Jazeera English (AJE) was launched in April 16, 2007 and broadcasts news and current affairs 24 hours from its headquarters in Doha as well as other centres around the world such as London, Washington DC and Kuala Lumpur. In a short time AJE has widened the outreach of the network into the world. By September 2016, Al Jazeera English claimed to have reached 270 million households in more than 140

countries (Al Jazeera 2016c). Its English YouTube channel received over 2.5 million views per month.

While Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA) has a focus on Arab affairs and the Middle East, Al Jazeera English (AJE) is distinguished by its emphasis on the global south. Its impact on the global sphere has won it numerous awards during the last few years. In 2011 the channel received the Foreign Press Association award for its distinguished news reporting of the ‘Arab Spring’ revolutions (Al Jazeera 2013). A slogan in Al Jazeera’s headquarters reads “Everyone watches CNN, but who is CNN watching ... Al Jazeera” tells about how the channel’s management and journalists see their work. While this can be viewed as a form of show off, the channel had at a point in being successful in seizing international attention in many instances.

The Al Jazeera Mubasher (which means Al Jazeera live) has also marked a new turn in the provision of satellite TV broadcasting of live events with no editing. The channel which broadcasts on a separate satellite channel and online on <http://mubasher.aljazeera.net> provides continuous live streaming of news based on unedited material from around the world. While the content is mainly news and current affairs coverage, it also includes conferences, debates, key speeches or press conferences of key politicians from around the world. Live news reporting may also encompass raw coverage of wars and conflicts, demonstrations, vigils or any other deemed newsworthy event. While this model of live TV broadcasting may seem not costly in terms of its production and distribution, the content of Al Jazeera Mubasher has proven significant especially during the last few years in reporting the Arab region.

The success of Al Jazeera Mubasher was followed in 2012 by Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr (Egypt). This separate channel was solely dedicated to cover news events from Egypt during the major events that the country witnessed after the ousting of President Mubarak on 25 January 2011 and the military coup against the first elected

president Mohamed Morsi, after the revolution, on 3 July 2013. This channel remained significant in reporting live rolling news until its closure by the Egyptian regime when general Al-Sissi seized power.

The Arab Spring revolutions have been pivotal historical moments to test the integrity of Al Jazeera network. Although its various channels have received mounting criticism regarding the evident support for the protesters against the regimes of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria the Al Jazeera Arabic as well as its sister channels were decisive in promoting people's struggle for democracy and freedom in those countries. It was clear since the beginning of the unrests in Tunisia for example on December 17, 2010 that Al Jazeera sided with the Arab public/street who has been yearning for regime change for decades under the rule of Ben Ali. The same goes regarding the regimes of Gaddafi in Libya, Mubarak in Egypt and Abdallah Saleh in Yemen. The airwaves remained open to members of the public, political and human rights activists from across the Arab world to voice their wrath in criticising corrupt regimes, and their poor performance which resulted in stark unemployment figures and economic failure. For instance in Taghyeer Square in Sana, Yemen on Friday 18th March 2011, Sumaya Khawas, one of the eyewitnesses was on the phone (Al Jazeera 2011a):

Presenter: 'Sumaya please tell us about the situation'

Sumaya: 'Hello, I don't know what to say, but it is like a slaughter house around me where I am. People are running around carrying injured and dead bodies. I don't know what to say but Abdallah Saleh (president of Yemen) is not anymore our president he is a criminal, we are not anymore asking for him to step down but to be tried in a court of justice for all the criminal acts being done. The Yemeni people must take stance and stop this bloodshed. There are no ambulances, and injured people are being carried in blankets, trucks, and motorbikes. People are also being taken from hospitals to prisons and further tortured'.

During this intervention by this eyewitness Al-Jazeera relayed images of injured people being rushed to the mobile hospital set up in the square. Also images of bloodshed, images of people attacked by tear gas which people say it is illegal. Marwan Al-Harazi: a political activist commented: ‘This regime is bankrupt and has lost all credibility by killing people. The public now are calling ‘people want to topple the regime’ nothing less than this.’

An hour later and in another live exchange, presenter Khadija Ben Genna asks another protester from Tahrir square in Egypt (Al Jazeera 2011b): ‘the government says that you are using force’.

Marwan Al-Harazi (political activist): ‘Not really we are civilians and we are not using any weapons. The regime is waging a propaganda war against peaceful civilians. They are spreading lies so that they can find excuses for their atrocities. This is a peaceful revolution and will remain so. The government police, *al-baltajia* (thugs) and snipers are targeting innocent and unarmed civilians. People are specifically targeted in the head and heart. A shoot to kill policy is being implemented here.’

It is worth noting that Al Jazeera has gained trust not only of millions of viewers from around the world but also journalists who admire its daring stance of journalism. On 25th Feb 2011 journalists of the Tunisia TV went on strike and the main news programme at 8pm was not broadcast for the first time. One of the female Journalists was interviewed on the *Al-Hasaad Al-Magharibi* (news programme at 10:50pm) to express her disappointment of the way the TV is run and continuation of what she called the same culture of dictatorial control. Khalid Nejeh the then News Editor tendered his resignation and sent it to Al-Jazeera Arabic channel to be broadcast to the public. This marked a very significant event symbolising the continuous lack of confidence in the Tunisian main public service broadcaster even after the revolution of 14 January 2011.

The Al Jazeera's camera as a witness on history

While the camera of Al Jazeera was a crucial reporter of what had happened in Taghyeer Square in Yemen its camera were also equally significant in recording the bloodiest moments of the Egyptian revolution including the Tahrir Square and Raba'a massacres. Waddah Kanfar (former Director General of Al Jazeera Network) unveils how the camera was a crucial tool to protect the protesters in Tahrir Square in Egypt. Whether in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya or Yemen 'Al Jazeera explicitly associates its media efforts to fight for democracy and free speech in those countries. The network sees itself as the voice of the voiceless and a platform of free speech for those who have none. The revolt in Libya was topping the news, being described as civil war. In Gaddafi's view, the West was using humanitarianism as a cover to seize control of Libya's oil wealth. Hassan Al Jaber was killed in Libya - likely a targeted killing. Beliefs have been circulating among Al Jazeera staff that Gaddafi put out a bounty on their heads'.

The Tunisian revolution and the snowball effect of Al Jazeera's rolling news

The Al Jazeera devoted exclusive air time and deployed scores of its journalists to capture the historical moment as the Tunisian revolution unfolded. Similarly, when the Egyptian street started mobilising against the Mubarak regime, Al Jazeera had dedicated large part of its daily airtime for the cause. Reporting the meetings, small pockets of demonstrations in various parts of Egypt became utmost priority for the channel. The channel also opened its airtime for all types of protesters, youth activists, political analysts and almost all shades of the Egyptian political opposition groups were given the opportunity to express their anger and frustration of the status quo by then. This led to the harassment of al Jazeera journalists, closing its office and cancelling its broadcasting signal

from NileSat (An Egyptian Satellite company, based in 6th of October City, Cairo, Egypt). Throughout these events Al Jazeera gave ample exposure to social media activists in the Arab Spring countries. The camera-bearing citizen or the citizen journalist has become the witness and sometime the maker of the history of our time. But these events have at least proven that history now is not written anymore by officials but by ordinary people. Anyone with a camera and access to the internet can make a difference and can become part of this process. This activity has also transcended the boundaries of gender, class, education and status.

In Tunisia there appeared a team-work between Al-Jazeera and social networks. For instance during the Tunisian revolution Facebook groups multiplied. Such groups as 'Tunis', 'Tunisia' had over 600 000 people subscribing. Activists used to wait for *Hasaad Al-Yawm* (Al-Jazeera's flagship evening news programme) and *Al-Hasaad A-Magharibi* (which was a special evening reporting about the Maghreb countries: Tunisia, Libya, Algeria and Morocco). As a result the effect of such news programmes get multiplied.

User generated material from activists in the field was gathered, sifted and selected to support its news coverage. Namely where the networks do not have regular reporters, it did capitalize on social media networks content and videos sent to its news room by citizen journalists. Such news scoops get amplified by Al-Jazeera news channels and turned into credible news stories that attract attention from around the world. For instance Al Jazeera English, according to Sarnelli (2013: 157) '...promoted a new configuration of 'big' and 'small' media in the MENA (Middle East and North African countries) region, based on the already well-established local media convergence'.

The channel further encouraged a direct engagement with activists in the field by promoting a dedicated page (yourmedia.aljazeera.net) to gather news. This space proved significant in gathering data which the

network has not invested any funding or logistics to obtain. Also this space was for activists a precious opportunity to have their material broadcast on a reputable network. Consequently, the opening up of social media as a residue of diverse narratives about the Arab revolutions for instance presented a multiplicity of perspectives. Through bringing these different voices coming from within the Arab region and beyond both in its news or documentary programs, Al-Jazeera symbolized a unifying platform for these voices and a fusing mechanism that made sense of all of the divergent narratives. All of this process is efficiently achieved in its news rooms aided by an army of editors and researchers in its offices around the world. This trend has continued post Arab Spring revolutions. Al Jazeera has been adapting with this fast developing socio-political atmosphere in the region and responding to the fast growing ‘eco-media’ reality overwhelmed by social media networks (Zran 2015).

Al-Jazeera news rooms also capitalized on material published on activists’ blogs and available freely for grab. On such significant pages like *Live Blog - Egypt* which constituted constant streaming source about the day-to-day affairs of the days leading up to the revolution of 25 January 2011 in Egypt. Activists kept posting comments, eye-witness accounts, video recording of the revolution and its aftermath. This space kept beaming with news and comments from social media activists five year after the revolution albeit with less enthusiasm judging from the number of posts in 2014-2015.

In this regard Sarnelli argues that ‘Reliable as a television channel, but informal and interactive as a blog, *Live Blog - Egypt* apparently became a reference for many non-Arabic speakers and particularly for the residents of countries where the channel is not distributed via cable or satellite; a flow that is less fluid than television and yet more rich of references to other media and closer to the protesters’ cultural and technological environment’ (Sarnelli 2013: 167).

Al Jazeera and the Arab Diaspora

One final perspective regarding Al Jazeera success was its outreach to the Arab Diaspora mainly in Europe and USA. With the commercialization of Arabic television in the 1990s, and the growth of satellite television, a pan-Arab audience has emerged and changed the way that media programmers, advertisers and politicians conceived of the Arab audience. The multi-channel environment via satellite that followed Al Jazeera has expanded the choice of Arab viewers despite the tight governmental controls on what can be broadcast on local terrestrial services. What is more, the connections diasporic media establish between various parts of the world, the perception of self and otherness. British or French Arabs can participate in a discussion programme on Palestinian refugees, or about democracy in the Arab world, produced in the London office of the channel and broadcast via satellite to the rest of the world.

“It was Al Jazeera that first grasped the enormity of the Tunisia uprising and its implications for the region, and Al Jazeera which latched onto -- critics would say fuelled -- subsequent rumblings in Egypt. And audiences around the world responded: the network's global audience has rocketed. During the first two days of the Egyptian protests, livestream viewers watching the channel over the internet increased by 2,500 percent to 4 million, 1.6 million of them in the United State” (Reuters 2011).

Arguably, the problematic BBC coverage of the Palestinian *Intifada* in 2009 and 2014, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict generally, in an impartial manner, has been highlighted by various academic studies. Research conducted by the Glasgow Media Group (Philo and Berry 2004) suggested that British television news failed to inform people about what was going on in the Occupied Territories. Philo and Barry's research results showed that

Israeli views such as their need to defend themselves against terrorism were very well represented on the news. Israeli

perspectives were more frequently featured in headlines and were often highlighted to the exclusion of alternatives. A frequency count of the coverage given to interviews and reported statements also showed the Israeli dominance. Journalists sometimes adopted the language of Israeli statements and used it as their own direct speech in news reports. (2004: 259)

It was mainly the advent of Al-Jazeera's alternative approach to news coverage that led to this increased awareness among the Arab diaspora and their interest in news, and led to an ability to compare and contrast news output from various sources, and to critique coverage of Arabs and Muslims by Western media as stereotypical.

Like the coverage of Palestine, September 11, 2001 attacks and the War in Afghanistan marked a defining moment for Al Jazeera. Diasporic communities found in Al Jazeera a refuge for what they saw as unbiased news of what was really happening. Its reporters challenged all the odds of the historical moments including the possible loss of life because of the air bombing and reported to the world the scenes of the American invasion in Kabul. They also unveiled the most shocking scenes of the conflict through graphic images of civilian casualties and dead soldiers on both sides.

For a parallel image, one may recall the BBC in its coverage of WW2 when 'Its news reporters stood alongside men at arms. Sharing their danger, in uniform, with honorary ranks, under the command of the military and prepared to shape or delay the truth...' (Marsh 2012: 72). In the same way, we may argue that Al Jazeera's journalists saw themselves during the Arab Spring revolution, namely when reporting the war in Syria as defenders of the 'truth' therefore stood defiant like robust soldiers defending their stance in search for the objective reporting in covering the war.

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News Reporting and the Politics of Representation: Al Jazeera's Culture of Journalism

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Two decades after its launch, Al Jazeera remains an icon in Middle East media. More than modernize Arab language broadcasting in a part of the world where historically freedom of expression has been venturesome and the press cowed, Al Jazeera introduced a new culture of journalism that helped redefine the relationship between media and politics in the region. This is not to say that Jazeera is not without shortcomings, excesses, and ambiguities, which have been invoked by the network's many critics and detractors, but only to point out a legacy that is enmeshed with the region's complex geopolitical reality.

Although Al Jazeera evolved from a modest Arabic language channel to a multi-channel, multi-platform, multi-language network with a global audience and offices throughout much of the world, the Arab channel remains particularly representative of Al Jazeera's ethos and the kind of journalism it espouses. Its prowess comes from its ability to define issues, shape perceptions, and influence debates. Loathed by Arab governments for undermining their authority, criticized by the West in the post 9/11 era for inciting anti-Western sentiments, shunned by disenchanted Arab publics who have been sobered by the deepening of conflicts and the setbacks that followed

the 2011 Arab uprisings, Al Jazeera has never failed to be a source of controversy.

One of Al Jazeera's traits is its crude way of doing journalism, which is largely defined by its politics of representation. Particularly noteworthy is the channel's unabashed use of images as a representational discourse that transcends news stories. This is most evident in the way Al Jazeera depicts human devastation. The screen of the Arabic channel is rife with violent images, scenes, and footage, with no timidity about displaying death, destruction, and suffering. The channel is often brimming with gruesome images of violence. It does not shy away from carrying images that are typically censored in Western media outlets because of viewers' considerations or because of appropriateness. Unlike the quick, superficial, and often sanitized reporting in mainstream media, Al Jazeera typically does not engage in a sampling of convenience. Especially during times of crises, it seeks to establish its "eyewitness authority" through explicit and unrelenting visual coverage that feeds on graphicness in a proclaimed attempt to depict reality as "as is." (Zelizer 2010: 15)

The channel's extensive coverage of the region's several wars and conflicts, its vivid account of the Arab uprisings and their aftermath, its reporting on the incessant violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and more generally its depiction of the plight of the Arab and Muslim world have, over the years, shed light on the grim reality of an unstable Middle East. In many ways, the images of vicious violence depicted on Al Jazeera's screens have become defining features of a troubled region. From a conflict-ridden Iraq to a politically unstable Lebanon, from a besieged Gaza to a divided Sudan, from a war-torn Syria to an imploding Libya, Al Jazeera thrives on trans-local conflicts, wars, crises, and debacles, which are not wanting in a tense region that is considered one of the newsiest parts of the world. Beyond the political nature of these mediatized events, what Al Jazeera powerfully captures is the devastation of the

human body. By using uncouth and unedited images that distinctly capture violence and destitution, Al Jazeera creates an iconicity that distinguishes it from other media networks. This is not to say that the channel is capitalizing on any inherent cultural violence, but only to ascertain that it exploits images of violence to the fullest. On the screen of Al Jazeera, there are no holds barred; when it comes to the representation of suffering and the depiction of human devastation, nothing much is left to the imagination.

Unlike mainstream media, which tends to offer a distanced mediation of human suffering and sanitized images of human pain, Al Jazeera constructs mediated suffering as an experience that is close to the viewers and, being such, induces an emotional investment and engenders feelings of compassion among audiences (Figenschou 2011: 233-53). Contrary to the sanitized Western media reporting which often conceals the reality of death and destruction, the “mediated closeness” of Al Jazeera exposes the ugly face of reality as experienced by affected populations (Figenschou 243).

How these images are consumed is not all that clear. The sporadic audience research that exists suggests that part of Al Jazeera’s appeal is its tendency not to downplay events. Shielding audiences from images of violence and holding back on graphic footage means giving them less than a full and complete account of what is happening (Fahmy 2007: 245-264). The fact that, at particular times, the network became a unique source of visuals that are widely sought after induced an increased dramatization of visual representation. Significantly, these dynamics have potential counter-effects. If such forms of representation have provoked popular outrage and fed street activism, particularly during times of war and periods of crisis, they may also over time induce numbness, fatalism, and fear.

Al Jazeera’s pursuit of “realistic journalism” (Fahmy: 248) necessarily entails editorial choices that are underwritten by the politics of representation. Al Jazeera not only claims that the

suffering of often underprivileged and under-reported subjects it focuses on is worthy of reporting, but also aligns itself with those subjects, relates to their cause, and identifies with their suffering. These dynamics necessarily define its take on the cherished value of journalistic objectivity. Al Jazeera is keen on presenting itself as the voice of marginalized groups and a window on many unprivileged parts of the world. As such, it takes pride in being the voice of the voiceless. In particular, it pays attention to and reports on marginalized groups, disenfranchised entities, non-state actors, and unconventional players. Whether it is reporting on the Taliban in Afghanistan, Hizbollah in Southern Lebanon, Hamas in the Gaza strip, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Houthis in Yemen, the Shiites in Bahrain, or the Rohingya in Myanmar, Al Jazeera has from the outset given prominence to the politics of the Other. In doing so, it has more than served as a platform to otherwise non-state actors and alternative political players; it managed to infuse the geopolitical reality of the region with new dynamics and bring to bear additional vectors that would otherwise have been deflected. A common thread that holds the channel's coverage and underpins many of its programs is that power dynamics are more malleable than they seem, that power relationships are not stable and could change, and that power politics are not necessarily the purview of conventional players. More than simply report on various unconventional groups and non-official players, Al Jazeera thrusts them to the fore and weaves them into a powerful narrative, which often enough is a counter-narrative that either undermines or deconstructs prevailing narratives.

Seen from a journalism standpoint, though, Al Jazeera's attention to the Other and the kind of assertiveness that underwrites its editorial line are fraught with challenges, the most insistent is professional considerations when it comes to objectivity. While the network attempts to unsettle certain privileged views, it necessarily privileges other views. Not surprisingly, Al Jazeera's reporting has often been

criticized as being either biased or lacking in objectivity, precisely because the channel adopts an advocacy style (Galander 2013). Although Al Jazeera has repeatedly insisted that if its reporting is biased only toward “the truth,” its journalistic practices have been a source of controversy. While some scholars have defended Al Jazeera’s brand of journalism and its keenness on expressing Arab views as “contextual objectivity,” (El Nawawy and Iskandar 2002) others have criticized the channel for its slanted views. Effectively, Al Jazeera’s keenness on advocating the “view and the opposite view,” which is also its much-politicized motto, entails an acknowledgement of the Other—the underdog, the oppressed, the oppositional, and the subaltern. Not surprisingly, Al Jazeera became a window on under-covered regions and a platform for various opposition groups, dissident voices, and non-conformist views that previously had limited media access to the wider Arab public.

If Al Jazeera Arabic, which caters to a particular Arab audience it claims to represent, pursues such a blunt editorial line, its twin Al Jazeera English, which offers a more global perspective and caters to a broader and more international audience, adopts a more nuanced approach. This is where the perspective of the “south” the network claims to offer comes into play. One of the proclaimed aims of Al Jazeera English is to balance the flow of information and to provide another perspective to mainstream news. By paying special attention to the global south, it seeks to balance and thus enrich the dominant, one-dimensional international flow of information and to offer discourses that are different from the ones offered by mainstream news organizations like the BBC and CNN and are of interest to a broader international audience. It does so by balancing West-centric news with news from under-represented regions and infusing them with a diversity of perspectives.

With a real global outlook rather than merely a global reach, Al Jazeera English proclaims to offer an alternative form of journalism.

Distancing itself from the practice of parachute journalism, which relies on dispatching journalists who may not have the necessary depth of knowledge of the terrain and conflict they are covering when on a short assignment to zones of conflict whenever there is a need for covering a story, it invests in local journalists who are present on the ground and have a good understanding of the complexity of the regions they are reporting on and a deep knowledge of their languages and societies, and who therefore do not rely exclusively on press agencies and official sources for their reports. Although the ambitious drive of Al Jazeera and its keenness on providing in-depth coverage of stories has its limits when it comes to international reporting from affected regions outside the Middle East ((Musa and Yusha'u 2013; Kasmani 2013)), Al Jazeera has invigorated the culture of reporting and, over the years, managed to build a core capability in covering stories that are typically under-covered by mainstream media. Significantly, whose reality is being reported and how it is represented make it difficult to disengage the question of representation from the politics of representation.

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Part II

Changing Media.. Changing Politics

Emancipation of the Media as a Means towards the Emancipation of the Arab Political Sphere

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Introduction

Since the mid-nineties of the last century, the Arab media landscape has witnessed great structural dynamism, not only in terms of the organization and size of the domain, but also at the level of diversity of content, professionalism and efficiency in the design and delivery of media content and its format and production.

The technological boom has played a crucial and pivotal role¹ in shaping the field of media, information and communication in many ways, and in bringing about "a new Arab media scene" in terms of openness and a range of different viewpoints and opinions. However, the author would argue that this would have been unthinkable, let alone possible, without social mobilization, with its economic, political and cultural dimensions.

It has become increasingly clear to the Arab media that they need to keep up with the boom, and to diffuse their messages wider than their narrow local, national and regional scope, into new spaces, being now conflicted by globalization, liberalization, openness, democratization and free access to information.

Although the technological developments have strongly contributed to ridding national media spaces of the constraints of the pre-digital revolution, it has, at the same time, helped to undermine the control of state monopolies over various media, especially the audio-visual sector. It has also exposed the problem of public governance of a sector that has become dominated by private actors, and which is capable of providing a media product with new specifications, innovative marketing mechanisms, and the ability to adapt to unprecedented developments.

Within the context of this technological boom and the re-positioning of the state, the political structures in place in the Arab world have faced fervent demands for reform - if not to open up the media sphere (among other areas) to new actors for whom the state's offer is no longer convincing or attractive, at least to create new spaces that guarantee individuals and groups a wider and a more certain margin of expression.

Therefore, the series of "democratic transitions" launched in several Arab countries, starting in the nineties, sought not only to restructure the political systems of existing regimes from an institutional perspective, but also the introduction of a series of laws, regulations and legislation with the aim of establishing pluralistic systems based on the protection of freedom of expression and independence of the media, with all its perspectives, shades and orientations. (Alabdellaoui et al. 2005)

The end of state monopoly over the media sector (radio and television in particular) was not therefore a voluntary political decision by the state, but came under the pressure of the availability of new technologies, and the end of the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; as well as the expansion of liberal policies and the logic of competition, the market, and supply and demand.

The emancipation of the media (freeing it from the yoke of monopoly and control as some say) was not, at the beginning of the

third millennium, the only demand. There was also a demand for the right of access to information, and for access to ideas and opinions through various media as a gateway to greater media freedoms. These were seen as a path towards political participation and a principal pillar of democratic practice in our current time and space.

Most Arab countries have suffered from the monopolization of the media and communications sector by political authorities, and their exploitation for the purpose of promoting a sole system of thought, with no others permitted, and to direct, mold and homogenize public opinion and its expression. In spite of the pressures, both domestic and from abroad, to end the era of state monopolization of media and to establish media freedom, Arab governments have not responded to this demand as needed, maintaining most forms of censorship while seeking to clothe themselves with a respectable layer of laws and regulations. Therefore, we find that all the ‘experiments’ seeking to bring about media reform have largely remained hostage to three limitations:

- The first lies in the inability to implement the provisions of national constitutions when it comes to the media sector-concerning media freedom as the embodiment of the freedoms of opinion and expression. These constitutional provisions have been altogether emptied of their contents, and cast in legislative and legal forms incompatible with the guarantees of freedoms contained in these constitutions.
- The second is the continued violations of, and restrictions on media freedom and freedom of expression in general (even in countries that claim to be reforming their media systems). This is not limited only to the continuation of legal and legislative provisions that violate freedoms, but also to the formulation of vague articles that can be judicially interpreted against the media or restrictions on the circulation of information, views and ideas.

- The third limitation is the absence of laws that guarantee the right of access to information. Although they can be found in some Arab countries, they are often general, not binding on the administration and limited by restrictions protecting the confidentiality of documents and information, either ostensibly to protect state secrets or due to requirements of national security.

These three limitations show not only the shortcomings of media freedom policies in various Arab countries, but also the reproduction of the system of monopoly over the media sector, despite the veneer of reform and the statements of Information Ministers.

If we attempt to classify Arab experiences in the field of media freedom¹ according to the factors I referred to - technological, institutional and political developments - we find three major models:

- The first concerns the political systems whose media policies have interacted with the technological boom and expansion of freedoms and proceeded to open their domestic markets to private actors in the media field, while maintaining a state monopoly over the television sector due to various considerations.
- The second is the "model" of maintaining the system of local media as it is - mute, monotonous and subject to legal and legislative barriers - while establishing parallel media channels (radio and television) that are almost a mirror image of existing channels in terms of their message.
- The third reflects the "experiments" that sought to liberate part of their local media sphere, but which opened the field to other actors to ride on the wave of satellite television to broadcast and disseminate their own media message.

There appears to be little fundamental difference between these three models other than in some of the details and particulars that are exceptions rather than the rule. Therefore, I argue in this paper that in

spite of the strong political mobilization that accompanied the satellite television boom in the last three decades, this is not due, in my opinion, to the opening up of political systems towards greater democratization and protection of media freedoms, but rather due to the local, regional and international political changes that the Arab region could not avoid.

To say that emancipation of the media is the way to liberate the Arab political sphere is a sound statement from a purely theoretical perspective, but it may not always be correct from the point of view of media practice. Media freedom is one of the essential prerequisites of opening up the political field, but it is insufficient if not accompanied by other conditions. Amongst these are acceptance of political pluralism, complete media freedom and above all democratic mechanisms for the transfer of power. Resolving differences between political actors, and between them and media players is another important pillar of the democratic process.

1. Emancipation of the Media as a Means to Enrich the Arab "Public Sphere"

Before the nineties, most media and communications channels in the Arab countries were under the ownership of the state and operated under their direct control or supervision, exercised according to the means and nature of the message to be disseminated and promoted.

The state was not short of ways to justify this position of monopoly, often invoking the objective of "building the nation state" or "preserving national unity", which decades of colonization had succeeded in undermining through sowing the seeds of discord between various groups. (Yahyaoui 2006)

The information technology, information and communications boom has brought with it new realities, together with the impact of digitization and satellite television techniques, and it has also produced the beginnings of a "public sphere" which has been expanded by new media technologies.

1.1 Emancipation of the Media as a Product of a Dialectical Relationship with Politics

It is impossible to imagine, either in absolute or relative terms, a political process without a media process within it or parallel to it. In fact, the relationship between these two sides of the equation is a dialectical relationship by all standards, with different levels of mutual influence between them depending on the nature of the existing political system. In this sense, the media is not only a collection of content, but also a communications system.

"The two systems, i.e. communications and politics, influence and are influenced by each other, although the influence exercised by the political system on the communications system in developing countries is greater than the influence of the communications system on the political system". (Mc Nair 2003) This highlights the way in which political authorities capture media, either for the purpose of using it for self-promotion, or as a way to enhance the image of a certain political system.

Rasem Aljamal argues that in the Arab context,

"communication policies all tend to support the existing power system and its choices in various fields, and serve its genuine and perceived interests, so as to maintain the coherence of the system and its longevity. This has resulted in media content that is best characterized as direct propaganda in some countries, which promotes the interests of the regime and its objectives, promotes national interests and instills loyalty in the minds of the masses". (Aljamal 1991: 30)

On the other hand, or in contrast, we find that the media in democratic countries (especially popular media such as press, radio and television) largely exerts pressure on the political system, especially when it comes to domestic issues. However, this is not the case with respect to international issues, where we find that the

political systems exert pressure on the media, in terms of aims, content and the space it is given.

On this basis, some researchers are of the view that in many Arab countries, there is no ideology for the state and a separate one for the media. Rather, there is a single/unified ideology that defines the state's political, economic and social agenda and determines its attitude to the media and its roles and functions, and the space it is to be granted at the heart or at the margins of public life. (Zaki 2004: 105)

However, some believe that the relationship between media (including communications) and politics should be viewed from two angles: the first is that the media is an influential monitoring and propaganda tool in policies and decisions in the political sphere, based on the famous saying that the media is the fourth pillar of democracy; the second is that "political power exercises control and influence over the media, so it becomes one of the instruments for achieving its political goals (El Bour 2012).

Therefore, the relationship between media and politics seems to be an intimate and interwoven one, to the point where it may not be possible to separate the political process from the media sphere behind it or in parallel to it. The process of influencing and being influenced by the other sphere is evident on two levels: on the individual private level in relation to values, behavior, persuasion and mobilization, and on the collective public level in reference, in form and in substance, to political harmony and cohesion or social disintegration. On the other hand, apart from the efficacy and power of the social approach presented, it is possible to trace the relationship between media and politics through the forms and patterns of communication that take place between them in time and space.

Personal communication in the field of politics "allows the individual possibilities of making his own political decisions, such as voting, based on information, emotions and influences he receives

externally, and to the extent that he is influenced by his cognitive resources and past experiences of people, symbols, ideas and events around him. Media and communications tools play an important role in political education and awareness-raising, through teaching about individuals' audio-visual conduct and how to respond and interact with events and issues around them". (Yahyaoui 2015)

Media, as a tool, enables politicians to communicate with their audience directly and face-to-face. While many favor the use of mass media, which has a broad reach, they do not hesitate to communicate closely and directly to promote their projects and political programs.

There is also communication via mass media, which occurs through traditional media channels (and through digital networks in recent years). The strength of these media lies in their ability to "deliver messages and speeches simultaneously to a wide, anonymous, scattered and diverse audience. Although it may seem as if this form of communication is only one-way, with no interactive feedback, technological advancements have forced these channels to modify their methods of message delivery, with the emergence of so-called interactive communication, so as to ensure broader participation and greater influence". (Yahyaoui 2015: 70)

While this type of media is dominant in political practice, it is still unlikely to bear much fruit unless it is integrated within a comprehensive media strategy, to be determined by the politician before he/she selects a particular medium.

1.2 Media and Politics from the Perspective of the Nature of the Political System

Several factors played and continue to play a major role in shaping the influence of the relationship between the media and politics, and the nature of the relationship itself. These factors are connected to the type of political system, its nature, and the prevailing communications and media system, in addition to the general factors that affect every social structure. There are also external factors,

mainly connected to the boom in information technology, information and communications, and specifically the digital boom since the advent of the Internet and the proliferation of social media networks.

We must recall that after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the "triumph of liberalism", the world has witnessed wave of democratic revolutions. This has been manifested in "the defeat of the most totalitarian regimes, and the isolation of the remaining ones, and the adoption by many countries, including developing nations, of democratic practices through elections and the ballot box. Few countries have moved to expand freedoms, while other countries preferred to begin by structuring their political institutions on democratic foundations". (Zaki 2004: 40)

This system is in opposition to the philosophy of totalitarian regimes where the state, represented by its political system and control over media and communications, works to subdue the latter to its choices and objectives. Journalists and media professionals become mere employees of the state, working to implement whatever is required of them, by promoting the prevailing system and its achievements, and beautifying its image for the domestic masses.

The preliminary conclusion from the above is that the diversity of political systems and their view of media and communications, the widening of the base of political participation or its weakness, faith in democracy or lack thereof, and the different laws governing media and communication- all of these directly influence media and communications and politicians. On the other hand, the importance of political communication tools is significantly shaped by factors determined exclusively by the nature of media regulation in the country in question:

- Differences in the dominant ownership patterns of the media and communications sector, ranging from public channels, which are controlled by the state, and independent channels, which are developing over time into huge media empires

focusing on their economic dimension and profits at the expense of other aspects.

- Differences in funding sources, which influence the media's policies. Among these sources, we find advertising revenues and official and non-official funding. As for commercial media channels, they are keen to avoid upsetting their audiences and advertisers in the themes and issues they present, and to avoid showing strong support for a certain policymaker or another, so they maintain some balance, while the state media work to promote the government's domestic and foreign policies.
- Differences in the nature of the relationship between media and sources of information, especially in light of the lack of laws protecting access to information or access to sources of information.
- Differences in regulation - in Western countries, self-regulation is practiced by media institutions themselves, without the need for intervention by censors, unlike developing countries where the media is characterized by a lack of transparency and state domination. However, the majority of media institutions in democratic countries are owned by big businessmen who "decide their editorial policy in accordance with their political tendency, and not the editorial board, and this in itself is a kind of implicit, hidden and imposed censorship, limiting the diversity of thought and content." (Champagne 1995: 215)

1.3 Liberating the Media from Government Domination

The focus in this section is not on how to liberate the media from government control since I have referred to its causes and dimensions at the start of this paper. I emphasized that the technological factor and the international context have had a major role in forcing governments across the world, including the Arab world, if not to lift

their control over all the media, then at least to enact legislation that moves towards opening the media field to new players and easing censorship of audio-visual media.

Arab satellite channels both public and private have played a big and growing role in shaping Arab public opinion, especially regarding major national issues. Their influence has become, in the view of some, greater than that of governments, political parties, trade unions and civil society organizations and others, which have declined in popularity and lost their ability to mobilize.

The emancipation of the Arab media (expressed in the explosion in the number of satellite channels) has contributed to widening the range and dissemination of media content, both general and specialized, exceeding the capacity of any political party to disseminate its discourse, promote its views or influence the public. However, the function of the media in this case differs from that of politics, not only in terms of their practical implementation and their vocation, but also in terms of the nature of their goals. The emancipation of the media, as a result of irrepressible technological breakthroughs and the pressures of the international context, has not only contributed to the creation of a margin of media freedom, which has long been suppressed using various justifications, but has also strongly contributed to cultivating a space within which one can distinguish between the political discourse of governments or parties, and media discourse disseminated by a given channel. At this level of detail, it is as if we are moving towards a new distribution of functions between these two domains, even if they have the same functions and objectives: influencing and reshaping public opinion in one direction or another. This became clear in the very beginnings of the Arab mobilizations launched at the beginning of 2011, where it was proven that democracy (or democratic transition) requires the existence of a "public sphere" in which fundamental problems and issues can be discussed. (Yahyaoui 2015)

2. Media, the Political Sphere and the Public Sphere

If we assume that there is a dialectical relationship between media and politics, we will conclude that any act by one of them would have an impact on the other. Therefore, expanding the field of media action is likely to expand capacities at the level of political action and vice versa. However, this conclusion cannot occur, let alone be accurate, without the existence of a minimal level of autonomy within this equation, i.e. between media and politics, as the two fields are distinct although intertwined in many ways. They both feed into the public sphere, as the "material" sphere in which actors battle to defend their opinions, ideas, images and perceptions. The public sphere, in its initial form, was limited to a restricted, enlightened and socially and culturally harmonious elite debating among themselves thanks to the availability of elite press journalism. The spread of mass media is, therefore, a real indicator of the progress in mass democracy, including the right to vote; the continued expansion of the political field; the institutionalization of the major functions of the state; the ability to manage difference and competition; and the possibility to utilizing media as a communication tool to address the masses, etc.

2.1 Media and the Mediatized Public Space

One of the features of "mass democracy" that emerged with the fall of totalitarian regimes, and the strengthening of counterweights to power, is the special role of media and communication. Indeed, their existence is one of the conditions for the formation of the pillars of political conduct and the democratic process in general.

Dominique Wolton expresses this relationship through the use of the concept of "mediatized public space", as a place where symbolic relations develop as opposed to direct physical relationships. It refers, in his view, to an "open civil society, where social relations are characterized by the central value of the individual, whether at work or at the level patterns of consumption". (Wolton 1991: 97)

There is a fundamental contradiction that stands out here, especially in light of the political models that are based on the individual, and give priority to tools that facilitate expression, individual freedom and respect for identity on the one hand, and on the other, a society that depends economically, culturally and politically on the number of citizens, consumers or participants in public debate. Therefore, we find that Wolton insists on the need for the availability of an expansive public sphere, so that these structural contradictions do not transform into tension, then to internal strife, and to competition, based essentially on violence. Thus, this mediatized public space gives the press and audio-visual media a prominent role as a communication and information tool to enrich the dimensions of the debate within it.

When this public space is vast and contains various types and forms of information and opinions, it provides the foundations for the expansion of the political sphere itself, not on the level of the number of actors, but also on the level of currents of ideas, symbols and representations that arise and are debated. On this basis, this mediatized public space has the features and advantages of the "individualist society", with freedom and media pluralism on the one hand, and the value of the individual as the epicenter of the political process, its means as well as its end. However, I note that there are several contradictions between the mediatized public space and political practice: (Wolton 1991: 99)

- The first fundamental contradiction is the domination of the news and the reduction of time to all that is current, direct and transient. As I have said in this regard, this new phenomenon is a product of the technological boom and the expansion of the political sphere after the decline of the totalitarian model, and the "triumph" of the liberal model, economically and politically. The irony here, particularly in the case of the opening up of the "media market", is that

politics is called upon, if not forced, to keep up with the logic of speed and the present, and that political actors are required, in turn, to adapt to an abundance of information that is not always consistent with what the public sphere needs to ensure democratic competition. Therefore, the emancipation of the media sphere here, in light of the developments analyzed above, will not necessarily result in an expansion of the public sphere where politics is practiced, because the latter acts on the long term and is not always hostage to the invasive power and density of information.

- The second contradiction between the mediatized public sphere and political practice is the representation of issues that the media disseminates in the public sphere, which is picked up by political actors and used in their daily practice. The availability of large volumes of information, emanating from a free media sphere, does not mean that political actors will be provided with the necessary information to understand reality. Knowledge requires a longer time span so that information can grow and evolve, becoming transformed into knowledge, which can be built upon to enrich the sphere of discussion and deliberation.
- The third contradiction is the fact that the more informed political (and cultural and economic) elites are, thanks to the abundance of information, the further they become from actual reality. Here it seems as if the large amount of information, and its capitalization by elites, obscures the reality of what is really happening. Thus, all debates and deliberations are exclusively the preserve of these elites, and are only relatively accessible to all other parts of the public sphere.

2.2 The Public Sphere, the Political Sphere and Mass Democracy

The more open and broad the political sphere, and the more diverse and pluralistic the media, the broader the public sphere in which different visions, ideas and representations can interact, and the larger the space for political action as one of the pillars of democracy.

These three levels (public sphere, political sphere and mass democracy) converge at more than one point by virtue of the nature of their functions and working mechanisms, but they may conflict with one another when one expands significantly or seeks to enlarge into the space of the other. Therefore, the emancipation of media in an open and broad political sphere requires a minimal level of organization, regulation and supervision. If the public sphere is the central democratic space for the circulation and exchange of ideas and information, it needs to be organized in terms of the distribution of roles (between private and public media on the one hand, and between general and specialized media on the other) so as to prevent inequalities in communication within the same sphere.

This is not solely a matter of ensuring a minimal level of harmony between a free media and the open "political market", but also a matter of maintaining the basic rules that ensure the continuation of the principles of public interest and prevent the domination of any actor. Public channels, for example, may not always be faithful to the principles of public interest, just as private channels may not necessarily be commercial enterprises seeking only productivity and profit. Thus, we must not overlook the public interest when we speak about the pivotal role of the media and public opinion in the public sphere.

The aim here is to use the right expression in order not to make a confusion between expression and communication, which are two different levels. Wolton (1991: 102) describes freedom of communication as "a demand for expression without taking the other's opinion into account. What we call communication is nothing

more than a claim to the right to expression. However, expression is not possible without the other, and the other might have something to say and not just to hear... Freedom of communication has this condition: we must not limit ourselves to freedom of expression but must also acknowledge that in any series of communications, there are at least two interlocutors, and that the other always has something he wants to say and not just to receive. Coercion here is a condition of freedom."

On this basis, the emancipation of the media sphere (and of the political sphere alike) cannot be achieved without re-organizing, regulating or reframing, without coercion according to Wolton. Media freedom (and consequently freedom of communication) will produce pluralism in media production and its approach and mechanisms but behind this industry lie citizens, values and major stakes, which transcend the industry itself and have other characteristics. Thus, media and communications are not mere technologies and messages that are sent and received, but are essentially tools to connect citizens and social groups that exchange, discuss and share ideas and visions. They are "objects" interacting in the framework of a public sphere intersected by the political, economic, cultural, religious and ideological spheres. It is a space divided by deep contradictions, which cannot coexist if we do not apply the principle of coercion to restrain and precisely determine its limits and extent. Otherwise, when media freedom becomes far-reaching media domination, it limits diversity because it is not as consistent with it as it is with homogeneity and fitting things within a "unified" framework. Even if this homogenization does not go so far as to impose the values and representations of the media, the latter only rarely reflect developments in society and do not seek, or see it as in their interest, to reflect, evaluate or address these developments in the public sphere.

2.3 The Political Sphere as a Media Tool

In democracy, there is no dividing line between action and communication. It is up to politicians to explain and justify their decisions, not only to give them the desired popular legitimacy but also to ensure their election or re-election. This is an old and established fact, but the spread of mass media has given it even greater salience to the extent of creating a fusion between political action and communication. It is now a foregone conclusion that the use of media and communications tools (especially television and social networks) is essential for convincing the public and influencing public opinion. The media itself do not tire of underlining to politicians that they must "speak more" on the basis of their belief in the right of citizens to receive and access information. Therefore, we find that many politicians (especially in the West) allocate between 20 and 40 percent of their time to formulating their media and communications strategies, if not when preparing their campaigns then at least to improve their public image.

The slogan of politicians when engaging with the media field is now "talking a great deal" or authorizing others to speak on their behalf. This is the most effective means to engage in a public sphere in which there is a great deal of "talk" and a deluge of ideas, opinions and messages. Political action thus requires the creation of a clear message, so that disputes can be resolved on the basis of communication, not through calling for or using violence. Therefore, the transition from violence to peaceful confrontation is evidence of political maturity, as democratic progress is measured by what is raised and discussed in the public sphere, not in other spaces. Therefore, the function of media and communication, especially when it coincides with the expansion of the political sphere, is to mitigate confrontations based on physical violence and conflict and to implement the principle of competition within the public sphere, which should be reflected by a liberated and free media.

Conclusions and Lessons for the Arab World

The dialectical relationship between the media and politics in the Arab world is no different from what I have discussed regarding democratic states, as it appears from a theoretical perspective. The two contexts may differ in degree, but not in terms of the nature and characteristics of this relationship. Therefore, I argue that the problem of emancipating the media which relates to emancipating the political sphere indicates the existence of positive and negative interactions, depending on the context in which they operate:

- First: In order for the relationship to be positive, it is essential to have a public space (I have referred to this as the “public sphere” in this paper) within which rivals can compete in open and free domains, free from coercion other than in matters of regulation, organization and framework or identifying the rules of the game. The existence of a free media market, according to this framework, can contribute to opening up the "political market" - governments, political parties and trade unions - as a necessary condition, but it will not be sufficient if this openness is difficult to achieve, restricted or if there is a lack of will.
- Second: If we assume that emancipating the media sphere can emancipate the political sphere (Arab and non-Arab), this requires us to recognize the independence of these two levels; otherwise it would make little sense to speak of subject and object. The political sphere is the fundamental element for constructing the public sphere, and the latter cannot be a space for discussion and competition if it is not “fed” with information, facts, data and knowledge by the media. The boom in information technology, media and communications has not only contributed to providing the information the public sphere needs, but has also contributed to facilitating access to such information, in

contrast to the age of scarcity of information, which caused quantitative and qualitative inequalities between actors.

- Third: When the political sphere is open and the media sphere is free, the role of public opinion carries significant weight and influence. In this case, neither political actors nor the media can resort to strategies of homogenization and propaganda. The availability of information allows public opinion to distinguish, compare and choose. As far as these positive links are relevant, there are, in the Arab world, unproductive elements that prevent the power of this dialectic to give form and content to this information.

The Arab political sphere is still restricted both physically and symbolically. Thus, even with the relative emancipation of the media sphere, the dialectic remains hostage to considerations that the actors cannot overcome. Therefore, we find an open media field in many Arab countries, but it is unable to contribute to “moving” the static political scene. This gives the impression of independence between the two spheres, but it is a negative independence as long as it cannot lead to influence and action.

The political sphere still suffers from a lack of mechanisms to create a public sphere with space for free competition based on differing ideas, visions, perceptions and representations, without leading to conflicts and rejection. Therefore, we find that what Wolton calls coercion (which is positive in his view) turns into restrictions to obstruct parties, journalists and politicians alike due to the static constitutions which are transformed into laws and regulations that constrain the field and seek to impose limits and restrictions.

Public opinion remains a "mythical phenomenon" and an abstract sociological concept of little significance. We may recognize that it has become better informed, thanks to the wealth of information and ease of access, but it remains an element that is only rarely taken into consideration in decision-making.

Finally I would emphasize that emancipating the media cannot be a means to emancipating the Arab political sphere unless there is awareness that the two spheres together must be an entry point to enriching the public sphere and to opening up the way for establishing democratic values.

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Al Jazeera and the Arab Spring: What role and what impact?

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Introduction

The relationship between the Arab Spring revolutions and Al Jazeera is a distinctive relationship unlike that of any other Arab or non-Arab satellite channel. These revolutions are the result of tyranny, injustice and deprivation endured for decades by a broad cross-section of social groups. Since its inception, Al Jazeera has taken a close interest in those concerns and grievances, which have often been at the heart of its work. This was a reason behind the sustained campaigns against it, which went as far as coordination between Arab regimes to issue legislation and adopt mechanisms to limit Al Jazeera's freedom to cover corruption and violations of human rights in the Arab world.

For these reasons, Al Jazeera was the best-placed media platform to closely follow any protest movement or social uprising, especially when it expanded and attracted broader popular participation. This was demonstrated at the beginning of the events in Sidi Bouzid in late December 2010, which spread rapidly to neighboring regions and reached various parts of Tunisia within three weeks. Al Jazeera's coverage was the most extensive of any channel despite a ban on its correspondents in Tunisia, attracting the attention of public opinion both

inside the country and across the Arab World (Zakhour 2011: 216). Its coverage of the subsequent outpouring of protests elsewhere was no less extensive - on 28 December 2010 in Algeria, 14 January 2011 in Jordan, 17 January in Mauritania and Oman, 18 January in Yemen, 21 January in Saudi Arabia, 24 January in Lebanon, 25 January in Egypt, 26 January in Syria, 28 January in the West Bank in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, 30 January in Sudan, 1 February in Djibouti and 4 February in Bahrain among others (Guidère 2012: 13-14).

Al Jazeera's close coverage of the development of the course of the Arab Spring provoked great controversy, ranging from highlighting its distinct embrace of those revolutions through dedication of special news bulletins, programs and talk shows, to accusations of exaggerating these events and attempting to spread them between regions and countries. The intensive news coverage made Al Jazeera look like by some as if it was manufacturing uprisings and revolutions rather than simply covering them.

A thorough analysis of the impact of Al Jazeera on the evolution of the Arab Spring requires a chronological examination of its coverage by tracing the three major phases (before, during and after):

- First phase: the role of Al Jazeera in facilitating the Arab Spring revolutions
- Second phase: forms of covering the Arab revolutions
- Third phase: the repercussions of the revolutions and their consequences on Al Jazeera's role and position

I rely, in my analysis of these three phases, on available studies, data, testimonies and statistics, in addition to one-to-one interviews conducted with a number of actors at Al Jazeera headquarters during my visit to the Qatari capital, Doha, in 2011 and 2013.

1. The Role of Al Jazeera in Facilitating the Arab Spring

Lynch considers that the evolution of the media field in the Middle East has enabled the beginning of the formation of an Arab

public sphere, gradually resulting in a kind of common awareness, creating trends that raised the expectations of the public and demands for change, and pushing for a response to those expectations and for them to be taken into account in the formulation of government policies and choices (Lynch 2006: 3).

Al Jazeera played an active role in the development process described by Lynch. It did not comply with the traditions and limitations of Gulf and Arab countries in its media discourse. Instead, it raised the level of freedom of expression, irritating all Arab regimes, not only those in the Gulf. Its coverage focused on Arab and international affairs and its slogan - "*One View... and the Opposing View*" - went against the prevailing media model as it opened Al Jazeera as a platform for Arab opposition figures, who had always been persecuted and isolated (Seeb 2011: 169), including Islamic movements whose persecution was backed by both Arab and Western powers.

Al Jazeera was pioneering in its political discussion programs that were diverse in their format - some with a monologue format such as "*Liqaa Khaas*" (One-to-One Encounter) or "*Bilaa Hudud*" (Without Borders), some featuring dialogue between two figures such as "*Al Ittijah Al Mu'aakis*" (The Opposite Direction), some with three guests such as "*Akthar Min Ra'y*" (More than One Opinion) and others with a discussion between more than three guests such as "*Hiwaar Maftuh*" (Open Dialogue). The most important programs are not always broadcast from the channel's central studios but from its studios in other capitals (Washington, London, Beirut, Paris, etc.), with other programs broadcast from outside Doha whenever required by the nature of the events or guests (from Cairo, Rabat, Moscow, Ankara, Tripoli, etc.). It also hosts guests via satellite link, in addition to having correspondents in all the most important world capitals and close to the most significant hotspots of conflict or important events. This allows the channel to enrich its bulletins and programs with live

coverage of events and to be the first to arrive and secure testimonies on the ground, before these events are then interpreted, analyzed and commented on by experts, specialists and analysts (Ghareeb and Mansour 2000: 24-25).

After CNN had dominated coverage of the Second Gulf War on Iraq in 1991, Al Jazeera - and later Al Arabiyya, Abu Dhabi and other Arab channels - changed the balance in the use of media in war, whether in its coverage of Iraq or Afghanistan, the war of liberation in South Lebanon, the resistance to the war on Gaza or the successive Palestinian uprisings. Arabs acquired a new pair of eyes to view wars and major events, gaining new Arabic sources of information on major events in the region. This is evidenced by major surveys that place Al Jazeera as the number one source of news for tens of millions of Arabs (Hwaik 2013: 78). This explains the race by world powers to establish Arabic-speaking channels, revealing their eagerness to reduce the influence of Al Jazeera and its impact on Arab public opinion (Lamloum 2004: 134).

Al Jazeera's relationship with its public has benefitted from developments in satellite broadcasting that have made it easier to cross borders, making it, since its launch under the leadership of its Qatari hosts, an Arab channel in its orientations and outlook with a broad audience across the Arab region and even among Arab expatriates in diaspora. It has sought to "capture political sentiments across the Arab nation, through addressing common Arab issues and concerns such as the Palestinian cause, American hegemony over the region, and political and economic corruption rampant in most Arab countries" (El Oifi 2013). Al Jazeera has laid bare, followed by other Arab satellite channels, what was concealed by official Arab media - the injustices suffered by Arab nations not only due to the despotism of their rulers, degradation of their peoples, and violation of their will and their exclusion from public affairs, but also due to the abuses practiced by both old and new colonial powers, their exploitation of

the wealth and resources of the region, and the continuation of direct occupation of Palestine and the Golan Heights, an aberrant case of modern-day colonialism.

The US war on Iraq following the siege and slow destruction of that country in the late nineties, the expansion of resistance to the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, the Palestinian uprisings and the wars on Gaza were the most significant events that highlighted Al Jazeera's identity and its distinctive media discourse in the Arab region. The events of 11 September 2001 also represented a turning point in the history of the Arab region and the rise of Al Jazeera. With these events, the United States discovered the extent of the failure of the Arab allies and rulers it supported to monitor and control public opinion in their countries, as evidenced by the wave of popular hostility towards American foreign policy in the region. It was a shock for the US administration to discover that the perpetrators of these events hailed from three of its most loyal Arab allies, which was no barrier to the involvement of their nationals (El Oifi 2005: 45-47). It provided a very clear lesson that the more the United States exercises control over Arab rulers and pressurizes them to act in its interests, the more they lose control of disaffected public opinion (Rice 2005). Al Jazeera's coverage increased that discontent by highlighting the continuing decline of the Arab world, whether due to foreign interference (American, Zionist, etc.) or the rise in corruption and authoritarianism that characterizes the relationship between Arab regimes and their peoples.

The task of managing public opinion, whether by Arab governments or external actors, has become increasingly difficult, particularly with the beginnings of the emergence of a shared Arab public opinion that is sweeping all Arab countries thanks to the rise of cross-border Arab satellite channels, with Al Jazeera at their helm (Schleifer 1999). Arab public opinion and the crystallization of an active public sphere have emerged as new challenges to dominant

forces in the region. Consequently, foreign Arabic-speaking satellite channels are increasingly seeking to compete with their Arab counterparts, especially Al Jazeera (El Oifi 2005), which has played an important role in developing a common Arab public sphere.

Within this context, the term "the Arab street" is frequently used as a concept and symbol (Eickelman 2002: 39-40) to highlight the chaotic and emotional nature of popular protests in the Arab region, without achieving any impact. However, it is worth noting that the term also covers the invisible substructure that shapes the consciousness of these nations and creates a common consciousness. This space is often an organizational medium for resistance not only against the United States whenever it displays excessive contempt for the rights of the Arabs, but also against some Arab governments, especially those complicit as partners or accomplices in the policies of dominant powers. This "popular anger" is often expressed via media that is close to the "pulse of the street" (El Oifi 2005: 45). Al Jazeera has succeeded in that role in its coverage of the Palestinian uprisings, resistance against Zionist colonization in Gaza and southern Lebanon, and the protracted siege and destruction of Iraq, and finally in its coverage of the Arab revolutions and subsequent turbulence experienced by the Arab region.

The emergence of Al Jazeera has transformed the rules of the game for Arab media, overturning the prevailing practices of promoting entertainment media and restricting news so as to conceal the deficiencies of the Arab reality. Al Jazeera's strategy was built on complete differentiation from the prevailing mainstream Arab media model (El Oifi 2004), in particular in its approach to the news. It opened its programs to all Arab political movements, including movements banned by Arab and Western powers such as Islamist and radical opposition forces (Fandy 2000: 379). It also opened its doors to talents from across the Arab world, from Jordanians and Palestinians to Syrians and North Africans, becoming a space for

shared creativity and cooperation between different generations of journalists, some trained abroad and others from Arab media organizations, as well as new talent that Al Jazeera developed and trained.

Those conditions have combined to make Al Jazeera able to respond to the Arab Spring other than with the zero-sum logic that governed most Arab media channels' response. How did it respond to the developments at that time? Did its coverage of the events differ between each Arab country?

2. Al Jazeera's Coverage of the Course of the Arab Revolutions

As Al Jazeera's Arab viewership widened and its news, programs and talk shows developed a growing loyal audience, it attracted the wrath of most Arab regimes, even pushing them to cooperate to pass new laws to rein it in, such as criminalizing criticism of national and religious symbols (Arab Ministers of Information, 2008). On the outbreak of the "Arab revolutions", Al Jazeera's approach to covering events was closer to the "pulse of the street" and popular feelings of frustration than it was to the position of Arab rulers and their portrayal of events as riots led by infiltrators, masked men or conspirators and anarchists.

Al Jazeera's response to those events can be described as reaping the fruits of its efforts, after having spent more than a decade exposing the excesses of those regimes and their violations of the rights of their people. Few experts and observers take the view that Al Jazeera's coverage was overly biased in favor of the revolutionary mobilization to the extent of promoting and embracing it, dedicating all its airtime to covering protests in Habib Bourguiba Avenue, Tahrir Square and the squares of Yemen - so much so that Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, told the French newspaper "Le Monde" in an interview on 11 March 2011, "Facebook and Twitter played a positive role, but not as much as Al Jazeera" (Assange 2011). This

points to the channel's strong influence, although it is difficult to quantify its role as compared with that of new media, which young people - especially in the Tunisian and Egyptian cases - creatively used to mobilize, organize and influence, and disseminate information and events in a continual struggle day after day.

"The Egyptian revolution has demonstrated, and before it its Tunisian counterpart, the status of new media and its importance. It has become clear that it is difficult to confront it using traditional tools for domination and repression, especially given its instant interaction with traditional media" (Bénilde 2011). That experience also proved that the new and old media are closely linked - while the Internet has created an uninterrupted flow of information and new methods for circumventing restrictions on information, and the ability to disseminate it through Social Media Networks, giving that information momentum and bringing it out of "the Facebook community" to wider society is where traditional media provides an added value. This was used to good effect by Al Jazeera in breaking the information siege on the Arab Spring revolutions.

It is true that Social Media Networks in general, and specifically Facebook, contributed to increased communication between youth participating in the protests and better coordination between them, enabling selection of places and times to meet, agreeing on protest demands and translating them into slogans. All this is true, but to consider Facebook or Al Jazeera as having created the revolutions would be an exaggeration. The Egyptian government's decision to shut down the Internet, for example, did not reduce the size of demonstrations nor the scale of their demands. The government's interference with Al Jazeera's transmission and even blocking its signal did not weaken the will of young people and their determination to achieve their demands. While those means provided an important boost for these youth-led mobilizations, they remain means and tools. The same tools, when used in other societies or even

in those same societies but in a different political, economic or social context, will certainly not produce identical results.

Given that the "Arab revolutions" are not homogeneous and cannot be treated as copycat of one another - although they share some common inspirations and influences - Al Jazeera's coverage differed from one country to another. This was shaped by differences in events, popular attitudes, levels of organization and the nature of the regimes and brutality of their security forces. Also this can be related to the extent of their infiltration of society, and their success in absorbing the momentum of the protests or transforming them into armed conflicts.

There is another interpretation of why Al Jazeera's coverage of the revolutions differed between countries, which argues that it is linked to Al Jazeera's agenda of focusing on protests in republican regimes while overlooking those in monarchies (El-Mili 2012). I will be examining these two alternative hypotheses regarding Al Jazeera's coverage - the first linking it to the different nature of each Arab revolution and the second linking it to Al Jazeera's agenda - through a systematic analysis of the forms and levels of coverage by Al Jazeera of the most important events of the Arab Spring and the differences between them.

The Tunisian Case

Al Jazeera had no organized or official presence in Tunisia until the beginning of 2011 as the Ben Ali regime had banned it from the country. Lotfi Hajji, its oldest correspondent there, had been denied a journalistic permit in the country for over a decade and only received it after Ben Ali fled. When protests broke out in Sidi Bouzid on 17 December 2010, the channel had no direct presence to cover them. As Ahmed Sheikh, former Al Jazeera editor, explained, coverage of the accelerating events was done through "dedicating a special team to follow developments by phone, Facebook and other media, which

alternated to follow events in Tunisia minute by minute" (Ahmed Sheikh 2011). Wadah Khanfar, former Director General of Al Jazeera, added that the channel was "the first traditional media channel to rely almost entirely on Social Media Networks in order to keep up with the developments and evolution of the Tunisian revolution" (Wadah Khanfar 2011).

What Khanfar describes as a distinguishing feature of Al Jazeera, Naoufel El-Mili sees as "abandoning professional norms and capitalizing on ordinary protests to create narratives used to mobilize and dissimulate for Al Jazeera's own ends" (El-Mili 2012). El-Mili agrees with argument that classifies Al Jazeera as an instigator of events, biased towards revolutionaries rather than maintaining an equal distance from them and the regimes they opposed. This view is inconsistent with the function of independent satellite news channels as a critical voice. Such channels do not tend to build their editorial line in harmony with the policies of ruling regimes, unlike Arab media whose editorial lines are determined by those policies. Al Jazeera has been committed to expressing the concerns of citizens, even when they are inconsistent with the official version of events provided by regimes, as was the case with the Tunisian revolution (Alhijawi 2011: 94).

Analyses of Al Jazeera's coverage of the events that shook the Tunisian street and impacted on many Arab countries often exceed the boundaries of media analysis and rules of discourse analysis and enter the realm of political conjecture. While proponents of the "Arab revolutions" consider that Al Jazeera's media coverage played a big role in transmitting events that shook the region like an earthquake in a number of weeks, those opposed to the revolutions and their consequences see Al Jazeera's coverage as nothing but a conspiracy led by Qatar on behalf of dominant world forces.

The margin of neutrality available to Arab political and cultural elites continues to narrow day after day since the beginning of 2011.

Thus, we see a trend towards political and cultural alignment heavily shaped by ideology, which leads to all events being interpreted from only one viewpoint and seeing all opposing views as a conspiracy. Views in Tunisia regarding Al Jazeera's role in events in the country tend to be shaped by this dichotomy - seeing it as either an unconditional champion of the Tunisian people or as an enemy conspirator. The reality, in the author's view, is not to be found in either of these extremes. There no doubt that Al Jazeera was biased in favor of the Tunisian people - if we consider the slogans raised by them to be an expression of their will - and that it was not biased in favor of the Tunisian regime, although it gave airtime to regime representatives until 13 January 2011. Al Jazeera is not an exception in this approach to covering the Tunisian revolution - the world's media celebrated the Ukrainian revolution and the Eastern European revolutions. However, this is not condemned in studies concerning media coverage of those revolutions, nor are they accused of being biased towards those populations and against their regimes.

Nevertheless, Al Jazeera's record may not be devoid of infringements of professional standards - such as providing equal representation to regime and opposition voices, in which it favored the latter. The accuracy and veracity of news was not verified in all cases, such as the reporting of armed clashes near the Tunisian presidential palace without confirmation, the near-absence of coverage of looting, arson and attacks on public and private property after Tunisian security forces withdrew, and lack of information and discussion about those incidents in the large number of programs that the channel dedicated to Tunisia in the second half of January 2011.

There were lapses in judgment in focusing on the celebratory aspects of the successful overthrow of Ben Ali without focusing on incidents of looting and damage that subdued Tunisians' celebrations and distressed them. Despite these reservations concerning Al Jazeera' coverage, we cannot deny that it was the major source of

information for the majority of Tunisian viewers, given that local media had been discredited in their eyes after betting on the survival of the Ben Ali regime until its last moments. One of the signs of the welcoming of Al Jazeera was the opening of its first office in Tunis and broadcasting of its programs from the heart of the Tunisian capital after years of being banned. An influx of prominent Tunisian politicians from all political trends came to participate in its programs and no voices emerged then to challenge the channel's impartiality or accuse it of bias towards the Tunisian people in their victory in overthrowing one of the most repressive dictatorships in a peaceful manner. It took approximately a year for criticisms of Al Jazeera's coverage to emerge, in parallel with the wave of denunciations of the aims of the Arab revolutions and their consequences.

Perhaps the unexpectedness of the Tunisian revolution and the lack of official presence before the revolution shaped its coverage of events. In that case, how does it compare with the Egyptian case, where those conditions not present?

The Egyptian Case

Al Jazeera's coverage of events in Egypt differed from that in Tunisia for several reasons, most notably that its office in Egypt had been operating for years and that its team was spread throughout Egypt's major cities and had the equipment, training and network of contacts that enabled it to keep up with the development of the protests. Moreover, the events in Tunisia came without prior warning while those in Egypt were inspired by the Tunisian example, even if they did not duplicate them. This information gave the Al Jazeera's teams greater capacity to cover and follow events both on the ground and in the central headquarters in Doha.

Al Jazeera began its coverage of events in Egypt in a state of complete readiness, as it had learned from the Tunisian experience to take the necessary precautions for all emergencies, including possible

closure of its office and disruption of its correspondents' movements. Its presence on the ground made it more balanced in covering events during the first few days, but with the escalation of events towards their peak, there was a noticeable preference given to voices in Tahrir Square compared with those representing the regime. Al Jazeera, and to a lesser extent Al Arabiya, were held responsible for helping destabilize the security and stability of Arab nations, accused of exaggerating events in relation to reality on the ground and deviating from its obligations of neutrality and objectivity. Mubarak supporters and those afraid of the contagious nature of the Arab revolutions assert that "Al Jazeera played a major role in the collapse of the Mubarak regime, causing its collapse in the media before its political collapse" (Ben Hamadi 2013).

The final days before Mubarak's resignation were a difficult time for Al Jazeera's correspondents in Egypt. Egyptian authorities ordered the closure of the Al Jazeera office, its head Abdel Fattah Fayed and the journalist Ahmed Youssef were arrested and the movements of its reporters were severely restricted and their permits withdrawn. The authorities went so far as to ban the channel from broadcasting on the Egyptian satellite carrier "Nile Sat". After Mubarak stepped down, the channel resumed its activities in its headquarters in Egypt despite the ransacking of its office and most of its equipment (aljazeera.net 2014), and the channel participated in the celebrations of the fall of Mubarak from Tahrir Square and other squares in a number of Egyptian cities.

Criticisms of Al Jazeera's bias in favor of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and against their isolated regimes did not only come from supporters of the two regimes, but also from Western specialists such as Mathieu Guidère, who commented on a program on the French satellite channel France 24 that some Arab channels did not stop at covering events but worked to create and feed them through biased news messages and one-sided analysis, thus moving

away from neutrality (Mathieu Guidère, 2011). This position was contradicted by most Western satellite channels (BBC, France 24, CNN and others) who covered the Arab revolutions in a similar way to Al Jazeera, especially when it became clear that these regimes would soon collapse.

In the case of the Yemeni revolution, we find a surprising consensus in criticism of Al Jazeera's coverage of events between supporters and opponents of the revolution, with different perspectives and justifications, as I will discuss in the next section.

The Yemeni Case

The first incidents of the "Yemeni revolution" took place while all eyes were on Egypt's Tahrir Square. Consequently, it did not receive the media attention its counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt did, or even that in Libya and Syria. The "Yemeni revolution" saw a very weak and limited Social Media presence. The use of Facebook, which was effective in Tunisia and Egypt, was not widespread and did not play a prominent role in mobilizing Yemeni youth and coordinating the protests. As the journalist Tawakkol Karman commented to swissinfo.ch at the time, "Those who have a computer in Yemeni society essentially belong to bourgeois families, which explains the small number of those active on social networks" (Khechana 2012). Local media was divided into supporters of Ali Abdullah Saleh, hostile to the protests and bent on vilifying and undermining them, and supporters of the demands for change, engaged in promoting them.

As for Arab satellite channels, and particularly Al Jazeera, Yemenis were critical of its weak presence at the beginning of the protests and its lack of focus on protests in their country similar to those in Egypt and Tunisia, despite the steadily rising scale of the protests and the participation of vast numbers of youth demanding change in response to regime corruption and the opposition's

ineffectiveness due to the tribal power balance, domination of security and military institutions by the family of Ali Abdullah Saleh and the control of his supporters over the administration and state institutions. Protesters also accused Al Jazeera, according to "Al Masdar Online", of "colluding with the regime due to what they saw as the major blackout on the protests taking place in the country to demand the overthrow of Saleh's regime" (Al Masdar Online 2011). In fact the charge was not directed at Al Jazeera alone but at all satellite channels that had closely covered events in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria.

Al Jazeera's correspondent in Sanaa, Ahmed Shalafi, rejects these accusations, arguing that "The fact that the Yemeni authorities prevented our correspondents Abdul Haq Sadah and Ahmed Zidane from continuing to work in Yemen was unjustified, and came after a series of measures against the channel's office in Sanaa and its crew by the authorities." He also pointed out that he had been detained for a week before without charge, harassed and subject to security restrictions, and that security authorities had voiced many objections to Al Jazeera's coverage (Shalafi 2011).

However, later developments revealed that Yemen's neighbours, mainly the Arab Gulf states, had clear plans for Yemen unlike in the case of North African countries (Tunisia, Egypt and Libya). They sought to impose a consensual solution that would remove Saleh - on the face of it - by replacing him with his vice-president while maintaining the ruling party's domination over all levers of power and keeping the Yemeni army under the grip of the President's family. This solution managed to take the wind out of the sails of the "Yemeni revolution" and transform it into a façade of apparent reform that would protect the rest of the region from the winds of revolutionary change that had begun to blow in some corners of the Gulf kingdoms.

The Gulf solution to the Yemeni revolution was reflected in Al Jazeera's coverage of events, which began to take a back seat in light

of the dangerous escalation of events in Syria and Libya. Was Al Jazeera neglectful in focusing on Libya and Syria instead as they erupted into armed conflict?

It is not possible to draw a clear conclusion - although early signs of armed conflict in Yemen did emerge with the army's deployment to the streets and the defection of parts of the army to the protests, in addition to the shelling of the former President's headquarters after he ordered attacks on dissident leaders and their homes (Al Masdar Online 2011). However, calm returned after the signing of the "Gulf initiative", which provided for the transfer of power from Ali Abdullah Saleh to his deputy, Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, in exchange for granting the former immunity from prosecution. The initiative was signed under pressure from Gulf states and with the blessing of the United States and resulted in a temporary calm - and a consequent drop in coverage by Al Jazeera compared to that of other countries. However, it remained the channel that had been closest to Yemen's squares when they were filled with protesters demanding the overthrow of Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Most analysts agree that the quality of Al Jazeera's coverage of the Tunisian, Egyptian and Yemeni revolutions were less vulnerable to criticism (especially in 2011 in the Egyptian and Yemeni cases), perhaps because their non-violent nature makes it more difficult to hold Al Jazeera responsible, as the most active satellite channel in its coverage of those revolutions, for the consequences of the consequent militarization that took place in the Syrian and Libyan cases, leading to grave human losses (from the dead and wounded to the displaced and missing) and the dismantling of state institutions and destruction of their infrastructure.

The Syrian and Libyan Cases: Similar paths, different outcomes

While Al Jazeera was criticized for a lack of coverage in Yemen compared to an unparalleled focus on the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, the equation began to change in the Libyan and Syrian

cases in particular. The peacefulness of the protests was soon aborted and confrontations became militarized through the deployment of tanks, artillery and airpower to suppress the demonstrations. This forced Al Jazeera to choose between two scenarios, both giving it a very narrow margin of neutrality - either to be biased in favor of protesters, their demands and slogans just as they had been in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen, or to accept the Libyan and Syrian regimes' denunciations of the protesters as traitors or conspirators controlled by foreign powers.

Al Jazeera hardly hesitated between the two options perhaps due to the rapid shift towards the use of force against demonstrators, which completely transformed the balance compared to the previous revolutions. Al Jazeera covered events as if it were a party to the conflict, in the words of Abdel Bari Atwan, "We were happy with Al Jazeera's support for the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia. In my opinion, its coverage was spontaneous and professional. But after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, viewers began to question its professionalism and credibility" (Atwan 2014).

After leaving Al Jazeera, Yosri Fouda rejected the accusations against the channel some of which have been circulating ever since the channel first began to challenge the state-controlled media model. He believes that the channel's coverage should be assessed in line with others', "I understand the criticism of Al Jazeera and I agree with some of these criticisms but I do not agree (...) with silencing voices. Al Jazeera gave the Arab citizen an opportunity to know what is happening in his country when local newspapers and television didn't (...) Before criticizing Al Jazeera, we should be critical of our media that did not provide anything worth viewing" (Fouda 2011).

Here, Yosri Fouda points out that Al Jazeera's performance should be judged relative to that of other channels, given that the loudest voices criticizing Al Jazeera's objectivity are mainly those belonging to the media organizations most in breach of professional

standards, and is down to their loyalty to their regimes more than a commitment to media impartiality.

It is clear for any observer of the Arab media landscape since 2011 to see that those loyal to the regimes that were toppled, particularly in the media sector, represent the loudest voices against Al Jazeera's discourse and its coverage of the Arab Spring revolutions. They are often not assessing Al Jazeera on its performance, with all its possible flaws, so much as they are asserting their political views grounded in longstanding loyalties that cannot accept the changes Al Jazeera has brought about in the media field, bringing it closer to the turbulent realities of the Arab peoples and their concerns rather than representing the will of their regimes. It is unsurprising that they should criticize its support for the will of the people and their revolutions rather than defending the narratives of their regimes and advocating for their survival.

A key conclusion is that all countries in which political change occurred were republics. While these were dictatorial and repressive regimes, the media did play a role in the conflict. Whether or not the media were decisive in the fall of those regimes (Atwan 2011), to argue that Al Jazeera can be said to have overthrown these regimes enters the realm of conspiracy theory, and contradicts the theory that the media had a strong and direct influence. Both theories have their own methodological and cognitive weaknesses. The former entirely overlooks the will of the people, led by youth, as the main driver for the uprisings, whose endurance transformed them into revolutions and made them the subject of television coverage. The conditions that interacted to fuel those revolutions in some Arab republics were not similarly present in most monarchies - especially in the Gulf - in terms of the nature of the political community, model of political development, levels of modernization and effectiveness of civil society. Moreover, the majority of those republics are experiencing a decline in the living standards of broad social groups, and in

particular young people, and lack of opportunities for professional and social integration, a situation that is incomparable with their counterparts in most monarchies. A comparative approach to analyzing the Arab Spring revolutions based on the nature of each political system finds its most prominent application in the case of the Bahraini revolution, which is examined in the next section.

The Bahraini Case

Al Jazeera's response to revolutionary events in Bahrain was fraught with the dangers of their geographical proximity and the ready-made accusations against Al Jazeera of neglecting those events as they threatened the stability of a neighbour and brought the waves of the Arab Spring into the heart of the Gulf region. This accusation against the channel is not new - since its establishment it has been accused of having a non-critical approach to Qatari affairs as opposed to those of other Arab countries. The channel's response has been that it is a pan-Arab channel with an interest in global affairs, particularly those that impact on the Arab region, and not a national channel devoting its attention to events in its host state given its small size and population and its lack of pivotal role in the causes that shape the Arab world and its many concerns and preoccupations.

Therefore, with the outbreak of events in Bahrain, all eyes turned to scrutinize Al Jazeera's response to these developments, especially as Bahrain was, like Qatar, a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and a close neighbour. However, two key factors reined in the mobilizations in Bahrain and made them different from events in other Arab countries, despite the momentum they had gained before the Gulf intervention.

The first factor was the sectarian nature of the protests, which meant that their demands were not the subject of a national consensus like in other states but representative only of the Bahraini Shiite community. Media coverage by channels of various backgrounds

showed no Bahraini actors from outside the Shiite "Wefaq National Islamic Society". Young Bahrainis from outside that community, if involved in those protests, could have made their voices heard across different Social Media Networks, as their counterparts did in Tunisia and Egypt and to a lesser extent in Syria, Libya and Yemen. The Iranian media mobilization in favor of the protests could be seen in Al Alam channel's coverage of the events, which far exceeded their coverage of the Arab revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Yemen. Given the explosive nature of sectarian strife in Iraq, with overt Iranian intervention, the possible expansion of this conflict into the Gulf alarmed the GCC countries and caused them to unite against the demands of the Bahraini community, regardless of the legitimacy of those demands and rights.

The second factor was foreign interference, which helped hasten the decline of this movement and prevent the unification of Bahrainis of no sectarian or factional background behind it. We can identify two clear sources of external interference; the first was Iranian support for Bahrain's Shiites, seen in the huge mobilization by Iranian media markedly unlike its approach to the other Arab revolutions, although these had occupied international headlines for weeks. The second source of intervention was the GCC who (with the exception of Oman) came to the aid of Bahrain, and in reining in protests in the country.

Also worth noting here is that Al Jazeera's coverage of events in Bahrain was in line with coverage by other global satellite television channels, and in particular news channels, with the exception of Iran's Al-Alam and other Iranian channels that gave Bahrain far more coverage and support than they gave to the other Arab revolutions.

Al Jazeera has represented, since its appearance, a media phenomenon that has fascinated specialists in the media field, regardless of their judgment of its performance, whether approving, skeptical or suspicious. The channel could not have captured all this

interest had it not been for its success in attracting the attention of millions of Arabs who follow its programs. Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab revolutions proves neither its popularity nor its decline, but rather has revealed a clear line between support for those revolutions and opposition to them and attempts to curb their expansion. Thus, it was only when those revolutions began to falter that Al Jazeera's editorial line and approach were criticized and it began to be blamed for its role during the revolutions, before the revolutions in facilitating and agitating change, and after the revolutions (after the fall of regimes), holding it responsible for their consequences, as we shall discuss in the next section.

3. Repercussions of the Revolutions and Impact on Al Jazeera's Role and Position

Although the Arab world is a region in which the term "revolution" has been most widely used since the 1950s, it has not in reality experienced many real revolutions if we exclude military coups that call themselves "revolutions". Thus, the culture of revolution - its characteristics, pathways and mechanisms - is almost unknown among the general Arab population and even among its elites (political actors, sociologists, journalists and others). The absence of such a culture is behind the promotion of narratives such as, Al Jazeera produced and manufactured the revolutions" and "the revolution was over the moment President Ben Ali fled, or Mubarak resigned, or Gaddafi was killed or Salah stepped down. The media was not blameless in this regard but helped promote many of these misconceptions.

Indeed, the counter-revolution built its strategies on a number of fallacies, such as raising people's expectations and belief that quick solutions could be achieved such as tackling unemployment, increasing the wages of all workers, developing infrastructure, transforming the economic model and closing the developmental gap

between regions. All were urgent demands and leaders of the post-revolution phase were held responsible not for their ability to solve these problems but for their existence, despite their accumulation over decades. They had the added disadvantage, compared to the former regimes, of not having an obedient media at their disposal that would always portray them as capable not only of providing solutions but of achieving miracles. Thus began the process of "demonizing" the revolutions, blaming all of society's ills on them. After the electoral disappointment they faced (especially in 2011 in both Tunisia and Egypt) the forces of the old regime and their allies, including extreme leftists and few liberal figures, actively worked to turn people against the revolutions and make them doubt their aspirations and expectations.

There is a correlation between the questioning of the revolutions and criticism of the impartiality and professionalism of Al Jazeera. Both spread gradually in most Arab Spring countries, especially with the rise of the counter-revolutions. The biggest indicator came after the success of the Egyptian coup in 2013 with the closure of Al Jazeera's bureau, ban on it broadcasting from Egypt, jailing some of its journalists and repression of those who were not imprisoned. This coincided with the beginning of restrictions on Al Jazeera's teams in Tunisia, Libya and Yemen - by the same parties who had criticized the revolutions and Al Jazeera's coverage.

The insistence on the declining popularity of Al Jazeera in the Arab Spring countries and a decline in its viewership (Al Quds Al Arabi 2013) has been presented as established fact. However, even if such a decline can be established, this cannot necessarily be attributed to a desire to punish the channel for its coverage of the Arab revolutions. Indeed, the most likely explanation may be that the new climate of freedom, particularly freedom of expression in the countries in which the revolutions emerged, has allowed local media to win back the interest of the local population and to compete in

addressing local concerns and affairs in a way that Al Jazeera cannot as a comprehensive regional channel.

A part of those nations that rose up against their regimes, whose activism Al Jazeera mirrored in its own coverage, no longer favor the channel or see it as professional, but now doubt its editorial line. This is in large part due to the open war waged on Al Jazeera by those who have a common interest in undermining the channel's achievements not only in covering the largest simultaneous mobilization experienced by the Arab nations in modern times, but also in seeking to break free from the clutches of regimes that failed to deliver on all the promises on which their legitimacy was founded - whether to definitively end the colonial era with all its discriminatory policies or to achieve modernization, growth and development so that the Arab world could match the achievements of other nations that began from the same starting point. Al Jazeera is not only denounced for its responsiveness to the slogans and objectives of the Arab revolutions, but also for critiquing the Arab media model, revealing its deficiencies, and going against its restrictions and traditions.

With the Arab revolutions and the counter-revolutions that have stemmed their progress, the Arab world has entered a phase of political, factional and sectarian polarization in which the media has played a pivotal role. It has produced a range of political, intellectual, media and social phenomena that pose a threat to co-existence in Arab societies, given the reality of significant differences within it. There is no doubt that some of what is happening today in Syria, Egypt, Yemen and Libya is partly a result of media mobilization and stirring of division, hatred revenge and exclusion, rather than seeking common ground and space for co-existence (Zahra 2014).

Al Jazeera is not immune from the currents of polarization in an era in which disguises have been stripped away and nations, elites and regimes can see each other clearly; in which foreign intervention has become blatant, with direct coordination not only with regimes but

also with some Arab political elites. Today, it is no longer possible to conceal those plots and practices, as was the case for decades, because new media has created citizen journalists whom no security force can prevent from expressing themselves and participating. Al Jazeera has adjusted to this new context and realized that the Arab revolutions are an opportunity to review its performance and achievements, particularly at the end of two decades of rich experience.

Conclusion

The Arab revolutions represent an earthquake that shook the region, shifting its very foundations. Its consequences will continue to be seen for decades to come. Al Jazeera has nurtured an awakening of the Arab peoples, close to the pulse of these revolutionary mobilizations and their aftershocks (the counter-revolutions). It is called upon to continue its mission - even if some of those nations may doubt its approach or aims - by continuing to report on Arab concerns without equivocation or any agenda other than serving the public interest by mobilizing its most able media professionals as a global channel in line with journalistic standards, and by bringing together a broad base of experts and specialists. It should remain a channel that provides opposing views, conveying diversity, difference and co-existence common values and practices in the Arab world, and not hostages to daily events, as is the case today.

All close analyses of the Arab media scene over the last two decades that are free from political bias recognize that the decline of Al Jazeera would be a loss to the Arab people. The channel has reached the highest echelons of global media and, for the first time, created a flow of news and information from south to north, while it had always flowed in the opposite direction. The demise of Al Jazeera, desired by all its opponents who were disturbed by its freedom and openness to all views no matter how different, would

represent a loss to all Arabs. The success of that experiment was not only created due to the will of a small country that grew in importance thanks to the channel, unsettling Arab regimes and their allies, but also by the efforts of journalists chosen from across the Arab world for their competence, who worked diligently to make Al Jazeera the leading Arab channel and among the world's leading news channels.

Arab nations must recognize that, for decades, they have been unable to produce leaders with unifying visions around which their nations could come together. They have failed to produce cultural icons and leading scientists who could use their intellect and creativity to address people's concerns and solve their daily problems. However, they are capable of establishing successful institutions able to compete globally, when they have a clear vision, determination and plan. Al Jazeera is one example of this in a critical field, covering critical issues and events and portraying them in a way that respects the rights of the Arab people, their history and future. Al Jazeera's coverage of the resistance in southern Lebanon and in the heart of Palestine was inclined in favor of their people and their legitimate rights. In its coverage of the US war on Iraq and Afghanistan, Al Jazeera's coverage differed completely from CNN's. Similarly, its coverage of the Arab Spring revolutions refused to go against the will of the people and their demands, and must not do so regardless of challenges and attacks.

The purpose of this paper has not been to praise Al Jazeera's role or to render its coverage of the Arab revolutions or its performance in general immune from criticism, evaluation and review. On the contrary, Al Jazeera's experience must be subject to critique and reassessment - as regularly occurs in its conferences - both by experts and specialists and by its viewers, in order to build on its successes, continually develop it and expand its viewership.

The Arab people need more successful institutions modeled on the achievements of Al Jazeera in the fields of news, sports, cinema

and television production, as well as arts, culture and education. They are in dire need of pioneering Arab projects that bring together innovators in every area. The image of Arabs is often vilified by Hollywood and global media, and can only be improved by Arab institutions and icons that are deeply engaged in the region's issues. Al Jazeera is one such institution whose experience can be emulated as a benchmark for future initiatives.

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Part III

Al Jazeera in Academic Studies

Al Jazeera in Academia

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Introduction

Beginning in 2000, just four years after its launch, Al Jazeera became a crucial topic and focus of academic inquiry. Early on, interest was driven in large part by an effort to better understand and explain the network's significance in shaping political discourse in the Middle East. Compounding this curiosity is the fact that Al Jazeera operates at the intersection of a number of fields of study, including media industries, journalism, public diplomacy, and deliberative democracy, to name a few. Thus, attention was not confined to any particular discipline, as scholars from around the world aimed to explain the significance of Al Jazeera within and across each of the related subfields.

This chapter reviews major academic publications (books, journal articles, and book chapters), highlighting trends, contributions, and findings from existing research. Publications were coded, categorized, and outlined to better understand how different fields approached the organization in different ways, while also looking for synergies across disciplines and methods.

Specific attention is paid to how research on Al Jazeera has contributed to building empirically grounded theories of global media (and mediated politics), as well as how the research contributes to

building improved methods for studying global media organizations. Major shortcomings of the research agenda are also be identified, as will best practices for research on Al Jazeera and other transnational and global media networks.

Method and Framework of Inquiry

This review analyzed 98 Al-Jazeera focused academic publications (detailed in Table 1: “Number of Artifacts Analyzed”). These included articles published in academic journals, books, and chapters published in edited volumes. The artifacts were selected using the following criteria: (i) a publication (e.g. not a draft, thesis, or dissertation) (ii) written primarily for an academic audience (iii) with the words (or a close variation) “Al Jazeera” in the title or abstract.¹ For the two major edited volumes focusing on the Al Jazeera Network—Zayani’s (2005b) *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon* and Seib’s (2012) *Al Jazeera English*—each chapter was catalogued and analyzed as a separate contribution to the literature.¹ These criteria necessarily exclude several notable but mainstream (i.e. non-academic) contributions to the broader public understanding of Al Jazeera, and its significance in the Middle East and in the media industries, including El-Nawawy and Iskander’s (2003) *Al Jazeera: The Story of the Network that is rattling Governments and Redefining Journalism*, Miles’ (2005) *Al Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel that is Challenging the West*, Rushing’s (2007) *Mission Al-Jazeera: Build a bridge, seek the truth, change the world*, and Steve Tatham’s (2006) *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds*. These criteria also exclude the numerous dissertation and thesis written on Al Jazeera, though Nasr and Abdelmoula (2013) have compiled a thorough list of these (and other) works in their *Academic Research about Al Jazeera*.

TABLE 1: Number of Artifacts Analyzed

	Journalism Studies	Geopolitics	Cultural Communication	Public Sphere	Methods	Total
<i>Number of artifacts analyzed</i>	55	18	15	8	2	98

For the purpose of better understanding the primary, secondary, and tertiary foci of Al Jazeera scholarship, each of the 98 artifacts was coded as primarily contributing to one of the following five categories: Journalism Studies (55); Geopolitics (18); Cultural Communication (15); Public Sphere (8); and Methods (2). Publications were then coded for reoccurring sub-themes, outlined below. These categories are not mutually exclusive, of course. Most publications address more than one of the categories, at least partially. Overlap exists between several of the categories, some of which will be discussed below. But identifying these quasi-distinct classes is otherwise helpful in navigating the vast array of writing on the network, and clarifies precisely how Al Jazeera-related research touches on numerous fields of research and disciplines of inquiry.

These five categories were developed iteratively, as I reviewed all academic publications on Al Jazeera. To assist in this process, I conducted a word frequency analysis of all the texts (combined), as outlined in Table 2, which lists the 25 most frequently used words. This analysis helped identify the range of categories, and to see the overlap between them.

TABLE 2: 25 Most Frequently Used Words¹

Word	Frequency	Categories
Media	7339	JS, PS
Arab	6618	CC, M, G
News	6519	JS, PS
World	2878	G, CC
AJE	2713	JS, CC
Public	2617	PS, JS
Political	2572	PS, JS
Channel	2189	JS
Coverage	2059	JS
War	1973	G, JS
International	1953	JS, G, CC
English	1554	CC, M
Television	1481	JS, PS
Global	1460	G, CC
Communication	1373	JS, CC, PS
Satellite	1334	JS
Qatar	1332	G
Press	1331	JS, PS
BBC	1317	JS, G
American	1301	G, CC
People	1162	PS
Western	1145	G, CC
CNN	1134	JS, G
State	1097	G, CC
Arabic	1058	G, CC, M

Key: Journalism Studies (JS); Geopolitics (G); Cultural Communication (CC); Public Sphere (PS); Methods (M)

I. Journalism Studies: This body of research focuses on Al Jazeera's relationship to trends in the broader journalism industry, including journalistic practices, journalistic ethics and codes of conduct, integrating new media technologies into news production and dissemination strategies, utilizing citizen journalists, studying audiences, coverage of particular issues, as well as its relationship to Arab, Muslim, and female identity politics. The following sub-categories were identified and coded for: conflict coverage (14); audience studies (10); organizational analysis (9); global south (8); industry studies (5); Arab spring (3); citizen journalists (3); and identity politics (3).

II. Geopolitics: Research on the geopolitics of Al Jazeera emphasizes the network's relationship to the Qatari government, its impact on international politics, and its capacity to challenge the perceived dominance of Western organizations in shaping the global news agenda. The following sub-categories were identified and coded for: public opinion (8); global south (5); and Qatar (5).

III. Cultural Communication: As Al Jazeera expanded its operations and began disseminating English-language news outside of the Middle East, researchers studied the possibility of the network contributing to an improved understanding of conflicts and inequalities, especially those not thoroughly or systematically covered by mainstream Western news organizations. The following sub-categories were identified and coded for: Al Jazeera in the West (8); and clash of civilizations (7).

IV. Public sphere: Scholars also studied how Al Jazeera's news coverage contributed to public deliberation regarding important social and political issues, especially in the Arab world. These studies tended to use focus groups, interviews, and surveys to determine Al Jazeera's popularity, its significance in shaping the region's news agenda, and to understand its role in fostering more robust democratic deliberations (8).

V. Methods: Researchers also used Al Jazeera as a lens through which to examine the integrity and applicability of existing research methods, including those used by media scholars to study how news organizations frame current events, as well as how identity politics can play into questions of access to data (2).

Journalism Studies

It should come as no surprise that the largest number of academic studies about Al Jazeera fall under the category of journalism studies. It is, after all, a pioneering news organization. What drove this surge in interest in the network was not merely the fact that it was the newest international news organization, but rather its **origin story, location, business model, and a disruptive approach** in an industry that had traditionally been defined, and confined, by convention.

By origin story I refer to the fact that the Qatari government created Al Jazeera in 1996 in an effort to challenge other state-supported institutions whose primary purpose was controlling information flows into and within the region. Hiring approximately 120 recently unemployed journalists—a result of the disbandment of BBC Arabic—and supported with a generous grant from the Qatari government, Al Jazeera's entrance to the Arab media scene was one of a kind. As the Qatari government wasn't, at the time, seen as a vying for regional hegemony, Al Jazeera was able to establish credibility with audiences in ways that other state-supported news networks couldn't. In addition to human and financial resources, both of which contributed to the creation of a highly professional product, the channel was also given sufficient freedom to create content that pushed the boundaries of what was considered acceptable news programming in the region.

Al Jazeera's location, both literally and symbolically, also drove academic interest. The highly professionalized news programming

resembled, from an aesthetic and technological perspective, the types of content you would expect on CNN International or Sky News. Yet this content was coming from a region that, historically, had not been known for producing media content capable of competing with the technological sophistication and professionalization of Western news agencies. Thus, the network became the symbolic heart for citizens throughout the region, a metaphor for what many hoped would become the norm: Arab-based and led institutions that could appropriate certain professional practices from Western companies while still remaining local and indigenous at the core.

Moreover, based in Doha, Qatar, the network had front-row access to a row of conflicts that would become central to global affairs, including Israel-Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and later during the Arab Spring, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Syria. This location gave it cultural and tactical advantages in covering news from the region. Not only could the network's reporters better understand local cultural norms, and thus make connections to get access to stories and better connect to local audiences, but at times they were simply closer to the action, meaning reporters could be on the ground first.

Al Jazeera's rise in regional popularity and its expansion into regional and global news markets with its English, Turkish, and Serbo-Croatian language programming came at a time when news organizations around the world were struggling to remain financially sustainable. Its business model—a hybrid of state subsidies, revenues from exclusive broadcast rights for popular sports programming, and some advertising—allowed it to not only weather the storm, but also expand when most international news organizations were looking to cut operations and costs.

By disruptive approach, I'm referring to a style of journalism that defied traditional norms of both regional and global news

networks. Not only did Al Jazeera explicitly challenge government officials in the region, aiming to hold them to account for various accusations of corruption and wrongdoing, but it also broadcast interviews with Israeli officials, a practice that was an absolute taboo by Arab media standards at the time. At the same time, the network’s coverage of conflicts defied Western standards of journalism. Al Jazeera’s journalists were known for getting close to the conflict, reporting from the ground, a practice that allowed for “contextual objectivity,” or coverage framed around how events are seen among a local community (El-Nawawy and Iskander 2003). Put another way, Al Jazeera wasn’t afraid to cover, and talk to, groups labeled as enemies or terrorists simply because a government or governments declared them as such. For example, in June 1999 the network broadcast a ninety-minute discussion with Osama bin Laden, the first of its kind to ever be broadcast to a mass Arab audience.

Each of the 55 artifacts analyzed within the journalism studies category examined Al Jazeera primarily through the lens of its significance on the news industry, its impact, and our understanding of how journalistic institutions function in different parts of the world. The largest proportion of studies focused on conflict coverage (14), then audience studies (10); organizational analysis (9), the global south (8), industry studies (5), Arab spring (3), citizen journalists (3), and identity politics (3).

TABLE 3: Sub-Categories of Journalism Studies

	Conflict coverage	Audience studies	Organizational studies	Global south	Industry studies	Arab spring	Citizen journalists	Identity politics
<i>Number of artifacts analyzed</i>	14	10	9	8	5	3	3	3

I. Conflict coverage. Part of Al Jazeera's popularity, and infamy, stems from its unabashed focus on covering the human consequences of war and conflict. Its systematic approach to covering wars in Iraq and Afghanistan differed from that of many news networks based in the West, as did its framing of the wars. As a result, substantial academic attention was paid to how Al Jazeera's coverage of war differed from other news networks, or how coverage differed between different streams within the Al Jazeera Network (i.e. Arabic v. English content).

Five studies examined Al Jazeera's coverage of the wars in Iraq and/or Afghanistan, typically emphasizing how its Arabic-language coverage was drastically different, if not in direct contradiction to, how mainstream Western news covered both conflicts (Al-Jenaibi, 2010; Barkho, 2010; Bessaiso, 2005; Kolmer and Semetko, 2009; Samuel-Azran, 2010). Related, four studies examined the network's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, again typically in comparison to other mainstream news organizations (Elmasry, El Shamy, Manning, Mills and Auter, 2013; Gilboa, 2012; Najjar Merriman, 2012; Zayani, 2005c). Three studies focused on how Al Jazeera's coverage of terrorism, and officially designated terrorist organizations, differed from other news networks (Fahmy and Emad, 2012; Gerhards and Schäfer, 2013; Zeng and Tahat, 2012). El-Nawawy (2010) compared AJE and CNN coverage of the 2009 Iranian Presidential election, included in this category due to the fact that much of the coverage was framed within the broader context of Iranian-West relations and Iranian regional ambitions. Figenschou (2011a, p. 233) deviated from the issue-focused research agenda by examining how AJE covered "distant suffering," finding that the "channel literally goes closer and zooms in, exposes, personalizes, and authorizes the experience of suffering in conflicts and disasters," potentially "engendering strong feelings of compassion in media audiences."

II. Audience studies. Central to Al Jazeera's significance was how audiences responded to its programming. In the region, the network was far and away the most popular regional news network from 1996-2006, sometimes referred to as The Al Jazeera decade for precisely this reason (Abdelmoula 2006). Studies were especially interested in understanding why Arab audiences view (or do not view) Al Jazeera (Arafa, Auter and Al-Jaber 2005; Auter, Arafa and Al-Jaber 2005; Jamal and Melkote, 2008), and how members of various Arab diasporas view the channel, and why (Miladi 2006; Sinardet and Mortelmans 2006).

Fahmy and Johnson conducted some of the most thorough research of Al Jazeera's audiences, examining audience reactions to the use of graphic violence (Fahmy and Johnson, 2007a), correlations between Al Jazeera viewership and support for press freedom (Fahmy and Johnson, 2007b), and two separate studies on audience assessments of the network's credibility (Johnson and Fahmy, 2008; Johnson and Fahmy, 2009). Abdul-Mageed (2008) studied how audiences reacted to Al Jazeera's news via comments on its website, noting how certain, conflict-oriented stories were more likely to generate user responses than other human interest stories.

III. Organizational Analysis. Substantial attention was paid to Al Jazeera as an organization, including studies of its organizational structure, culture, and business model.

Zayani and Sahraoui (2007, p. 1) conducted a remarkably thorough review of Al Jazeera's organizational culture, conducting intense ethnographic research inside its newsroom to study "why and how Al Jazeera managed to do what it did better than any other media outlet or competing media player in the Middle East region." They found that the network's success isn't based on a particular core-competency, but rather a combination of factors, including flexibility, employee entrepreneurialism, independent thinking, self-growth, and its unique, hybrid business model.

Quinn and Walters (2004) argue that Al Jazeera's sophist-like defense of freedom of expression and push for accountability stems from its unique structure, and support from Qatar, noting the network laid the groundwork for the revolution in Arab media that soon followed the network's trailblazing path. Ayish (2005) digs into this phenomenon further, focusing on "The Opposite Direction," among the network's most popular and controversial programs, emphasizing how it is structured to engender robust audience responses and attention. Schleifer (2001) traces Al Jazeera's meteoric rise back to the 1991 Iraqi war, whereby the power of transnational media—symbolized by CNN's coverage of the conflict—kick started an Arab media sector eager to cover the region's news with its own reports and perspectives.

Barkho (2011a, 2011b) studied how internal guidelines and norms shaped how Al Jazeera journalists framed stories, including their use of particular terms and phrases (e.g. rebel, terrorist, martyr). Related, Kraidy (2008) offered a comparative assessment of the differences between Al Jazeera (Arabic) and AJE newsrooms, touching on how each deals with questions of discourse differently.

Boyd-Barrett and Xie (2008) analyze how Al Jazeera's hybrid model of government subsidy and neoliberal conglomeration (e.g. revenue from sports programming supports the network's news coverage) fits into, and complicates, our understanding of theories of media imperialism and liberalization. Usher (2013), also focusing on Al Jazeera's hybrid business model, notes how the lack of incessant pressure for advertising revenue has allowed the network to adopt advanced new media metrics and to consider audience habits and uses in its content creation decision making process.

IV. Global south. This sub-genre of research examined how Al Jazeera's global news coverage portrayed events and actors typically under-represented by Western news organizations. For clarity, this sub-category differs from the Geopolitics/Global South sub-category

in that the publications identified here focused primarily on how Al Jazeera's content and/or personnel reflect the "global south," whereas publications listed under geopolitics focused primarily on the consequences of such an agenda on international politics and diplomacy.

Tine Figenschou conducted several important studies examining Al Jazeera's potential to create, in Daya Thussu's (2007) words, a contra-flow of transnational news and information. Along these lines, Figenschou (2010a, p. 85) found that "the channel airs more news items from and about the global South than the global North, and that the South is covered in more in-depth news formats, with more correspondents on the ground," while also noting the network's overreliance on male elites as on-air experts. Figenschou (2011b) further clarifies the challenges of Al Jazeera's alterity, arguing that, based on newsroom observation and interviews, the network's staff are conflicted as to what "other" perspectives should (and should not) be included. At the same time, Figenschou (2012) argues that the network's consistently graphic coverage of war and conflict isn't driven by a desire to be critical of the war effort, *per se*, but rather an effort to give the global south—in this case, victims of state and non-state violence—the opportunity to have their stories shared around the world.

Some researchers approached the question of the global south from a regional perspective. For example, Arsenault (2012) studies Al Jazeera's reach into and coverage of Africa, while Mellese and Müller (2012) compared Al Jazeera's coverage of Sub-Sahara Africa to that of the BBC. Kugelman (2012) focused on the network's reach in South Asia, and coverage of South Asian affairs, in Pakistan in particular.

Loomis (2009) and al-Najjar (2009) studied just how alternative or "Arab" AJE's programming was. Using comparative content analysis, Loomis found that AJE's programming closely resembled

the news agendas and sources found at the BBC, CBS, and CNN, while al-Najjar found that AJE's content deviated from its Arabic-language counterpart and focused more on European news than the MENA region.

V. Industry studies. Yet another area of inquiry was how Al Jazeera's rise impacted the broader journalism and media industries. While many of the publications categorized as Organizational Analysis (III) also note Al Jazeera's importance on the rise of the Arab media sector in particular, this was not their primary focus or argument. The publications listed here place Al Jazeera in the context of its impact on, and significance for, regional or transnational media industries.

Miladi (2003) analyzed how Al Jazeera's programming output and editorial policies have affected broadcasting by other Arab television channels, concluding with a discussion of how the network's success challenges the prevailing definitions of impartiality in news coverage across the sector. Zayani (2005a, p. 6) found that, within a few years of launching, Al Jazeera had "instilled a competitive drive in some mainstream Arab media and accelerated the institutionalization of new trends in programming," highlighting a wave of trends, including live interviews and call-in, interactive programming, that the network had popularized across the region's TV markets. Zayani also argued that the network's regional influence was only likely to grow, especially considering its investment in training facilities like the Media Center for Training and Development.

Awad (2005) argued that Al Jazeera's dual presence via satellite transmission and online ruptured a static industry, challenging the capability of existing news behemoths in gatekeeping the global news agenda. Related, Sullivan (2001) documented how Al Jazeera was courted by media "giants," including CNN, for rights to re-broadcast their footage from parts of Afghanistan where Western journalists could not travel.

Zayani (2008, p. 207) studied the network's use of public relations tactics in dealing with criticism and controversy, arguing that Al Jazeera's adoption of PR practices "complicates our understanding of how public relations is understood and practiced outside the normative Western public relations paradigm."

VI. Arab Spring: There is widespread recognition of Al Jazeera's role in publicizing and spotlighting early protests in Tunisia, facilitating greater regional interest in the country's political situation. These studies focus on Al Jazeera's role in covering, and possibly participating in, the Arab Spring revolutions. Rinnawi (2012), for example, examines how the Al Jazeera reported the fall of Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt early 2011, arguing that the network has played a crucial role in the process of Egypt's political transformation, both during the uprising itself and beyond it.

Two studies used comparative content analysis to better understand how AJE's coverage differed from major media actors like CNN and BBC. Bashri, Netzley, and Greiner (2012) conducted a comparative analysis of CNN and Al Jazeera English's online coverage of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and found that while CNN relied on American officials and experts to report on the uprisings, Al Jazeera English emphasized used Tunisian and Egyptian citizens as sources. Fornaciari (2012) conducted a framing analysis, comparing AJE and BBC, finding AJE and the BBC had the similar tendency to focus on the attribution of responsibility and conflict frames, though the BBC also utilized human interest frames more often.

VII. Citizen journalists: Al Jazeera was also a pioneer in its efforts to integrate new media technologies into its coverage and dissemination strategies. These three studies highlight the network's efforts to utilize information communication technologies to better connect with and get information from its audiences.

Powers (2012a) argued that the network's approach to new media and its ability to marry new technologies with its organizational

priorities and mission, offer an important case study for public service journalism in the digital era. Specifically, he suggests AJE's online operations offer important insights into the difficulties and possibilities of public service news production in the digital era. Similar to Powers, Duffy (2011) examined Al Jazeera's "networked journalism" approach, including use of Twitter, Facebook, blogs and the user-generated mapping platform, Ushahidi. Bruna (2013) studied how AJE relies on the audience feedback and reporting to broaden its news coverage, its program schedule, and its reach.

VIII. Identity politics. This sub-category of research examines Al Jazeera's role in cultivating particular types of identities, like nationalism, Islamism, and feminism. Cherribi (2006) analyzes the ways in which Al-Jazeera brings the veil onto the screen and into its network current affairs, news, and religious programming and how it reported on the story of the veil in France between late 2002 and early 2005. He suggests Al Jazeera is not, as is often said, the "CNN of the Arab world," arguing instead its religious focus makes it more comparable to an Islamic version of the Christian Broadcasting Network. Cherribi concludes that Al-Jazeera is using the issue of the veil in France to influence viewers in France and Europe, mobilize a shared public opinion, and construct an imagined transnational Muslim community.

Phillips (2012) studies Al Jazeera's coverage of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and argues the broadcasts address viewers as a common Arab audience who are simultaneously encouraged to embrace nationalism. He concludes by noting that so-called 'supranationalism' (or pan-Arabism) need not be considered mutually exclusive with more traditional conceptions of state-based nationalism.

Sakr (2005, p. 145) examines the way gender inequalities are confronted in Al Jazeera's programs and argues that Al Jazeera has "expanded the space for critical and contestatory discursive interaction over issues related to women's empowerment."

Geopolitics

The second largest area of scholarship studied Al Jazeera through the lens of geopolitics, focusing on the network's relationship to its sponsoring government (Qatar), its ability to strategically shape foreign public opinions, and its role in challenging the dominant newsmakers and rebalance global information flows. The following sub-categories were identified and coded for: public opinion (8); global south (5); and Qatar (5).

I. Public opinion. This area of focus studied how Al Jazeera shaped foreign public opinions in ways that emphasized policy reform and/or regime change. Building on a body of work that studied CNN's ability to shape the trajectory of international politics (see: Gilboa, 2005), some scholars suggested the possibility of an Al Jazeera Effect, or the impact of new media technologies on global politics, namely, reducing government and traditional media control over information and empowering groups which previously lacked a global voice.

Seib's *The Al Jazeera Effect* (2008) spearheaded this line of inquiry,¹ suggesting that Al Jazeera's growing popularity, and impact on Arab politics, signify a dramatic shift in the relationship between media, public opinions, and power: "traditional ways of reshaping global politics have been superseded by the influence of new media--satellite television, the Internet, and other high-tech tools." While not using the term "Al Jazeera Effect," Hudson (2005) and Bahry (2001) also embraced the transformative potential of the network, calling on Western governments to respect its liberal principles, including the power of freedom of expression and the import of the marketplace of ideas.

El-Ibiari (2011) argues against such a phenomenon, suggesting that the proposed Al Jazeera Effect overstates the democratic, populist potential of the network (and the technologies it uses), underemphasizing the fact that the network serves a specific national

interest and only selectively encourages popular protest and uprising. Seib (2012) countered, arguing that the network's growing success and popularity in the English language news sector demonstrate its capacity to transform the foundational rules of international politics. Tausch (2011) re-worked the concept, proposing an Al Jazeera Revolution, suggesting the network has the potential to rework the economic foundations of the existing capitalist system.

Focusing exclusively on Al Jazeera in the Arab world, Rinnawi (2006) argues that the network has contributed to the emergence of pan-Arabism by using new technologies to appeal to a variety of "local tribe identities," crossing national and regional borders. Powers and El-Nawawy (2008) studied AJE's impact on local news markets in Asia, focusing specifically on its role in fostering a more democratic media culture in Malaysia.

II. Global south: These studies focused on Al Jazeera's capacity to challenge the gatekeeping power Western governments and news organizations have exercised on global news flows for much of the 20th century. Seib (2005) suggests that Al Jazeera's ability to garner substantial audiences marks the end of an era of US-led competitive war coverage, laying the path for other regional newsmakers to grow and promote alternative stories. Related, Painter (2008) studies Al Jazeera alongside Hugo Chavez's Telesur, arguing the Qatari network had inspired other "global south" networks to embrace the possibility of edgy broadcasting using local, indigenous voices and stories to tell the news.

Figenschou (2013) tackles these questions using policy, production, and content analysis, showing how AJE's production processes and news profile are meant to be different from its Anglo-American competitors. Bebawi (2016) agrees, using framing analysis to show how AJE challenges mainstream Western news discourses with perspectives from the global south. Iskandar (2005), however, argues that much of Al Jazeera's alterity is "self-attributed and affirmed through strategic marketing campaigns."

III. Qatar: This final sub-area of Geopolitics research focuses primarily on Al Jazeera's relationship to its sponsoring Qatari government. These studies are driven by a historical understanding of how and why states support the dissemination of international media, sometimes described as "international broadcasting." Drawing from studies of The UK's BBC, USA's Voice of America, and others, these studies aim to examine how Al Jazeera helps the Qatari government pursue its national interests through the dissemination of news to the Arabic and English-speaking worlds.

Da Lage (2005) argues that Al Jazeera is central to Qatar's growing role in regional politics, specifically noting its anti-American editorial perspective is strategic in that it helps the Qatari government balance its otherwise unpopular alliance with the US military. Powers and Gilboa (2008) build on this analysis, demonstrating how the network's criticism of vastly unpopular, corrupt regimes in the region strategically helps to improve the image of a somewhat unknown, non-democratic state. Powers (2012b, 2013) extends this analysis by arguing that the decision to launch AJE was fundamentally about transforming how the Western, English-speaking world thought of Arabs, and Qatari's in particular.

Samuel-Azran (2013) conducted a longitudinal content analysis of 8-years of Al-Jazeera's coverage of Saudi affairs, revealing a strong correlation between Al-Jazeera Arabic's tone toward Saudi affairs and the development of the Qatari-Saudi conflict. He argues that Qatar invented a new model of public diplomacy by operating Al-Jazeera as a hybrid state-sponsored/private network, effectively transforming the network into a highly potent public diplomacy tool.

Cultural Communication

The third area of academic inquiry focused on how Al Jazeera could improve or shape cross-cultural communication, typically between the amorphous Western and Islamic worlds. Building on

work on the proposed “Al Jazeera Effect,” these studies were less interested in the geopolitical consequences, but rather on how the network may contribute to Marshal McLuhan’s imagined “global village,” or a shared global consciousness capable of placing empathy for other human beings above the parochial interests of governments and corporations. Scholarship in this area falls into two sub-categories: Al Jazeera in the West (8) and the Clash of Civilizations thesis (8).

I. Al Jazeera in the West: These studies looked at how Al Jazeera was received in Western societies, especially Western Europe, Canada, and the United States. Tatham (2005, p. 50), for example, predicted the network would struggle to break into the American news market: “a new English-language variant may struggle to find a foothold in the closed and complex circle of U.S. broadcasting, an arena tightly controlled by media tycoons and multinational corporations - many with close links to the U.S. administration - who may well refuse outright to carry the new broadcaster.” Alterman (2005) mostly agrees, though he suggests the English-language channel’s strength will be among Muslim minority audiences outside of the Middle East, stretching from North America and Europe through Africa, to the South Asian subcontinent and into Southeast Asia.

Youmans and Brown (2011: 1) studied perceptions of AJE after the Arab Spring, when American journalists and select politicians offered the network considerable praise. Despite a shift in elite opinion, they found that there “remains substantial prejudice against AJE among segments of the American public.” Meltzer (2012) studied American media coverage of AJE through its first seven months of broadcasting, finding that AJE’s attempts to shape and modify its image for an American audience have been mostly successful, in particular due to a growing acceptance of the network among the American journalistic corps. Youmans (2012) considers

the changing politics of AJE's distribution efforts in the United States after the Arab Spring, arguing that growing interest among elite audiences combined with a vulnerable cable and satellite market meant that the network would have the opportunity to shore up a significant niche audience in North America, especially through online broadcasting.

Dakroury (2005) studied Canada's regulatory response to the Al Jazeera's desire to broadcast domestically, noting the legal challenges the network may face given the range of discourses included in some of its more controversial programming. Amin (2012) argued that AJE's success depends on its ability to establish credibility with Western audiences, which in turn requires demonstrable independence from the Qatari government.

II. Clash of Civilizations. This sub-category of research focused on how Al Jazeera challenged Samuel Huntington's (1996) Clash of Civilizations thesis, which suggested that Western and Islamic worlds were fundamentally at odds and would inevitably engage in a civilizational conflict. An underlying premise tying these studies is the possibility for improved communications between Western and Islamic societies to alleviate misunderstandings and, thus, "civilizational" tensions.

El-Nawawy and Gher (2003: 1) laid the groundwork for this line of inquiry, arguing early on in the Iraq war for Americans to "support an indigenous open and democratic medium like Al Jazeera, which can contribute to bridging the philosophic gap between the peoples of the West and the Middle East." Khamis (2007) argued that transnational news networks and Al Jazeera in particular, were uniquely positioned to challenge growing belief in the existence of a clash of civilizations. Zaharna (2005) found that American efforts to engage Arab audiences through engaging Al Jazeera, and appearing on its programming, failed due to a lack of understanding of the various cultural assumptions embedded in routine communications practices.

El-Nawawy and Powers (2009, 2010) conducted a study of AJE's audiences in six-country's and found that viewers of the network were less dogmatic than viewers of other international and national news providers. They argued that this provided evidence of the possibility of a "conciliatory media," suggesting increased distribution and viewership would indeed decrease the likelihood of civilizational conflict. However, Powers and El-Nawawy (2009) also found that audiences are drawn to news channels which reaffirm pre-existing political and ideological perspectives, challenging AJE's (or any news organization's) potential to become a conciliatory broadcaster. Looking specifically at the network's coverage of the Park 51 Mosque in New York (e.g. the 9/11 mosque controversy), El-Nawawy (2012) found that AJE has the potential to play a conciliatory media function, especially when it comes to highly charged and controversial issues.

Public Sphere

This area of research studied the relationship between Al Jazeera and Arab public opinion and deliberation. Unlike the Geopolitical/Public Opinion approach, which studied how the network shapes the hearts and minds of foreign publics, this group instead emphasized the ways in which Al Jazeera's programming encouraged and contributed to democratically grounded and oriented discourse among Arab societies. Tying these studies together is an interest in Jürgen Habermas's theory of the Public Sphere, suggesting that free and respectful discussions of shared public issues contribute to the formation of public opinion and influences political action.

Drawing on interviews conducted in the Middle East and analyses of Al Jazeera programs, and public opinion polls, Lynch (2006) examines the nature, evolution, and influence of the new Arab public sphere. According to Lynch, the days of monolithic Arab opinion are over, and the way in which Arab governments

and the United States engage this newly confident and influential public sphere will profoundly shape the future of the Arab world. Similarly, Abdelmoula (2015) analyses Al Jazeera as a case study, analyzing how engaging the public and providing platforms for open debate and free expression contributed to the emergence of a new vibrant Arab public sphere and political transformations in the Arab world.

Writing from his experience as the creator and host of Al Jazeera's *The Opposite Direction (Al Ittijah Al Muaakis)*, Al Kasim (2005: 93; 104) argues that the use of live programming, combined with audience interactivity (viewers able to call in, for example) resulted in the "most popular and controversial political Arab talk show" that "brought Arab masses together in their quest for freedom of speech and search for more open societies both politically and socially."

El Oifi (2005) argues that Al Jazeera played a central role in liberalizing the Arab media discourse, putting an end to media control by Arab regimes, and triggering a reconfiguration of the political systems in the Middle East region. Focusing on the network's local significance, Al-Hail (2000) found that Al-Jazeera contributed to emergence of civil society in Qatar, in particular in by increasing awareness of and demands for women's rights and freedom of expression. Al-Jenaibi (2010) argues the Al Jazeera's programming builds on fundamental Islamic principle to facilitate greater press freedom and rights to access information.

Taking a slightly different approach, Zayani (2006: 184) argues that Al Jazeera isn't responsible for mobilizing or bolstering the so-called Arab street. Instead, he suggests that Arab public opinion has always existed, and that Al Jazeera (and its competitors) have "made it more visible, more pronounced and more public."

Methods

Two publications used Al Jazeera as a means of exploring methodological challenges in studying transnational media organizations, especially those outside of traditional Western, urban environments. One could also describe these studies as contributing to a broader effort at de-Westernizing media studies.

Figenschou (2010b) examined the specific challenges of researching major media organizations operating in societies under authoritarian rule. Drawing on interviews with over 60 Al Jazeera employees, the study found that Al Jazeera's location complicated each phase of the field research, from establishing contact to conducting interviews. Figenschou concludes that more attention is needed to improve research methods cross-cultural and patriarchal environments.

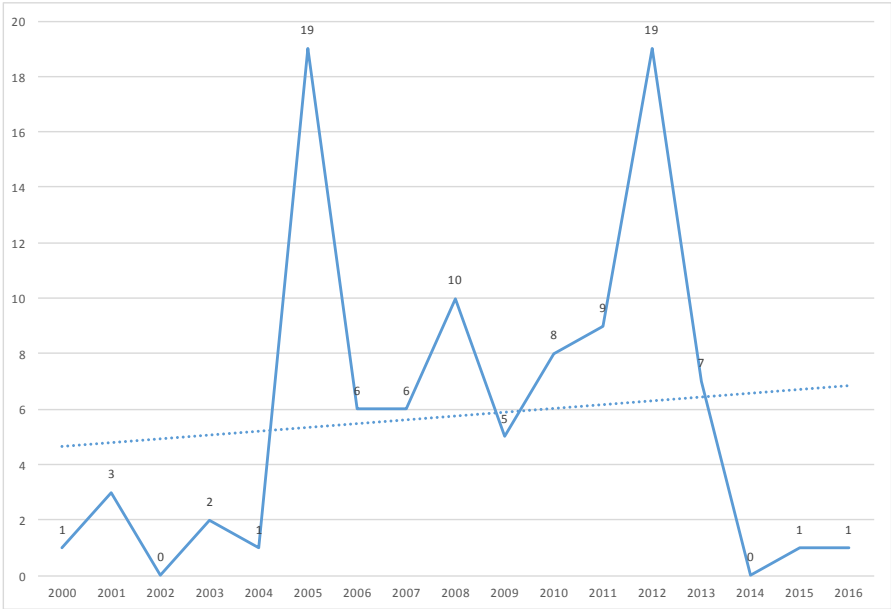
Wojcieszak (2007) examines how Al Jazeera presents unique challenges to the framing research paradigm. The study argues that traditional framing scholarship is not be applicable to analyzing al Jazeera because it is grounded in an idiosyncratic understanding of the American media system, and fails to account for emerging technologies.

Conclusion

This review of academic publications about Al Jazeera aims to provide an expansive, birds-eye view of the breadth of research conducted on one of the most important news organizations of the last twenty years. Research touched on a range of disciplines, including Journalism and Media Studies, International Relations, Legal Studies, Sociology, Globalization Studies, Intercultural Communication, and others. Starting in 2000, the network, and its coverage, generated substantial academic interest. Chart 1 maps the number of publications on Al Jazeera per year, and includes a trend line extending across the 16 years examined. The vast majority of

research was published between the years 2005-2013 (89 of the 98 artifacts analyzed). The upsurge in publications in 2005 is likely the result of the major role Al Jazeera played in covering the wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), considering the lag-time required for research, writing, editing, and the publication process. The decline in publications after 2013 is a bit more difficult to explain, especially given the network’s ambitious plans to expand into the American and Turkish markets around that time. It is possible that these publications are forthcoming, as researchers wanted to look at these efforts over a certain period of time.¹ It is also possible that Al Jazeera’s change in leadership, beginning with Director General Waddah Khanfar’s resignation in 2011, played a role in the declining academic interest in the network. Sheikh Ahmed bin Jassim Al Thani, a member of the Qatari ruling family, followed Khanfar, and it is possible that researchers didn’t perceive Al Jazeera as accessible or as forward-looking as a result. This, of course, remains to be seen, and the network is now under the leadership of Dr. Mostefa Souag.

CHART 1: Number of Publications by Year, 2000-2016



Two years stand out for producing the largest number of publications: 2005 and 2012. This is partially explained by the two edited volumes—Zayani’s *The Al Jazeera Phenomena* and Seib’s *Al Jazeera English*—published in 2005 and 2012, respectively.¹ Again, considering a considerable lag-time for academic research and publication, it also correlates two of the major developments that drove interest in the network: Al Jazeera’s post 9/11 coverage, including of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (2001, 2003) and the launch of AJE (2006), and its subsequent challenges to Western, mainstream news networks.

Impressive as the range and number of publications about Al Jazeera is, it is also important to note how important this research has been to the broader academic fields of media studies and international relations. Research on the network is well cited across academia; the 98 publications reviewed have been cited, collectively, 2427 times. Al Jazeera-related publications were each cited, on average, 24.8 times, over five times as often as a typical social science publication.¹ Table 4 lists the ten most cited publications on Al Jazeera. Four of the six most cited publications on the list are books, each requiring years of research and substantial fieldwork.

TABLE 4: Most Cited Academic Research on Al Jazeera

<i>Year</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Citations</i>
2006	Marc Lynch	<i>Voices of the new Arab public</i>	424
2008	Philip Seib	<i>The Al Jazeera Effect</i>	160
2005	Philip Seib	“Hegemonic no more: Western media, the rise of Al-Jazeera, and the influence of diverse voices”	76
2006	Khalil Rinnawi	<i>Instant Nationalism</i>	69
2001	Louay Bahry	“The New Arab Media Phenomenon: Qatar's Al-Jazeera”	66
2007	Mohamed Zayani and Sahraoui Sofiane	<i>The Culture of Al Jazeera</i>	61
2006	Noureddine Miladi	“Satellite TV News and the Arab Diaspora in Britain: Comparing Al-Jazeera, the BBC and CNN”	58
2006	Sam Cherribi	“From Baghdad to Paris Al-Jazeera and the Veil”	58
2009	Christian Kolmer and Holli Semetko	“Framing the Iraq War: Perspectives from American, U.K., Czech, German, South African, and Al-Jazeera News”	52
2010	Mohammed El-Nawawy and Shawn Powers	“Al Jazeera English: A conciliatory medium in a conflict-driven environment?”	50

Looking only at the most cited publications provides a slightly skewed perspective, however. Of the ten most cited publications, none was published after 2010, for example. As citations typically increase over time, a simple snapshot of overall citations privileges older publications, as can be observed in Table 4. Thus, Table 5 lists the most cited publications by year of publication, offering insight into the impact of more recent research on Al Jazeera. Combined, the two tables offer a balanced review of the most important scholarly research resulting from the collective study of Al Jazeera.

**TABLE 5: Most Cited Academic Research on Al Jazeera
by Year of Publication, 2003-2015¹**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Citations</i>
2015	Ezzeddine Abdelmoula	Al Jazeera and Democratization	3
2013	Tine Figenschou	Al Jazeera and the global media landscape	24
2012	Shawn Powers	“The Origins of Al Jazeera English”	16
2011	Arno Tausch	“On the global political and economic environment of the current Al Jazeera Revolution”	21
2010	Mohammed El- Nawawy and Shawn Powers	“Al Jazeera English: A conciliatory medium in a conflict-driven environment?”	50
2009	Christian Kolmer and Holli Semetko	“Framing the Iraq War: Perspectives from American, U.K., Czech, German, South African, and Al-Jazeera News”	52
2008	Philip Seib	The Al Jazeera Effect	160
2007	Mohamed Zayani and Sahraoui Sofiane	The Culture of Al Jazeera	61
2006	Marc Lynch	Voices of the new Arab public	424
2005	Philip Seib	“Hegemonic no more: Western media, the rise of Al-Jazeera, and the influence of diverse voices”	76
2004	Stephen Quinn and Tim Walters	“Al-Jazeera: a broadcaster creating ripples in a stagnant pool”	9
2003	Noureddine Miladi	“Mapping the Al-Jazeera Phenomenon”	32

While the literature reviewed here is no doubt robust, many research questions remain, and the study of Al Jazeera should continue to be an important area of inquiry moving forward. In particular, how the network navigates Middle East and global markets in the current information rich context remains to be seen. Moreover,

there are questions about the future of the network itself. Was the decision to shut down *Al Jazeera America* a sign of things to come? Are the legal challenges faced in Turkey insurmountable, or a harbinger of future challenges? What can be learned from these experiences? In a world where news flows are generated and sent in every conceivable direction, is there as much a need for a “voice of the global south?” How do the region’s politics, and ongoing conflicts, shape audience expectations? Will Qatari support continue, and if so, will it be seen as impacting the network’s coverage? For every answer and insight offered by existing research, several questions follow. One thing, however, remains clear: Presuming Al Jazeera continues to be a mission-driven news organization, aiming to transform the global news and media industries, and as long as it remains open to academics interested in studying it, there will continue to be robust interest and research output on the iconic and influential media network.

Notes:

1. Publications were searched for using the Library of Congress, Google Scholar, Google Books, Amazon book query, Galileo, EBSCOhost, and JSTOR.
2. A third edited volume, *Kuala Lumpur Calling: Al Jazeera English in Asia* (2008) was also reviewed. Two of its chapters (Powers & El-Nawawy and Kraidy) were academic in nature and included in this analysis. The remaining chapters were practitioner oriented and thus not included.
3. Certain common words were excluded from the query as they didn't offer any explanatory significance. These included: "Al Jazeera," "one," "information," "study," and "also."
4. The term "Al Jazeera Effect" was used prior to Seib's 2008 book, however. For example, El-Nawawy and Iskander reference the possibility of an Al Jazeera Effect in the 2003 book, *Al-Jazeera: The Story of the Network that is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism*
5. For example, see Will Youmans (forthcoming, 2017) *Unlikely Audience: Al Jazeera's Struggle in America*. Oxford University Press.
6. As is noted in the "Method and Framework of Inquiry" section, each chapter of these edited volumes was entered and analyzed separately to capture the range and diversity of perspectives they offered.
7. Social science research averages 4.7 citations per publication, based on aggregated data from 2000-2010. See: Times Higher Education, "Citation averages, 2000-2010, by fields and years," <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/citation-averages-2000-2010-by-fields-and-years/415643.article>
8. Please note, 2014 was excluded from this table as there were no academic publications on Al Jazeera published that year.

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Part IV

Al Jazeera: An Innovative Approach to Professional Journalism

Professional Journalism? Aims, strategies and dilemmas in Al Jazeera English's news production

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Introduction

Over the last 20 years, Al Jazeera has gone from obscure outsider into a multi-language, multi-channel, multi-platform global media network. Throughout this period, there have been repeated arguments about whether the network—given its rare combination of rich resources, ownership model and a counter-hegemonic remit—qualifies as ‘mainstream’ or ‘alternative’, ‘professional’ or ‘biased’?

As discussed in this chapter, Al Jazeera, exemplified by its global English language news channel Al Jazeera English, represents an editorial mission and production strategies which support and promote the professional journalistic logic, at the same time as the channel questions and sets out to counter the professional practices of Anglo-American global news networks. It argues that AJE’s editorial project thus extends and challenges binary models of ‘alternative’ versus ‘mainstream’ journalism, representing a *professionalized Southern alternative model*. The chapter is structured as follows: It first introduces the concept of professional journalism, before it discusses AJE’s code of conduct, editorial mission and strategies in relation to professional ideals such as objectivity, balance and neutrality. Second, it analyzes AJE’s

inbuilt critique of mainstream news values and practices in global news. In the concluding section, it discusses Al Jazeera English as a journalistic project beyond the dichotomy of alternative and mainstream journalism.

Defining professional journalism

‘Professional’ is a concept packed with meaning, stresses Waisbord (2013), in his book on the origins, characteristics and challenges facing *professional journalism*. A minimal definition understands profession as the job or occupation of journalists, what journalism does, the specific set of skills and knowledge marking occupational boundaries (Waisbord 2013: 6-13)¹. More often however, professional journalism comes to encompass the positive, normative model of quality reporting and journalism’s contribution to democracy. For others, as will be discussed more below, professionalism has first and foremost come to represent the problems and challenges facing mainstream journalism today (Waisbord 2013: 3-4).

The normative ideal of professional journalism, underlines that journalism contributes to the public good by questioning power, facilitating critical debates and informing citizens (Waisbord 2013: 122). According to the professional ideal, journalists adopt and enforce ethics of public service, social responsibility, neutrality and fairness, with the ethics of objectivity and neutrality as the core professional values (Waisbord, 2013: 123-4). Unpacking how objectivity has been understood, Hackett and Gurleyen (2015), argue that objectivity is first and foremost normative ideal, indicating values concerning how journalists provide information (facticity, accuracy, completeness) and the detached, independent and impartial position journalists should take (Hackett & Gurleyen 2015: 55). Second, the objectivity ideal encompasses two conflicting epistemological positions - there is both a belief that it is possible to ‘report the world as it is’ (journalism as a reflection of the actual world), at the same time as there is an emphasis on balance and fairness (journalism as a representation/construction).

Third, objectivity is consolidated through a set of newsgathering and news presenting practices, such as journalistic methods (critical investigation, observation, documentation and source networks); news values (such as prominence, timeliness, conflict and proximity), and archetypical news formats (favoring short, unambiguous and often episodic, single event stories) (Cook 1998; Iyengar 1991; Waisbord 2013). Fourth, objectivity represents a language to evaluate journalistic quality and performance, in public discourse about journalism and within the journalistic community (Hackett & Gurleyen 2015). Fifth, objectivity has been embodied in the institutional and legal frameworks, designed to secure professional autonomy from external economic, political and religious interests in democratic societies (Waisbord 2013: 43-54). The media's right to access information, investigate powerful actors, and reveal failures and malpractices is widely acclaimed, established in far-reaching freedom-of-information laws in a range of countries. The power of this professional logic has been based in the monopolistic position and control held by journalists and editors over the last two centuries to decide newsworthiness and public interest for large numbers of people (Waisbord 2013), a position which is challenged markedly in the current media landscape.

The professionalization process in modern journalism was first initiated in Anglo-American media throughout the nineteenth century in response to political and economic pressures, but it has had a global presence and become a global influence over the last century. International studies find that the core values of objectivity, accuracy and truth, is at the core of professional ethics globally and central to understandings of good journalism worldwide (Hanitzsch Plaisance & Skewes 2013). Analyzing how this professional ideal developed in the Anglo-American context, Waisbord (2013) underlines that although the professionalism ideal is known and internalized among journalists across the globe, it does not mean the same across journalistic cultures and local contexts (see also Ward (2013)).

Professional ethics

One approach to study media organizations' normative ideals and editorial mission is by analyzing their codes of ethics. Obviously code of conducts and mission statements cannot be taken as characteristic of the channel's performance and professionalism, but it is an illustrative insight into who the channel aims to be (normative ideal). Al Jazeera English's Code of ethics (revised in late 2014) can be characterized as relatively brief (ten paragraphs, one page) and consequently more generic and overarching, than concrete and detailed. Overall, it largely reflects and incorporates the normative professional logic outlined above. According to the code, the channel will "adhere to the journalistic values of honesty, courage, fairness, balance, independence, credibility and diversity, giving no priority to commercial or political over professional consideration" (paragraph 1). It further states that the channel will seek "to get to the truth" (paragraph 2), present a "clear, factual and accurate picture" (paragraph 3), to "distinguish between news material, opinion and analysis" (paragraph 9), to present "unbiased and faithful reflections" of diverse races, cultures and beliefs (paragraph 6) and present diverse points of views and opinions "without bias and partiality" (paragraph 5). Although, objectivity is not explicitly mentioned in this code of ethics, the aims outlined here, indirectly reflect that the channel subscribes to fairness and objective core values of professional journalism. To do this, the code stresses journalistic practices such as unequivocally and clear reports (paragraph 2), unbiased and faithful representations of various beliefs and values (paragraph 6), transparency regarding news work and its sources (paragraph 8) and to acknowledge mistakes, correct them and ensure it does not happen again (paragraph 7).

Although stressing diversity (points of views, opinions, values and individualities), overall the professional values foregrounded in the code reflect a belief in professional journalism as a reflection of

the actual world. Other parts of the Al Jazeera English code of ethics, stress the channel's aim to contribute to and support the professional community of journalists, most explicitly expressed in paragraph 10: *Stand by colleagues in the profession and give them support when required, particularly in the light of the acts of aggression and harassment to which journalists are subjected at times. Cooperate with Arab and international journalistic unions and associations to defend freedom of the press.* The relation to other journalists is further stressed in paragraph 4, stating that the channel welcomes "fair and honest media competition", at the same time as it stresses that this competition should not lower standards of performance as the journalistic 'scoop' should not "become and end in itself". Other sections of the code of ethics stress, the channels aim to treat their audience (paragraph 3), colleagues (paragraph 4) and their sources (paragraph 8) with respect and fairness. Particularly, the feelings of "victims of crime, war, persecution and disaster" and their relatives should be respected in the channel's reporting (paragraph 3). As underlined in previous studies of professional ethics, such codes of conduct should not be taken at face value as documentation of the professionalism of a news organization. It is rather a mission statement of what the organization ought to be and do, and how these ethical concepts are interpreted and translated into journalistic practice varies significantly across global newsrooms (Waisbord 2013; Ward 2013). In the next section the Al Jazeera's code of conduct, which largely reflects generic, universal professional ethics will be discussed in relation to the channel's editorial core values and editorial strategies.

Professionalism, editorial core values and strategies

Although Al Jazeera English's editorial mission has been evaluated, negotiated and reformulated throughout its almost ten years on air, some core values have remained strong. In the following

these core values and the editorial strategies that have been employed to meet them, will be discussed in relation to the normative ideals of professional journalism outlined above and results from existing studies of the channel's performance.

1) *The Southern Perspective*: From early on, AJE official statements and promotional texts, stated that the channel would be a global channel which should report from a distinctive perspective to balance "the current typical information flow by reporting from the developing world back to the West and from the southern to the northern hemisphere" (AJN 2010). Interviews with AJE editorial staff and management, document a political understanding of 'the South' that addresses patterns of power, wealth, development and privilege across and within regions (Figenschou 2013: 91). A number of studies of Al Jazeera English's news have documented that the channel did indeed emphasize the Global South (Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East) over the Global North (Europe and North America) in its news coverage - with more news items about and originating from the South¹, prioritized higher in the running order (Bigalke 2013) and in longer, more in-depth formats (Figenschou 2010).

In the AJE newsroom this explicit Southern perspective, has been reflected in the channel's editorial strategies: First, the channel have had a *complex, decentralized production structure*, with an extensive network of bureaus and correspondents in the South. In the channel's first five years on air, this priority was further accentuated by a decentralized headquarters structure that manifested itself structurally in the establishment of four headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, Doha, London and Washington D.C. respectively. Although, this Southern presence has been resource-intensive, it has been highlighted as a key strategy for maintaining the channel's editorial distinctiveness and the channel has had an active policy of countering the location practices of the western news media (Figenschou 2013).

Al Jazeera's politics of location and presence on the ground, has been a crucial condition for the network's international journalistic breakthroughs, but it has also been controversial as the channel's reports from inside the territories controlled by the 'enemies' of the West have induced its critics to question the network's editorial autonomy and agenda (Figenschou 2013: 56-60).

Secondly, an interrelated key editorial strategy has been to cover global events with *local correspondents*, particularly in the Global South. There is a widely shared belief within the channel that local correspondents are better equipped to grasp and convey the realities on the ground than professional, international (foreign) correspondents. According to AJE sources local correspondents 'who have lived the story' are better qualified to communicate the channel's editorial core values: The local correspondent speaks the local language(s), knows the culture, religion and way of life, has personal experience with and a deep understanding of the challenges of the community. Moreover, from the AJE perspective local correspondents navigate the system and know how to deal with local authorities, have more extensive and alternative source networks, respect local sensitivities, and strive to give a fair representation of the local point of view. According to interviewees, local Southern correspondents are perceived as better resourced to develop alternative independent news stories and news angles (Figenschou 2013: 60-65). There are few empirical tests of this claim, beyond the fact that having correspondents who know local culture and language has been foregrounded as comparative advantages during many of AJE's defining stories (see Bridges (2013) for a discussion of the 2011 Arab Uprisings). Analyzing discourses and framing on Al Jazeera English, Bebawi (2016) finds that the channel's non-Western reporters represented a more critical, counter-hegemonic discourse than their Western colleagues indicating that socio-cultural background did have an ideological impact.

The editorial emphasis on a Southern perspective is based in a critical understanding of global journalism, which challenges the normative self-understanding of professional journalism as outlined above. The emphasis on the Southern *perspective*, signals an editorial project with an explicit point of departure in contrast to the perceived universality and neutrality implicit in the Anglo-American professional logic. The emphasis on both the Southern location and background, counters the ideal of the detached, independent and impartial position of professional journalists. Inbuilt in this strategy to recruit local correspondents is a belief that correspondents reporting from a Southern perspective will produce journalism of higher quality - as they have lived the story. In the AJE rhetoric these local correspondents are perceived to be better qualified than the professional international correspondents who follows and promotes the professional logic. Although local expertise was often foregrounded in promos and interviews, AJE interviewees also stressed that the channel compensated for some local correspondents limited international experience through teaming them up with producers with extensive, international careers and moreover that local talents were brought to the Doha headquarter for training (Figenschou 2013). As pointed out by Bigalke, the hiring strategy was to combine local staff and international expertise, whereby interviewees repeatedly emphasized that ‘professionalism’ always trumped questions of (perceived) ‘authenticity’ (2013: 216). Crucially, looking more closely, Bigalke identified an unexpected aspect of this distinction in her data that appeared to be less strategic, and more a reflection of bias inherent in a wider unequal professional playing field: a strong correlation with gender that meant that while a majority of on-screen reporters with a non-Western background were women, men made up more than 95% of on-screen reporters with a Western background. AJE had a conscious recruitment policy regarding local, Southern correspondents, whilst the gender bias (due

to lack of conscious strategy) can be seen as a byproduct of wider imbalances (Bigalke 2013:185). Moreover, the on-screen diversity was not reflected behind the screen. In essence, finding local, Southern correspondents, producers and editors who met the professional qualifications perceived necessary in international television (English fluency, training and knowledge in the professional logic) proved difficult. Consequently, positions on the executive level were held by a closely-knit group of professionals with backgrounds and extensive careers in Anglo-American mainstream television (Figenschou, 2012). The struggle to combine a Southern perspective with the logic of professional journalism, will be discussed more in detail in the concluding section.

II) The voice of the voiceless: A related editorial core value, which has been key to AJE from the start is that of giving a *voice to the voiceless* - the subaltern, the disenfranchised, marginalized people and interests far from international power centers, elites and media. In this context, the concept of *voice* is understood as an expression of an opinion, or a distinctive perspective on the world (Couldry 2010). It has been an explicit editorial mission to redirect and redress the elite domination in international news by consciously redirecting attention from the ‘corridors of power’ to the margins (AJE, 2009). To *hear the human story* (AJE, 2014) and *the voice of the people* (AJE 2016) - as this perspective is expressed in more recent promotional campaign. This has implied giving on-air voice to people who were comparatively disadvantaged through existing geo-cultural, political, economic and social inequalities. It is a core value, which has been understood quite flexibly (*any* group of people currently underrepresented in other media), within the channel (Bigalke 2013: 96), which again has opened for diverging interpretations, intense internal debates and internal controversy within the Al Jazeera Network (see Bigalke (2013) and Figenschou (2012) for discussion). Overall, the core value has primarily been translated into two sourcing strategies:

First, reflecting the anti-establishment spirit which has characterized the broader Al Jazeera Network (Zayani & Sahraoui, 2008), AJE sources aim to be systematically critical towards authority and elites, to invite all sides of the story into the studio, including *the other opinion* often denied access to mainstream international news (Figenschou, 2013). Whether the channel actually did give voice to the other opinion, who represented such deviant positions and who were deemed illegitimate (too extreme) - constituted a recurrent topic in internal editorial debates during the channels' early years (Figenschou 2012). One group of AJE staff, most of them with professional experience from Arab and other Southern news organizations, argued the channel has been overcautious and cowardice when it came to give a platform to controversial guests critical of the Western hegemony, to interview, examine and try to understand their position and perspective. Such radical interpretations of giving voice to the voiceless other, further implies an extension of the range of legitimate sources to include those actors defined as outlaws by the international community (dictators, war criminals, war lords, terrorist or extremist leaders), which challenges established mainstream professional perceptions of what kind of mediated opinions that are legitimate and worthy of being heard. There is a lack of systematic examination of these claims, although case studies indicate that AJE have had somewhat different sourcing strategies from its international competitors. Figenschou's (2013: 118-38) study of the Gaza war coverage, find that AJE had more Hamas sources than BBCW and CNNI, and that the channel staff was markedly tougher in its interviews with Israeli officials than Palestinian representatives. Other qualitative studies, examining whether the discourse on AJE is different to that of the BBCW and CNNI reach more mixed results: they find nuances of difference between AJE and its competitors, but they also identified discrepancies within samples of AJE coverage and strategies (Bebawi 2016; Bigalke 2013).

Second, from the start, it was an expressed editorial aim within AJE to strive to find ways to *let people on the ground report on their own lives* (Figenschou, 2013: 56), explained as telling the story from the point of view of the subjects of the story (confer the authenticity of local correspondents discussed above). The extent to which this strategy has been reflected in the channel's news beyond its promos is more contested: Source analysis of AJE news finds that both ordinary, unaffiliated people (Figenschou, 2010) and female news sources (Figenschou, 2013) are systematically underrepresented in its news shows, and often given narrowly defined, stereotypical communicative registers which place them outside the realms of power (Bigalke 2013). At the same time, comparative case studies find that the channel gives voice to more ordinary people from its stories from the Global South than the North (reflecting its strategy of local correspondents and Southern presence) (Bigalke 2013: 191; Figenschou 2013: 116).

Since its launch, AJE has experimented with formats told by citizen reporters. Letting non-journalists 'report on themselves' in participatory and collaborative newsgathering processes, represents a redefinition of journalistic professionalism (Singer et al. 2011) and potential redistribution of political and communicative power (Chadwick, 2013). Overall, AJE's television news and programming has largely remained elite-oriented, with relatively few "non-professional" segments. This has been somewhat different from the online news desk of AJE that has been more innovative, experimenting with new interactive tools. During major news events, from the 2008-9 Gaza war onwards, the channel has highlighted user-generated information and interactivity in online live blogs, event timelines and maps to provide updated reports from those affected by crisis (Powers & Youmans, 2012), war (Bridges, 2013), elections (Youmans, 2014) and popular protests (Aouragh & Alexander 2011). For Al Jazeera the potential and power of such networked reporting

was epitomized during the 2011 Arab uprisings - when protesters on the ground interacted and cooperated extensively with the network (Bossio 2014): AJE broadcasts included relatively more social media sources (although it remained a limited source group) and explicitly focused on social media's importance and role in the uprisings (Robertson 2013; Sarnelli 2013). It summarized the latest developments in networked media in hourly web desk updates (Aouragh & Alexander 2011; Bridges 2013) and set up a website to facilitate the uploading of clips and images directly (Sarnelli, 2013). At the same time as the Al Jazeera Network validated and integrated social media in their newscasts, social media posts on the Arab uprisings largely reflected, referred to and linked to the network (Aday et al. 2013).

Overall, studies of AJE's sourcing practices find that although the channel is elite-dominated, it has expanded the range of elite voices, representing independent, oppositional and civil society perspectives, in addition to the political, economic and military establishment (Figenschou, 2013: 114). Moreover, there are more independent elites on AJE than on its international competitors (Bigalke 2013): Independent elites are quoted more often, given more airtime, accorded more authority and invited to speak in more analytical news formats (Bigalke 2013; Figenschou 2013). Moreover, analyzing sociocultural background of story protagonists, Bigalke (2013: 273) finds that majority of Western protagonists represented the establishment, while a majority of non-Western protagonists represented independent elites and ordinary people. This alternative source hierarchy does not fundamentally alter the elite-grass-roots distribution, the notions of hierarchical sourcing, sourcing relationships or even the elite notion of sourcing - it primarily alters the perception of *which elites* have been accorded credibility on Al Jazeera English. Another, recurrent finding is that presence on the ground influence the source diversity on the channel: In those stories

where Al Jazeera English has had reporter teams on the ground, the channel finds, meets and provides to more ordinary people and a larger range of elite voices (Bigalke 2013: 200-3; Figenschou 2013: 133-8).

Linguistic barriers, that sources should be English speakers according to editorial policy, was highlighted by interviewees as the primary barrier for greater source diversity (although this policy was debated internally and reporters made exceptions, if the story was perceived important enough) (Figenschou 2013). Further, expertise, media competence and training, accessibility, time and resources, influence which sources that are compatible with the international news format. Moreover, the source imbalances largely reflect structural imbalances on the ground, which is difficult for media organizations to overcome. Within the AJE newsroom there has been a high awareness about such structural inequalities both on the global level and in relation to concrete ongoing stories. Thus, the practice of going beyond official statements, PR machines and spin has been continuously repeated in interviews and mission statements (Figenschou 2013). Within the AJE newsroom, there were diverging opinions on whether being a voice of the voiceless meant to try and be balanced by *proportionally* representing those underrepresented elsewhere (a position more closely associated with traditional notions of journalistic professionalism) - or whether a historic bias in the wider field meant that an overall balance could only be approached by meeting systemic underrepresentation with a deliberate emphasis beyond questions of proportionality. This latter position extends the normative ideal of professional practices as detached, independent and impartial and demands reporters to give disproportionate voice to disenfranchised groups and interests. In essence, to offer more airtime, a stronger voice, to those actors, which have been muted in international, mainstream media. During the Gaza war (2008-9), for example, the editorial management urged the need to actively counter

the asymmetry of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Figenschou 2013: 118) in an effort to counter Israeli spin and recruit a diversity of Palestinian voices. Reflecting this strategy, comparative analysis of the coverage, identified a larger source diversity on AJE than on its Anglo-American competitors (who were more dependent on official Israeli sources) (Figenschou 2013: 133).

Discussion:

Who we are... Trusted. Respected. Valued. These solid professional characteristics are selected by Al Jazeera English on the channel website as an introduction of the network and channel (AJE 2016), emphasizing reliability and solidness rather than a radical, progressive profile. The complex, broad and sometimes even contradictory editorial core values of the AJE project has spurred many internal discussions regarding how different news agenda the channel can pursue, without becoming irrelevant and outside of the global news race. Al Jazeera English's Southern presence has enabled it to broadcast and prioritize significant stories that had not already made their way into international newsrooms, while stories that due to their adherence to established news values were already ubiquitous across international media were correspondingly often given lower priority as reflected in the running order (Bigalke 2013: 273). Moreover, fulfilling the channel's progressive aims requires more planning and resources to go beyond the dominant framing, sources and stories repeatedly covered in other news organizations. At the same time, integrating long-term planning more fully into the production, could potentially reduce the boldness, instinct for breaking news, flexibility, dynamic production practices and individual freedom which has been decisive for the successes of the network (Figenschou, 2012; Zayani & Sahraoui 2007, 35-42). Overall, the boldness and controversies characterizing AJE's sister channel Al Jazeera Arabic (King & Zayani, 2008), has not been a key

characteristic of Al Jazeera English's ten years on air. It is worth noticing, however, that editorial decisions, which push both the editorial staff and the limits of accepted practices, have been vital, yet controversial characteristics of some of the channel's major international stories. The primary example is AJE's bold coverage of the 2011 Egyptian uprising, which gave the channel its global breakthrough, yet raised external and internal criticism (see Bridges (2013) for a compelling analysis).

Existing empirical investigations of how AJE's self-declared difference and counter-hegemonic mission have been manifested in its output and production (Bebawi 2013; Bigalke 2013; Figenschou 2013) have found nuances of differences, rather than a radically different journalistic project. Particularly studies of production processes, which has often been overlooked in the literature on global news flows and contra-flows (Hanusch & Obijiofor 2008; Hjarvard 2002; Paterson, 2011), illuminate how the channel balances being *different enough* to stand out while being *similar enough* to matter (Bigalke 2013; Figenschou 2013). Here, the aim appeared to be to alter global news within the constraints of its professional logic, rather than aiming to revolutionize, replace or fundamentally alter it. According to Bigalke's production study (2013: 274), "it was never in question for AJE's leadership that the aim was not to contest, but to emulate, the brand of professionalism practiced by the dominant organisations in the field of news broadcasting. It became clear very early in the channel's development that AJE did not want to radically alter the presuppositions upon which the field of international English-language news broadcasting is based. Rather, it was concerned with a struggle to alter some of the rules *within* this journalistic (sub)field". A position of similarity which Bigalke argues "allowed the channel to establish areas of disagreement" with historically Western news values that had a better chance of translating back into the wider professional field, precisely because

the organization positioned itself firmly within its boundaries (2013:275). The emphasis on professionalism and international community of journalists is reflected in the channel's code of conduct discussed above. At the same time Figenschou's (2013) interviews documented that there were vocal groups of editors, producers and correspondents, who held more radical interpretations of AJE's editorial mission, which contested and aimed to confront the professional logic of international news. A similar radical discourse is identified in some of the news stories analyzed by Bebawi (2016), often carried out by non-Western AJE correspondents and anchors.

This same ambiguity is seen in AJE professionals' relations to their colleagues and competitors in other news channels. In interviews, editorial staff frequently criticized their international Anglo-American competitors for being driven by commercial imperatives¹; for closing down and reducing their global presence; and systematically ignoring waste areas of the globe (Figenschou 2013: 61-62). Aiming to contrast the Al Jazeera project from the dominant Western media interviewees contrasted their mission with stereotypical, caricatures of 'parachute reporters' - correspondents that are bigger stars than the news and people they cover, fly in from far away, spend very limited time in the field, simplify matters on the ground, and report from a Western-centric worldview to their domestic audience back home. Such active positioning vis-à-vis, opposition and challenge to professional, mainstream media have been a defining characteristic of alternative media (see among others Atton (2002 2015) and Couldry & Curran (2003)). Particularly the tendency among AJE informants to position themselves against a one-dimensional caricature of a parachute reporter - echoes the monolithic often simplistic perception of mainstream media in alternative media approaches (Hájek & Carpenter, 2015).

At the same time, the majority of interviewees, had extensive professional backgrounds and gained their training in Anglo-

American news channels (predominantly from British ITN and the BBC, or American CNN, ABC and CNBC). On the one hand, interviewees underlined how Western correspondents, editors and producers were in the process of unlearning the professional mainstream logic and that this was essential for the editorial project to succeed (Figenschou 2013: 70; Bigalke 2013: 225). On the other, Bigalke (2013) finds that in terms of journalistic practice, interviewees said they were often doing mostly the same as their Western colleagues, reflecting the ongoing struggle between professional habitus reminiscent of practices specific to the wider field and journalistic agency associated with AJE's counter-hegemonic aim. Moreover, these similarities in journalistic practices were crucial for the channel to succeed internationally as managers at AJE realized from the beginning, "entering the field 'on a par' in terms of journalistic practices was the precondition for editorial difference to have an impact" (Bigalke 2013: 221). In other words, this adaptation of the normative professional logic enabled AJE as a new channel with a Southern perspective to actually make an impact globally, but as discussed in this chapter may also have limited AJE's scope for difference in crucial ways.

The academic discussion on Al Jazeera English's combination of (professional) similarity and (editorial) difference have led researchers to characterize Al Jazeera English as a *professional (Southern) alternative* (Figenschou, 2013) or as *hybrid reporting* (Bebawi 2016). Such seemingly contradictory characteristics illustrate how Al Jazeera English cannot easily be put in neither the alternative media nor the mainstream media archetypes. More recently, scholars studying other media have approached this definitional problem by either arguing the need to analyze "alternatives *within* the mainstream media", to acknowledge and categorize increasing levels of difference and similarities within the professional logic (Hájek & Carpenter 2015: 378). Others have

approached the issue from the alternative media literature, arguing the need to emphasize impact, size and professionalism in alternative media organizations, which arguably have had a tendency to idealize small-scale, amateur projects (Fuchs 2010). Overall, the discussions related to AJE's editorial aim and practices raised in this chapter, contribute to and reflect ongoing wider scholarly discussions on the relevance of the mainstream-alternative dichotomy; how to rethink, protect and conceptualize the journalistic professional logic, and, and how to understand the development and role of international news broadcasters, in the current multi-directional, participatory, hybridized media landscape.

Notes:

1. There is an ongoing debate on whether journalism should be defined as a conventional profession, since practicing journalism is not regulated by formal knowledge requirements, state-sanctioned credentials or active membership in organizations or associations and sentiments of professional identity are often weak (see Waisbord 2013, 80-88).
2. See among others Al-Najjar (2009), Bigalke (2013), Figenschou (2010), Painter (2008) and Uysal (2011).
3. For a detailed analysis of the impact of commercial considerations on AJE's editorial remit, see Bigalke's discussion of the "cost of difference" (2013: 236-265).

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**Representation of Women and their Role
in the Public Domain on Al Jazeera:
Analysis of women's programmes
*For Women Only and Pioneers***

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This chapter examines the role played by Al Jazeera since its launch in November 1996 in the transformation of representations of women in the Arab cross-border television sphere and of their roles in the public domain, through the study of gender representation and the positions and roles of women as presenters, guests and subject. It also looks at the particularities, implications and repercussions of this representation in the content of programmes that specifically target women. The chapter focuses mainly on the mechanisms adopted by the channel in establishing a new and unique approach in dealing with the representation and roles of women and addressing their issues, contributing to a stream of new and positive images of women as both active participants and important actors in the public domain. These efforts challenge the stereotypical images fixed on traditional roles promoted by entertainment channels that employ women's bodies for propaganda and commercial purposes on one hand, and programmes targeting them on public channels that confine their roles to the private sphere as a wife, mother and housewife on the other hand.

While previous studies on images of women in the media in recent decades have focused on the negative aspects more than the positive (Kadri, 2008; Kadri 2015), this research starts from a specific subject that may be more optimistic, taking into account the relative capacity of the media to influence the public in conjunction with a multitude of factors, including individual preferences, references and allegiances.

For this study we have chosen to focus on a sample consisting of two women's programmes, *For Women Only* and *Pioneers*, selected because of the significance, richness and diversity of their content. These two programmes broadcast a total of 172 episodes during the period between January 2002 and March 2007 in the case of *For Women Only*, and between 2002 and February 2008 in the case of *Pioneers*. These episodes tackle a range of gender issues relating to the participation of women in political, social, cultural and economic life, and the problems and obstacles they face in the private and professional spheres and abroad, as well as addressing the specificities of Arab and Muslim women in general, according to their contexts and situations. Given the sheer quantity of material available, amounting to hundreds of hours of broadcast television, we decided to focus on a sample of 30 episodes selected from the two programmes, representing approximately 20 per cent of their output, so as to be representative of this type of television content. Before entering into the key questions, methodology and structure of the study, we present a brief overview of the two programmes in order to introduce them to the reader.

The weekly talk show *For Women Only* was launched in January 2002 and continued until June 2007 that is, over three and a half years, during which 160 episodes were aired, each nearly an hour long of live television for the whole series. The programme was presented by a number of Al Jazeera anchors - including Khadija Ben Genna, Luna Shibl, Muntaha Ramhi and Mona Salman - and prepared by Asmaa Ben Qada, a researcher of Algerian origin specializing in

women's studies. The programme was produced by Ramzan Rashed Anuaimi and Imad Bahjat. *For Women Only* can be classified as an interactive talk show aimed at provoking discussion and mutual dialogue between the various guests, including experts and specialists from the Arab world and beyond from different nationalities, affiliations and orientations, whether present in the studio or via satellite, and between the guests and the audience of both women and men via several means, such as special reports, opinion polls or direct participation via telephone, fax or email.

Pioneers, meanwhile, was a documentary programme profoundly shaped by the young journalist, producer, editor and director Rawan Addhamen. The programme highlighted Arab women "pioneering role models" in their fields of expertise, from different age groups and geographical backgrounds in an "attractive and new format, in the sense that the guests were not well-known women, and an entertaining format in terms of the richness of the information and images used and on-the-ground reports" according to Rawan Addhamen.¹ This monthly programme ran for 12 episodes of approximately an hour each of broadcasting time for the entire series) showcasing ten "pioneers". All episodes aired between March 2007 and February 2008 are available in the programme archives on Al Jazeera's website, alongside other programmes that are no longer broadcast. The programme presents the "social experiences" (Dubet, 1994) of these women "pioneers" through the format of a television interview and a range of recorded reports that focus on the role of the social environment in shaping the paths of these women and strengthening their ability to excel and exercise leadership in their different fields of specialization, such as medicine, literature, art, politics and scientific research.

In our study of the characteristics of gender representation in the content that deals with women's issues on Al Jazeera during the 2000s, we rely on a double-layered approach that employs the methodology of both gender studies and cultural studies. Media

content is shaped by conflicts between representations within the public sphere, especially among social, political and cultural actors, and media professionals' perceptions of the public's opinions, concerns, attitudes and views (Macé, 2000; Macé, 2001). Thus, it is necessary to study the evolution of women's representation on television in light of other developments in this area (specifically, gender sensitivity and working methods), within the framework of gender representation, roles and approaches (Fleury and Walter, 2009).

We based our study of gender representation in the content that addresses women's issues on the Al Jazeera network on a set of sociological techniques such as interviews, content analysis and focus groups. For this purpose, the research principally uses a data set collected between 2009 and 2010 during fieldwork conducted at the Al Jazeera television station, during which the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with a group of presenters, particularly those who participated in presenting the two programmes examined, such as Muntaha Romhi, Leila Chaieb, Khadija Benguenna and Rawan Addhamen. This research examined the relationship between the new gender representation of women in the media and the public sphere (Hussein, 2012) and the role played by Arab satellite channels in reshaping the public imagination and gender roles through the study of how this representation was received in the Lebanese context (Hussein, 2013). The author used the results revealed by the first study to uncover the extent of the existence of a general gender awareness or gender sensitivity among the programme presenters and in the channel's policy in general, as well as to research the mechanisms for the formation and use of this awareness in media coverage of gender issues and its impact on the contribution of the channel to the emergence of a gendered media discourse.

As for the results of the second study, on the reception of coverage, the author used these to support the conclusions reached by the study.

The author also used the content analysis method (Fairclough, 2003), especially in monitoring the quantity and quality of the representations of women as guests, with the aim of analysing repeat appearances compared with repeat appearances of men (or those groups assumed to be more visible in the media) and identifying the symbols, connotations and ideas these representations present and their distribution across different issues, according to the nature of the concerns and needs, in order to identify the extent of their symbolic and material contribution to strengthening public awareness. Alongside qualitative assessment, which is more sensitive to the considerations and working methods of producers, this quantitative tool helped in monitoring representations of women as subjects. The study has been structured as follows:

Initially, the focus was on the active role played by women presenters in strengthening a gender approach in media discourse and public awareness of gender issues, by revealing the relationship between gender sensitivity, commitment to gender issues and educational and professional qualifications, independence, professionalism and support available to them from the channel.

The focus in the second phase was on studying the new and diverse presence of female guests from various scientific and professional backgrounds and geographical, political and ideological affiliations. These contributed to the emergence of a new stream of female voices, both elite and opposition, and Islamic-feminist in particular, in public debate around hot issues and in the formation of opinions and attitudes regarding gender issues that embody the concerns of women and men alike. This stage also focused on the involvement of men and their views on these issues, through the space devoted to them, consciously or unconsciously, by the channel.

The third and final phase focused on monitoring the presence of women in relation to the issues raised, in an attempt to understand the specificities of a gendered media approach and to assess the value and potential benefits that it provides.

Presenters and Gendered Media Discourse

We focus in this first phase of the study on the role played by the programme presenters as messengers in promoting a gendered approach in media discourse due to their gender sensitivity - and that of the channel's management - and its implications for engaging in gender issues. This is examined through research into the mechanisms for the development of awareness about gender issues among the presenters, alongside their educational and professional backgrounds and the distinctive approach adopted by the channel in dealing with the team of women presenters. The channel gave the team the opportunity to participate in various talk shows, without exception, and in all the stages of producing the media message from conception, preparation and production, through to editing. This contrasts with the dominant context in the Arab media scene, which is characterized by gender discrimination, and which confines women to programmes about family, fashion and entertainment, and men to political programmes. This approach also contrasts with the patriarchal view of women, which degrades their status and value by dealing with them as objects of seduction and to serve the husband and family only.

Professional Experience, Distinctive Policy and Gender Awareness

A succession of presenters and journalists from Al Jazeera's first generation participated in presenting the programme *For Women Only*, such as Khadija Benguenna, Muntaha Ramhi and Leila Chaieb. They come from a variety of Arab nationalities (such as Algerian, Syrian, Jordanian and Tunisian), and all possess considerable academic qualifications and professional experience. The majority of these journalists attained high levels of academic qualifications and vocational training in the field of radio and television media from prestigious universities, institutes and centres, in addition to having

professional careers at Western media organizations, in particular, which played a key role in developing their sensitivity to gender issues.

The Algerian presenter, Khadija Benguenna, for example, joined the channel in the middle of 1997, less than a year after its launch. She held two professional qualifications from the Centre for the Training of Journalists in Louvre (CFJ) and the CIRNEA Centre for television production in Paris dating back to 1989 and 1993, in addition to a bachelor's degree in radio and television media from the University of Algiers in 1988 and around a decade of experience in presenting on radio and television and the development of programmes in Algerian media institutions and the Arab service of Swiss Radio International. She said:

After four years of working at Swiss Radio International in the federal capital Berne, I saw an advert in *Al Hayat* newspaper for a new channel in a country called Qatar, so I applied and was surprised that they were interested in my application [...] but I hesitated before joining to be sure of its professional standard. In the middle of the first year [after the start of Al Jazeera], I moved to Doha to begin my journey with Al Jazeera.²

The Tunisian Leila Chaieb gained her professional experience in the studios of BBC Arabic for two years, before moving to work at the new channel, which she found to be "a copy of the BBC in every sense of the word, especially at the professional level".³

It is clear that the search for professionalism and competence in the field of television presenting was a primary motivation for both these journalists and the new channel, in the ongoing search to distinguish themselves in the media scene at the regional and global levels. As Hugh Miles (2005) argues, the team at Al Jazeera is largely composed of "those who have received their education or who have lived in the West" (Miles, 2005: 234) "and exhibit a high degree of

media professionalism" (Miles, 2005: 338). Their social and professional backgrounds and experiences were a key contributor to their awareness of the importance of the principle of equal opportunities and equality between men and women in various social and professional fields and in recruitment, wages, training and continuous development, nominations and promotion to senior roles.

This gender sensitivity among the new channel's management can also be traced to the same considerations, which were present from its inception. Adnan Sharif, the founder of the new channel, is a Briton of Palestinian origin, a graduate of the Lebanese University and a former member of the BBC Arabic team. The channel maintained its selective approach and gender sensitivity when searching for academically and professionally qualified staff without distinction on the basis of gender, even ten years after its launch. In mid-2006, the young Jordanian of Palestinian origin Rawan Addhamen, a graduate of Britain's Leeds University with a master's degree in television media (2003), joined the channel's team of presenters. She created the concept for *Pioneers*, and produced and directed the programme. Rawan Addhamen began her media career as a presenter and producer on Palestinian television (1998-2001) while still a student in television and radio media at Birzeit University, from which she graduated in 2001. She then moved to work for the Jordanian television channel (2002-2006):

Before I went to work for Al Jazeera, I undertook a training in the field of television media in both Sweden and the United States [...] The first programme I proposed to Al Jazeera was the *Pioneers* programme in 2006. I presented a two-page proposal for a programme on women pioneers in the Arab world because every time I asked young girls about their role models, they would always mention a man or woman from history. The channel's administration asked me to expand on the project so that it could take a decision, so

this is what I did - and in record time, I saw a sense of enthusiasm for the project by the administration. As the general manager of the network Wadah Khanfar told me at the time, commenting on the draft proposal I had submitted: “the shifts in time and place are excellent and the dialogue is interesting, but where is the rest of the episode?”⁴

This gender sensitivity falls within the framework of Al Jazeera’s policy of distinguishing itself by selecting its media team to be composed of women and men alike, which from its launch was a strong factor in setting it apart from Saudi Arabian satellite channels that broadcast from outside the territory of the Kingdom in particular, and which have always had a policy of limiting women presenters to entertainment programmes (Hussein, 2016). One of the consequences of this policy has been a flood of new names of male and female journalists from North Africa in particular, as well as Lebanese and Egyptian journalists, in the “national media field” (El-Oifi, 2010: 75), adding “diversity and credibility to the editorial line of the channel” (Levallois, 2010: 86) and to its representative nature and popular legitimacy in comparison with other news channels (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002).

Awareness of the Need for a Gendered Media Discourse

The gender sensitivity that distinguished Al Jazeera in that period was embodied in its commitment to the production of a gendered media discourse via *For Women Only*, and its innovative way of addressing women's issues. In the words of Leila Chaieb:

The programme helped to fill a large gap in the media’s treatment of women's issues. The majority of programmes targeted at women at that time were focused on women's and family issues, home life and women’s relationship with their spouses, divorce and spinsterhood. The programme addressed a much broader set of issues.

Here, women had a significant role as participants in the production of this gender discourse using modern methods of media work on several levels, starting from programme research and preparation. Khadija Benguenna said: "The biggest responsibility in the preparation process lies with the presenter [...] because the producer may specify the topic or contact the guests, but the rest of the research work and preparation of questions is done by the presenter" (interview with Khadija Benguenna). This extends to fieldwork: "In 2002, while presenting the programme *For Women Only*, I participated in the preparation of a field report from Iraq on the issue of Iraqi women threatened by war" (interview with Leila Chaieb).

Al Jazeera maintained its gender sensitivity and commitment to gender issues even after the tenth anniversary of its founding, especially through the expansion of "women's participation in the production of the media message" (Sakr 2007: 85) and gender, in particular:

I continued working on this issue [the proposed *Pioneers* programme] despite all the difficulties I faced, given that I came up with the idea and was the producer, presenter and editor. This involved all the preparations - lighting, directing technicians, make-up and clothing, greeting the guests, montage and field reports. But I accepted the challenge because I was very keen to work on the subject of women leaders. The work requires full commitment. The montage for one episode would take me almost a month, during which I had to work to prepare for the following episodes. Research is an essential part of the episode. I was responsible for communicating with the guest and with her friends because knowing the social and professional environment of each of my guests was key in the preparation for each episode. For example, I accompanied

the Moroccan astrologer Maryam Shadid over the duration of six months, between phone calls, research and arrangements for filming and editing. This is essential so that I can transfer this experience to the viewer in the most interesting format, because my first priority is to present a unique programme. (Interview with Rawan Addhamen)

Among the results of the channel's policy of expanding women's participation in producing gender discourse and media discourse in general was the increased awareness of these presenters and their acquisition of additional expertise and skills. This enabled them to contribute to a broader and more comprehensive approach to gender and the importance of achieving diversity in representation and expanding women's participation in various programmes, highlighting the importance of listening to their views and experiences and the competences and skills they gained:

I love to address topics that deal with women's issues but Al Jazeera's orientation is more political, given that it is a news channel. As a woman, I insisted in *The Nakba* [a documentary by the journalist] on talking about the first Palestinian woman detained during the period of the British Mandate, Sadjid Mukhtar, and showed a photo of her. I have tried, through the political prism, to touch on women's issues that a director may not pay attention to [...] I also wanted a Palestinian female historian to participate in *The Nakba*, but unfortunately could not find one. (Interview with Rawan Addhamen)

Here it must be pointed out that such a commitment requires a climate of professional autonomy and a margin of freedom and material support by the channel:

What distinguishes Al Jazeera is the availability of a high degree of freedom compared to official channels, and 100 per cent independence when working on a programme; no

one interferes. Once I would finish an episode, I would show it to the technical team to check the quality of the image and sound, and no one would interfere with the content or the information, which places a big responsibility on the producer [...] It is not possible to produce a programme like *Pioneers* in the same form for Jordanian or Palestinian TV. There are two key factors provided by Al Jazeera, namely: freedom and financial support. When we worked on the Moroccan episode of *Pioneers*, for example, Al Jazeera provided us with all the necessary resources to film in Morocco, France and Chile. No other channel would provide such support for the preparation of a report. No other TV channel would cover travel and accommodation costs for a team in several countries to produce two hours of television broadcasting (over two episodes) on a thirty-year-old Moroccan astronomer, so I was excited to produce it with Al Jazeera. (Interview with Rawan Addhamen)

Women's and Men's Voices and the Deconstruction of Gender Stereotypes

Perhaps one of the most important positive elements of the new gendered media approach that characterized both of the programmes studied was their contribution to deconstructing the gender stereotypes that surround women's issues and their image and role in predominantly Muslim Arab societies. On the one hand, the image conveyed by the programme guests - experts, academics and researchers and other educated women from these societies - contributed to diversifying the image of women and their role on Arab satellite channels, undermining gender stereotypes that are created and promoted by the majority of programmes targeted at women as we have already noted above. The new contribution of these programmes was to present, through the guests they featured, a

stream of new images of elite practicing Muslim and/or Islamist women across a range of researchers, experts and university professors, who have long been overlooked and absent from Arab satellite television for several reasons. On the other hand, this new gendered media approach, which did not seek to exclude men's viewpoints, differed from the traditional approach usually seen on women's programmes, opening up new possibilities for discussions, confrontations and occasionally clashes between differing views of women and men about gender prejudices, traditions and misconceptions, which bear a large part of the blame for obstructing the advancement of women's status in the Arab world.

New and Diverse Images of Women

During the 2000s alone, Al Jazeera, through the programmes *For Women Only* and *Pioneers*, hosted hundreds of female elite voices from different age groups (with a notable space allocated to youth), political affiliations (pro-government, opposition and neutral), geographical backgrounds (from within and outside the Arab world) and ideological and academic backgrounds. Participants included female university professors, researchers, analysts, activists, experts in different social, economic, political and scientific fields, political opponents, lawyers, artists, poets, writers and rights activists, and other areas that are still largely the preserve of men, in addition to hundreds of other female voices from the lower and middle classes and modest educational backgrounds, who participated in the discussions and expressed their views⁵ on various issues raised, contributing to the transformation of Al Jazeera into a platform for female voices, opening the way for "new uses for Arab television as a communicative medium for the benefit of women" (Sakr, 2007: 88). The number of female voices in our sample, which amounted to only about 20 per cent of all the episodes of the two selected programmes aired by the channel, exceeded 250, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Number and percentage of women and men in the studied sample

Representation	Number	%
Women	258	66.5
Men	130	33.5
Total	388	100

However, one criticism of the two programmes in this area is their focus on urban women to the detriment of rural women who, unfortunately, were not given ample space to speak about their situation, needs and problems, in spite of the position they hold in Arab society. One episode of the programme *For Women Only* was dedicated to the issues of this group of women under the title "Rural Women", while the reportage that accompanied the episode gave the floor to urban women in major Arab capitals such as Cairo, Amman, Doha and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the major contribution of the two programmes remains their reduction of negative attitudes towards the presence of elite, religious or Islamist women on cross-border satellite channels, in new roles and categories never seen before. The policy of discrimination against these groups can be traced, on one hand, to the commercial logic towards images of women in the media and, on the other hand, to the media policies of some Arab states, such as Egypt, which has occupied a symbolic position in the Arab cross-border media landscape for many years due to the role it played (and still plays) in the production and export of media products - soap operas in particular - and which has significantly limited the appearance of such images on television.

What is particularly new in this female representation is the introduction of an Islamic-feminist approach that characterized the contributions of the guests and participants in *For Women Only*, from researchers, preachers and university professors in Islamic studies and

feminists belonging to, or supportive of, this trend, which contributed to the enrichment of the public debate on gender issues in Muslim-majority societies. Such contributors included Khadija Mufeed (advisor and university Professor of Islamic Thought at the University of Mohammed V in Rabat), Souad Saleh (Professor of Comparative Jurisprudence at Cairo University), Abla Alkahlawi (Dean of Islamic Studies at Al-Azhar) and Malika Yousef (Professor of Islamic Law at Cairo University) among others.

This strengthened the role of Al Jazeera in providing an alternative perspective, not only on political or religious issues (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002) but also on gender issues and as a platform for democracy (Seib, 2009) and intellectual pluralism. This is in light of the Arab media's focus on a secularist feminist approach, inspired by the Western feminist experience to address gender issues through women's groups who advocate for this trend in particular, who were not excluded in the programmes studied. The programmes can be criticized for taking an excessive interest in Islamic-feminist narratives, or even in Islamic perspectives on gender issues, even in areas that were not necessarily related to religion, such as "the religious (Islamic) view on cosmetic surgery" or "theological views on a husband's access to his wife's property." This was also reflected in the use of vocabulary, terminology and concepts connected to, or derived from, the Islamic semiotic field, which were raised or used in the discussions: Islam, the Islamic perspective, the Islamic view, the views of Islamic scholars, curatorship, the Islamic model, the Arab-Islamic society, Islamic Sharia, the Islamic world, and others, instead of other religious non-Muslim terms or civil or human rights language: divine law, the principles of human rights, women's rights. This might be construed as excessive attention by the two programmes, and the channel as a whole, to Muslim women's issues at the expense of women belonging to other religious and cultural affiliations.

Non-Exclusionary Approach to Men

In my opinion, women's issues should not be discussed by women only. When we talk about divorce, violence or even the participation of women in political life, it also concerns men. The man is a key part of the debate. (Khadija Benguenna)

Despite the progress made in the presence of women as presenters, guests, participants and contributing viewers (as Table 1 above shows), the presence of men is still prominent in discussions on the programmes studied. The programmes avoid gender profiling, according to the results of our study, by ensuring the presence of both women and men.

It is clear that the two programmes have adopted an approach that is committed to the importance of involving men in discussions about the issues at stake: 55 per cent of the total male participation in the programmes is through all-male opinion polls (on men's attitudes to the changing roles between husband and wife, following a wife who moves abroad for work, women pursuing business careers and their view of divorced women, on *For Women Only*) and one-to-one interviews with specialists, experts, advisers and political activists on *For Women Only*, or with the families and friends of the guests on *Pioneers*. The remaining 45 per cent consists of contributions by telephone or via the Internet or fax by men, which indicates an interest in, and a pre-existing will and awareness of the importance of, participating in gender-related discussions.

An examination of the content of men's participation in the discussions, and of the way they approach women's issues, especially on the programme *For Women Only*, reveals different levels of awareness (or lack thereof), and diverse and sometimes strongly opposing views concerning these issues, which served to enrich the discussion in one way or another. One example of this diversity of views about these issues is the following extract from a debate

generated by a discussion on "Views of Gulf women on leadership", which opened the way for a rational and objective dialogue on the relationship between traditions, customs and common readings promoted under the cover of religion, and representations, status and roles of women in Muslim-majority societies:

K.A. (man): My sister, what I know regarding the verse mentioned by the sister, "And stay in your houses", this is not for the wives of the Prophet, but for all believing Muslim women [...] The Prophet peace be upon him also said: "A people will not succeed who are led by a woman". This is also general. It means there is no need for a woman to be a ruler or a minister or a judge, since her physical nature goes through phases, which we all know. Aside from this, some sayings of the Prophet state that the woman should not be seen [...]."

The guest (woman): [...] In the case of the saying "A people will not succeed who are led by a woman", the brother said that this applies to all women in general, and this is not true. If he goes back to the date and time in which it was said, he will find that it was said on a specific occasion, at a specific time, regarding a particular woman. It does not apply to all women [...] or that a woman should not be seen. It means [...] Allah the Almighty created women and men from the same soul, and [...] both have the same divine function, which is to develop this world and to be trustees of this earth. If Allah the Almighty gave women this role in cultivating the world, and this is not limited just to raising children and young people and so on, she has a role in development and in education and training, etc. She must fulfill her role in this area. How can women have responsibilities and duties and not be given rights?! One of her most basic rights is to be involved in building this society.

Muntaha Ramahi (presenter): [...] in the Quran, Balqis (Queen of Sheba) was referred to as a leading and wise woman.

[...]

S.Y. (man): [...] History contains relative statements. Contemporary or neo-Salafi authors have made these relative statements into absolute statements. We are now faced with a very important issue - either we pierce these sayings that have taken on a sacred character, especially in the religious context, and acknowledge that there is a wall or obstruction that we must examine up close by taking these sayings out of the hands of those regressive forces - because religious discussions are not the property of anyone, they belong to progressives, secularists and religious people together [...].

What is significant is that the method of not excluding men has opened the way for different male viewpoints, including those that promote discriminatory ideas, opinions and expressions that reflect the forms of hidden violence, whether verbal, psychological, moral or symbolic. The space created by the programme to address such issues and to highlight the different points of view among women and men alike, and benefit from the expertise of the female guests or even the correspondents, must be recognized. This contributes to the restructuring of the gender field, just as political talk shows on Arab satellite channels helped to restructure the political field in that period (Lynch, 2005) or as images of female presenters in headscarves on Turkish channels helped to restructure the religious field (Göle, 2002).

A Comprehensive Approach to Women's Issues

A review of the entire content produced by the two programmes during their broadcasting period on Al Jazeera

(172 episodes), reveals the diversity, richness and range of themes and women's issues addressed, whether highlighting their experiences and professional achievements (Inam Muhammad Ali, production and leadership, *Pioneers*), scientific research (Maryam Shadid, research in astronomy, *Pioneers*) or political and human rights activism (Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, national service, *Pioneers*), showing their problems and the forms of violence to which they are subjected (violence against wives in Arab societies, *For Women Only*), highlighting the discrimination they face and their social status and rights in general, or covering conferences, reports and public debates concerning their issues. The most prominent element that stands out is the focus on the social, political and human rights fields and the status of certain groups that have been, and remain, largely absent from media coverage, such as women in the diaspora and in conflict areas or suffering other forms of oppression, as Table 2 shows:

Table 2: Woman and Fields Addressed

Women and Fields Addressed	Number of programmes	%
Social field	47	27.3
Political and rights fields	41	23.8
Professional and economic fields	23	13.3
Family life	23	13.3
Armed conflicts, war and oppression	19	11.04
Symbolic field	11	6.3
Conferences, reports, public discussions	8	4.6
Total	172	100

Three-Fold Approach to Discussing the Needs of Women

All the topics we addressed in the programme concerned the political and human rights of women, such as the right to vote, her voting preferences, and so on. (Leila Chaieb)

We can understand the three-fold concern - with social, political and human rights issues - of the two programmes as reflecting the desire of those in charge of the programmes to adapt a gendered media approach to the situation of women in the specific context of Muslim-majority Arab societies, and to reflect their basic needs. This is undertaken through the inclusion of the difficulties, pressures and problems they may face in their daily lives, including violations of their rights, divorce, spinsterhood and harassment in the workplace. These serve as entry points to speak about their political and civil rights imposed by the necessities of modern life and the evolution of their situation (thanks to education and entry into the labour market), facilitating the path towards equality between men and women in various fields and with reference to the cultural specificities of these societies. The focus on these aspects in public debates in the media, and television in particular, about the rights of women to hold positions of leadership, pass their nationality on to their children, and to vote and have access to decision-making roles directly addresses the needs of Arab women today more than anything else. This is especially the case since the media sphere has reached the height of superficiality, shallowness and excessive voyeurism in addressing women's issues for purely commercial reasons, particularly in programmes that present themselves as social talk shows, where violence against women becomes an attractive entertainment tool to feed the curiosity of the audience (Zarrouk, 2015).

Increased Awareness of the Situation of Women in Armed Conflict and in Diaspora

In keeping with its Arabist, objective and comprehensive approach, Al Jazeera was keen in *For Women Only* and *Pioneers* to address the issues of Arab and Muslim women not only within the Arab world but also, as far as possible, in the diaspora (the status of Arab women and families in the diaspora, difficulties of Arab women's integration in Western societies, the headscarf ban in French schools, *For Women Only*) and in areas of conflict and war or other forms of oppression, such as in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Chechnya (Iraqi women under the occupation and the absence of security, the suffering of Palestinian prisoners, the reality and future of Afghan women, Arab women and armed conflict, *For Women Only*). These types of themes hold particular importance in terms of their contribution to giving more visibility to the difficulties and daily struggles of these groups of women and increasing awareness of their particular needs, which can be used and built on in the short or long term as useful sources, subject to review, in studies examining the situation of these women. This is particularly so since they are based on social realities, experiences and concrete situations that illustrate the topic at hand, as well as addressing, in some cases, the legal framework in question, particularly the general and specific rules that could protect women in different contexts, thus contributing to a better understanding of their specific problems and needs.

Conclusion

For Women Only and *Pioneers* both contributed to giving greater visibility to new models of Arab women that have been absent from Arab satellite channels, and to their experiences and the daily struggles and problems they face, making their voices heard in the media and creating greater sensitivity to gender issues. They also played a prominent role in promoting a positive image of women on

Arab satellite channels and influencing the audience, and young people in particular, which was confirmed by the results of our study on responses to images of women on Arab satellite channels. This is illustrated by the following discussion between a group of teenage boys and girls from a rural environment about Khadija Benguenna as a "role model for the successful woman":

Yahya: Khadija Benguenna is the presenter of my favorite programmes. I like watching the programmes she presents because I admire her style and intelligence.

Tweet: She represents a realistic image of the modern woman, strong, educated and successful.

Ahmed: She has done something pioneering by demonstrating that women are able to adhere to their religion and excel in society at the same time. If a woman chooses to preserve her religious identity, she can still work in whatever field she chooses. I do not accept for my sister to present entertainment or reality TV programmes like *Star Academy* or *Taratata*.

Hanadi: Serious programmes highlight women's capabilities.

Tweet: I think it's good that women appear on TV with these kinds of images.

Ahmed: If a woman from our village appeared on television in a serious and useful programme, we would be proud of her.

In conclusion, we can say that the programmes *For Women Only* and *Pioneers* fall within the category of talk shows that presented the Arab public with "a wide range of unconventional viewpoints on the issues and questions that affect their lives" (Ayish, 2011: 96) and reflect the concerns of both women and men, as well as young people, both inside and outside the Arab region. Many of these issues still occupy a prominent place in public debate - such as the division of roles on the basis of gender, the notion of femininity and masculinity, violence and harassment, and other topics - which demonstrates the

need to address them in the media sphere. It is regrettable that this pioneering experience by Al Jazeera, which contributed to a wave of similar experiments on competing channels, is no longer with us today - perhaps “to be continued”, in Leila Chaieb’s terms.

Notes:

1. Interviewed by the author in July 2009.
2. Interviewed by the author in July 2009.
3. Interviewed by the author in July 2009.
4. Interviewed by the author in July 2009.
5. Interviewed by the author in July 2009.

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Annex: Research Sample

For Women Only programme:

- 1) The exchange of roles between men and women, January 21, 2002.
- 2) The participation of women in political life, February 25, 2002.
- 3) Sexual harassment of women, March 11, 2002.
- 4) The image of women in the Arab media, 15 April 2002.
- 5) Business women and Arab women's role in building the economy, May 13, 2002.
- 6) Women's press, June 4, 2002.
- 7) The status of women and the Arab family in the Diaspora, July 15, 2002.
- 8) Foreign and private schools, August 26, 2002.
- 9) Arab Women and the Earth Summit in Johannesburg, September 2, 2002.
- 10) Views of Gulf women on leadership, October 14, 2002.
- 11) The rights of domestic workers in the Gulf, November 4, 2002.
- 12) Women and political changes in Iraq, May 12, 2003.
- 13) Arab society's view of divorced women, February 2, 2004.
- 14) The future of women's movements in the Arab world, January 27, 2003.
- 15) The concept of gender: a call for equality or imitation? February 17, 2003.
- 16) The phenomenon of suicide of women in Chechnya, June 2, 2003.
- 17) A husband's access to his wife's property, August 25, 2003.
- 18) Breast cancer in the Arab world, October 6, 2003.

- 19) Amendments to the Personal Status Code in Morocco, November 17, 2003.
- 20) Violence against wives in Arab societies, December 15, 2003.
- 21) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, January 26, 2004.
- 22) Women and the mosque, February 9, 2004.
- 23) Cosmetic surgery: between the need for beauty and obsession with appearance, April 5, 2004.
- 24) Love before marriage, May 3, 2004.
- 25) Arab women in educational curricula, August 30, 2004.
- 26) Marriage between Gulf women and Arabs, February 21, 2005.
- 27) Kuwaiti women and the right to vote and run for office, March 14, 2005.
- 28) The development of the Arab family in Jerusalem, April 18, 2005.

Pioneers programme:

- 29) Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim: National service, September 7, 2007.
- 30) Souad Al-Sabah: Creative Youth Awards, February 8, 2008.

The Epistemology of News Coverage of Arab Issues at Al Jazeera Channel

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Introduction

In the process of representing events and incidents, the different media will highlight the semantic structures which they construct for action-oriented viewers, whether they be individuals, groups, institutions, organisations, or countries. At the same time, these media reflect the patterns of knowledge which they disseminate and broadcast to their audience and present an intellectual model that defines their view of reality, particularly as the audience's knowledge, their thoughts, and topics presented to them as a must-think-of are formulated through the communication and interaction with the media socially and politically. This view underscores the importance of news framing and the narrative viewpoint when handling events and incidents by placing them within a frame that adds harmony and consistency to some of their aspects and probably discards others. This adds an epistemological dimension to the process of structuring a news story which may be loaded with narratives demonstrating the ideology of the producer of its discourse. In fact, news framing and narrative viewpoint seem to render media discourse in itself, and coverage in general, a source of knowledge in the process of constructing reality.

With this concomitance between discourse and knowledge, media discourse becomes a “knowledge discourse” (Van Dijk 2014: 5) formulated through the processing of different sources according to the “news context model” which includes a significant amount of knowledge as it carries the new piece of information about current, important, and exciting events as well as knowledge that may be relevant to central historic events.

In general, the different genres of journalism formulate a general knowledge of specific incidents and issues based on the model of news context (Van Dijk 2014: 159 - 160) whose themes can be studied through what has been known as the “epistemology of news” (Johnson-Cartee 2015: 147), a term that refers to the essence of news and its nature to answer questions around the knowledge provided by the news coverage and its narrative viewpoint.

This epistemic/knowledge discourse has been at the foundation of the strategic view of Al Jazeera Channel since its launch in 1st November 1996. This is reflected in the types and mediums of coverage of Arab, Muslim, and international issues broadcasted on the channel as Al Jazeera, since the beginning, sought to provide space for Arab audience for a “free access to knowledge, enabling them to see the truth, thus empowering and arming them with knowledge and awareness”.

Such “food for thought” represents a prominent factor of attraction in the formula of Al Jazeera which proved that Arab media may be beneficial in obtaining knowledge about major events (Seib 2011: 34) and which has “had a deep impact in formulating audience awareness through a media work that parted from the former established practices marked by a suppression of the other’s opinion, and magnified its role as an influential media organization on the international scene” (Al Jazeera Network 2015: 13-14). As pointed out by the former Director General of Al Jazeera Network Wadah Khanfar on the 25th anniversary of the launch of the news network,

the channel has shaped a “collective consciousness” that can only be reached through “knowledge tools that stem from the mother tongue and the common history” (Khanfar 2011: 16) to change the life of audience, their ideas, breaking the ties with the past and telling of a brighter future (Al Jazeera Success Story 2011: 3).

The Knowledge dimension of the news coverage coming from Al Jazeera in its professional experiments with its different stages has relied on its proximity to the realities of the Arab world and its issues. Since its launch, Al Jazeera has transmitted the pulse of political, social, union and rights action through a network of reporters inside an Arab zone imbued with conflict between political actors, opposition and regimes. It has explored some of the silenced profiles in official audio-visual media and provided space for a different opinion, balancing the opportunity of expression in official and non-official media, and communicating with its popular base to promote its propositions, ideas, and programs (Erraji, 2010: 89 - 90).

Al Jazeera has also been the platform for deconstructing the political scene and reintroducing its figures in the eyes of ordinary viewers who came to see their leaders acting naturally outside the frameworks painted for them by their propaganda machine. This methodology of dealing with the political scene and its symbols influenced the media and its function on the one hand, and influenced citizens’ awareness of politics and their ability to initiate political change on the other, adding another brick to a new political culture which Al Jazeera attempted to establish in the region (Abd Al-Mawla, 2015: 152-153). Al Jazeera has managed to achieve this formula by “defending the causes of freedom, justice and human rights” (Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani, 2011: 10), providing a media model that confirms the proposition of the study regarding the knowledge/epistemic dimension of news, and adopting for this study the theoretical approach of “news epistemology” or what we have referred to as the “Epistemology of News Coverage” of Arab issues on Al Jazeera Channel.

Thus, an exploratory observation of the coverage of Arab issues on Al Jazeera Channel shows that the epistemological dimension dominates the types of coverage and their methods, or rather organises the structure of its discourse. This in turn raises the issue of defining the pattern of such knowledge, its essence and frameworks, and the narrative viewpoint defining its formulation, particularly as the process of articulation contributes to crystalizing the utterances, revealing their objectives and functions.

The epistemological analysis of news will focus on three main issues¹: First: the Syrian crisis, going on its sixth year, as the military conflict with its local, regional and international dimensions has flared following Russia's participation in the war supporting the Syrian regime; Second: the Yemeni crisis, growing out of proportion with the Houthis seizure of power, Third: the political crisis in Egypt and the continued deterioration of conditions following Al Sisi's ousting of Mohamed Morsi, the first democratically elected president in the history of Egypt.

The Epistemology of News

The Epistemology of News is based on the two theories of news framing and news narratives, which, through their propositions, allow the definition of frames and knowledge base behind news coverage of Arab issues on Al Jazeera Channel. In this context, it is essential to view news, as sociologist Robert Park remarks, as knowledge or a source of knowledge since much of what audience around the world know is related to news they have read or watched whereas the world that these audience have to deal with politically remains beyond their reach, sight and even awareness, and hence must be discovered and covered (Johnson-Cartee, 2005: 148). Van Dijk also asserts such meaning as he considers the media to be the most prominent institution and source for spreading knowledge of events through a model of the news condition, and unofficial education of general

knowledge around the world through an abstract intellectual model (Van Dijk, 2014: 320) as cited in his book “Discourse and Knowledge: A Socio-cognitive Approach” considered a main reference in epistemological discourse analysis.

In this context, news play a major role, as the professor of media sociology history Michael Shudson affirms, in building a knowledge structure for audience through the massive spread of common beliefs around public incidents, places and actors. In short, news spread what sociologists refer to as “culture”. In fact, Shudson believes that news is a “form of culture” (Johnson-Cartee, 2005, p. 148) and by culture they mean symbolic forms publicly available through which audience discover and express meaning, including beliefs, rituals, art forms and celebrations, as well as unofficial cultural forms like the accent, chatter, stories, and the routines of day to day life (Johnson-Cartee, 2005: 148). Hence, based on this knowledge/cultural understanding of news, it can be said that news contributes to formulating audience awareness of the use of these available symbolic elements, in addition to, seeing it as a communication process, formulating the audience’s culture, stances and inclinations toward the different issues through its epistemological dimension represented in news frames and news narratives.

Media frames are referred to in different terms: reference, context, theme, and news angle through which the story presents a meaning by referring to other value news that link one incident to other coherent incidents (McQuail, 2010: 380). Some consider the media frame to be the theme of the news story, being an idea that links the different semantic elements of the story in complete harmony (Johnson - Cartee, 2005, p. 164). It is also a “central organization of the idea or the limits of the news story which gradually add meaning to abstract incidents; as the frame defines the development of the argument around the essence of the issue” (Gamson, 1987: 137 - 177).

In this case, the media frame of these processes of communication plays a role in categorising, organising, and interpreting reality, facilitating the understanding of information and putting events in their context (Wicks, 2011: 78). This means that “the choice to highlight certain incidents or cases, and link them to each other is an enhancement of a special interpretation, evaluation and/or resolution” (Entman, 2004: 5).

The process of choice and highlight reflects the importance of context in representing events and incidents, defining problems, explaining their reasons, as well as processing, and evaluating their different dimensions. In fact, context may be the factor formulating the news story itself following its framing and construction of expectations that facilitate understanding its parts. Context may be more important than the meanings and symbols constructed by the producer of discourse, acting as the agent deciding the flow of the story.

In this framework, the study employs the explanatory model of news framing for Robert Entman, which is based on four main functions (Entman, 2004: 5) revealing the epistemic dimensions of the news coverage of Arab issues:

1. Defining the core of the problem,
2. Diagnosing the reasons and active forces in the case or incident,
3. Defining the moral values of the case,
4. The proposed solutions to the case and how to handle it.

The news narrative, which stands for the actual action or practice of the epistemology of news in discourse, is the formal shape or structure of the news story, which Van Dijk calls the “grammar of the story” or the “rules of the story” that refer to the formatting of rules which distinguish the patterns of narrative categories and define the system of its structure in the story (Van Dijk, 1988: 50). The news narrative shows the creative power of ideas and visualization. In addition, it demonstrates the ability to achieve flow, unity, harmony,

strength of expression, vision of time and place during the representation of events and incidents (Johnson - Cartee, 2005, p. 153). The term also probes into the cohesion of the news story, its organised flow and relation between the elements of its structure or conversely, its lack of cohesion, contradictions, integrity elements, and the logic of its arguments (Johnson-Cartee, 2005: 151).

General Knowledge of Incidents and Facts

The patterns of knowledge and their intellectual models vary, including general knowledge (event knowledge) (Van Dijk, 2014: 159) whether related to current situations or historical carryover, which can also be called the “knowledge of facts and incidents”. Such knowledge comes through a variety of mediums with mass media, as previously mentioned, standing on top of the platforms broadcasting, airing or spreading such a pattern of knowledge.

This reflects an intellectual model of sharing public events through a communication process that aims at empowering the receiver or the user to reach information that they do not know or cannot reach, sharing specific information, and introducing them to personal experiences and the roles that different actors play whether these actors be individuals, groups, institutions, or agencies, etc.

Hence, the most unique side to such knowledge are the facts and information at the foundation of its discourse, bearing in mind that “knowledge is not merely knowledge but is an ethical case in a manner that makes it say the truth” (Van Dijk, 2014: 268), which is the meaning intensified by Al Jazeera Channel in its professional experience during the last two decades, turning it into an editorial policy - documented in the book of “Editorial Policies and Guidelines” which represents the fruit and summary of its media experience and a reference for journalists in their work, as the channel provides “information not advice...does not mix it with predictions or personal analysis does not allow personal emotions to interfere in the

choice of news or the components of each piece of news” (Al Jazeera Network, 2015: 22).

An analytical study of the Arab issues discussed on Al Jazeera Channel shows that general knowledge forms the essence of the semantic structure of its media discourse, as it continued - since its foundation in the last quarter of 1996 - to provide the facts of the status quo, and trusted information from sources around historic incidents, what represents an enlightenment intellectual model that relies, as we shall proceed to demonstrate, on facts, field testimonies, known and verified sources, and documents rather than assumptions and anonymous sources.

And although the Turkish issues do not fall within the scope of this study, the live news coverage of the progress of the failed military coup in Turkey on 15 July 2016 can be considered one of the major modern milestones in the channel’s professional experience. This case underscores the general knowledge model, which the researcher cannot overlook while showing the dimensions of this model, as the general enlightening knowledge produced by some media - including Al Jazeera Channel - were a key factor in “empowering” the audience to access the facts, arm them with awareness, and the “power of knowing” the course of events prior to the abortion of the coup.

At a time when some Arab and international news channels were propagating the story adopted by pro-coup networks, airing news of army control over the government and promises to safeguard democracy and adhere to agreements made with foreign countries, Al Jazeera made sure to air accurate and correct information through its network of reporters in the field, and by seeking news from known and trusted sources around the developments of the coup.

At that moment some channels promoted rumours claiming that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has requested asylum in Germany and left the country, while other channels were engrossed in

promoting the coup, describing it as “the Turkish army revolution against the Erdogan dictatorship”, with some long-rooted Arab newspapers rushing to forecasts and readings of the development of the coup in an attempt to, apparently, express their political rather than professional stance. Some of these newspapers made general judgements confirming that the “Turkish army is ousting Erdogan” (Al-Ahram), that “The Army Rules Turkey and Expels Erdogan” (Al Watan), or that “Turkey is in the Eye of the Storm” (Al Masry Al Youm) (refer to ZDZ website, “Arab and Western Coup Channels Celebrating the Turkey Coup”, 16 July 2016).

Indeed, the coup propaganda, the flood of rumours, news from unknown sources around the fate of the Turkish president - as promoted by this media - cannot be categorized under any circumstance under the general knowledge model, but are rather a type of media forfeit, and misleading that turns facts around, polishing the coup and presenting it as legitimate. This places us before a model of political propaganda** which aims at promoting the proposition of a “revolution” against the Turkish government, asserting that “what happened was not a coup” (refer to Quds Press, Egyptian Media Shocked following the Failure of the Coup in Turkey” 16 July 2016).

This is done by distracting the mind of the receiver, distorting the facts and broadcasting forced lies and forged facts to produce an intended effect that serves the agenda of the propaganda producer. Meanwhile, Al Jazeera was aiming to enlighten the public with the developments of incidents through news coverage where a network of reporters related the details of events from their place of initiation and not through unknown sources. Such performance from Al Jazeera stems from a realization that “Knowledge is an ethical matter” that becomes a true belief in the presence of professional precursors, as audience submit to the integrity of such knowledge, trusts and believes in its veracity.

In this view, the contrast between two models of media discourse must be noted: one is a propaganda/misleading discourse distorting facts to direct the public toward its opinions, ideas and political beliefs; the other is a knowledge/enlightenment discourse aiming at giving the audience access to facts and information as they happen in the scene of the event.

Such an ethical dimension to general knowledge, which sets the foundation for enlightenment, epistemological model, we find in all news coverage from Al Jazeera, and in the most controversial of issues, particularly those which relate to armed jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda and its sister organisations. Accusations were made to the channel of airing promotional material for these organisations while the channel management views that its responsibility obliges them to sanctify any “news material” and hence any recording that was newsworthy would be aired regardless of considerations or biases toward any side (reference to the interview with Ahmed Al-Sheikh on Al Jazeera Talk: “The phrasing of the referendum was a mistake we admit, and we have questioned those responsible”, 22 December 2007).

This epistemological enlightenment model has helped Al Jazeera transcend its regional limits and establish a global status since 2001 due to its coverage of the war on Afghanistan as its special coverage of that war attracted an international audience through other channels like CNN, BBC and Sky News while other international media failed to remain in the field and broadcast events with such impartiality and independence from the view of the pentagon and the directions of American forces. Moreover, the comprehensive and continued coverage of the war on Iraq in 2003 consolidated such status and challenged the domination of western media over the news industry (Abdelmoula, 2015: 157 - 158).

This intellectual, enlightenment model in Al Jazeera’s professional experience became firmly established in its different

channels, appearing obviously in the winds of change witnessed in some Arab countries around the beginning of 2010 and the end of 2011, and the repercussions of what was referred to as the “Arab Spring”.

During that era, Al Jazeera was witness to the political changes in these countries, and influential in them with its knowledge enlightenment discourse that sought to “empower” the audience and “arm them with awareness” of the reality of its political conditions and the path of change movements, their developments and outcomes. Currently, and at a later stage, Al Jazeera remains witness to the political crises in Arab Spring countries, particularly the developments of the war in Syria, the military conflict in Yemen, the growing political crisis in Egypt, what would be discussed under the heading of “transmitted knowledge” or “propositional knowledge”.

Propositional Knowledge

In our analysis of the study sample, the epistemological enlightenment model appears strongly, and we shall observe that news coverage of some Arab issues, like the Syrian, Yemeni and Egyptian crises makes this model a starting point or a foundation for a deeper knowledge that can be called a “propositional knowledge” that establishes a certain understanding of issues and incidents, or a “transmitted knowledge” that carries ideas and views around the issues it tackles and follows its context**, specifying the factors influencing their paths and putting them in the frame of themes or specific epistemological contexts (the core of the problem), and monitoring the actors, defining the causes of this issue and the moral dimensions it poses, the proposed solutions or alternatives which may represent a way to rectify it.

If we look at general knowledge (event knowledge) carried by the media discourse of Al Jazeera around the Syrian crisis, we’ll find that the Syrian regime continues to insist on the barbaric military

choice as a solution to the conflict where regional (Iran and its allies of Shiite militias) and international (Russia and The U.S.) powers have been involved. The Syrian regime uses all kinds of internationally banned weapons against civilians to end the Syrian revolution, rejecting all initiatives and political solutions proposed by the international community to end the tragedy of the Syrian people who marched 6 years ago on 15 March 2011 calling for freedom, dignity, and asking to end oppression, corruption and dictatorship.

The direct core of the problem, then, which is highlighted through this discourse, is the continued choice of military action by the Syrian regime and its allies (killing) against the rebelling Syrian people. The reason is this regime's desire to continue in the reign for which it would take no substitute, what contradicts the will of the people to select their rulers and a democratic rule that achieves their hopes. Thus, the Syrian issue continues to become more entangled and the political solution becomes more problematic with the interference of major powers in the conflict.

Deconstructing this discourse and its semantic structure is constructed by the grammatical and structural language used, the central theme providing the frame of the general knowledge or the "event knowledge" is represented in the "annihilation" of the Syrian people following their revolution against the Syrian regime which, aided by its allies (the Russians, Iran, and affiliated Shiite militias like Hizbullah and Ansarullah), burns cities, destroying its entire elements of life sustainability (schools, educational centers, hospitals, relief warehouses, bakeries, human passages...). Meanwhile, the Syrian regime relentlessly pursues its mass, systematic killing of Syrians in rebelling areas with explosive barrels and different internationally banned weapons (chemical, phosphoric, napalm bombs, cluster bombs...) and implements a policy of siege and hunger, aided by regional and international sides, violating all international laws and conventions, and committing crimes against humanity. These lines

summarise the “annihilation” theme which forms the central part of the epistemological discourse of the coverage.

The core of the problem facing the Syrian crisis hence becomes, and is magnified by the participation of Iran and Russia in the war as “the Syrian air force is no longer the sole killer of tens of Syrians today, but the Russian air force, the official sponsor of the truce, has also participated in the killing...” (Al Jazeera Channel, 23 April 2016). “Amid international silence, Aleppo is being burned and annihilated. It is the painful truth of a reality tied by the calculations of major players dominating the word and action...” (Al Jazeera Channel, 1 May 2016).

This truth is also made evident by the diplomatic language of the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Stephen O’Brien who confirmed in one of the Security Council sessions discussing the humanitarian situation in Syria that “the city of Daria has become the Syrian capital for explosive bombs in Syria” (Al Jazeera Net: “UN: Daria the Capital of Explosive Barrels in Syria”, 24 June 2016). The Assad supporters had since the beginning of the crisis chanted a rhyming motto of “Assad or we burn the country”, what Bashar Al-Assad expressed in a speech before the Syrian parliaments saying that “We have no choice but to win, otherwise there will be no Syria and no present nor future for our children” (Ath-thawra website: “Decisive Choices Speech. President Assad: Victory is Inevitably Coming”, 8 June 2016).

Table No. 1 shows a map of the lexical field which flows into the propositional knowledge framed for understand the Syrian crisis

The core of the problem	The reasons and actors	The moral values of the issue	The solutions
<p>Annihilation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aleppo under fire - Aleppo burned and annihilated - Innocent civilians killed in Aleppo holocaust - After weeks of continued killing - Victims killed by Russian and Syrian missiles - Tens of explosive barrels left damage in property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assad regime's insistence on the military solution - The Iranian agenda in the region and its arms of Shiite militias - Russia - Syrian opposition factions - American failure to act - International silence - Arab League silence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Syrian people's desire to get rid of dictatorship and live in freedom and dignity - Syrian people choosing their political system and rulers - Questioning those responsible for the tragedy of the Syrian people - Assad regime commits crimes against humanity through the systematic killing of Syrian people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The participation of regional and international powers in the war makes solutions more complicated - World superpowers' management of the crisis, draining the Syrian state is a service to the project of regional powers - The perseverance and resistance of the Syrian people

According to the above, the coverage highlights that dimensions of the Syrian issue by focusing on the four elements - as mentioned in the table based on Entman's model. They are: the core of the problem, its causes and actors, the moral values, and the proposed solutions. These elements represent the main semantic structures which the viewer receives as the ideas or essential themes in the coverage which define a pattern of knowledge that doesn't stop at narrating the incidents and facts but rather frames them in their local, regional and international context through the "contextualization" carried out by the producer of the discourse revealing the actors, reasons, values and possible solutions by the sides of the conflict.

This places us before a value-based intellectual model that doesn't refer to the ethical meaning based on opposing dichotomies like: truth and falsehood, good and evil, legitimate and illegitimate etc., but with the philosophical meaning that links values to awareness and critical thinking of the dimensions of the issue, understanding its causes and explaining its consequences.

This intellectual model can also be traced in the coverage of the Yemeni crisis, showing the Houthis (Ansarallah group) and former president Ali Abdullah Saleh as an obstacle in the way to the political solution following the coup on the legitimate President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi on 21 September 2014 and the takeover of power. The central theme in the coverage highlights the hurdles and hindering - by the coup perpetrators - of regional and international efforts to implement UN Security Council Resolution 2216 concerning the settlement of the crisis. Thus the coverage focuses on how the Houthis and ousted president Saleh refuse to discuss central issues during Kuwait negotiations based on the requirements of the mentioned resolution (requiring the group to end all violence, withdraw their troops from all the seized areas, abandoning all the weapons seized from security and military institutions and stopping all acts considered within the authority of the legitimate government in Yemen (Al Jazeera Channel, 9 May 2016).

Table No. 2 showing the lexicon of the transitted knowledge framing the Yemeni crisis

The core of the problem	The reasons and actors	The moral values of the issue	The solutions
<p>Hurdling and hindering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The coup committed by the Houthis and ouster president Saleh against legitimate authority - Houthi takeover of government institutions - Houthis and Saleh fighting against the Yemeni people - Houthi and Saleh refuse discussions of core issues during Kuwait negotiations based on UN Security Council Resolution 2216 - Houthis and Saleh continue to violate the ceasefire - Houthis continue to smuggle weapons into Yemen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Houthi coup against constitutional consensus legitimate authority - Houthi fighters and Saleh - Iran - The Yemeni government - The national army and resistance - The international coalition - The UN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Setting the foundations for a state of law and institutions rather than a state of militias and armed groups - The best interest of the Yemenis lies in civil harmony and peaceful co-existence - Citizenship is the umbrella under which Yemenis gather rather than family rule or racial/sectarian rule - A conflict between two agendas; a national project and racial/sectarian one

Here, this intellectual framing model does not stop at the conflict between the coup project looking for political legitimacy, and the project of restoring national authority, but delves into the roots of the political crisis in Yemen and its actors. In this view, the model linked the Houthi militia's coup against authority, to their alliance with ouster president Saleh and the Iranian interference to destabilize the country, a factor that further complicates the crisis due to the group's loyalty to the Iranian agenda. Meanwhile, the role of the Arab coalitions appears as a repelling force against the coup (Houthi militia and Saleh) and a catalyst for restoring the legitimate authority in Yemen, achieving security and peace.

In our study of the media discourse around Egyptian affairs, we will notice that the organising theme of its semantic structure draws a picture of a regime lead by Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, seizing power following a coup against Mohamed Morsi, the first civil, democratically elected president in Egyptian history. Two years into his rule which started 8 June/July 2014, El-Sisi turned the country into a grand prison for opposition, journalists, citizens that hold a differing opinion, sarcasm artists, and demonstrators, amassing a total of 60,000 political detainees. These prisoners - under the security regime laid down by El-Sisi - are deprived of their basic rights, denied family visits and medication, emergency cases prevented from hospitals, taking the lives of more than 370 detainees since the coup.

Under the rule of the coup, the judiciary has become a tool of the state and a political actor serving the regime, issuing rulings of execution against political opposition and journalists and transferring demonstrators against the coup to military courts where the freedom and rights of defendants are breached, and where the procedures and standards of a fair trial are totally lacking.

Table No. 3 showing the lexical field flowing into the propositional knowledge providing the frame for understanding the core of the problem in Egypt

The core of the problem		The reasons and actors	The moral values of the issue	The solutions
The coup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More than 60,000 detainees in Egypt since the coup - More than 370 dead since the coup - Coup opposers transferred to military courts - Accusations to the regime of being the bloodiest in the history of Egypt - Major violations committed by the regime against Islamists - The regime's failure and mismanagement of foreign affairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The reason here is the coup itself, hindering the democratic process, whereas the official actors are the government bodies and institutions representing tools in the hands of authority to implement their political agenda (the Ministry of Interior, the judiciary, the media...) - Demonstrators rejecting the coup, and different political powers. - Political prisoners - International rights organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People's demands of a means of living, freedom, and dignity - Broad sections of the Egyptian people rejecting the coup, demonstrations calling to bring down the regime even among the supporters in 30 June 2013 - International rights organisations calling to respect and adhere to human rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The unity of Egyptian political powers - Pressure from international human rights organisations and other entities

The narrative viewpoint of propositional knowledge

This section tackles the narrative viewpoint of major themes in the coverage, focusing on the strategies of utterance and the frames of phrasing the semantic structures in the discourse. The section assumes that the producer of the discourse sets the foundation for tackling the issue by adopting a specific narrative view of the core of the problem and a construction of events, the chronology of incidents, their reasons, results, the role of actors in it, and the proposed solutions. This means that, as suggested earlier in the study, the act of utterance or discourse practice contributes to the formulation and production of the events uttered.

The analytical study of news briefings demonstrate that there are specific strategies used in constructing the events and putting a frame to problems in the context of a news model indicating the epistemological pattern of the discourse. The following table (No. 4) clarifies the most prominent of these strategies:

No.	The Strategies	Repetition and Ratio	
		Repetition	Ratio
1	The passive actor and positive actor in problems and issues	40	26,66
2	Showing the problems and their repercussions	35	23,33
3	Citing proofs and arguments	25	16,66
4	Descriptive reporting language	50	33,33
Total		150	100

Hence, the producer of the discourse - in context of news processing of the three issues (The Syrian, Yemeni and Egyptian crises) - underscores the negative sides by defining the losses and harm resulting from them to affirm its views concerning the importance of these issues like annihilation in case of the Syrian

crisis. Annihilation, in this argument, touches the national public opinion, impacting its present and future, as well as the regional and international public opinion, impacting them too. Such highlight is apparent in the first sentence of the news story, and is accentuated in all elements of articulation to reflect the danger of the issue facing the crisis.

The story may end at this point, as seen in one of the news reports beginning with “Amid international silence, Aleppo is burned and annihilated”, and concluding that “Aleppo is burning twice”(Al Jazeera Channel, 1 May 2016). In this frame, the producer of the discourse focuses on the systematic killing of the Syrian people through explosive barrels and the different types of internationally banned weapons, destruction, and demolition afflicting all the features of human life.

This strategy is similarly found in handling the Yemeni and Egyptian crises as the producer of the discourse highlights the negatives of the coup in the two countries through its political, economic, social and cultural repercussions after the Houthis and Saleh in Yemen, and Al Sisi the minister of defense in Egypt stopped the democratic machine and seized power.

Here we notice the conscious meditated use of the strategy of highlighting the negatives of the issue and its outcomes, accompanied by a focus on the shortfalls of the official actors (the Assad regime, Russia, Iran, The Houthis, Saleh, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi regime) which were mentioned at a percentage of %25.17 in comparison to other categories.

In most cases, the producer of the discourse will accentuate both of the change factors together (i.e. the negative sides of the problem and its results, and the negatives of the doers) and so the Assad regime appears as a slaughtering, murdering regime committing massacres, and holocausts against Syrians who rebelled against a dictatorship, where “mass murder” is a natural impact of the problem and its repercussions: namely, annihilation.

In the case of Egypt which Abdel Fattah Al Sisi turned into a grand prison for political opposition, demonstrators, artists criticising his regime with sarcasm, journalists of an opposing opinion, and the security system he established to tighten his grip on power, all of which are natural consequences to the coup, its negatives and repercussions.

Based on this, it can be said that there's a conscious choice of combining the causes and effects together with the features of the actors and their roles. A main point appears in this context, as the study reveals a minor ratio of the negativity of active opposition to Al Assad regime, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, Al Houthis, or Saleh, not exceeding in their total 2% of the total categories, while the positive features of official actors seems totally non-existent, reaching 0.66% for active opposition. These ratios seem normal and logical, coinciding with the intellectual model of Al Jazeera discourse that looks into the roots of the problem, its core, causes, effects, and repercussions and provides the arguments and proofs of the responsibility of official actors as the results show in table (No. 4).

In that manner, the discourse does not suffice with description, but demonstrates the size of the issue and its negative impacts with numbers that change depending on the conditions and stances. In the holocaust committed by the Syrian regime and its allies of Russians, Iranians and Shiite militias in Aleppo at the end of April early May 2016, the number of victims reached more than 235 deaths and over 1500 injured within ten days of bombing.

In Egypt, which turned following the coup into a grand prison, the regime incarcerated over 60,000 political prisoners, and bad imprisonment conditions took the lives of 370 prisoners. In Yemen, the Houthis are seeking to hurdle any efforts for peace in the country, refusing to respond to UN Security Council resolution 2216, violating the truce and continuing to smuggle weapons into Yemen.

Thus, the choice of these strategies seems intended to create an

awareness of the gravity of the problem, its impacts, its actors, and the moral issues it poses, clarifying how far it affects the daily lives of citizens and their best interest. This is what makes such discourse influential in the course of events due to its powerful epistemological ground and impact in enlightening broad categories of audience about their reality, helping them understand the course of events, and hence the reaction.

Conclusion

In our epistemological approach of the news coverage for Arab issues on Al Jazeera four main conclusions appear as firmly established by the professional experiment of the channel in its different stations since its founding twenty years ago:

First: the impact of Al Jazeera and its pioneering role on the scene of Arab and international media which originally stems from the epistemological, enlightenment model which characterizes its communication policies through the pattern of general knowledge of the incidents and facts in its coverage of the issues related to the Arab region and international events. Thus, by presenting the truth and correct information from its trusted sources, Al Jazeera discourse gained an enlightenment dimension that emphasises its independence from news sources or any political, financial or economic authority.

This media model prized Al Jazeera with a widespread presence among the audience even those non-Arabic speakers, being the channel of choice to follow up events and their development. In fact, through this model, Al Jazeera has impacted the course of events, being witness to them and creating knowledge and awareness of the facts, thus passing the power to the receiver by owning information.

Second: the enlightenment epistemological discourse stirred Al Jazeera's media discourse away from the chameleon effect of propaganda, misleading information, and subjective expression that guides public opinion toward specific stances or serves the agendas of

one side of the conflict. The channel's discourse did not fall into the trap of propagating a specific political stream or party, nor did it adopt the ideas or opinions of any of these streams. At this point, it becomes evident to the researcher and easy to find the indicators attesting to the media model which Al Jazeera represents with its bias toward the facts and the people at the same time.

Third: Al Jazeera presents its view of reality through propositional knowledge which focuses on a certain theme, and defines the elements influencing its paths, monitoring the actors and the ethical dimensions it poses, and the solutions that may be proposed for its settlement, what allows the channel to play a major role in formulating public opinion around the issues and crises facing countries in the region and influencing its epistemological, emotional and behavioural aspects.

Fourth: for the process of framing the issue, the producer of the discourse employs a narrative, intellectual viewpoint to manifest its negative sides by defining the losses resulting from them while at the same time focusing on the negatives of the official doers to assert its view of the importance of the issues tackled in the coverage as they affect the national public opinion, its present and future, and trespass this to affect the interests of the regional and international public opinion; what signifies that the act of utterance is a conscious choice contributing to the formulation of the uttered reality and its production.

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Part V

Mapping Al Jazeera's Global Audience

Rise of Al Jazeera as a Global Media Player

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Twenty years since its inception and Al Jazeera has moved from being an investment in a regional pioneer project to an alternative source of information and on to a global media player; a serious contender for audience with CNN and BBC. Broadcasting from a region that has been a constant provider of news content yet where its population was largely not an avid reader of newspapers and sought out audio visual sources of information, Al Jazeera and other Arabic satellite televisions found a fertile ground to flourish.

The Arab satellite media landscape has also changed dramatically in two decades; it has become a booming environment constantly developing, growing, and introducing new narratives. Satellite TV such as Al Jazeera has had a large impact on information availability in Arab societies and left its print on how Arabic media operate and broadcast news and events of the region. Though not the pioneer, Al Jazeera Arabic news channel was among the first satellite televisions that appeared in the Arab media landscape, and developed to become a significant source of information globally since 9/11, as well as an alternative source of information globally with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Al Jazeera's viewership expanded in different regions of the world with the different stages of the station's

development in sync with the significant events that shook the world.

The biggest leverage point Al Jazeera had since its outset was its steady source of finance and the quality of its staff, 250 of whom were previously trained to international standards for the short-lived BBC Arabic's project. In an industry that mostly relies on advertisements to survive, Al Jazeera had over other satellite channels in the region was the 20 million startup fund and a yearly budget allocated by its host state and investor, Qatar.

The birth and expansion of Al Jazeera network as a global media player can be marked by several significant events, namely the First Gulf War, Second Palestinian Intifada, 9/11, Afghan War, US invasion of Iraq, launch of Al Jazeera English (AJE), the Arab Spring, and the launch of Al Jazeera America (AJAM).

Incubation: the First Gulf War and the “CNN Effect”

Many scholars agree that one of the main catalysts for change in the MENA media landscape was the First Gulf War (after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 2nd 1990). This was the time when, what some scholars now call “The CNN Effect” started in the region. The Cable News Network, also known as CNN's 24 hours real time news coverage from the run-up to the US allied forces' attacks on Iraq and all through the event helped create awareness and shape public opinion of the Arab audience.

This was a time when Arab regimes controlled and filtered information reaching its public carefully through censorship laws, and the Arab audience only had access to state owned or controlled media outlets (except in Lebanon). Thus, Arab states that took part in the military attack against Iraq sought ways of controlling public sentiments about their participation and counter the Iraqi regime's radio broadcast propaganda (radio being the most common receiver Arabs were using at this time and the most abundant in the Arab world). Egypt and Saudi Arabia were two of the Arab states that

provided military support to the allied forces and their way of confronting the Iraqi state propaganda was by airing CNN's constant coverage of the built-up to the war and the wa

The two countries incorporated CNN broadcast in different ways. Egypt provided a direct, free and uncensored transmission of CNN eight hours a day (initiating January 10, 1991 free until March 31) after an agreement in October 1989 between CNE's (Cable News Egypt) private sector partners and the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU). (Foote, 1998) Though CNE was not ready to market the service, encrypt the signal, sell decoders, and collect subscriptions, CNN was hastily broadcasted Six days before the first Gulf War. The Egyptian government ensured its control of operations by making ERTU the majority stockholder in CNE. (Foote, 1998) Saudi Arabia's transmission of CNN, on the other hand, was more conventional; the broadcasted material was taped, screened for censorship, and aired several hours after initial satellite transmission. (Schleifer 2004)

To the Arab audience, CNN's transmission was more interesting than what they were used to in their local government-controlled television broadcasting even if their sentiments were not approving of the attack. Arab leaders and entrepreneurs soon realized the political effectiveness and commercial potential of transnational media coverage in the Middle East. They also realized that despite their political alliance against Iraq, CNN's reporting and editorial outlook of the war was biased to the US perspective. This realization ripened the interest in creating transnational TV channels that reported news and events in Arabic from an "Arab perspective", namely each regime's perspective. Egypt was technically the first Arab state to start a satellite television transmission (initiated December 2, 1990) after launching its own satellite, "NileSat" (because Egypt was excluded from ARABSAT due to a boycott on the Egyptian regime by the Arab league as a reaction to its peace treaty with Israel in

1978), aiming to transmit Egypt's official stance on regional issues, starting with the Iraq-Kuwait crisis. The initiative was immediately followed by the first private Pan-Arab (in terms of content and purpose) satellite channel, the Middle East Broadcasting Cooperation (MBC) in 1991. MBC was a free news and entertainment channel established by Saudi Arabian investors, headed by Sheikh Waleed Al Ibrahim. It operated from London and was the first Arabic satellite channel that deployed Arab correspondents to report on events from the field, quickly becoming popular among its Arab audience. Other groups of Saudi investors established two new Arabic satellite companies; the Arab Television and Radio Network (ART), and ORBIT, in 1994. In the following three years two Lebanese investors also established Lebanese satellite channels; the FUTURE and the Lebanese Broadcasting Company (LBC), as well as a Syrian investor launching the Arab News Network (ANN) and Qatar's Emir Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani investing in Al Jazeera.

The potential of Arabic satellite televisions in shaping the Arab public opinion was forecasted in a region that has an estimated total population of 300 million in 22 Arab states, in addition to more than 46.4 million in diaspora or minority communities in the region (an estimate calculated from different sources) of Arab origins.

Pan-Arab audience: The Second Intifada and championing the Palestinian cause

Al Jazeera Arabic had gradually gained popularity and a loyal Arab audience through introducing talk shows tackling issues that were politically and socially considered taboo. The mere fact that the Arab audience could hear different opinions on Pan-Arab issues in live talk shows was a novelty, but an analysis of the topics and the guests discussing these issues showed that Al Jazeera Arabic reshuffled the authority of traditional political opinion leaders. (Shigenobu 2011) The Arab masses were mostly used to hearing the

discourse of political leaders and traditional feudal rulers before being exposed to Al Jazeera's talk shows where more than half of the guests were now journalists, political analysts, academics, researchers and writers. On one of its first weekly flagship programs (now halted) *Akthar Min Raii* (More Than One Opinion) 62% in 1999, 58% in 2003, and 50% in 2007 of the program guests were of this new category of specialists, exposing the Arab audience to narratives not purely motivated by political ends. (Shigenobu, 2011) Guests on *Al Itijah al Muaakes* (Opposite Direction), which is considered to be the most popular flagship program on Al Jazeera Arabic, were also highly representing this new category of opinion leaders. The program hosted 57% in 1998, 60% in 2003, and 62% in 2007 speakers from the expert, scholar, and writer category. In the past, this category of people had a much smaller audience limited to intellectual circles and not exposed to the general public. This new group of opinion leaders have raised the level of political and social awareness and narratives among its Arab audience, despite the occasional drama that occurred on live programmes.

The Second Intifada, which started September 28 of 2000, was the first real-time televised event by Arab transnational television broadcasting and reported mostly by the indigenous people living in the heart of the conflict. Arabs and Muslims from all over the world tuned to Al Jazeera and other Arab satellite channels for their comprehensive coverage from the occupied territories. For the first time, the audience was receiving reports in the context of Pan-Arab concerns that matched their sentiments.

Spearheaded by Al Jazeera, Arab satellite news channels focused on the Palestinian uprising in an hour-by-hour coverage of daily clashes, Israeli incursions, assassinations, stories of the victims and their families, and expanded airspace to Palestinian political players. Al Jazeera dedicated the subject of most of their flagship programs to the Intifada and pro-Arab issues. In the two months that followed the

Second Palestinian intifada, six out of nine of *Al Ittijah Al Muakes* talk show content were related to the Intifada, whereas on *Bila Hudud* eight out of night of its content were related to the conflict, and on *Akthar Min Raii* six out of eight of the topic tackled in the program were dedicated to the Intifada. (Shigenobu 2011: 106-108) The newscast relied heavily on reports over news agencies' footage and information and had their reporters seek facts and figure from local sources and organizations. Since most of Al Jazeera's reporters covering the Intifada were Palestinians living in the heart of the conflict, journalistic objectivity was hard to achieve, but Al Jazeera managed to showcase its reporters' professionalism to the wide Arab audience. Being an Arab channel with Arab staff, it was difficult for Al Jazeera to hide the side it supported in the conflict and this was evident in the terminologies describing the events; using terms such as Israeli "aggression", Palestinian "resistance", "occupying forces", "martyrs" (for Palestinian victims); and in the amount of segments and time it dedicated to the Intifada in their news bulletins, as well as the amount of airtime it provided the Palestinian speakers compared to the Israeli spokesmen. The Israeli speakers were given much less airtime with a tone of scrutiny from the anchors who were interviewing them live on their programs. Furthermore, Passionate slogans were run between segments rallying Al Jazeera audience to support and donate to the Palestinians. The unreserved bias of Al Jazeera won it its image as a champion of Pan-Arab and Palestinian causes and placed it as the favored source of information among its Arab audience.

In a survey conducted by Gallup on Arab viewership after the Second Intifada (November 12, 2002) in Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Morocco, Al Jazeera was considered the most objective among local and international news channels in all four countries; 55% in Kuwait (followed by MBC's 51%), 51% in Jordan (followed by MBC's 21%), 38% in Saudi Arabia (followed by MBC's 37%),

and 48% in Morocco (followed by local RTM TV's 14%). In comparison, CNN had lost its credibility among its audience in the surveyed countries in this conflict with 11% of viewers in Kuwait, 5% in Jordan, 7% in Saudi Arabia, and 2% in Morocco considering its coverage objective. (Rheault 2007)

Now that traditional Western media were not monopolizing information or the flow of it, the Israeli government realized the effect Al Jazeera's coverage of Palestinian issues is having on Arab societies and the resulting anger towards its policies, and the role the channel is playing (with the launch of Al Jazeera English channel) in galvanizing the global sentiments. During the war on Gaza in January 2009 (also known as "Operation Cast Lead"), Ehud Olmert's government imposed sanctions on Israeli-based Al Jazeera Network staff by limiting their activity in both Israel and the Palestinian territory; not renewing visas for non-Israeli Al Jazeera staff (and not granting any visas to new employees); reducing Al Jazeera's reporter's accessibility to government and military bodies, denying access to press conferences; limiting access to Israel's official spokespeople (at the Prime minister's Office, Foreign Minister's office, and the Israeli Defense Force office) to three; and issuing a non-binding instruction to the Israeli parliament members of the Knesset not to grant interviews to the station. (Ravid 2009)

Global audience: Ben Laden exclusivity post 9/11

Al-Jazeera, now dubbed the "CNN of the Arab world," remained little-known in the West and non-Arabic speaking countries until the September 11 attacks on the US, which drew new interests in the Middle East. The Qatari based news channel drew global attention by airing the full length recorded video message from the Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden, who was by then accused by the United States government for being behind the terror attacks, on October 7, 2001. Al Jazeera Arabic achieved an overnight fame around the

world, and continued to be exposed by regularly receiving exclusive video messages from the infamous Al Qaeda leaders. The exclusive footage was immediately bought and broadcasted by news media all over the world. Most people had not heard of Osama Bin Laden, let alone seen his image before the American governments' accusations, thus the footage was of immense value to all news media outlets around the globe.

However, this was not the first contact Al Jazeera had with Al Qaeda leader in Afghanistan. Osama Bin Laden had previously given an exclusive interview in 1998 to Al Jazeera (aired on June 10, 1999), in which he denied his relation with the near-simultaneous attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar al Salam, Tanzania in August 7, 1998. In January 9, 2001, Al Jazeera aired another exclusive footage with its coverage of Bin Laden's son's wedding in Afghanistan, which was followed by the airing of yet another exclusive footage later in the same year (October 5, 2001) of what is believed to be a celebration of a political union between Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda and Ayman Al Zawahiri's Jihad group. (El Nawawy and Iskandar 2002: 150) However, even in the Arab world, for the majority of the audience there, news about Arab jihadists fighting in Afghanistan's civil war was not of a major importance or interest. Bin Laden and the Arab jihadists fighting in Afghanistan's occasional appearance on Al Jazeera was not significant to the general Arab audience till after the attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001.

Recognition by world media that Al Jazeera is a vital source of information on Ben Laden, Al Qaeda, Afghanistan, and the Middle East in general manifested in the form of deals made with the major global news networks such as CNN and BBC to share exclusive footage. Even non-English broadcasting companies and cable providers started to include Al Jazeera in their packages soon after 2001.

One such example was in Japan, where Sky Perfect cable provider included Al Jazeera in its free-to-air packages (from Nov 9, 2001) airing Al Jazeera fully on one of its channels with 30 minutes Japanese simultaneous interpretation of news bulletins twice a day. This free airing of Al Jazeera Arabic ended in September 30, 2002 only to be relayed on NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyoku) Japan's only public broadcaster and the largest broadcasting organization through one of its cable channels BS1's daily program "Ohayo Sekai" (Good Morning World) in a segment and on its terrestrial program "World News Hour" (the programs have since changed its name to "World News" "World News Asia", and "Check Sekai Top News")

In other Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia Al Jazeera Arabic was broadcasted on their local and cable channels as translated or subtitled material broadcasted in program segments on a daily basis. However, with the launch of Al Jazeera English, the channel went on to be carried by regional satellite platforms such as the All-Asia Satellite Television and Radio Operator ASTRO making the whole broadcast available to a new Southeast Asian audience. As a result of the newly gained constant visibility on media and satellite providers' platforms around the globe Al Jazeera gained a new non-Arab audience and an alternative media status shifting the global flow and of information and challenging the traditional monopoly on information of government media and international satellite news channels, namely CNN and BBC.

Enhancing global broadcasting: exclusive coverage of Taliban ruled Afghanistan

Al Jazeera's global broadcasting and expanding of fame and audience was enhanced with the start of the Afghan war in October 7, 2001. Al Jazeera's reporters were the only journalists Taliban allowed to remain and cover the events there when the US launched its attacks on the country. The channel became the only media with access to

live war footage, eventually providing the most up-to-date information on the world's most significant event at the time. The numbers of Al Jazeera Arabic's audience saw an overnight increase from 35 million to billions of viewers. (Kelly 2002: 66-67) In Canada and the US, the network's nearly 200,000 subscribers grew 2,500 each week according to the managing director Jassim Al Ali with more than 150,000 subscribers paying \$22.99 per month to receive Al Jazeera Arabic on Echostar's Dish Network (estimate before 2002). (El-Nawawi and Iskandar 2002: 65) The network became a vital source of information for the international media and audience.

Moreover, in the run-up to the war on Afghanistan Al Jazeera signed a venture with the BBC, a news gathering deal, where the latter would be able to gain access to some of Al Jazeera's facilities such as Al Jazeera's Uplink capabilities in places where it has them and BBC doesn't in exchange for BBC's help in training staff and building Al Jazeera's English website. (Miles 2005: 223)

On December 27, 2001 Al Jazeera Arabic made world headlines again for broadcasting a full thirty three minute video message from Bin Laden after the US had announced defeating the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and replaced it by a new interim government. His appearance and message was one of defiance to the US claims indicating that the US military operation in Afghanistan was not fully successful with Al Qaeda's leader still unharmed and at large. The broadcast gave birth to debate over the "dangers" of airing Bin Laden's taped messages among governments and media outlets in the US and Europe for fear of activating terrorist "sleeper cells" and providing a platform for "inflammatory messages". The National Security Adviser at the time, Condoleezza Rice personally urged the five major US networks (ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC, and Fox) not to broadcast video messages from Bin Laden or his aids without reviewing them, and urged leading US newspapers not to publish the full text of the transcripts of these messages. (Nawawy and Iskandar

2002: 178) The five major US networks agreed to comply, but others in Europe (UK, France, Spain, and Germany) decided that this would be a breach to the basic principle of free press in a democratic society and an infringement of editorial independence.

Invasion of Iraq: the spin war and the global anti-war audience

Significant difference was evident in coverage of events in the 2003 invasion of Iraq between the Western mainstream media, especially the American, and the Arabic media that were transmitting to the wide Arab audience. Unlike the First Gulf War one media outlet did not have the monopoly of reporting, and non-Western media such as Al Jazeera were heavily present in this war, thus the US and the coalition had to find new ways of managing and filtering media coverage. The task of waging the spin war was attempted by creating the Central Command where all military press briefings of the US lead Coalition were held, the other solution the Coalition resorted to was by introducing embedded journalism. Journalists were urged to be embedded with Coalition troops for security reasons and to ensure their safety, but Al Jazeera was among the few media outlets that dedicated the bulk of their coverage to its non-embedded journalists' reports focusing more on civilian casualties and anti-war movements around the world. Western media such as CNN and BBC, on the other hand quickly shifted from discussions about the legality of the attack with the onset of the offensive, to providing detailed accounts of the Coalition Forces' military activities once the war began, serving the "Shock and Awe" quick liberation images desired by the invading party. The stark difference in the content covered by Western media and Arab media such as Al Jazeera was the difference representing the pro-US/Western perspective as opposed to representing the pro-Arab perspective. This difference in perspective gained Al Jazeera a huge new loyal audience in the anti-war camp

from around the world. This following was supported by the launch of Al Jazeera's English website.

The launch of its English website on the same month as the invasion of Iraq (March 2003) helped in making it immediately popular among non-Arabic speaking audience seeking an alternative source of information to the warring sides. Al Jazeera Arabic, already considered a credible news source for its coverage of the Afghan war, achieved new reach among those who found the Western media slanted to the US and the Coalition forces sanitizing civilian casualties, and Iraqi government official statements gravely inaccurate and propagandized. People in the Arab world and in the non-Arab world now found Al Jazeera's pro-Arab slant less objectionable. The removal of the language barrier made Al Jazeera's information accessible and its website topics became one of the top searched in major search engines such as Lycos according to the NYT. (Warren 2003, April 4)

Global messenger: Al Jazeera English

After securing an international name and a wide global audience Al Jazeera - now a network- launched its English 24 hour news and current affairs channel from four "strategic broadcast centers": Doha, Washington DC, Kuala Lumpur, and London to 180 million households on 6 continents in more than 100 countries. (Al Jazeera Network, Media Pack, 2010: 4) Employing many acclaimed western media personalities such as David Frost (from the famous Nixon Interview 1977), Riz Khan (BBC and CNN host), Avi Lewis (CBC host), and Josh Rushing (media spokesman for US Coalition Command Center in the 2003 Iraq invasion) Al Jazeera English became the first Middle Eastern English language news channel.

At launch, it reached 80 million homes in Europe, Africa, and South-East Asia, which was double the targeted audience ("Al-Jazeera English hits airwaves," 2006); however, its penetration in

North America was poor due to not being carried by the major cable networks there. In 2008 Al Jazeera overcame the carrier barrier globally as internet users around the world accessed its Arabic and English channels on Livestation internet streaming (however, Al Jazeera's US live streaming was stopped in 2013 before the launch of Al Jazeera America as part of carriage contracts).

By 2013 Al Jazeera's English Channel was carried by 16 free-to-air satellite platforms and on more than 225 service providers in 82 countries around the world reaching an estimated one billion viewer globally. (Al Jazeera Facts and Figures, 2013) This expansion in reach in the English language was instrumental in cementing the shift from the traditional flow of information that used originate from less than a handful of developed countries, and permitted the introduction of new narratives to events around the world addressing issues previously filtered out by the traditional international satellite news channels. Another overlooked benefit of Al Jazeera's expansion and subsequently the channel's internal growth is that a huge number of international journalist were now exposed to the Arab and Islamic world's discourse and narratives, thus increasing the number of Western journalist who expanded their understanding of the MENA region (even after their contact with Al Jazeera ends at some point).

Championing revolutions: The Arab Spring and “Al Jazeera Effect”

In 2012, with news about the “Arab Spring” increasingly dominating world attention and Al Jazeera quickly deployed large teams to each of the hot locations and opened its airspace to the people taking part in the uprising unlike national televisions and loyalist media. This move made the Arab and global audience view Al Jazeera as the champion of the “Arab Spring” (in its early stages). Media scholars even coined the term “Al Jazeera Effect” for the impact the channel has on Arab world politics by the role it was

playing to empower groups that previously had no voice globally and weakening the monopoly governments and mainstream media had on information.

Al Jazeera's English and Arabic news channels' global viewership numbers grew to 220 million households (Al Jazeera Facts and Figures, 2013) becoming a major source of information on the events that unfolded in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Iraq, and Syria. Even when the channel's bureaus were halted for certain periods of time in some of these countries like Egypt and Iraq, the channel broadcasted continuously from them making use of citizen journalism and videos posted on You Tube assisted (controversially) by testimonies of local activists from the ground. According to a research conducted by Ipsos (a media research agencies), Al Jazeera Arabic had swept viewership numbers in most of the 11 countries it surveyed for first quarter of 2013, with 34% more viewers than all the other Arabic satellite media combined. (Al Jazeera Facts and Figures, 2013)

However, the "Arab Spring" was a catalyst for political investment in media, and according to the director of Jordan Media Institute, Bassam Tweisi the number of satellite channels in the MENA region increase from 450 in 2010 to 1,400 in 2015 despite revenue figures showing that this industry is financially not a viable investment. (The Declining Popularity of Al-Jazeera News Network and Other Channels, 2016) According to Tweisi the value of investment in the media industry was \$25 billion where as its return for this investment was a mere \$1.5 billion a year, adding that the investment in media in the Arab world was an effort to gain political influence.

Al Jazeera's experience in the past two decades has become a textbook example of how a media can rise from being a little known alternative source of information to a mainstream heavyweight media with global reach, how a media outlet can shift from being a

professional global challenger of information monopoly to an information source affected by its financiers' agendas, and how development in the media and information industry could gradually make way for new sources of information replacing even the major media institutions. Al Jazeera is constantly tackling its challenges and industry developments by introducing new techniques and outlets that are in line with its audience needs and industry development. One such example is the huge success Al Jazeera Plus is gaining on social media with its rich output of short yet concise and informative videos catering to the millennial generation's preference of visual nano information.

Al Jazeera's impact and popularity in the MENA region forced traditional and state-run television stations to a more professional level of broadcasting. It is safe to say Al Jazeera is responsible for raising the bar in political discussion among its Arab audience and for raising their political and social awareness of both the MENA region and world affairs albeit controversies of its bias and political agenda in recent years loom. It can probably be credited for raising audience expectations about receiving professional broadcasting and in upholding their right to voice their opinion on public matters.

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Al-Jazeera and migratory audiences: Is satellite TV reshaping the space-time notions of identity and belonging

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Introduction

The appearance of the Al-Jazeera channel in the Arab television landscape was the starting point for a new era of Arab television. This is because it was a real dividing line between two separate periods: before the launch of Al-Jazeera and after it. The channel has been a media phenomenon that researchers have been keen to study from many different perspectives, ranging from media studies to political, social, and economic approaches. In fact, within six years of its launch in 1996, Al-Jazeera had become one of the television channels exciting most academic interest in the world. This is according to a study (Nasr and Abdelmoula 2013) that listed no less than 66 doctoral theses, 65 masters theses, 48 books, and 30 research papers in peer reviewed journals, and is discussed at universities and research centres worldwide. All of these have studied Al-Jazeera as one of the fastest spreading and most influential channels in the world. Moreover, it has also become one of the most controversial channels, exciting media and political debates regarding the nature of its editorial line, as well as the ideological or political agenda that the channel is serving. These debates have raged particularly in countries

embracing considerable numbers of Arabs in Europe and North America, such as France, Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK, Canada, and the USA.

Most politicians and media personalities who raised the issue of Arab satellite channels publicly in their countries have focused on the risks of "alien values" being broadcast by Al-Jazeera and other Arab channels, along with the negative effects on social and intellectual developments. They assume that these channels are destroyers of intellectual and behavioural values which Arab immigrants and their offspring are supposed to be taught to facilitate their integration into the social, intellectual, and ideological structure of embracing communities (Hamidou 2005). Other views, adopting a similar approach, have focused on the risks of disturbing the mainstream supported by the media in order to maintain the identity of the "nation" and the "one people" within those countries. In fact, academic studies concerned with immigrant communities and Al-Jazeera or Arab satellite channels in general, are of two opinions. On the one hand, some address this issue from the perspective of the availability of media for minorities, considering it to be a good sign linked to human rights in the area of media and knowledge. On the other hand, some studies consider it as a negative phenomenon threatening the entity and the social coordination of the nations embracing those minorities. However, the latter view has a drawback, which is its complete dependence on a functional approach when analysing this influence. It has focused on the risks of social imbalance created by minorities' media in countries included in those studies, without taking into account the nature of individual needs being met by those media.

Research problem and questions

The study presented in this chapter aims to overcome this drawback by introducing the problem of receiving extraneous satellite

channels in the Western social and media environments. This problem is introduced from the perspective of the needs of Arab recipients in Europe that are met by Al-Jazeera programmes in an extremely competitive environment of endless news¹ and an abundance of entertainment programmes. Furthermore, this study raises the problem of the impact resulting from watching these satellite channels. This is done by determining the intellectual or political influence of the Al-Jazeera network as a model, by means of the determination of the impacts of Al-Jazeera on the internal policy of countries to which it is broadcast. The study also seeks to understand the factors that have allowed Al-Jazeera to become an indispensable source of news, information, and expert opinion among Arab communities in overseas countries, by introducing three questions. These questions are linked to three central issues that help to understand the popularity of Al-Jazeera, and ultimately to understand its effects. The first central issue concerns the rise of Al-Jazeera as a main channel for news and information among Arab migrant communities, by asking: what is the practicability of Al-Jazeera imposing itself on a migratory audience between 1996 and today? The second pivotal issue concerns the motivations that lead immigrant audiences to interact with this channel rather than others. The question here is: what motivates Arab audiences in Europe to interact only with Al-Jazeera rather than other channels? Are they linguistic motives or emotional motivations associated with nourishing the original cultural identity of Arab community members in Europe? Or are they professional motivations associated with how Al-Jazeera covers what is happening in the Arab world? The third central issue deals with the influence of Al-Jazeera on recipients by asking this question: does watching Al-Jazeera influence political and intellectual convictions related to political life within migratory countries themselves?

Methodology

In order to accomplish this study, we have relied on interviews carried out with focus groups in three contiguous EU countries, distinct from each other in their various historical, political, and social characteristics: France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Interviews were conducted between 5 July and 20 August 2016, asking ten questions. Questions revolved around ten pivotal points designed to provide specific scales that help to understand the relationship between Al-Jazeera and its Arab and Muslim audience in migratory countries and to grasp the nature of the influence that Al-Jazeera has on the political and intellectual convictions of its audience. We divided the sample into three age categories: firstly, people aged between 15 and 26; secondly, individuals between 26 and 48; and finally those over 48 years old. We intentionally chose such a division to make it easier to understand the general trends, as well as how different generations follow such channels differently. This is particularly important when considering language variant, either Arabic or the language of the country of residence.

From horizontal flow to reverse flow:

The process of imposing Al-Jazeera on a migratory audience

During the 1970s, third-world countries tried to impose a reconsideration of the structure of the international media system, in both its inputs and outputs, regarding the agendas of some international organizations. These attempts faced fierce resistance from the major Western countries, which controlled the media networks, and media content. At times, this resistance was under the pretext of not compromising the principle of free flow of information. At other times, it was under the pretext of not compromising the principle of free flow of content and media services (Al Jamal 2005). Eventually, Western nations refused to reconsider the mechanisms and legal frameworks that controlled the media flow at that time,

despite the ascendancy of the unidirectional flow on it from north to south. In spite of their efforts to create some balance in media flow, all attempts by third-world countries have failed, including media gathering projects South-South, exchange and co-production agreements, and other initiatives. Even though it was not among the first priorities of Al-Jazeera to compete with international companies in covering news and matters of the Arab world and southern countries in general, it is well known that the measures taken, and what had been done by individual and collective schemes by third-world countries made the output of Al-Jazeera the most successful achievement by Arab world and the third world in establishing a horizontal flow between Southern countries, and hence, in establishing a reverse flow towards northern countries.

Unsurprisingly, results of interviews done with the three sample age groups have shown that the presence of Al-Jazeera in covering major global events at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, is what contributed greatly in the imposition of international marketing of the channel, and then in its dedication as one of the world's most important cosmopolitan television channels. Most interviewees of the second and third age groups attributed their first interest in Al-Jazeera to when the channel started covering the US Operation Desert Fox in Iraq in December 1998. Al-Jazeera was eager to cover what was happening differently to how it was being covered by the US CNN channel. Al-Jazeera deliberately focused on what was called "collateral damage" by the US media, and called it "targeting Iraqi civilians" during strikes. The esteem in which migratory audiences held Al-Jazeera continued to rise after careful coverage of the second Palestinian uprising in 2000. We know that Al-Jazeera dedicated considerable human resources and logistics in order to convey the Palestinian Intifada to Arab public opinion, and to show the brutality of the Israeli army in dealing with Palestinian children while attempting to suppress the uprising.

Interviewees fully adopted the channel “after it covered what happened on 11 September 2001 and subsequent international events in the Middle East”. During this period, Al-Jazeera faced a challenge of universality when the US started war in Afghanistan in October 2001, due to the fact that it was the only approved channel in Kabul, and due to its use of exclusive coverage of battles, raids on cities, and fighting on various fronts, as well as the exclusive broadcast of statements by the Taliban and Osama bin Laden, the spiritual leader of Al-Qaida at the time. Comments by most individuals of the three questioned groups illustrated that Al-Jazeera “imposed its photos and contents not only on Western viewers, but also on prestigious Western media, which were forced to rely on a lot of Al-Jazeera’s content to cover the events of the war”.

Most of the interviewees reported that Al-Jazeera’s popularity peaked among Arab migratory communities “in 2003, during the American war on Iraq”. Indeed, Al-Jazeera was more distinctive than other Arab and international channels that compete in coverage of battles on the ground, such as the US CNN, British BBC, Lebanese Hayat, Saudi Arabian Al-Arabiya, and Emirati Abu Dhabi. It was distinctive in covering the war from both fronts, Iraqi and American. As a matter of fact, what draws interviewees’ attention in Al-Jazeera’s coverage of those four wars was simply two things: the first was the adoption of an independent editorial policy, while the second was the imposition of its own concepts and terminology, which reflected its maturity and independence in dealing with events differently from the framing mechanisms and agendas that control how the Western media deals with matters of the Arabic and Islamic worlds. One example is the success of Al-Jazeera in imposing the term "invading forces" in media discourse to characterize the coalition forces that had occupied Iraq. Another obvious example of its editorial approach is hosting people from outside the formal governmental institutions, such as activists and opponents during the

Palestinian uprising. Among those were politicians or field commanders from the Hamas Movement (Al Oifi 2004), such as Sheikh Yassin, Mahmoud Azzahar, and Abdul-Aziz Arrantisi. This, however, was along with giving the floor to Palestinian politicians belonging to Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Al Jazeera as a media outlet in an environment dominated by uniformity and conformism

After the reputation of the independent editorial line of Al-Jazeera was established, and after gaining credibility and legitimacy that went beyond regional borders, the interest of Arab migratory communities in Al-Jazeera increased between the late twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first century. In 2005, Al Jazeera claimed 50 per cent of the total viewership of the Arab community in Britain (Miladi 2005). Furthermore, the number of subscribers to Al-Jazeera doubled only one week after the American war against Iraq in 2003. In Europe alone, the number of viewers was up to four million, while the channel has accounted for 70 per cent of cable subscribers in the Arab world (Miller 2007). In the same period, many migratory Arabs in Europe purchased the satellite dishes supplied with two heads, which made it possible for them to receive Al-Jazeera. Besides, requests for paid subscription have increased in the USA since 2005, to reach 2,500 subscribers per week on average. It reached 200,000 in both America and Britain back then (Miller 2007).

In their explanations about motives for watching Al-Jazeera, respondents to the questionnaire gave almost consistent responses, all of which centred on the idea that “the poor quality of the typical coverage of matters concerning the Arabic and Islamic worlds in western media” was the main motivator that made them change to Al-Jazeera at the expense of other Western channels, either domestic or international ones. Al-Jazeera has facilitated access by Arab

immigrant viewers to news concerning Arab and Islamic issues, considered differently from the perspective of Western media. Many interviewees stated that “during their stay in overseas countries, they did not feel comfortable with the contents of Western media” because the latter covered “Arabic and Islamic issues and values with too much prejudice, and too many preconceptions, and deliberate errors”. Further, in order to justify this attitude, respondents cited repeatedly “Israeli-Palestinian conflict coverage”, “misleading coverage of women's rights in Islam”, “provocative coverage of the issue of wearing Hijab in public”, “misleading coverage implicitly linking Islam to terrorism”, “contents implicitly linking Arabic and Islamic traditions to retardation”, “focusing only on negative news in Arab countries without talking about positive ones”, “the usage of fallacies when talking historically about Israeli-Palestinian conflict or about the history of some Arab countries”, and “indifference for Arab and Muslim victims in wars and conflicts compared to a state of massive exaggeration that accompanies the death of one Western citizen”. Moreover, members of all age groups spoke about another factor associated with a state of “semi-pathological saturation” because of what was broadcast by those media with regard to Arabic and Islamic issues. This made them feel something like “media suffocation”, which ultimately necessitated an alternative outlet that provides news for an Arab audience.

From another perspective, the interviews we have done have uncovered other repeated indicators —— especially among the third age group, those over 48 year old —— showing that one of the most prominent factors in Al-Jazeera’s popularity among Arab migratory people was “the new tone of voice” imposed by the channel since its arrival on the Arab television scene. When interviewing people of the second and third groups (26-48 years and over 48 years), there was noticeable repetition of two words or two meanings. These were the feelings of “pride” in, and “appreciation” of, Al-Jazeera, which “was

launched to Arab viewers using completely new speech and a new style differing in terms of content and techniques used”. This made its quality comparable with the most important Western television channels. However, these indicators do not express themselves in the youngest age group (15-26) as strongly as in other groups. This could be attributed to the fact that the youngest age group is less to follow the channel due to the language barrier. Indeed, the vast majority of members of this age group were born in the three migratory countries, hence only a minority of them had the opportunity to learn the classical Arabic which is used by Al-Jazeera. The interpretation of these indicators is linked to understanding the media and political context through which most Arabic television channels worked during the time when the second and third age groups (26-48 years and over 48 years) were growing up. Before launching the channel in 1996, Arabic audience had very few options confined to domestic channels — most of which were governmental — many of which had fallen into blind loyalty to rulers or others that had fallen into the trap of adopting the pretentious speech of the leader, the party, or the revolution. In all four cases, however, propaganda predominated in those media, and they did not respect the minds of the audience. It is fair to say that most broadcast contents at that time were suffering from conformism, supported the mainstream, and were monotonic and dominated by tough language, and they even lacked innovation in preparation and presentation that were really routine. All these attributes deprived television discourse of its credibility, and rendered the message empty of content, which caused Arab television channels to lose two significant features: attraction to look at, and effect on Arab recipients’ minds.

In this conformist media landscape, Arab viewers became used to "media blackout” and “superficiality in handling topics”. These were two prominent traits applicable to most Arabic channels at the time. Actually, these features forced a large proportion of people in

different Arabic countries to direct their antennas towards foreign channels well known to respect the audiences' minds and demonstrate innovation in preparation and presentation, such as the BBC in eastern countries as well as public and private French channels in the Western Arab Region. This was the case until Al-Jazeera was launched, showing "distinguishable variance in Arab media picture", because it used a "new media approach that was different in professional and thematic standards". Interviewees highly appreciated the professional approach adopted by Al-Jazeera, because it allowed the channel to compete with the most prestigious television channels. This can be understood when knowing that Al-Jazeera showed high commitment to three professional and ethical standards: accuracy, objectivity, and balance. It also introduced the logic of "the opinion and the other opinion" when dealing with sensitive Arab social and political issues. This logic was otherwise accessible to Arab viewers only when stealthily watching foreign channels, despite their extreme passion for it. Additionally, the channel adopted a new audacity when dealing with political, historical, and social topics that substantially have drawn Arab people's attention from east to west. As a result, Arab viewers have become reconciled with their televisions after feeling alienated. Ultimately, Al-Jazeera became so famous that it set high records in viewership (Lamloum 2007). Therefore it was envied by even the most major international channels that target the Middle East and Western Arab Region.

On the other hand, results of interviews showed consistent views expressed by viewers of all age groups. They felt "proud and satisfied" because of the existence of a channel that "broadcasts the preoccupations and concerns of the Arab World in the Western World", and "bears a new media perspective". To interpret such indicators, we need to grasp the general context in which Al-Jazeera has developed. It is the context attached to the structure and properties of the international media system that had the right to

decide whom the “players” are, and whom the “consumers” are in the international media field at that time. In fact, during the 1990s, conflicts intensified between the great powers of media in order to extend the areas of their cultural and media influence. It is because of “central powers”, as Galtung terms them (Galtung 1971), that control the technology of satellites and direct broadcast satellite (DBS)” at the time. Britain, the USA, Russia, and France launched their own satellites, and established channels directed towards specific geographic areas of the world, according to the areas of cultural influence that arose either according to the political geography of former colonies or to previous protectorates, or according to the impact of the political geography of the new areas of influence, which were formed after World War II, following the emergence of the eastern and western blocs. Further, more than seven direct broadcast television systems were launched between 1988 and 1996, before Al-Jazeera, all of which aimed to serve areas of cultural and intellectual influence. These included: TDF1, TDF2, TV sat1 and TV sat2 as a Franco-German partnership, Swedish Telle X, British PSB, European Olympus, Luxembourgian Astra, Eutelsat (Balle 1992).

This conflict of international cultural and media positioning, of which the Arab region was one field, coincided with an intellectual and cultural awakening that had accelerated in the Arab world during the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, much political, academic, media, and religious literature has debated the issue of media dependency and cultural invasion (Barakat 2003), in addition to reflections of the problematic media dependency on Arabic and Islamic identities. Our interviews with all three age groups have revealed that the migratory community was not satisfied about official reactions towards those challenges; reactions were modest compared to challenges and dangers threatening the whole area at the time. From a historical perspective, it is well known that it was enough for Arab governments to perform only some cautious individual initiatives that have failed

because of relying merely on the press sector, and accepting some joint initiatives; neither eventually succeeded. This is because of differences and conflicts, or simply because of the fruitless mechanism of action, for instance the Arab-Sat project, preceded by the Arab TV and Radio Union. The Al-Jazeera project succeeded, from the point of view of interviewees, “after only a couple of years, while previous individual and joint initiatives have, apparently, failed”. The channel managed to impose itself on a regional scale, before gradually reaching universality. Today, it is one of the biggest television channels all over the world.

Suspicion about Al Jazeera among Western political and media circles

Since globalization is somehow the embodiment of the triumph of liberal ideology calling for the freedom of dissemination of news and information, it was predicted the openness of the liberal West on others and to accept their media despite the differences in values and culture, in respect to the rules set by the West itself: the rules through which the West imposed globalization and defended the sanctity of media freedom and the principle of the free flow of information. However, as soon as Al-Jazeera and other Arab satellite channels began to compete with the major Western channels, we heard in the three countries (France, Belgium, and the Netherlands) voices warning about the Arab satellite channels, which began to impose themselves among Western citizens of Arab origin. “God’s satellite channels”, as they were called by some media professionals (Renaud 1995), were then quite controversial among political and media circles, and people argued that they posed an ideological threat, or at least, that their negative effects would undermine the integration process¹ of citizens of Arab descent within those countries. As a consequence, authorities in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands did not consider the appearance of Arab channels in these countries as a good sign, and did not look at this

matter as does a tolerant country with prestigious traditions of belief in the freedom of the media and communication. Moreover, they did not deal with Arab channels with the tolerance they applied to Italian, Polish, Spanish, or Portuguese channels, which were all targeting non-Arab audiences in these three countries.¹

In the 1990s, despite the fact that public opinion in the three countries was to ignore the issue and not to give it any additional concern, the number of journalists and politicians calling to limit Arab satellite channels increased. In France, for example, the Supreme Council of Audiovisuals enacted legislation limiting the "invasion" of Arab satellite images onto French television. And because of the sensitivity of dealing with the issue through a government decision, French authorities have avoided the vilification that would arise from directly banning those channels, but instead have allowed local councils to take action to control the matter. There have been examples of crippling procedures imposed by some municipalities, housing companies, or even electronic supermarkets. The retailer Darty, for example, required people to get prior authorization from the municipality in order to purchase satellite dishes (Hamidou2005). It went further in 1993, when a decree was announced saying that people need a "construction permit" before installing any satellite dish on the roofs or balconies of buildings. More and above, the French Delegate at Universities once made a sharply worded statement criticizing French citizens of Arab origin watching Arab channels. He said: "Arabs live with us during the day, but they go back to their homelands in the evening, they watch those channels that connect them with God, homelands, and the voices of their masters. The more the satellite dishes increase capabilities to collect the incoming signals from the East, the more France would become useless" (Al Omrani 1995).

After the attacks of 11 September 2001, worries about these channels greatly escalated, and they were accused implicitly of

forming a "fifth column", which would work inside EU countries to eventually do them harm. These concerns did not stop with verbal expressions, but they exceeded and were emphasized when the Supreme Council of Audiovisuals prevented the Al-Manar channel from broadcasting in France. This was surprising for observers, considering that France is a country with a history of defending the sacredness of press and media freedom. Perhaps what has fuelled these fears most is what was being promoted in some extreme Western political and media circles, which since the break-up of the communist bloc, have been speculating about the inevitability of the emergence of a green Islamic advance over the ruins of the red advance of communism. In their view, this advance would compete with the free world for the cultural supremacy of the world. Samuel Huntington (Huntington 1993) is considered to be the main inspiration for those defending such a position after the attacks of 11 September 2001.

Al-Qaida's call for a war against the West appeared to legitimize these fears of a green advance through tremendous academic and media momentum. Huntington's argument was based on the assumption that the fall of ideologies caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, would boost the demands associated with identity and belonging. However, in contrast to what happened in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, those demands, rather being expressed on the basis of belonging to countries or minorities, would be expressed on a broader sense of belonging to a civilization. Thus, Huntington predicted the next battlefield to be the fractured areas that separate between the nine spaces of civilization he had defined¹. Surely, supporters and advocates for the exclusion of Arabic channels in general, and Al-Jazeera in particular, from European Media Space forget one important fact: the phenomenon of the violation of privacy of another media was not initiated by Arabs when Arab satellite channels were founded in the 1990s. This phenomenon was created

by channels of the great Western countries for two reasons: first, as a response to the requirements for propaganda during the Cold War, and second, in response to the needs of public diplomacy, which were exercised by previous empires in order to maintain areas of cultural influence. In both cases, however, Arab countries and Third-World countries found themselves as victims of such practices, because they were an open space being continuously violated by powerful broadcasting stations founded by the great powers.

Al-Jazeera programmes as a socio-psychological necessity for the migratory audience

A question can be raised here: why Arab-origin audiences prefer to watch Arab channels, especially Al-Jazeera, when a broad selection of European channels, characterized by diversity and professionalism and can be an interesting alternative, is available? An intriguing socio-psychological phenomenon caught our attention when doing this study. This phenomenon is full of meaning and worth exploring in depth; it is related to the life of immigrants and we have already noticed it in one of our previous studies (Hamidou 2005). It is the phenomenon of both belonging and temporality¹, which is multidimensional and makes the individual not confine his interest to a narrow spectrum limited to the country where he lives. Someone could watch a channel either to meet the needs associated with his narrow belonging and narrow temporality, or to meet the needs associated with his wide symbolic belonging and temporality. This study has proved that some people continue watching news related to migratory countries because this meets local needs. On the other hand, they adhere, at the same time, to watching news on Al-Jazeera since this meets the wider needs of belonging. In point of fact, the cultural values of the country of residence compel a person always to struggle to find some kind of psychological balance through coordination between two processes: culture erasure “acculturation”

and cultural upbringing “enculturation” in the migratory country. Such processes of erasure and upbringing are an inescapable part of the experience of expatriates, through the change of intellectual and moral context when leaving the original community to the new one, or as a result of the value differences experienced because of the difference between two things: the family model struggling to impose parents’ cultural heritage, and the social control of the institutions of the country of residence seeking to develop the expatriate on their own regulations. As a result, an expatriate feels three-dimensional belonging divided between three groups: affiliation group, reference group, and expanded reference group. Along with that, he would experience three-dimensional temporality, which is also divided between: temporality of country of residence, temporality of reference country, and temporality of reference nation.

To be clear, what we mean by affiliation group is the society in which someone lives and interacts daily with its components in workplace, neighborhood, schools, governmental institutions, associations, and so on. When talking about reference group, we mean the specific society that the individual considers to be the essential reference and from which he draws inspiration for cultural and ideological values. Obviously, this might be a society other than where someone lives. As for the expanded reference group, it is the broader entity that carries the connotation or the significance of the nation in our case here. In regards to the concept of the three dimensions of temporality, we mean temporality of country of residence, when an individual lives according to that country’s time, adopting its symbolic dates that create the individual's sense of common belonging. Dates might be the daily news, which is held on regular basis, or activities that may not be on a regular basis, such as political and sporting events. National and religious holidays are also among periodic symbolic dates. Temporality of reference country means that an immigrant keeps in mind symbolic dates that exist only

in his country of origin, but not in the migratory country. Lastly, temporality of reference nation implies that a person is set on dates related to the biggest entity, the affiliation nation, before dates of the reference country, which, in turn, come before symbolic dates in the migratory country.

If we carefully examine the sociological data of the audience of Al-Jazeera in the three studied countries, the first notable thing to observe would be that the language variable as well as the sex variables are two influential factors. They affect to what extent Al-Jazeera is important for the respondents. A descending curve corresponds to the tendency to watch the channel in the first age group (15-26 years old). In that group we could not find anyone who exclusively watches Al-Jazeera. Conversely, 65 per cent of the third age group (over 48 years) watches it exclusively. Of the second age group (26-48 years), 16 per cent watch it exclusively. Thus, the weakest language capabilities that allow individuals to watch French, Belgian, and Dutch channels, accompanied the highest rate of watching Al-Jazeera; when these capabilities increased, the channel is watched less. To explain this trend, especially among those over 48 years old, illiteracy among members of the third group, who formed the first economic migration cohorts to the three countries over the past century, clearly seems to be the reason. The second distinguishable thing to observe here is the fact that older people mostly watched news and political programmes, followed by religious programmes, and then movies, comedy shows, and sport. This explains the relatively high tendency to follow Al-Jazeera. As for women of this group, movies and series came first, followed by songs and music before women's programmes and lastly religious programmes. Knowing this demonstrates why women followed public channels more than rolling news channels, including Al-Jazeera. Another observable thing among the majority of men of the third group is that they are concerned mainly about news and politics

of their countries of origin, the Western Arab region, and the Middle East.

On the contrary, more respondents of age 26-48 watched Al-Jazeera and news channels of their migratory countries equally. Those accounted for 55 per cent of the second group. Interestingly, men of this category set news programmes in the second place, preceded by movies and comedy. Sport came third, followed by reality programmes, then political shows, and lastly religious ones. Women of this group had different preferences but were similar to women in the third group; first of all were movies and series, then songs and music, before reality programmes, women's programmes and lastly religious programmes. This also explains their lack of interest in Al-Jazeera. News, political, and sport temporality of men of this group was also been divided between countries of residence and countries of origin. The same applies to movies, but when it comes to reality programmes, temporality of country of residence was preferred. Last but not least, religious temporality was limited to what was going on in the Arab West and East. Temporality of women of this group was also distinct; the preferable temporality of movies and series was that of the east and west regions, while temporality of country of residence was preferable when it came to women's programmes and religious programmes. Observed orientations of members of the first age group (15-26 years) reflect a break with trends seen in the previous two categories; a high proportion declared that they only watch television programmes of migratory countries, despite the availability of Arab satellite channels (76 per cent). As for the order in which the rest, that is, those who watch Arab channels, favoured programmes, it was as follows: men preferred reality programmes, then movies and comedy, sport, news, and lastly documentaries, whereas women chose to watch firstly singing and musical programmes, then reality programmes, women's programmes, movies and comedy, and lastly documentaries. The fact that the majority of

women and men of this group focus their interest on the news, political, and sport temporality of the migratory country, helps to explain the scarceness of watching Al-Jazeera in this age group.

But then again, is it legitimate for migratory countries to fear citizens of Arab origin watching those “extraneous” channels that might cause a “break” in the ideological structure, as well as in the ideological continuity of French, Belgian, and Dutch communities in our sample? Especially when knowing that these citizens comprise up to 6 per cent of the total population of each country alone (France, Belgium, and the Netherlands). The reality, of course, is that there is no one Arab viewer, but rather there are many Arab viewers watching programmes from Arab satellite channels, specifically Al-Jazeera. This means that Arab immigrant communities are far from being a homogeneous social group that has independent ideological components as well as awareness to those components. When a French, Dutch, or Belgian citizen of Arab origin follows such Arabic programmes, it does not necessarily mean that this citizen turns his back on the values of the country of residence or on the social control institutions there. In reality, watching Arab television programmes does not eliminate watching French television programmes, except for people who do not understand French (and those accounted for 57 per cent of third age group, those over 48 year old). When looking, for instance, at people continuously watching news on Al-Jazeera, we find most of them (78 per cent) are not willing to miss the main news broadcast on channels of migratory countries in favour of other foreign news broadcasts. This also applies to political, social, and sport programmes.

This fact takes us back to the previously mentioned temporality, meaning that a French citizen of Arabic origin is, like any other expatriate, trying to converge the temporality of the migratory country and the temporality of the country of origin. This, however, is accompanied with giving each of them priority at the appropriate time

and place. Psychological studies prove such situations to be non-pathological, threatening neither social integration nor social settlement, but instead it is demonstrated to be completely healthy, and beneficial to communities of residence. A Research (Sanella 2002) hypothesized that each expatriate unavoidably passes through a long-term socio-psychological pathway that is severely troubled. Depending on psychological upbringing and the environment around the expatriate, this pathway could lead him either to normal integration in the society, or to isolationism and incidence of nervous mental illnesses that might pose some danger to the community where he lives. From this point, we consider that Al-Jazeera, as a television channel received from the original cultural space, contributes to help individuals not to lose social and psychological features essential for maintaining a balanced personality during the integration process. These conclusions would refute justifications underlying calls for the restricted access of citizens of Arab descent to Arab channels under the pretext that the latter depend often on "intellectual religious construction", and are inconsistent in content with the secular orientations of social control institutions in European societies.

The proportion of respondents expressing a total rejection of the channels of migratory communities remains very low (only 2 per cent of all interviewees). Qualitative study reveals that the rejection is not based on a constant ideological or religious attitude that rejects in principle those channels. Rather, it is a reaction towards what respondents call "racist excesses interminably repeated in many lessons and news broadcasts in the country of immigration". This implies it is a systematic work that has two goals: its immediate goal is to distort the Arab and Muslim image, while its future goal is to create a significant gap between citizens of Arab descent and communities of migratory countries. However, no matter what the credibility of that feeling, and whether it was objective or subjective, expressing it like this suffices to indicate the failure of some

television programmes of migratory countries that citizens of Arab origin consider sometimes to be "an apartheid tool", whereas these channels should have shown a social and ethical responsibility to contribute to a harmonic reunion and the mutual life of all the residents of the communities of the three studied countries.

Conclusion

Our discussions with members of the focus groups in the three countries revealed that language, professionalism and innovation, and covering topics differently, were three main factors influencing Arab communities migrating to the West to watch Al-Jazeera, not only at the expense of other Arab channels broadcasting from their homelands, but also at the expense of Western channels. According to sociological data related to the audience of Al-Jazeera in the three European countries, the majority of the followers are first-generation immigrants or middle-aged immigrants who have migrated recently. In contrast, interest in Al-Jazeera diminishes among new generations growing up in migratory countries. This is because of a lack of Arabic language abilities, as well as being unintentionally distant from Eastern intellectual and psychological structures due to an upbringing in the European cultural environment. This, in turn, creates the ground for an inevitable decrease in the number of viewers of such channels in the future, if they do not take this variant into consideration. One additional notable thing was the fact that Arabic followers in the three countries do not watch news and political programmes on Al-Jazeera except for meeting the needs related to the temporality of Arab political and news space. Furthermore, the pace of exclusively watching Al-Jazeera seems to be regressive because of the barrier of Arabic language in which all programmes are broadcast.

Among the majority of citizens of Arab origin, watching Al-Jazeera is combined with watching channels of migratory countries, which are considered the main source of news about those countries.

In fact, such channels are not abandoned in favour of Arab channels except when provoking the viewers' feelings through misleading coverage of events related to conflicts in the Middle East, or when offending Arab and Islamic culture. When we talked about the historical context of the emergence and development of Al-Jazeera, we have noticed that its existence was not due to an offensive strategy aimed to impose the Arab ideological pattern, assuming there is such pattern. Further, the channel is mostly subjected to a domestic or a regional political logic when programming its media content, but not to international determinants that stem from the logic of civilizational conflict. It is clear that the indicators we have found in our research refute allegations that the channel is seeking political influence over citizens of Arab origin in the West. This study has revealed that everything linked to the temporality of the country of residence regarding the news and political priorities is being met through local television programmes. It has also revealed that Arab television channels have no impact on the formation of the views of the Arab communities about the internal policies of countries of residence, especially with regard to the determination of electoral trends for the members of that immigrant community.

On the other hand, our data refute the idea that Al-Jazeera aims to convey an ideological message to citizens of those countries. It is evident that most programmes on "Al-Jazeera Arabic" are broadcast to Arab people in their regional surroundings and in their own language, while access to Arab viewers in their European or American surroundings is merely a secondary objective, as evidenced by the limited content that is specifically directed to those communities. The emergence of few channels targeting Western people in their own languages such as "Al-Jazeera English" is undeniable, however the purpose of most programmes on those channels is either to present an Arabic view of news, or to present the culture of countries as well as their touristic potentials. The broadcast

of video and audio of the Arab world to the West by Al-Jazeera should not be seen from the perspective of cultural and civilizational conflict, as some people want to portray it, but from the perspective of the multiplicity and diversity of visions, and as a form of interaction between civilizations imposed by globalization. From our point of view, it is a legitimate attempt, since it accompanies the currently prevalent orientation in the world for the sake of cultures' convergence and interaction. It would allow Arab cultural space, with its rich history and unique privileges, to highlight its contributions to human civilization. Al-Jazeera and other Arabic satellite television stations should not be considered as a source of conflict, but as a cultural factor that is highly effective, but that humanity has not yet fully employed for getting to know each other. The Western world that forced human openness by means of companies and technologies crossing borders and continents cannot demand a unidirectional openness. Moreover, the West will not be able for long to determine alone the rules of globalization according to narrow-dimensional economic and cultural interests.

Globalization, as a historical inevitability, will impose itself on all human beings at the end; not as an ideology of the victorious party, but as one of human mutation that would create a profound impact in social relationships between individuals, as well as in social control processes within societies and states in the stage of postmodernity. Inevitably, however, until the ultimate adoption of it by everyone, there will be an unavoidable taming process, which would make humanity accept the positive sense of globalization, which refers to the development of a global space in which cultures and civilizations reside equally, side by side, but not according to a pyramidal rationale based on the logic of power. In contrast to what theorists of the clash of civilizations think, we suggest that the phenomenon of cultural overlap, to which satellite channels and technological innovations that reduce time and space contribute,

would eventually create a general human space beyond national spaces, and would also create a complicated identity that exceeds narrow cultural and civilizational affinities. That complex identity in addition to the wider space will inescapably force us to reconsider our current understanding of the concepts of identity and culture, which we have been accustomed to develop using a confrontational logic by putting determinants of oneself in the face of determinants of another's identity. That complex identity we are talking about will not be based on symbolic or ideological components that were previously important when developing local identities, but will be based on objective and rational components that will create social links between people with different beliefs. Moreover, that identity would change our views about concepts of culture and civilization, which would no longer be considered as subjective ethnic dimensions, but instead objective contributions to building the edifice of humanity.

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Al Jazeera's reception in Australia

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Introduction

Al Jazeera was launched in 1996 as a single, Arabic-language news channel. That channel, initially broadcasting for only a limited time each day to a small terrestrial audience, evolved over the following 20 years into the Al Jazeera Media Network (AJMN, or simply “Al Jazeera”) comprising a suite of news, sport and entertainment products delivered around the world on multiple platforms and in a variety of languages. Funded by a large loan from the government, Al Jazeera was conceived by the then-new emir as part of a suite of state projects intended to exert regional influence and project a liberal and modern face of the small country to the world (see, for example, Miles, 2005; El-Nawawy & Iskander, 2002; Powers, 2012; Bahry, 2001). While Al Jazeera's editorial stance is largely independent from the government on a day-to-day basis, Al Jazeera was, and is, an articulation of Qatar's post-1995 foreign policy which relies on strategies of hedging and branding to ensure the country's security in an increasingly unstable region traditionally dominated by larger players (see, for example, Pintak, 2010; Kamrava, 2013; Gray, 2013; Youmans, 2012; El-Nawawy & Iskander, 2002).

The genesis stories of the original Arabic-language Al Jazeera news channel (called “Al Jazeera”, but referred to in this chapter as AJA for clarity) and its younger English-language sibling (AJE),

along with their effects, are well known and there is no need to recount them here; instead, in this chapter, I am interested in the story of the network's audience growth throughout the world. While an urge to grow is seemingly baked into media companies' DNA, in the case of the AJMN, expansion is central to the very purpose of the organisation as a project of the state. Just as the viewers of a commercial television network are conscripted to work on behalf of its advertisers (Smythe, 1981), viewers of a non-commercial broadcaster are put to work on behalf of the benefactors; thus, the accumulation of an audience allows the AJMN to achieve the soft diplomatic outcomes it was created for and is maintained to pursue.

In particular, I will focus on Al Jazeera's expansion in Australia, as Australia has hitherto been overlooked in analysis of Al Jazeera's growing global footprint. Australia is a relatively small market for Al Jazeera and other international media organisations — it is home to fewer than 25 million residents — but given the near-universality of the English language, and its cultural similarity to the UK and USA, the country seems an obvious target for expansion. However, as I will demonstrate, the unique nature of the Australian media market means there are many hurdles and structural barriers that frustrate prospective new entrants: five terrestrial broadcasters have long exerted a stranglehold on the television market; subscription television arrived very late and its take-up has been relatively slow; and as broadcast audiences continue to fragment and bleed away to non-broadcast content consumption options, it becomes harder still for new broadcasters to build an audience. In this environment, Al Jazeera's strategy of expansion-through-content sharing via reciprocal broadcast agreements with Australia's two public broadcasters has proved the most successful form of broadcast growth in the country. And when Al Jazeera's aggressive growth in the digital and online spaces is taken into account, many Australians are now regularly exposed to Al Jazeera content.

After outlining the chronology of Al Jazeera's presence in Australia, and unpacking AJE's relationship with the Australian public broadcasters, I will provide an overview of how the network has been received in Australia by critics, the audience, and by editorial staff at the public broadcasters. I will then discuss the impact that Al Jazeera has made on the Australian media market.

Al Jazeera in Australia

Compared to culturally similar countries around the world such as the UK and USA, the Australian media market is quite unique. For example, Australia has one of the most concentrated media ownership structures in the world (Finkelstein 2012), and in 1996 the broadcast television field was dominated by five free-to-air terrestrial television networks — two government-funded and three commercial — and subscription television had only just launched; indeed, Australia was the last English-speaking country in the world to get a pay television service. The take-up rate of subscription television in Australia was quite slow given the entrenched market position of the terrestrial broadcasters, combined with specially introduced laws limiting the content pay television providers could exclusively broadcast (for example, big-ticket sporting events). By 2005, only 23% of Australian households had purchased a subscription television service, compared to figures of 88% in the USA and 50% in the UK (Young 2010). To this day, broadcast television occupies a far more important place in the market than pay television, although streaming, digital and online video services are now presenting a serious challenge to those players' long dominance. Taken together, these factors make it very difficult for new entrants to break into the market.

Al Jazeera first arrived in Australia in 2001, five years after the network's launch. AJA was picked up in that year by one of the three new subscription television services, Optus, and was also offered for a fee by the Mysat service to those with the necessary satellite

equipment. Soon afterwards, Al Jazeera was reported to be planning the establishment of an Australian bureau (Jackson, 2002). From 2012, AJA was dropped from Mysat but became available for free on the AsiaSat service (personal communication, Hasan Patel, Senior Executive, AJE Communications Department, June 23, 2015).

When AJE was launched in 2006, the channel's then-managing director, Nigel Parsons, conceded that Australia was "quite a difficult market to get access to, although it's a very important one for us to get into" (Ziffer 2006). Both of the subscription television services at the time, Foxtel and Optus, declined to carry AJE, although Foxtel suggested that the channel could pay for carriage on its service (Westbury 2006). However, AJE was available from launch on the Optus C1 satellite (a distinct service from the Optus pay TV service despite the name) free to anyone with the necessary equipment — a very small number of households in Australia where satellite dishes are rare. AJE was also available in its first years on a number of small, miscellaneous services, such as IPTV (Internet Protocol Television) offerings from internet service providers: Canberra-based telecommunications company TransACT added AJE in November 2006, and was joined later by national provider TPG. Small Sydney community television broadcaster TVS began re-broadcasting selected AJE bulletins in April 2010 (Knox 2010). In 2009, AJE was added to regional subscription television service AUSTAR, and in May, 2012, AUSTAR was acquired by Foxtel, giving Foxtel a monopoly over the pay television market in Australia (Optus had closed to new subscribers in 2009, and was eventually wound up). As part of the merger, AJE was added to Foxtel's basic package of channels and made available to a national audience of 2.2 million households (Foxtel 2012), although its actual viewership on the platform is likely very low.

Despite being available in Australia via these delivery channels, Al Jazeera's presence in Australia up to 2010 was relatively trivial as

none of the services described above resulted in significant viewership. It is only through reciprocal broadcast agreements with the Australian public broadcasters, combined with online growth, that Al Jazeera has achieved noteworthy success in expanding its viewership in Australia.

Al Jazeera and the Australian public broadcasters

In 2010 and 2011 respectively, AJE signed reciprocal broadcast agreements with Australia's two public broadcasters, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS).

ABC

The Australian Broadcasting Commission (later renamed the Australian Broadcasting Corporation) was established in 1932 and was modelled on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (Davis et al. 1987). Like the BBC, the ABC is funded by taxpayers, but unlike the UK's television license system, the ABC's budget is appropriated from consolidated revenue. Despite its funding model, the ABC enjoys statutory editorial independence from the government of the day and the network's staff fiercely defended that independence. The ABC's services across all platforms are extremely popular — according to the ABC's 2014 annual report (ABC 2014), ABC TV is watched by nearly 10 million metropolitan-area Australians each week, ABC radio is listened to by nearly 5 million people, and online services are accessed by 6 million. In addition to being popular, the ABC is one of the most trusted news services and public institutions in the country (Essential Media 2015). Simons (2007: 176) calls the ABC “unquestionably, the most important cultural institution in the country” and says no other organisation “reaches as far and as deep into Australians' hearts and minds.”

The ABC and AJE signed a reciprocal broadcast agreement in 2010, allowing each to use the other's content in their own news

bulletins. In practice, however, the ABC uses significantly more AJE content than AJE does ABC. The agreement also allows the ABC to rebroadcast AJE's output in the case of breaking news. Additionally, the networks use each other's facilities from time to time, and they are in regular contact about editorial matters. Gaven Morris, Head of News Content at ABC and Controller of *ABC News24* (personal communication, October 24, 2013) told me the reciprocal broadcast agreement provides the ABC with a "trusted source of content" in exchange for "some access to an audience in Australia." The Head of *ABC NewsRadio*, Helen Thomas (personal communication, July 4, 2014), believes AJE offers a "different and strong perspective" which is "imperative, and ever-increasingly imperative in the overall reporting of news around the world, but particularly the Middle East."

The ABC's two rolling news channels — *ABC News 24* on television, and *ABC NewsRadio* on radio — are the heaviest users of AJE content. Both sources incorporate AJE packaged stories and other elements such as interviews into their branded news bulletins, while *ABC News24* also re-broadcasts two one-hour AJE bulletins at 2am and 5am each morning. My content analysis of one cumulative week of these two sources' in-house news bulletins showed that *ABC News24* used an average of 8'52" of AJE per day, while *ABC NewsRadio* used an average of 11'30" per day.

SBS

The Special Broadcasting Service was launched by the Australian government in 1977 following successful trials of foreign language radio stations in Sydney and Melbourne, becoming the world's first multicultural public broadcaster (Ang et al. 2008). SBS in 2016 delivers a range of news, information and entertainment content across broadcast and digital platforms. The network's funding model mixes government support with commercial revenue from advertising and content sales.

As a result of the reciprocal broadcast agreement, AJE content is incorporated into SBS's flagship in-house news bulletin, *SBS World News*, and whole AJE news bulletins are re-broadcast on SBS as part of a suite of foreign news bulletins called *WorldWatch*. The Executive Producer of *SBS World News*, Andrew Clarke (personal communication, May 19 May, 2014), told me AJE is good at providing background on a story and getting into areas that its competitors do not, such as Africa and South America. The Executive Producer of *WorldWatch*, Paul Williams (personal communication, May 19 May, 2014) said AJE provides a counter-balance to the dominant English language global news channels from the Anglosphere which are also broadcast by the program. In addition to the daily rebroadcasts of AJE bulletins on SBS, my research found that *SBS World News* uses an average of 3'47" of AJE content in its bulletins per day.

Al Jazeera's broadcast audience in Australia

Attempting to arrive at a definitive figure for Al Jazeera's past and current viewership in Australia is an exercise in folly given the range of distribution channels and the spotty availability of data. Nevertheless, it is possible to calculate some approximate figures using publicly available metrics.

Regarding AJA, we do know that 20,000-25,000 Australians paid for access to that channel on Mysat between 2001 and 2011 (personal communication, Hasan Patel, June 23, 2015) which, given Australia's Arabic-speaking population of 250,000 in 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013), is a fair number of viewers.

Calculating AJE's non-public broadcaster audience requires mainly guesswork. Figures for its carriage on AUSTAR are unavailable but are unlikely to be significant, and IPTV services would register negligible numbers. Even on Foxtel with a potential audience of over 2 million households, AJE's actual audience is

probably very small. Foxtel's average metropolitan prime time audience is usually comfortably under one million people (Mitchell and McIntyre 2014), and in one indicative week, Foxtel's in-house news channel, *Sky News Australia*, attracted less than half of one percent of all viewers of all free-to-air and subscription television channels. In the same week, BBC World (the only other Foxtel news channel included in ratings data) was so low it rounded to zero (OzTAM 2015a). Sky News Australia's cumulative reach over the week was just under one million people and BBC World's was 160,000 (OzTAM 2015b). Taking into account the full suite of news channels available to viewers, such as CNN and FoxNews, and the fragmentation of audiences, AJE's ratings on Foxtel are unlikely to be significant.

While AJE's deals with the public broadcasters undoubtedly increased Al Jazeera's viewership in Australia, it is more accurate to characterise such viewership as "exposure" given that, for the most part, AJE content is incorporated into the ABC and SBS's branded news programs and most people consume AJE's content incidentally. It is nevertheless possible to estimate a level of exposure based on the ratings figures for the public broadcaster news channels and programs that use AJE content.

As at April 2015, *ABC News24* had a weekly metropolitan audience reach of around 900,000 people (OzTAM 2015b), and its average peak-period evening audience in 2014 was 41,000 (personal communication, Steve Allen, Head of Fusion Strategy, April 8, 2015). Celebrating *ABC News24*'s fifth birthday in July 2015, the ABC's Director of News, Kate Torney, claimed 4 million people tune into the channel each week (Back Story, 2015), although this figure seems quite high compared to the others. The AJE overnight rebroadcasts on *ABC News24* on April 7, 2015, rated 10,000 people at midnight and 8,000 at 5am, and these figures are consistent with trend (personal communication, Steve Allen, Head of Fusion Strategy, April 8, 2015).

In January-February 2015, *ABC NewsRadio* had an average audience of 27,000 people between 5:30am and midnight in the five metropolitan centres, according to ratings figures compiled by GfK (2015a; 2015b; 2015c; 2015d; 2015e). The ABC claims the channel has 1 million weekly listeners (ABC 2015; Young 2010).

Based on a sampling of mid-2015 ratings figures, as reported by TV Tonight (Knox 2014; Knox 2015a; Knox 2015b; Knox 2015c), *SBS World News* attracts around 100,000-200,000 metropolitan viewers per night. Its average metropolitan rating in 2014 was 135,000 (personal communication, Steve Allen, April 8, 2015).

It's important to note that all of these figures, except Kate Torney's *ABC News24* viewership claim and the ABC's *NewsRadio* claim, exclude regional and digital viewers/listeners, but taken together, the available data suggest that up to four million Australians *could* be exposed to Al Jazeera content each week via the ABC and SBS, although the actual number is likely to be significantly lower.

Al Jazeera online

Despite AJE being, first and foremost, a television broadcaster, its digital and online products are increasingly the face of the organisation for many news consumers. Australia, in particular, is an important market for AJE online; my research suggests that, in Australia, AJE's online audience is significant and growing fast.

In 2015, Australia represented the third-largest market for AJE video online despite the country's relatively low population (24 million, compared to the first- and second-largest markets of the UK and Canada at 64 million and 35 million, respectively). More significantly, AJE statistics reveal strong growth in the number of Australians visiting the AJE website. Indeed, in the first half of 2015, the number of new Australian users visiting the AJE website — that is, users who had never visited before — was “in the six figure range” (Ziad Ramley, Online Analyst, Al Jazeera English, personal communication, July 14, 2015).

This growth is even more significant when paired with the fact that about 80% of Australian sessions on the AJE website are organic, as opposed to referrals from social media or other websites — it is not unusual to see news websites with social media referrals in the 60%-80% of total traffic range. AJE Online Analyst, Ziad Ramley, agreed with the proposition that this metric indicates the vast majority of Australians who engage with AJE online do so deliberately and directly, and suggests a healthy degree of brand loyalty. While stories seemingly of interest to Australians include all regions of the world, stories about Australia are particularly popular with Australians. Ramley (personal communication, July 14, 2015) says that “when a country comes to us for news about their own region, or their own internal matters [it is a] metric of success.”

Al Jazeera English’s ‘moment’

The reciprocal broadcast agreements between Al Jazeera and the Australian public broadcasters were implemented with fortuitous timing for AJE. A slew of major news stories at around the same time as the signing of those agreements, and in the months afterwards, helped to drive Al Jazeera’s brand recognition in Australia at exactly the time more Australians were being exposed to the network’s content. Hasan Patel (personal communication, July 1, 2015) identified a period between late 2010 when Qatar won the right to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, and late October, 2011, when Qaddafi fell in Libya, during which time Al Jazeera’s coverage of major news stories drew the world’s attention to what he called the “phenomenon of Al Jazeera”. In Australia, the plight of Australian AJE journalist Peter Greste, arrested and jailed in Egypt, ensured that Al Jazeera remained at the forefront of people’s consciousness well beyond 2011.

Key among those major news stories covered by Al Jazeera were the protests and uprisings of the so-called “Arab Spring”, but

principally the Egyptian demonstrations of early-2011. That period of a few weeks culminating with the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is often referred to as AJE's "moment" in reference to CNN's so-called "Gulf War moment" during the early 1990's. The concept of a news media "moment" describes a turning point in a media organisation's fortunes driven by coverage of a major news event.

While AJE's Egyptian Revolution moment is not directly responsible for the channel's success in Australia, it was certainly a major contributing factor. And in turn, these big news events, combined with the reciprocal broadcast agreements with the public broadcasters, helped to drive growth for Al Jazeera English's digital offerings.

Al Jazeera's reception in Australia

Unlike in countries such as the USA (Youmans 2012), there has never been a widespread anti-Al Jazeera mood among the Australian public. However, there have certainly been pockets of suspicion of the network based on the Western narrative around the Arab broadcast since the 9/11 attacks and subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. For example, the Head of telecommunications company TransACT, Ivan Slavich, was quick to reassure potential viewers that he had vetted the channel when that company added AJE to its IPTV service: "I certainly asked questions about ensuring there wasn't any inappropriate vision on the channel ... For example, I didn't want a channel that showed beheadings or anything like that and they ensured [sic] me that was not what the channel showed" (ABC News 2006).

My research into Al Jazeera's reception in Australia has focused on four areas: 1) how Australian audiences regard the network's presence in Australia; 2) how commentators in Australia regard the network's presence in the country; and 3) how staff at the public broadcasters regard the network as a source.

The audience

My research into Australian audiences' reaction to Al Jazeera in Australia was limited to reviewing formal and informal feedback to the public broadcasters. As a result, this is an area ripe for further research. Nevertheless, the results represent a useful indication of the public mood about Al Jazeera.

Staff at the ABC and SBS told me that they receive no more or fewer complaints about AJE than they do regarding other partner broadcasters. Gaven Morris (personal communication, October 24, 2013) said the ABC received some negative feedback about the network's use of AJE content when *ABC News24* launched, although he thinks it was "more a misunderstanding about what Al Jazeera was ... [there were] misconceptions [among the audience] that [Al Jazeera] was Terror TV." He says there have been no substantive complaints about specific content, only a small number of generic comments wondering "what on earth is the ABC doing partnering with an Arab broadcaster?" *ABC News24*'s Tony Hill (personal communication, October 24, 2013) said the channel has had "occasional but quite rare comment as to why are you using Al Jazeera [but] in the general run of complaints we get it doesn't stand out at all." *ABC NewsRadio*'s Helen Thomas (personal communication, July 4, 2014) says she is only aware of anecdotal feedback about AJE on *ABC NewsRadio* and it is all positive.

Audience communication data received by SBS from the beginning of its partnership with AJE to the end of 2013 includes 53 items referring to Al Jazeera. Of the 53, 40 referred to AJE's editorial content or a general sentiment regarding the channel (the others addressed unrelated matters). 27 of those 40 items were generally positive while 13 were generally negative. Two examples of the positive comments are typical:

"I want to congratulate SBS for deciding to broadcast one of the very best of news sources on free to air TV. Thank you for your good choice."

“Al Jazeera - Thank you so much for adding this to your WorldWatch schedule. I find it very interesting. It covers lots of news we don’t get elsewhere ...”

However, the following comment reflects an opposite view:

“Why do we have this news on the Australia TV? Did you know that Al Jazeera news supported by terrorist [sic]!”

SBS has also conducted focus groups throughout Australia over the years, and SBS’s Andrew Clarke (personal communication, May 19, 2014) said Al Jazeera’s positive name recognition has increased and seems even to have eclipsed CNN as one of the focus group participants’ preferred sources of news.

Commentators

By far the greatest pushback against Al Jazeera’s presence in Australia, and in particular its partnerships with the Australian public broadcasters, has come from a small but vocal group of prominent commentators.

The first major instance of critical commentary occurred in 2011 when US President Obama announced the capture and killing of Osama bin Laden. As the news broke, the ABC switched for a period of time to Al Jazeera English’s output. *The Australian* newspaper’s then-media columnist, Caroline Overington declared that “[i]n one segment on ABC1 [the name at the time of the ABC’s flagship free-to-air channel], courtesy of al-Jazeera, bin Laden was being described as a ‘hero’ to some in the Arab world” (Overington 2011a). The next day, after seeking comment from the ABC, Overington reported incredulously that AJE was selected by the ABC for rebroadcast by choice, rather than by necessity (Overington 2011b).

In early 2015, in the wake of the attacks on French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, leaked internal AJE emails revealed disagreement between some editorial staff about how to cover the incident (Bordelon 2015). Associate editor of *The Australian*, Chris

Kenny, tweeted that AJE had engaged in “propaganda” (Kenny, 2015a) and “[a]pologia for terrorists” (Kenny, 2015b), declaring it “a disgrace” that the ABC “outsource[s]” to AJE (Kenny, 2015c). *Herald Sun* newspaper columnist, Rita Panahi, was similarly incensed that the ABC used AJE as a source for reporting (Panahi, 2015). *The Australian’s* political reporter, Sarah Martin, under the headline “ABC gets pasting after Al Jazeera boss’s attack”, wrote that “The ABC has defended using Qatari-based news service Al Jazeera for its coverage of the Paris terror attacks, after leaked emails revealed the network had denounced the satirical magazine at the centre of the violence.” The piece drew heavily on a statement by federal Member of Parliament Michael Danby, in which he said “the Qatari political elite seem to be batting for the other side” and that “the ABC should consider the implications” (Martin 2015).

The most consistent critic of Al Jazeera in Australia has been high profile blogger, newspaper columnist and television host Andrew Bolt. After the bin Laden controversy, Bolt asked rhetorically, “What on earth is the ABC’s agenda?” (Bolt 2011). In 2014, during the conflict between Israel and Hamas, he again took aim at the relationship between AJE and the ABC, writing at his blog: “Of all the broadcasters in all the world, the ABC chooses al Jazeera to broadcast into Australia on its taxpayer-funded facilities, twice a day, every day. We need the Doha regime’s broadcaster to interpret world politics to us? ... Get it off. Or let’s have the ABC also donate two hours a day to a news service from Israel” (Bolt 2014).

A few days later on Bolt’s television program, *The Bolt Report*, guest Rowan Dean, editor of *The Spectator Australia*, expanded on this theme:

“... the whole thrust of Al Jazeera is ‘bad Israel’, you know ‘evil Israel’, ‘down on the poor Palestinians’ and ‘killing them mercilessly’, ‘war crimes’ and all the rest of it ... So, what the ABC are doing presenting us with two hours a day of Al Jazeera, they’re

actually presenting the propaganda from the same people who are behind a lot of what Hamas is doing ... as a taxpayer I'm absolutely offended that they're doing this. I don't mind them showing whatever they want to show, but they should be showing some kind of balance from the Israeli point of view. Even within the Israeli media you will find all sorts of diverse points of view, but not from Al Jazeera where you'll only get the one anti-Israeli point of view." (Dean 2014).

However, apart from a relatively small number of people agreeing with these commentators' sentiments in tweets and website comments, this criticism seems not to have translated into widespread opposition to Al Jazeera amongst the general population.

The public broadcasters

Regarding editorial and managerial staff at the ABC and SBS, my research found that, generally speaking, employees of the public broadcaster are very positive about Al Jazeera and their ability to draw on its content.

Helen Thomas (personal communication, July 4, 2014), for example, said AJE provides a "different and strong perspective [which] I think is imperative, and ever-increasingly imperative in the overall reporting of news around the world, but particularly the Middle East." She also argued that *ABC NewsRadio* staff love having access to AJE because it "adds to the journalistic strength, our editorial strength overall, and they love [being able to] work with that." *ABC NewsRadio* producer and presenter, Mark Tamhane (personal communication, August 4, 2014) agreed, saying that AJE has good correspondents and produces "terrific" stories that bring a different perspective to other broadcasters, and that AJE packages are well-written and "more thoughtful". *SBS World News* Executive Producer Andrew Clarke (personal communication, May 19, 2014) said AJE is good at providing background on a story and getting into areas that its competitors do not, such as Africa and South America.

However, a couple of editorial staff conceded that they are sometimes cautious about using AJE content, suggesting that they will only select stories after assessing them for “balance and accuracy” (personal communication, Michael Reid, Executive Producer, *ABC News24*, August 5, 2014), with particular attention paid to stories from the Middle East where network biases are believed be more likely to manifest (personal communication, David Coady, Shift Leader, *ABC News24*, August 5, 2014).

Al Jazeera’s impact in Australia

When it comes to the field of broadcast television news in Australia, the dominance of the free-to-air networks and of Foxtel’s in-house Sky News Australia channel are undisputed, and it is unlikely that any of these outlets were troubled by Al Jazeera’s arrival in Australia. AJA and AJE are only available on Australian television sets as just another pair of foreign news channels buried amongst hundreds of choices on subscription and satellite TV services, and AJE is rebroadcast for a dozen or so (mostly overnight) hours per week on the public broadcasters’ airwaves. As demonstrated, the number of Australians tuning into Al Jazeera via these distributions channels is low, and it is extremely unlikely that existing news services’ audiences are significantly cannibalised.

However, to truly understand Al Jazeera’s effect on the Australian broadcast news media market, it is necessary to go beyond simple metrics of ratings and audience share. As explained in this chapter, the main way that Australians consume Al Jazeera on their televisions is when the English channel’s output is sliced, diced and incorporated into the public broadcasters’ news bulletins. In effect, Al Jazeera is filling a hole in Australian news production as ever-tightening budgets mean that domestic news organisations have to rely more and more on third parties for international news content. Indeed, AJE is playing a *de facto* agency role for the public

broadcasters, alongside traditional agencies such as AP and Reuters, and other foreign broadcasting partners such as the BBC.

There has been much discussion in the literature about whether or not Al Jazeera may serve to facilitate a contra-flow of information from global south to global north (see, for example, Boyd-Barrett and Boyd-Barrett 2010; Figenschou 2014; Thussu 2007; Rai and Cottle 2010). This chapter is not the place for such a debate, other than to note that in playing this pseudo-agency role for the Australian public broadcasters, Al Jazeera is influencing those broadcasters' news services in terms of story selection, views canvassed, and the like. Thus, Al Jazeera's editorial policies and practices can certainly be said to be influencing the Australian news industry.

Online, along with a plethora of other foreign news outlets, Al Jazeera's continued provision of high quality and, most importantly, *free* news content will continue to undermine domestic news organisations' efforts to build sustainable business models around international news content. However, having said that, most Australian news organisations have largely abandoned the international news field, relying significantly or exclusively on secondary content from partners and news agencies. Healthy online growth for AJE in Australia points to a bright future for the network in this country as broadcast distribution continues to lose ground to digital, on-demand distribution, however, it is hard to say how this may or may not come at the expense of other news services.

Conclusion

Al Jazeera's entry into Australia was hobbled by the unique nature of Australia's media market which presents a structural hurdle for prospective new entrants. As a result, Al Jazeera has pursued a non-conventional expansion strategy in Australia where its partnerships with the Australian public broadcasters are the main vehicle through which Australians are exposed to Al Jazeera content.

The ABC and SBS's use of AJE news content confers legitimacy upon the Arab broadcaster by its association with the trusted Australian public broadcasters, and combined with the attention AJE attracted by its coverage of major news events such as the Egyptian Revolution, the brand awareness created by these partnerships has helped to drive online growth for AJE in Australia. In 2016, Al Jazeera is popular with Australians as evidenced by feedback to the public broadcasters and online metrics, and is well-regarded by editorial staff at the public broadcasters. Some critical reaction from media commentators has not resulted in any noticeable opposition on a broader scale amongst the Australian public.

Al Jazeera's impact on local news organisations can be characterised as both positive and negative: for the public broadcasters especially, AJE helps to fill the gap left by shrinking news budgets and foreign bureau networks; but by offering free news content considered by many Australian consumers to be high quality, Al Jazeera undermines the efforts of domestic news organisations to put together a business model in an increasingly competitive news market.

Ultimately, Al Jazeera's quest for audience growth is motivated by the continued support of the network's primary benefactor. Seen through this lens, there is no doubt that Al Jazeera's expansion in Australia has not only increased the number of people who access its content and regard it positively, but has helped to further the foreign policy aims of the state of Qatar.

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Part VI

The Future of Al Jazeera and the Arab Media

The Future of Al Jazeera and Arab News Media

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The future of Arab news media will be shaped by many of the same factors that have influenced the development of Al Jazeera during the past twenty years, but accentuated by dramatic political and technological changes. Similarly, the Arab news audience will continue to evolve in ways related to Al Jazeera's role in shaping information consumption by the Arab public, but also made more complex by changes in the journalistic and political environments.

This chapter views post-Arab Spring Al Jazeera as necessarily adapting to changes within the Middle East. While the region's politics were thrown into turmoil by the uprisings of 2011 - uprisings of which the final outcomes are yet to be known - the Arab public's hunger for news has continued to grow. In addition to the increased intensity of regional politics, Al Jazeera also confronts profound advances in news access and delivery that change its societal role and its capacity for providing information.

Building on the past

The past is prologue; the history and likely future of Al Jazeera and the Arab news audience are parts of a continuum that dates back at least as far as Gamal Abdel Nasser's radio program *The Voice of*

the Arabs, which began in 1953. Then and for decades afterwards, a forceful pan-Arab news voice was an anomaly. For believable, well produced news programming, many Arabs found themselves listening to Western voices, such as those of the BBC and later CNN. It was not until Al Jazeera arrived in 1996 that Arabs had their own newscasts that were as lively and had the same production values as those from the West. Most important about Al Jazeera's rise was that finally Arabs could see news about the events that shaped their lives through Arab eyes, with reporting grounded in Arab culture and Arab political sentiments. This was revolutionary in terms of geopolitics as well as journalism.

When assessing the likely future of Arab news media, it is important to remember how important Al Jazeera has been in pioneering the delivery of truly *Arab* news to Arab audiences. During the past twenty years, many of the advances in Arab broadcast news are at least partly attributable to Al Jazeera. Even Al Jazeera's competitors have found their journalistic and political environment built upon foundation stones laid by Al Jazeera - everything from controversial talk shows, to lavish sets, to aggressive reporting.

This is not to say that Al Jazeera is a paragon that has had no missteps. It has been embroiled in controversies about the extent of its journalistic independence and political favoritism, and the channel's competitors have been able to take advantage of these disputes. Its expansion into new markets has not always gone smoothly, and questions have been raised about its global aspirations. And, like other television companies, Al Jazeera has had to face the challenges of adapting to new technologies, a costly and uncertain process.

These are all factors that will influence not only the future of Al Jazeera, but also of all other Arab news organizations. The next twenty years promise to be at least as tumultuous as the past two decades.

Al Jazeera in the world

Al Jazeera has always been more than a Qatari or exclusively Arab phenomenon. Its largest audience (for its Arabic channel) has always been within the Arab world, but since its inception, and particularly as it has grown in reach and influence, it has been monitored by governments and other interested parties elsewhere who seek to take the political temperature of the Middle East. Further, it is seen as a vehicle for the West to reach Arab publics. Particularly when Al Jazeera stood alone as a pan-Arab satellite channel, Western policymakers came to recognize that reports that would be considered politically incorrect in much of the West were accurate reflections of Arab opinion.

During the *Intifada* (Palestinian Apprising) of 2000, Al Jazeera's coverage reflected Arab fury at being, as Gilles Kepel observed, "the collective target of a humiliation campaign inflicted by Israel, in collusion with the United States and its Western allies" (Kepel 2004: 20). During the early stages of the American-led war in Iraq, U.S. officials tried to use Al Jazeera to make their case for the conflict, but just appearing on Al Jazeera broadcasts did not assure a warm reception from Arab audiences. A television talking head cannot offset a policy that was widely despised. As R.S. Zaharna noted, this U.S. effort amounted to "a dance of intercultural miscommunication" (Zaharna 2005: 200).

More frequent than such attempts to share Al Jazeera's credibility were criticisms and efforts to undermine the channel, often emanating from the highest levels of the U.S. government. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz accused Al Jazeera of "very biased reporting" that was "inciting violence against our troops" in Iraq (Timms 2003). Al Jazeera saw matters differently. The senior editor of the Al Jazeera website, Faisal Bodi, wrote, "Of all the major global networks, Al Jazeera has been alone in proceeding from the premise that this war should be viewed as an illegal enterprise" (Bodi 2003).

This kind of debate is relevant to the future because it illustrates Al Jazeera's willingness to stand outside the global news mainstream and tie its reporting to the Arab identity. Along with other popular channels such as Al Arabiya, Al Jazeera is seen as representing a significant part of the spectrum of Arab political thinking. As such, these and other Arab broadcasters are valuable reservoirs of open-source information for governments, scholars, and others. Although the Arab media universe is more crowded today than it was in the past, and is certain become more crowded still, Al Jazeera continues to be a barometer that reflects conditions in parts of the Arab political world.

In addition to the journalistic challenges presented by the beginnings of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the first decade of the new century saw technological advances that began to reshape news delivery by Al Jazeera and other Arab media companies (as well as other media organizations around the globe). When Al Jazeera was born in 1996, effects of the rise of the internet were difficult to predict. As it turns out, these effects have been more revolutionary than any political movement.

Some basic statistics provide an indication of how profound the changes have been. At the end of 2000, there were 450,000 Egyptians with internet access. As of June 2016, there were more than 33 million. In Tunisia, the numbers are 100,000 and 5.4 million. In Saudi Arabia, 200,000 and 18.3 million. Overall, in the Middle East, internet use grew by nearly 4,000 percent between 2000 and mid-2016 (De Argaez 2016).

The growth rate is impressive, but what will it mean for the future of Al Jazeera and Arab media collectively? First, the growth is certain to continue; in years to come, nearly universal connectivity in most parts of the world will become reality. Tools to connect, such as smartphones, will become much less expensive. With this connectivity will come even greater changes in news consumption

habits and in what people do with the information they can access. Al Jazeera was among those news organizations quick to expand offerings to include online products, but understanding audience preferences remains an evolving process. (More about this below.)

As it has kept up with new technologies, Al Jazeera has also expanded its global reach through broadcasts in various languages. Al Jazeera Balkans and Al Jazeera Turk illustrate the parent company's complex agenda. It goes into new markets where it believes it can capture enough market share to make money, but it also is aiming, at least in part, for largely Muslim audiences outside the Arab world that might develop at least "virtual" ties to Qatar.

Similarly, although reaching a far more diverse audience, Al Jazeera English carries the company's brand to the many countries where there is an audience for news in English, the most widely spoken language in the world. Although many people knew *about* Al Jazeera because of the prominence of the Arabic channel, Al Jazeera English has allowed millions to become actual consumers of Al Jazeera's news product. Based on the main Al Jazeera campus in Doha, Al Jazeera English has its own newsroom and editorial staff, and its content is less Middle East-centric than the reporting of the Arabic channel. It has distinguished itself among other satellite channels by emphasizing reporting from the "global South," parts of the world often neglected by many major news organizations. Because it can tap into the resources of the overall Al Jazeera news operation, it also became a go-to source for information about major happenings in the Middle East. During the first weeks of the Arab uprisings of 2011, traffic to the channel's live online stream increased 2,500 percent, with 60 percent of that coming from the United States (Burman 2011). As of 2016, Al Jazeera English could reach 220 million households in more than 100 countries (Al Jazeera.com).

Viewers of global satellite news channels appear to value the perspective of a Middle East-based broadcaster and appreciate the

breadth of coverage provided by Al Jazeera English. But while Al Jazeera English may be considered a success, that was not the case for Al Jazeera America. This newcomer to the U.S. market won praise for its journalism but found it could not build a sizable audience. With so many channels available, any new offering has little chance of gaining traction with the U.S. audience unless it fills a unique niche. Al Jazeera America survived for less than three years.

The world turned upside down

When a young Tunisian, Mohamed Bouazizi, killed himself out of frustration with a political system that gave him only dismal personal prospects, he set off a series of events that shook the Middle East like a massive earthquake. The political landscape still quivers, as do the region's news organizations.

Al Jazeera was at the center of this "Arab spring," delivering news to Arabs even when their governments blocked national television channels from reporting about the upheavals. Although much was made about the impact of social media (such as references to "the Facebook revolution"), satellite television was a bigger factor because it was accessible to far more people in the Middle East in 2011 than was internet-based communication (Seib, 2012: 41-64).

These were heady times for those who hoped that old autocracy would give way to new democracy. But with the exception of Tunisia, political reform has stalled or failed outright. Harsh governments have become harsher in Egypt and Bahrain; horrific civil wars have ripped apart Syria, Libya, and Yemen; Iraq struggles to hold itself together; and massive refugee flows threaten the economic stability of Jordan and Lebanon.

In the midst of all this is Al Jazeera, which has not been immune to the anger-infused politics of the post-2011 Arab world. With passions so high, covering the news is not perceived as a neutral function, and Al Jazeera has found itself assailed by those who

consider the channel and the government of Qatar to have become disruptive partisans. Debate about these matters will continue indefinitely, but over the long term, from Al Jazeera's standpoint, changes in how information is delivered and consumed will be at least as important as political change.

Although political reform may have faltered in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, the transformation of media use has rushed forward. At the heart of this is internet access. As noted above, the growth rate of internet use in Arab countries has been extraordinary, and it is certain to accelerate as access improves and costs decrease for smartphones and other devices.

Although Al Jazeera and some other Arab media organizations anticipated that this growth would happen over time, none expected the increase in the public's reliance on new media to be so fast and pervasive. Part of this is generational. More than 28 percent of the Middle East's population is between the ages of 15 and 29, meaning about 100 million young people (Youthpolicy.or). These are the prime users of new media, and it stands to reason that the part of the population that is even younger will grow up even more dependent on these media. This is not a fad; it is a transformation of lifestyle that is reshaping society.

Most news organizations, including Al Jazeera, recognized that without an online presence their survival would be unlikely. Al Jazeera created aljazeera.net at the outset of this new era. But just "being online" is not enough. News consumers' preferences shift frequently, and staying ahead of the curve requires technological adaptability and astute demographic analysis. Consider the rise of social media.

In 2006, when Al Jazeera was celebrating its tenth birthday and Al Jazeera English was being born, social media were virtually nonexistent. But since then, we have seen the emergence of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and many other social media companies. Some such as

Facebook, with almost 1.5 billion followers, appeal to a mass audience, while many others search for comfortable niches. Some of these niches are filled with specialized news reportage that might be grounded in a particular political or religious outlook.

Even more important is the sense of empowerment that social media provide to their users. The nature of these media is such that news consumers can talk back to news providers and can converse with one another. The former means that news organizations must *listen* to the public and be responsive. Among other matters, this changes the work environment because reporters, for example, will be responsible for replying to emails and other messages about their work, and a controversial story might generate a mountain of electronic correspondence. This is a huge step beyond the volume of “letters to the editor” that used to trickle in to news organizations. As for online discourse, the power of the tweet to exponentially expand the audience for a news story or other content is immeasurable, as the mathematics of a retweeting network illustrate.

This media-enabled empowerment offsets the sense of being shut out by non-democratic governments. As some of the 2011 protestors found, communities of interest can be built through social media and political organizing can be faster and safer than in the past. This alters the political dynamics as well as the journalistic standards that affect how news professionals do their jobs. Politics can become far more highly charged when so much communication is taking place.

The downside to all this is that those who want to disrupt society in negative ways can use new media to take advantage of political volatility. The so-called Islamic State (IS) has shown itself to be exceptionally adept at using social media to recruit, fundraise, and support its combat operations. The use of these media tools by IS and others has become a subject for news coverage in itself, presenting yet another challenge to media organizations that must diversify their arrays of correspondents in order to ensure that they have staff with

the skill-sets needed for such coverage. Further, extremist organizations such as IS and Al Qaeda have used social media and other internet-based tools to be disseminators of “news” themselves. IS, for instance, produces a slick online magazine, *Dabiq*, to raise its visibility and attract followers.

In the midst of this increasingly crowded media environment, Al Jazeera and other news organizations find themselves competing not just with established journalistic enterprises, but also with pseudo-journalists whose reporting is uniformly self-serving and often bears little relation to the truth. The internet is democratic in the extreme; just about anyone can jump online, declare herself or himself to be a “journalist,” and distribute information that if believable or weird enough could reach a vast audience within moments. (A non-journalism example: the 2012 *Innocence of Muslims* video that defamed the Prophet Mohammed. It was supposedly a trailer for an American-made movie, but the movie didn’t really exist as such. Nevertheless, once online, the video spread rapidly and widely and led to violent anti-American protests in Cairo, Sana’a, Tunis, and elsewhere.)

One of most significant changes in journalistic practices that emerged from the 2011 uprisings was the use of social media content as a source for traditional news organizations’ reporting. Al Jazeera correspondents were barred by the regime of Zine El Abedine Ben Ali from covering events in Tunisia on site, but as Mohamed Zayani has noted, Al Jazeera’s coverage of the Tunisian revolt “relied almost exclusively on sources from the social Web, most notably Facebook.” Zayani also observed, “While social media captured the unfolding of events and provided a constant stream of images, videos, reactions, and statements, transnational media like Al Jazeera wove the material into a powerful and compelling narrative that brought together people’s voices, activists’ accounts, political commentary, and civil society perspectives” (Zayani 2015: 189).

To exaggerate slightly, anyone with a mobile phone can be an Al Jazeera correspondent, collecting information, including video, and sending it to the broadcaster. Social media users, with their disparate perspectives, can collectively provide multi-faceted portrayals of events that new organizations such as Al Jazeera can use as information sources for their own coverage. Zayani noted that Al Jazeera contributed to this process by posting online those reports that originated with Facebook material and then sharing those posts on Facebook. “That feedback loop,” wrote Zayani, “energized the protestors” and created a de facto partnership between citizen activists and professional journalists.¹

This example illustrates how the definition of “news media” is expanding beyond the traditional professional realm and is now incorporating online venues. Al Jazeera was among the first to systematize a response to this by collecting, vetting, and then disseminating online “reporting” from the public and featuring it on its own broadcasts and website.

The events of 2011 changed politics in the Arab world in ways that will have aftereffects for years to come. No less profound were the changes in the ways that information was gathered and disseminated. All these matters will be factors in shaping Al Jazeera’s future.

Moving into tomorrow

For roughly 50 years, television was the dominant news medium in much of the world. Its presence changed the way news was reported and consumed, and the public’s living-rooms were home to vivid depictions of everything from politics and wars to soothing feature stories. As an instrument, the television set gradually became bigger and better, holding a central place - physically and socially - in millions of households. But will that continue forever, or is the television era receding into the past, with conventional broadcasting

to be replaced by even more internet-centric communication? Al Jazeera, like other broadcast news organizations must craft its answer carefully, not clinging too resolutely to the past but also not jumping too quickly into an uncertain future.

That future, however, is taking shape quickly, with new venues constantly appearing (and many of them also quickly disappearing). In mid-2016, news organizations covering the American political conventions leaned heavily on social media. The *Washington Post*, tweeted five times per hour and had a Twitter account dedicated to politics. The *Post* also used Snapchat, Facebook, and Facebook Live, as well as Genius, which allows crowdsourced annotation of news stories and speeches. Twitter and Facebook Live provided real-time feeds of convention sessions. Reporters used multiple platforms to tell their stories and linked the platforms, such as by doing an interview on Facebook Live and providing a link to that on Twitter and Facebook accounts (Lee 2016).

As more members of the news audience gravitate to these social media platforms, a news organization - whether the *Washington Post*, Al Jazeera, or any other - will need to constantly adjust its use of multiple venues to be where the news consumers are. Note that none of the new news sites are directly related to broadcast, but rather depend on online tools and, increasingly, on the assumption that their content will be accessed on mobile devices. Sitting in the living-room in front of a television set is becoming an obsolete habit.

While Al Jazeera and its kin are adjusting to the newest technologies, they also must pay attention to changes in how a geographically dispersed audience gets its news and sees the world. Of particular importance to Al Jazeera and other Arab media is the Arab diaspora. There has always been an Arab diaspora; Arabs can be found almost everywhere in the world. But, once again, technology has changed the old order. Christina Slade wrote: “News from the country of origin is no longer, as it used to be, months old, nor is it

mediated by others and shot through with nostalgic framing. Instead, it is immediate, aired in the country of origin and the host country at the same time. Where once diasporic communities gathered and shared news of the country of birth in physical spaces such as cafes, they now can share the mediated public sphere of the heritage country in digital cyberspace.” She cited a British Arab visiting Kenya who turned to Al Jazeera (Arabic) to get news, and noted that the “sense of belonging is no longer tied to a particular place but instead is created around an individual using a technology. For Arabic speakers, language is the key to home, and it is transnational” (Slade 2014).¹

The global reach of satellite television channels was important in this context, but now social media tighten ties even more between the Arab diaspora and Arab homelands. As access to these new media forms increases, so too do expectations rise about being “connected” to the civic life of those homelands, which means having ample access to news. This is a further reason for Al Jazeera and other Arab media to do whatever they must to be available to news consumers who use a diverse range of media tools. The audience has more options and will go elsewhere if certain information providers are not available on a wide range of platforms.

More broadly, all news purveyors must adapt to information consumers’ changing demands. During Al Jazeera’s first years, the channel - like other broadcasters around the world - could tell the audience: “Here are the times we will present the news. Take it or leave it.” For the most part the viewers conformed their schedules to that of the broadcasters. Today, if early in the morning or late at night the news consumer wants information and clicks on her or his mobile phone app to get it, it had better be available instantly or that person will go elsewhere. Further, if a news item is controversial or just interesting, it can take on a life of its own as a news consumer or the news organization itself sends it racing through social media networks.

This is a “big bang” theory of information dissemination. Everything from media organizations’ finances to individual journalists’ duties will be increasingly affected by this explosive transformation.

For Al Jazeera, matters are even more complicated because of the political influence it exerts, attributable to its relationship with the government of Qatar. The situation in Libya in 2011 illustrates this. As civil war wracked Libya during the Arab Spring, Qatar became a principal backer of anti-Qaddafi rebels in Libya, providing financial, humanitarian, and military aid. Al Jazeera was granted exclusive frontline reporting access and rebel leaders issued many of their public statements through the channel. Qatar also helped the rebels establish their own television station. Funding for the channel came primarily from a wealthy Libyan expatriate, while Qatar made available the facilities and technical staff of one of its local channels. Qatar also offered to buy and export oil produced in rebel-held Libyan territory, providing a revenue stream for the insurgents. In the longer term, Qatar expected to play a significant role in managing Libya’s oil and gas concessions if the rebels it backed prevailed. Qatar’s Emir was also winning the gratitude of the NATO nations involved in the military campaign against Qaddafi, and was building his credentials as an Arab Spring supporter without engaging in reforms at home (Stephen, Tuttle, and Alexander 2011; Hounshell 2011).

This case illustrates how the Qatari government and Al Jazeera may move in tandem to advance their joint public diplomacy goals. Of Qatar’s many efforts to expand its role on the world stage, Al Jazeera has remained the most visible actor, and the tone of the channel’s coverage remains reliably in synch with that of its royal Qatari sponsors. Shawn Powers and Eytan Gilboa observed: “First, Al Jazeera is not merely a transnational media organization, but also a network that acts and is treated as a powerful actor in international

politics....Second, the network has adopted a political agenda relating both to the internal matters of the Arab world and to the external affairs of the rest of the world, primarily the West....Third, related to its status as an international political actor facing severe criticism from both inside and outside the Middle East, Al Jazeera has engaged in a widespread and thorough communications campaign to overcome the many controversies that it has been involved in” (Powers and Gilboa 2007: 74-5).

This is an instance of dual public diplomacies, with a government and a news organization reaching out to publics in sometime joint and sometimes distinct efforts but with shared purpose and linked agendas. Many nations use broadcasting as a public diplomacy tool - Great Britain’s BBC and Russia’s RT, for example - but the Qatar-Al Jazeera model stands out because the broadcaster maintains a separate public identity while it uses information as a tool in regional politics and pursues a public diplomacy strategy of its own (Seib 2012: 117-18).

Qatar’s public diplomacy assets extend far beyond Al Jazeera. It built Education City, home to branches of American and other universities. It has created world-class museums and other cultural offerings. It attracted the 2022 FIFA World Cup as well as other sports events. It hosts numerous conferences and negotiating sessions that address an array of global issues. The tiny country’s vast wealth allows it to do these things and more. Al Jazeera’s managers know that the channel must adjust to coexist with this larger public diplomacy enterprise.

“Adjust” is the crucial word when considering the many aspects of Al Jazeera’s future. Some media professionals and scholars would argue that the “Al Jazeera era” is over, that the mix of tumultuous regional politics and dramatic changes in technology and information consumption have ended the journalistic-political hegemony of sorts that Al Jazeera once enjoyed.

It is true that the Arab media scene is far more crowded than it was when Al Jazeera first went on the air in 1996. Success breeds imitators and competitors, and Al Jazeera's early market dominance was certain to gradually be reduced. Al Arabiya and other satellite channels found their own constituencies within the Arab audience, and the playing field became much closer to being level.

As this process took place, regional politics - always a factor in the Arab media industries - shaped audience expectations and sensitivities. When public militancy reached its peak in 2011, many Arabs expected their media outlets to match their own political passions. This will continue to be a test for Arab media: to what extent can a news organization be responsive to the public's political interests without betraying journalistic commitment to detached, even-handed coverage? Credibility, and thus audience loyalty, will depend on how Al Jazeera and other Arab news organizations are perceived to be meeting this test.

Political upheaval, however, has been less significant than the changes related to new media technologies. If Al Jazeera and other Arab media companies are to remain relevant, they must transform themselves fully, adopting a "broadcasting-plus" approach to the news business. The public is no longer merely an "audience," but rather is a partner in the new - and still evolving - processes of information gathering and dissemination. Think of how many people now go to their mobile phone, tablet, or laptop rather than their television when they want to check on news stories.

That is the environment in which the future of Al Jazeera will be shaped. To succeed, or even just survive, in that environment, Al Jazeera and other news organizations must make difficult choices about deemphasizing broadcasting and shifting their focus to social media...and then to whatever comes next.

Challenging decisions - journalistic, financial, and political - lie ahead.

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A New Era of Public Broadcasting in the Arab World

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Introduction

Since its launch, al Jazeera Arabic channel has made headlines in western journalism and has become the most studied news network in western and Arab academia. Scholars have called it “maverick”, a creator of a “new public sphere”, and a site for “democratization” in the Arab region. However, the channel has faced many challenges since the beginning of the recent Arab uprisings. In addition to the impact of the regional and global economic downturn on the channel’s resources, al Jazeera Arabic channel faced wide criticism particularly in the countries of uprisings, such as Egypt and Libya.

In this chapter, I argue that al Jazeera Arabic has managed to establish a brand which has uniquely distinguished it from its competitors in the region. However, the alleged decline in its viewership in the recent years must be seen in the specific context of Arab mediascape where media and politics are unremittingly intertwined, making it often difficult for news media to achieve full professional independence. Instead of creating rival channels, media investors and professionals should envisage new avenues for collaboration between pan-Arab outlets and local or community media.

I begin with a review of the factors that helped give Al Jazeera a leading position in the pan-Arab news market then I review some of the accusations targeting the outlet following the recent uprisings. In the subsequent section, I assess the potential of Al Jazeera, and other pan-Arab outlets, to function as a new public sphere, in lieu of a proper public service broadcaster and in a region where media are so deeply entangled with politics. Finally, I suggest the way forward based on a collaboration that brings together regional pan-Arab outlets with local media.

A new public service?

Launched in 1996 as the first all-news Arabic channel in the region, Al Jazeera Arabic quickly established itself as a professional Arabic network competing with international brands like BBC Arabic. Based in Qatar, Al Jazeera attracted international attention particularly since the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent war in Afghanistan. The success of Al Jazeera spurred competition in the then stagnant pan-Arab news market with the launch of al-Arabiya satellite channel in 2003 by the Middle East Broadcasting Center as the main rival to Al Jazeera. The number of news channels has since ballooned and there are now well over 66 news networks competing for eyeballs and advertising, most of which are free to watch. The combination of Gulf wealth and a common written-form of the Arabic language mean there might be money to be made in the news business (Mellor 2015). The Saudis have been the biggest players, and with the country forbidding independent media at home, many Saudi conglomerates began pouring money into creating news outlets in more liberal markets, first in London and later in Dubai. Rigid media laws and self-censorship, however, have remained the norm across the region, which means that every news channel needs a patron state to survive and that government influence is evident in coverage throughout the region (Mellor 2015).

The new satellite channels can be characterized by the fact that they address Arab audiences not only in the region but they also reach a wider audience among Arabs in Europe and the Americas (Ghareeb 2000). Al-Jazeera Arabic kept its place as the leading news provider in the region and one of the most preferred news providers for Arab Diaspora communities who have been the first beneficiaries of transnational media whether satellite television or pan-Arab newspapers. Thus, Al Jazeera Arabic, thanks to its global reach, has achieved a global reach in metropolitan cities like London, allowing the reintegration of Arab Diaspora communities into Arab affairs (Miladi 2006). Giving voice to political opposition groups, questioning Israeli spokespersons on screen, and debating controversial political and social issues, Al Jazeera Arabic provided a new diet for Arab viewers who were hungry for “new about their lives that they could trust and in which they could claim ownership. For too long they needed to rely on the BBC, CNN, or other non-Arab information sources to tell them what was happening or else they were dependent on new programming tightly controlled by Arab governments” (Seib 2011; 20).

Al-Jazeera has had three main, important advantages that distinguish it from other regional players: financial support, the newest technology, and a reasonable amount of journalistic freedom (Ghareeb 2000). In addition, the network hired several anchors and experts with previous experience at international networks such as the CNN and BBC, and it provided new genres including political talk shows modelled on the American format, such as “The Opposite Direction” moulded after “Crossfire” programme. Aiming to reach even wider western audiences, Al Jazeera network introduced its English sister channel Al Jazeera English in 2006, although it was argued that Al Jazeera English coverage is starkly different from its Arabic sister outlet (Abdul-Mageed & Herring 2008). Later the network expanded to include other specialized channels such as Al

Jazeera Sport, Al Jazeera Documentary, Al Jazeera Mobile, Al Jazeera Mubasher. Following the Arab uprisings, Al Jazeera launched Al Jazeera Mubahser Misr focusing solely on Egyptian affairs. In 2013, the network launched Al Jazeera America after purchasing the US channel, The Current, but the new enterprise closed down this year (April 2016) after announcing that its business model was unsustainable in light of the economic challenges in the US media market. The network also justifies the closure by the increasing turn to new and social media as sources of news, spurring an expansion in Al Jazeera digital content and distribution services to include the US as well as other international market.

In fact, Al Jazeera was one of the pioneers in using digital media: It launched Aljazeera.net in 2001 as part of the Al-Jazeera group, which provides an extensive database of news and an archive of Arabic programs. Aljazeera.net won the 2008 Arab Journalism Award, an award established in Dubai in 2004. The rival channel, Al-Arabiya, based in Dubai, also launched a web service—Alarabiya.net—in 2004, after reviewing competitive sites in order to define the topics that interested young Arabs (Ayish & Mellor 2016; 25). Al-Jazeera English website won an Online Journalism Award from the Online News Association (ONA) for its coverage of the Egyptian revolution, bearing in mind that more than 70 percent of the traffic to its website originated from social media (Ayish & Mellor 2016; 56). Another example of social media integration into pan-Arab media functions is Al-Jazeera's Sharek (sharek.aljazeera.net), or "Share." The citizen journalism platform, modeled after CNN's iReport, was first launched in 2008 and has claimed more than seventy thousand video uploads from across the MENA region (Ayish & Mellor 2016; 68). The Al-Jazeera Transparency Unit (AJTU) was launched in January 2011 as the Arab world's version of "WikiLeaks" and "a platform [for] send[ing] documents, multimedia content or plain clues and pieces of evidence, for the newsroom to

consider using them in the editorial output” (Ayish & Mellor 2016; 144). The network has enhanced its audience engagement through developing interactive features to its online platform while inviting citizens to contribute with their user generated content and building an impressive network with bloggers and activists in several Arab countries (Duffy 2011).

All in all, Al Jazeera has undoubtedly invigorated the pan-Arab broadcasting market which encouraged the rise of a new generation of media-savvy well educated youth from the Gulf region (i.e. Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait). The opportunities provided to this new generation of Gulf media professionals and educated youth have contributed to creating a new sphere for this generation to express themselves. This development coupled with the increasing Qatari investment in new media platforms warrants our attention to the inevitable future role to be played by this Gulf generation. Moreover, Al Jazeera Arabic provided an alternative to the dominance of Saudi Arabia via its ownership of several satellite channels and pan-Arab newspapers, although Al Jazeera was argued to constitute an important element of the nation branding of Qatar as an emerging international player. For instance, it is argued that Qatar’s media strategy is part of an overall strategy of nation branding, crafting a new image of Qatar as an active participant on the political, cultural, and media scenes (Tamimi 2012). Having given Qatar a recognizable national brand, one strategic aim of the channel was therefore to enhance Qatar’s image and launch its new public diplomacy strategy (Seib 2011). After establishing Al Jazeera, Qatar abolished its Ministry of Information in a gesture that it is moving towards more transparency and free press, and in 2007 it partnered with Reporters without Borders to set up the Doha Centre for Media Freedom to defend journalists worldwide, thereby marketing itself as a host and haven of media freedom (Tamimi 2012; 87).

Numerous academic studies focused on Al Jazeera as a catalyst of politico-social reforms in the region and academic scholarship about the Arab media highlighted the network's impact not only on the regional but also global media scenes (for a detailed overview see Abdelmoula 2015). Positioning Al Jazeera within the regional Arab media landscape presented media scholars with a new paradox highlighting the acute need for a new paradigm to account for the specific media-state relationship to explain the possibility of democratic media operating under undemocratic regimes (Abdelmoula 2015). The network emerged as a credible alternative to local media, and was represented as a new form of "public service broadcasting" providing credible, professional information to empower Arab citizens; a service that is caught between the state-controlled media and commercial media, whose content is determined by authoritarian states or advertisers respectively. Such empowering service can be defined as a medium for "providing access to and participation in public life [...], promoting access to education and culture, developing knowledge, and fostering interactions among citizens" (Banerjee & Seneviratne 2005; 13). However, this begs the question whether it is possible to expect Al Jazeera to function as a public service provider promoting this interaction amongst Arab citizens in a region embroiled in political conflict.

The recent uprisings have provided a practical example of the difficult role of Al Jazeera as a new public sphere or a form of regional public service broadcaster, with many commentators accusing the network of taking sides in the ongoing conflicts. Undoubtedly, the recent Arab uprisings provided yet another opportunity for Al Jazeera to profile itself as an international news outlet with vast network of correspondents and reporters on the ground. With cameras transmitting live pictures 24/7 from Tahrir Square, Al Jazeera Arabic was perhaps the most important news source about the Egyptian Revolution, for instance. The channel's

website traffic also increased remarkably during the uprisings in tandem with the rising use of social and new media by Arabs on the ground. However, the channel found itself embroiled in the deep political tensions re-surfaced in the aftermath of the uprisings.

Entangled in the political web

Since its inception, Al Jazeera Arabic has been subjected to a lot of criticism; the US administration criticised the network's coverage of the 2001-war and the broadcasting of Bin Laden's tapes, while Arab regimes were irked by the network's frequent, daring reports on human rights violations in those countries resulting in the closure of several Al Jazeera offices in many Arab cities (Seib 2011).

The US accused Qatar of manipulating Al Jazeera content which contradicts the Arabian state's declared support for a free press, "The Qatari government claims to champion press freedom elsewhere, but generally does not tolerate it at home," commented the US embassy following the resignation of the French director of the Doha Centre for Media Freedom in June 2009 on the ground of restrictions on freedom to operate (cited in Booth 2010). Al-Jazeera was accused to be using the recent WikiLeaks documents on behalf of Qatar as a bargaining chip in foreign policy negotiations with the USA and it tended to adapt its coverage to suit this policy and cease critical coverage in return for concessions (Tamimi 2012; 84).

Furthermore, Following the toppling of Mubarak, Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr, which began broadcasting in Egypt in 2011, was shut down in 2013 on the ground that it did not obtain a legal license to operate in Egypt and that its discourse threatened the stability of Egypt (Abdulla 2014; 15). Many journalists of Al Jazeera were arrested by the Egyptian security forces including three from Al Jazeera English charged in what was known as the Marriott cell case, for operating from the Marriott hotel allegedly without permission from the authorities (Abdulla 2014; 22). Also, a recent study about Al

Jazeera (English and Arabic) network's coverage of the Libyan uprising in 2011 argues that national and foreign policy interests influence the coverage. The study compared Al Jazeera's coverage with that of the BBC (Arabic and World News) which is interesting because both host countries of the two networks, namely Qatar and the UK respectively, actively participated and propagated for NATO intervention in Libya. It concludes that the coverage in both networks were influenced by the foreign policy interests of the two nations, thereby strongly suggesting of the link between news agenda and the political contents (al-Nahed 2015).

According to Barakat (2016), Al Jazeera Arabic has contributed to changes on the ground in both Egypt and Libya during their uprisings in 2011 by providing a platform for intellectuals such as Azmy Bishara and Yousef al-Qaradawi, in conjunction with opposition figures from Egypt and Libya, in an attempt to delegitimise former Egyptian and Libyan regimes through intense framing processes. The role of Al Jazeera gained momentum due to the weak media engagement by local media in both Egypt and Libya, compared to Al Jazeera's extensive reporting and thorough analysis in diagnosing the situation in both countries and allowing intellectuals like Bishara to propose strategies to rectify the situation. Al-Jazeera played a new role, following the uprisings, which involves the deployment of media technologies in constructing those intellectuals' articulation of the political transformation and a new political reality in the region. In doing so, Al Jazeera emerges as a form of institutional intellectual, one that combines technology and resources with the ability to mediate and influence wide social strata, and one that serves as a counter hegemonic force in opposition to the despotic regimes (Barakat 2016).

It was also claimed that Al Jazeera's motto of the Opinion and Other Opinion was compromised in its religious programme *al-Sharia wal-Hayat* (Dabbous-Sensening 2006). Al-Jazeera was

criticized for its sympathy with the Brotherhood illustrated in the many interviews with Brotherhood highest echelon such as Khairat al-Shater, Mohamed Morsi and Mohamad Badie hosted by the veteran broadcaster, Ahmad Mansour, who himself was claimed to belong to the Brotherhood (al-Qassemi 2012). Several veteran journalists and anchors at Al Jazeera Arabic emphasised their social responsibility in giving a voice to the voiceless Muslims; for instance, Mohamad Krishan, presenter of the flagship programme *Revolution Talk*, defended Al Jazeera's seemingly positive stance towards the Brotherhood saying that the Islamists constituted a strong opposition movements in the Arab world and Al Jazeera was just doing its professional duty as news provider by affording a platform for the opposition (Abunajela & Mellor 2016). In other words, Al Jazeera would be abandoning its commitment to the liberalistic ethics of objectivity if it did not provide a platform for Islamic as well as secular voices. The veteran journalist such as Ahmad Mansour sees it as the outlet's duty to stand by the weak and the oppressed, including Islamic movements such as the Brotherhood following the crackdown by the military institutions in Egypt and the ban of the movement in several Arab countries. On the other hand, journalists who left Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr following the toppling of Morsi justified their exit by their unwavering support of western objectivity which does not take sides in an ongoing conflict (ibid.). In addition, Al Jazeera journalists got entangled in the heated debates about the network: Following the eruption of the Gaza-Israel attacks in July 2014, a number of Egyptian and Al-Jazeera journalists engaged in exchanges on social media such as Al Jazeera's Jamal Rayyan and the Egyptian journalist Moustafa Bakri (Ayish & Mellor 2016; 151).

While Al Jazeera was criticised by few observers of sympathising with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, al-Arabiya was claimed to have trumpeted the overthrow of Morsi and the marching of the military coup. Meanwhile, some commentators argue that a

new Qatari outlet was set up in London to mitigate the criticism directed at Al Jazeera. Al-Araby al-Jadeed, or the New Arab, was set up in London in 2014 as a newspaper followed by a television station, only to face similar claims of bias. Such claims were refuted by al-Araby al-Jadeed newspaper CEO Abdulrahman Elshayyal who said claims that the project was subject to any political influence were unsubstantiated, "Our funding is from a Qatari-owned private holding company. We have no qualms about this nor have we ever denied it. Nor are we a political party or affiliated to any group of any kind," he said (cited in Kilani 2014). The new outlet sparked concern and suspicion among many Arab regimes, and it was not long until Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates blocked access to al-Araby website in January 2016, prompting the latter to issue a statement stressing the outlet's freedom of speech, "The blocking of these websites goes against the company's principles of supporting democracy, human rights and liberty, as well as the notion of press freedom. The New Arab and its sister site provide a platform for the voice of the Middle East and aim to provoke an exchange of ideas and open discussion in a responsible manner" (cited in Jackson, 2016).

The media-politics nexus

To be fair, Al Jazeera was not the only outlet that found itself deeply entangled in this political web: Since the start of Arab uprisings in 2010, Bahrain has accused Iran of funding 40 satellite channels aimed at waging hostile propaganda against Bahrain and the Gulf States. Egypt shut down 12 satellite channels and 20 others were issued warnings for insulting religion. In Iraq, the government suspended the licenses of 10 satellite channels for what it described as the promotion of sectarian discourse. Moreover, al-Mayadeen TV, set up by Ghassan Ben Jeddu, the former Al Jazeera anchor, was accused of serving as the voice of the Syrian-Iranian community and

Hezbollah in Lebanon, counterbalancing Saudi influence there. And despite the best intentions, the new channel al-Arab met a similar fate of this inevitable and detrimental link between politics and media. Launched by the Saudi billionaire, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, al-Arab promised to be something revolutionary in the Middle East. It began its broadcasting on the 1st February 2015 and by the following day, the Bahrain government had shut it down for what it called “administrative” reasons, saying the network had not obtained the proper licenses to broadcast. The real reason, it emerged, was the interview with Khalil al-Marzooq, a leader of Bahraini main opposition party. The Bahraini government denies the network was suspended for political reasons. The example of al-Arab’s attempted rise and conspicuous fall provide a glimpse into the increasingly rough and tumble world of TV news in the Middle East, where there are now vast fortunes to be made, but steep political hurdles remain (Mellor 2015).

Indeed, all news outlets in the region operate within a wider system of policies and regulations which directly impact on the outlets’ output and freedom of expression. The political factor is perhaps one of the most important in the analysis of the news production in the region. Recent events such as Arab uprisings have helped magnify that intertwining relationship of politics and media (Abdel-Sattar 2013). Al-Jazeera’s coverage has consequently become part of the conflict thereby enmeshing the role of news production with political activism. Indeed, the Arab mediascape presents a strong case of the intertwining media-politics nexus where politicians communicate with citizens through mass media using the latter in lieu of the waning party politics system. Despite the revival of party politics following the Arab Spring, mass media still play a pivotal role in guiding and influencing public opinion particularly with the inflated number of new parties making it difficult for citizens to form an independent view of each party. Post-2011, for instance, Egypt

witnessed a deluge of political parties and movements amounting to more than 40 parties. Audience can also jostle to censor media content; for instance, al-Arabiya broadcast this year a documentary about Hezbollah leader, Hasan Nasrallah, entitled 'Hasan's Tale' to the dismay of many viewers particularly in Saudi Arabia who took to social media sites accusing the channel of positive depiction of Nasrallah as a hero. Consequently, al-Arabiya general manager, Turki al-Dakheel was sacked (Al-Heyad 2016).

Abdelmoula (2015) argues that it has become rather impossible to separate changes in the media landscape from those in the political field. For him, the Arab spring was yet another empirical example illustrating this intricate interplay between media and politics which showed the slow developing process of democratisation in the Arab region. Media can no longer be positioned as subjected only to the market forces or to state restrictions (Curran 2005); rather, pan-Arab media almost function as political institutions per se, in as much as they serve as a forum for public opinion and discursive processes that underpin decision making. The political environment in the Arab world and the prevalence of authoritarian regimes in many Arab states have enforced the latter's control of the media and the view of journalism as a profession with a clear political mission. No matter how hard Arab journalists negotiate their autonomy, there are still limits to how far they can push the boundaries of their profession and role in society.

Cooperation instead of rivalry

Undoubtedly, the Arab broadcasting market is fettered by developments in the political field; for instance, programmes and even whole channels can be taken off air for political reasons. While Arab States encouraged Open Market policy in the economic field, they have adopted a rather ambivalent attitude towards opening up the media market preferring instead to maintain a neat division separating the political and commercial from the cultural spheres. In fact, the

focus of many Arab States has been on liberating the economic sphere, adopting neo-liberal and capitalist values while keeping the social and political scenes under state control. Even with the expansion of private television and radio stations, the increasing penetration of the Internet, and the launch of media free zones, the state created a favourable business environment for media production as long as these media are not used to promote political activism, whether through drama, talk shows or current affairs programmes. Following the Arab uprisings, the rhetoric of turning the production wheel fast is still chanted so as to enforce the idea that wealth, and not political debate, is the only avenue to development (Mellor 2014).

While the traditional liberal theory advocates the role of media as a watchdog that holds the state to account, this model hardly takes account of other shareholders and thus it does not guarantee “a check on the abuse of all sources of power in both the public and private realms” (Curran 2005; 124). Private media, on the other hand, can be argued to compromise institutional independent or downgrade investigate journalism in favour lighter and more popular genres (Curran 2005; 129). All the same, private media ventures can encourage competitiveness, as the competition between external and regional media outlets clearly results in increasing professionalism among news professionals, although privately owned media can be argued to be fettered by commercial stakeholders such as advertisers. Curran (2005) suggests a model where national public service television engage in a debate with peripheral media sectors including private, social market, professional and civil media sectors. But can we develop a similar model for the Arab mediascape and can we expect only one regional outlet to provide such a service in lieu of national public service and in a region where media are deployed as a tool serving political or even religious agendas?

As a point of departure, Curran’s model of a public service broadcasting system engaging in dialogue with local and community

media as well as professional and civil society media activities is a promising, albeit difficult, model to apply to the pan-Arab media sphere. While Al Jazeera has contributed to the counter-flow of global cultural output from North to South, it still operates within a deeply intertwined media-politics nexus and it becomes therefore rather impossible to maintain complete editorial independence from political influence. In an unregulated mediascape, jam-packed with factional and partisan media, it is a challenge for any outlet to provide a forum for free exchange of ideas and criticism; nor can we expect one regional player to fulfil the mission of a national public service system. The way forward could be in collaboration, rather than rivalry; media's function is not only to give voice to different, even conflicting, groups in society, but also to "promote conciliation" (Curran 2005; 137). The problem in the Arab media sphere, in my view, is the unwillingness to cooperate and regulate the current satellite realm, and this problem has already been identified and raised by Al Jazeera (see Al Jazeera, *al-Waqe` al-Arabi* program, episode broadcast on 24 December 2014).

There is untapped potential and new avenues for joint cooperation between pan-Arab media outlets, such as Al Jazeera, and local media; opportunities include for example the use of local expertise and resources when covering local events (avoiding incidents such as the so-called Marriott cell), producing joint documentaries, creating joint pools of training resources, and agreeing on a set of joint professional standards. Curran (2005; 144) points at OpenDemocracy website as a vivid example of a global journalism providing "an open, pluralistic, interactive an intelligent channel of debate and discussion between people in different parts of the globe". Pan-Arab outlets such as Al Jazeera are best-placed to spearhead similar initiatives in the Arab region drawing on local and regional expertise. The irony is that the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) has actually a committee whose function is to manage

collaboration amongst Arab satellite channels in matters of coordinated output, annual forums, debating new legislations, arranging joint training resources and providing new visions for intercultural communication; however, such cooperation has never really materialized. One Iraqi commentator laments this lack of cooperation in producing joint programming or even agreeing on a future vision on how the satellite channels can contribute to political and media reforms (Yasri 2016).

Activating such a cooperation can also enforce solidarity amongst Arab journalists and strengthening their professional identity as members of one professional community. It will also help reveal the position of those journalists vis-à-vis their audiences, and for example, whether their agenda is compatible with the needs of their local audiences, particularly the poor and the marginalized. Although several volumes have been written about media ownership and political censorship in the Arab region, not much attention has been given to the role of journalists as mediators and how they perceive of the power they share in their community of practitioners, who play a pivotal role in constructing and maintaining a viable public sphere. Indeed, even in the bleakest circumstances, Arab journalists have managed to negotiate their autonomy, albeit partially, from the political regimes by (re)defining the boundaries of their profession and role in society such as asserting their role as “eyewitness” and “historian,” thereby rivalling the official accounts of the history of the region. This role of eyewitness has taken an international turn with the increasing number of foreign correspondents, adding to the journalists’ knowledge and understanding of international affairs.

Having a media sphere that can contribute to creating and maintaining a vibrant public sphere depends on the joint efforts of Arab media professionals with transnational pan-Arab outlets such as Al Jazeera spearheading such initiatives to increase the autonomy of media professionals, in an attempt to mitigate state’s intervention.

Otherwise, those pan-Arab outlets will remain unstable ventures that depend for its survival on political backing; but once the latter is gone, so does the news. She calls therefore for a media sphere that can contribute to creating and maintaining a vibrant public sphere and which depends on the joint efforts of Arab media professionals with transnational pan-Arab outlets such as Al Jazeera spearheading such initiatives to increase the autonomy of media professionals, in an attempt to mitigate state's intervention.

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The Soft Power of Hybrid Media: Media Convergence and the “Al Jazeera Effect”

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Introduction

Al Jazeera television (AJ) has influenced both regional and international politics, and provided a “contra-flow,” “Voice for the South” that upended Western media hegemony. Seib (2008) deployed the term the “Al Jazeera effect” in an attempt to capture the AJ’s unprecedented influence on the global body politic, and how proliferating new communication technologies are transforming international affairs. To fully grasp AJ’s influence on world affairs, I argue, it is important to look at AJ as both a soft public diplomacy tool for the state of Qatar, but also recognize how its innovative reporting on Arab and world affairs has been rooted in its unabashed pro-Arab and pro-Islam world views. AJ represents a new “hybrid media system” in which “old” and “new” media are increasingly blurred, empowering its audiences and networked users, and contributing to an emerging participatory political culture in the region. To that end, I will briefly discuss its role in transforming Qatar from a peripheral actor to a progressive/central player in regional politics and international conflicts. The intersection of AJ’s reporting with Qatar’s foreign policy is delineated through an overview of how it has covered the Arab Israeli conflict, the US War on Terrorism, and the so-called “Arab Spring.”

Call it “the Al Jazeera effect” or call it an instrument of Qatar’s “soft power,” the innovation and trailblazing effect of Al Jazeera stems from its hybrid media ecological system that embraces technology and political activism of networked Arab publics. Almost two decades after its launch, Qatar-based Al Jazeera media network’s expansion has been breathtaking. It has morphed from a small pan-Arab TV news channel into an information and news behemoth hiring hundreds of reporters and media workers (Allied-Media 2016a). It continues to draw millions of viewers and users. It has successfully established an unrivaled global footprint with more than 40 bureaus worldwide (Allied-Media 2016b). More significantly, AJ has asserted its Arab voice, and by extension the voice and interests of Qatar, in regional geo-politics and international relations (Miles 2006; Samuel-Azran 2013). The network’s significant achievements and international reach have long conjured up comparisons to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) services and the Cable News Network (CNN). Since its establishment, AJ’s programming format, news breaking schedule, and general news ethos was often compared to CNN, leading some analysts and researchers to describe it as the “CNN of the Arab World” (e.g. Fandy 2000; Johnson and Fahmy 2008).

The analogy between the two global media powerhouses, AJ and CNN, transcended news format and programming to focus on the substance of their reporting of global politics. For instance, CNN’s ground reporting of the first Gulf War became indispensable to international viewers who wanted to follow the war’s progression. While CNN’s coverage had arguably a distinct framing of the 1991 Iraq War as a “clean” war where precise and smart weapons limited civil casualties (Baudrillard 1995), it still cemented the network’s reputation as a global news leader. In a similar fashion, AJ’s unique coverage of the United States’ war in Afghanistan and the subsequent Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq in 2003 enshrined AJ as a

news leader from the Arab world and the South. Instead of a sanitized war, told from the lenses of Pentagon's embedded reporters, AJ reveled in showing the human toll of US military interventions, the untold number of civilian casualties, and the ensuing chaos ushered in by the occupation. With a tongue in cheek recognition of its own rising influence, the Doha headquarters of the network hoisted a poster that read: "The world watches CNN, and CNN watches Al-Jazeera" (Cherribi 2012).

To grasp AJ's influence on world affairs, it is important not only to view the network as a soft public diplomacy tool for the state of Qatar, but to also recognize how its innovative reporting on Arab and world affairs has been rooted in its unabashed pro-Arab and pro-Islam world views (Rinnawi 2006). In addition, this chapter contends that AJ represents a new "hybrid media system," to borrow Chadwick's terms (2013), in which "old" and "new" media boundaries are increasingly blurred, empowering its audiences and networked users, and contributing to an emerging participatory political culture in the region. To that end, I will briefly discuss the network's role in transforming Qatar from a peripheral, conservative state to an influential actor in regional politics and international conflicts. The intersection of AJ's reporting with Qatar's foreign policy is delineated through an overview of how it has covered the Arab Israeli conflict, the US War on Terrorism, and the so-called "Arab Spring".

Hybrid Media Ecologies: Beyond the "Al Jazeera Effect"

The meteoric ascendancy of AJ network and its multi-dimensional influence in the Arab world have challenged media analysts and researchers seeking to account for this mediated phenomenon, often times positioning it as part of a "contra-flow" or a "Voice for the South" that upended hegemonic Western media (Thussu, 2014). Most famously, Seib (2008) deployed the term the "Al Jazeera effect" in his attempt to capture AJ's unprecedented

influence in international relations, and how proliferating new communication technologies are transforming international affairs. Conceptually, the “Al Jazeera effect” employs a broad-brush to paint a picture of a network whose news coverage often galvanizes Arab and Muslim public opinion, and thus has wielded an outsize role on world politics in the 21st century. It encompasses the complex impact of the network on other news organizations in the region and beyond. Unsurprisingly, AJ’s impressive international broadcasting model has been emulated by Russia’s station “Russia Today” and France’s “France 24.” More importantly, the “Al Jazeera effect” indicates the increasingly fluid nature of the contemporary media ecological system, a fluidity arising from converging media environments.

The “Al Jazeera effect” is symptomatic of the new hybrid media ecology, the convergence of traditional and new media, and the collapse of old boundaries among media communication technologies, to borrow Chadwick’s analysis of the “hybrid media system” (Chadwick 2013). The Internet and other “new” media have revolutionized and subverted news genres, turning traditional media audiences into users and producers of content. Faced with the challenge of the Internet, “old” or legacy news media organizations have attempted to adapt to these users’ active participation and interaction with the news. What we are witnessing is a continuum between “old” and “new,” as Chadwick puts it:

The hybrid media system is built upon interactions among older and newer media logics—where logics are defined as bundles of technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizational forms—in the reflexively connected social fields of media and politics. Actors in this system are articulated by complex and ever-evolving relationships based upon adaptation and interdependence and concentrations and diffusions of power. Actors create, tap, or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals and

in ways that modify, enable, or disable others' agency, across and between a range of older and newer media settings (p. 4).

Through its reporting on the Arab world, AJ has become a central node in the politics of the region, as an actor in the system, connected to other nodes of Arab political, cultural and social networks. Part of the enduring success of AJ may be credited to its appreciation of, and agile response to, this shifting paradigm of news, embracing the participatory culture of social media in its reporting and news production. AJ has harnessed the disruptive power of social media, such as YouTube and Twitter, making its products accessible on various platforms. In concrete terms, Al Jazeera Mubasher indicates the network's grasp of the networked information environment in which producing and consuming media content have become unconventional, crowd-sourced, interactive and collaborative. In addition to Al Jazeera Mubasher's TV channel and website, the Network's reporting comes on other platforms including its social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram), WhatsApp and Telegram applications.

The Hybrid Soft Power: AJ and Qatar's Foreign Policy Synergy

One way of appreciating AJ's influence on world affairs is to understand the transformation in Qatar's status in regional politics and international relations. Qatar had been a peripheral actor in international relations for obvious geo-political reasons: Lacking geographic and demographic depths, the small size, oil-rich emirate adopted a conservative, low-profile role in global politics, and thrived under the shadow and security guarantees of its big neighbor, Saudi Arabia, until the mid-1990s (Brakat 2012: 3). In Arab politics and culture, Egypt had long played a central role, promoting pan-Arab nationalism and Arab unity, whereas Saudi Arabia's status as Islam's

birthplace and their spiritual hub guaranteed the Kingdom a special status in the Islamic world. The foreign policy status-quo began to change as the then-new Emir, Shaykh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, assumed power in 1995, sought to gradually liberalize the country, and project a more forceful stance in world politics (Barakat 2012). Al Jazeera became part of the strategy to overhaul the country's foreign policy, effectively enhancing Qatar's reservoir of soft power. In contrast to the hard power of military force or economic inducement, soft power co-opts the 'other' through persuasion rather than coercion (Nye 2004). Chitty (2015) argues that soft power and public diplomacy are distinct concepts; yet, they overlap in the area of soft public diplomacy or cultural diplomacy. Viewed from this perspective, AJ constituted an effective and strategic tool in the realm of Qatar's soft public diplomacy.

The concoction of professional journalism and media diplomacy proved highly successful. Al Jazeera has largely retained its editorial independence from the State, successfully promulgated a new professional journalism and news ethos in the Arab world, it nevertheless constituted "a new model of public diplomacy by operating Al-Jazeera as a hybrid state-sponsored/private network, effectively transforming the network into a highly potent public diplomacy tool" (Samuel-Azran 2013: 1293). Unlike traditional state-sponsored international broadcasting, like Voice of America, AJ's hybrid model gained more credibility because of its willingness to rattle authoritarian regimes, needle "untouchable" dictators and "superpowers" alike, and shake off entrenched stereotypes about Arabs. Initially, Arab audiences found the network's criticism of Arab authoritarianism refreshing and empowering and they soon flocked to the network in droves (Lynch 2005). Foreshadowing its role in the "Arab Spring" upheavals, AJ helped create "a new Arab public, and that public is visibly transforming Arab political culture" (Lynch 2005: 40). At the international level, Al Jazeera Arabic built a

niche and loyal viewership in the Arab diaspora that turned to the channel en masse, seeking “alternative news and current affairs, in addition to challenging discussion and religious programmes,” as Miladi’s (2006: 953) audience study found out.

Media scholars have concluded that the “visual power” of AJ not only promoted Qatar’s foreign policies at the world stage, but also lent the country greater credibility as a power broker in international conflicts (e.g. Thussu 2014). Regionally, the symbolic capital AJ afforded Qatar has lent a greater level of seriousness to Qatar’s efforts to broker an accord between Palestinian factions. In Syria’s internecine civil war, Qatar has supported greater co-ordination among Syrian opposition factions seeking to topple the Assad regime (Thussu 2014). Moreover, when its host country is party to international disputes, studies have suggested AJ’s coverage tilts in favor of Qatar, which demonstrates clearer links between the media outfit and the state. For instance, Samuel-Azran (2013) argued that AJ constituted “diplomatic tool by Qatar throughout the Saudi-Qatari conflict (from September 2002 to September 2007)” (p. 1295). Based on a longitudinal analysis, the tone of AJ’s coverage of Saudi Arabia’s affairs between 2002-2007 tended to become more negative as diplomatic tensions and rifts between Qatar and Saudi Arabia grew wider (p. 1301). Negative coverage of Saudi Affairs included shedding critical light on the country’s human rights violations, disregarding Saudi official input/response, and giving platform to Saudi dissidents.

Notwithstanding the above concerns, AJ’s rise coincides with Qatar foreign policy’s transition from a passive to an active international player, as testified by its increasing mediation and peacemaking in regional and international conflicts to preserve its “security.” As Barakat (2012: 36) explains:

This transition has come with Qatar’s realization that ‘size does not matter’, that soft power and wealth are powerful

tools in the arena of international relations, and that the Arab Spring is a pivotal moment in Arab--Western relations, with corresponding political, economic and security-related advantages for those nations that are progressive and dynamic enough to 'come out on top.'

To fulfill this mediation role, Qatar's mediation efforts often succeeded because they featured both financial incentives and a strong commitment from its leaders, such as the personal involvement of its former foreign minister in the Arab League's "Friends of Syria" initiative. To a large extent, the country mediation efforts resolved conflicts and tensions in Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen, as well as the border conflict between Djibouti and Eritrea (Kamrava 2011). AJ's coverage of these conflicts offered a soft power synergy that hinged upon, and propagated Qatar's image "as an honest broker interested in peace and stability" (Kamrava 2011: 539), and transformed the country into "an independent and progressive international actor" (Ulrichsen 2013: 1).

The Arab Israeli Conflict Retold: A Foreign Policy Media Contra-Flow

AJ's popularity among Arab viewers has stemmed from its readiness to embrace the downtrodden and the voiceless in synch with Qatar's progressive, activist international relations role, and its evident ambition to play the role of a peacemaker at the global stage. Throughout its coverage, AJA's innovative reporting on Arab and world affairs has been rooted in its unabashed pro-Arab and pro-Islam worldviews. The intersection of AJ's reporting with foreign policy is delineated below through an overview of how it has covered the Arab Israeli conflict, the US War on Terrorism, and the so-called "Arab Spring."

So, how does AJ covers the protracted Arab-Israeli Conflict? The coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has become a defining issue

for AJ and the network as a whole. According to Arab media sources, the violence that erupted in the Palestinian territories was in response to the provocative visit to Al Aqsa Mosque (aka the Temple Mount) by then Israeli opposition leader, Ariel Sharon, on 28 September 2000 (Pressman 2006). The protracted violence between 2000 and 2005 came to be known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada or the Second Intifada (second uprising), with hundreds of civilian casualties on both sides. Analysis of the AJ's coverage of the Second Intifada has concluded that the TV network employed several rhetorical strategies that did not disguise its pro-Palestinian position, a position strongly shared by its Arab audiences. As Wendon (2005)'s discourse analysis revealed, AJ's reporting on the Second Intifada framed the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from within metaphorical lenses of a "David and Goliath" battle to "characterize the disparity in power between Israel and the Palestinians" while legitimizing the notion of resistance as the only effective strategy against the Israeli occupation (p. 99). Covering the Intifada became the first defining moment for AJ's history, as it broadcast unfiltered scenes of violence and mayhem, most symbolized in the live footage of the death a twelve-year-old Palestinian, Mohammed Al-Durra. And there was unprecedented market demand for this media fare: As El Nawawy and Iskander (2003: 69) observed, "Whether Al-Jazeera frames the Intifada as a consequence of Israeli or Palestinian aggression is unimportant. Instead, Arab audiences remain passionate about the Intifada, and that passion drives Al-Jazeera's coverage: Supply meets demand."

AJ became inseparable from the so-called Arab Street's deep commitment to the rights of Palestinians in their struggle against Israeli occupation. Its graphic images depicting the bloody toll of the conflict heightened awareness of, and empathy for Palestinians' plight that worked in concert with its calls for Arab solidarity and action (Lynch 2005). Such sympathetic coverage has cultivated deep trust among Arab viewers, and consolidated its "centrality to Arab

political life” (Lynch 2005: 38), as ethnographic and audience investigations have revealed (e.g. Tawil-Souri 2007). Within the Palestinian territories, for example, local viewers tuned in to AJ to watch the violence raging on their own streets during the Intifada. A local Palestinian man explained to media researcher, Tawil-Souri, that ““all of us in town watched Al Jazeera to know what was happening down the street... I think all the local channels, at some point they stopped sending their own reporters and just played Al Jazeera”” (p.19). For Palestinian and other Arab viewers, AJ’s cultural affinity to its audiences, and its unconditional embrace of the martyrdom and resistance lexicon, have merged with the anti-colonial ethos associated with fighting the Israeli occupation found on the “Arab Street.”

Unlike foreign media, AJ conveys a different perspective on the Arab Israeli conflict: a historically grounded narrative in which violent eruptions are part of a long struggle, rather than isolated, intermittent, tit-for-tat patterns commonly found in international media coverage. This pro-Arab position could also be discerned in AJ’s coverage of the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon’s Hezbollah. After studying Arab media’s coverage of this war, Harvard’s Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy concluded that the visual coverage, the photos used in AJ website’ stories about the war, largely depicted Israel as the “aggressor” (Kalb and Saivetz 2007). The alternative nature of AJ’s coverage confronted Western media’s narratives about the Arab Israeli conflict giving birth to the realization that Western media are “hegemonic no more” (Seib 2005).

From Kabul to Baghdad: “Counter-Narratives” of the “War on Terror”

Beyond the Arab-Israeli conflict, AJ did not shy away from providing a critical counter-narrative, what I described elsewhere as alternative “meta-narrative frames,” to the Bush administration’s self-

declared “War on Terrorism” after the 9/11 attacks on the US, as well as the US-led wars in Afghanistan (October 2001) and Iraq (March 2003). While the station’s access to Al-Qaeda-leader’s, Osama Bin Laden’s, tapes and transmission of Afghan war footage were soon to be breaking news worldwide, often re-transmitted on CNN and other global television networks, such privileged access to Taliban and Al Qaeda and its reporting scoops escalated into a flashpoint in the network’s relationship with Washington (Thussu and Freedman 2003). For AJ reporters and staff, broadcasting Bin Laden’s taped interviews constituted a news scoop coveted by any self-respecting, professional news organization worldwide. For US officials, however, broadcasting these tapes tended to be a reckless act of sabotaging US Mideast policy that also endangered its national security (Sharp 2003). Condoleezza Rice and other Bush officials claimed that Al Qaeda’s taped interviews broadcast on AJ might contain coded messages to terrorist sympathizers, and urged US and other Western media outlets not to air these interviews (Magder 2003). Other western media soon joined the fray and aspersed AJ, labeling it “Bin Laden TV.” Tensions boiled over as the US-led Northern Military Alliance in Afghanistan bombed the network’s bureau in Kabul, causing an outcry from the network that it was intentionally targeted because of its defiance.

A similar scenario was acted out during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, as AJ faced vilification, accusations of terrorism collusion and anti-Americanism, culminating in physical threats against the network and its reporters. At a deeper level, US officials’ hostility towards AJ, their construction of the network as “the enemy’s” mouthpiece was a reaction to its popularity in the Arab world and perceived negative influence on US foreign policies in the region. The outright hostility raises an important question: How did AJ’s coverage of the war on terrorism, the war on Iraq and US Mideast policies diverge from US media?

The framing of the Iraq war on AJ provides some preliminary responses to the above question. Social construction theory explains that media frames provide readers and viewers with a “selective” presentation of “reality” that helps them “make sense” of issues around them, including war, poverty, racism etc. Not only do media frames describe social “problems,” but they also prescribe “solutions” by focusing on certain attributes of the problem, relying on official sources, language choice, among other mechanisms. On AJ, the “humanitarian frame” unapologetically offers viewers a non-sanitized view of the war in Afghanistan (and Iraq): Pointing to the human toll of the US-led military alliance, and using graphic images and videos of dead Afghans, interviewing wounded victims of US airstrikes, AJ’s “humanitarian frame” bore “witness,” and debunked the myth of a “clean war” that the US military sought to propagate (Jasperson and Kikhia 2003: 127-128). When it employed military frames, AJ’s footage focused on the “collateral damage.”

The counter-framing of AJ gets stark when juxtaposed to the language tropes and metaphors overshadowing US media’s coverage of these wars. For the sake of comparison, CNN’s “military frame” waxed on the technological supremacy of the US military while its correspondents’ and Generals’ use of technical and euphemistic terms obscure what bombs and military equipment is solely designed to do i.e. kill. The “language” of war on CNN seems rather benign and abstract and includes gems such as “soft targets,” “carpet bombing” “daisy bombs” (Jasperson, & Kikhia, 2003). On other US news networks, Lule (2004) found out that four metaphors predominated NBC’s coverage of the run up to the war on Iraq included: “the Timetable;” “the Games of Saddam;” “the Patience of the White House,” and “Making the Case/Selling the Plan.” In exculpating the Bush administration and disinventing dissent and debate about the war in Iraq, Lule concurs with Lakoff, that media metaphors can kill. On AJ, the language of war and the metaphors are often blunt and thus leave no doubt in viewers’ minds

that people would be killed in US military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. That is the alternative nature of AJ.

Covering the “Arab Spring”: Convergent Media and People Power

AJ network now constitutes a “hybrid media system” where the “old” and “new” media distinctions have become obsolete. In harnessing the disruptive power of social media, making its products accessible on various platforms, it has launched Al Jazeera Mubasher’s that operates as a separate broadcast channel and uses various social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), WhatsApp and Telegram applications, to cover the “Arab Spring” and Arab affairs. The above case studies demonstrate the vigorous posture AJ took in covering regional politics and US Mideast interventions in clear synergy and confluence with Qatar’s foreign policies. AJ’s revitalization of the political environment in much of the Arab world (Lynch 2005), the network’s embrace of the power of the web has bolstered its claims that it facilitates a new culture of vibrant public debate by offering platforms for Arab citizens to protest authoritarian rule and vent their long repressed dissent.

In other terms, AJ and ICTs have shifted the balance of power between the public and the state and “altered the dynamics of influence” in such a way that enables virtual and diasporic communities to effectively challenge the political narratives legitimizing authoritarianism and repression in the region. As shown above, media analysts’ attention has mostly focused on the shows formats and how it breeds new and contentious forms of debate into the public arena. Furthermore, while AJ’s news coverage has played a significant role in the political turmoil that overthrew authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, these unfolding “Arab Spring” events have continued to raise questions about the internet’s role in speeding up the pace of political and social transformations in Arab societies.

Scarce attention has been focused on how these satellite channels' websites offer a unique forum for public debate through user comments and the implications of this user generated content on freedom of speech. Such gap still needs to be addressed given the popularity of discussion boards and reader commenting functions on Arab news websites, and the fact they have re-engaged a large number of previously excluded Arab citizens in public discourse (see Al-Saggaf 2006; Bunt 2009; Douai & Nofal 2012). The few existing studies that examined the topic explored the potential of these user-generated comments to transform political speech and expression in the region. In a study of AJ's user-generated content, Douai and Nofal (2012) observe how online user comments underscore the "representative" and "inclusive" nature of this online public opinion that offer a more accurate portrayal of public debates. Moreover, these online forums and commenting functions construct "hybridized" spaces for Arab opinion connecting the local to the global.

In hindsight, the network's role in covering and cheering the "Arab Spring" revolutions constituted a natural progression and consequence of its capitalization on new media's convergence with traditional mass media. The "Arab Spring" upheavals unveiled the expansion of the "new" Arab public as a highly mediated, interactive, and technologically empowered public that AJ helped nurture and revitalize. After the fall of Hosni Mubarak, AJ launched its Egyptian channel, Mubasher Misr (Live Egypt), which the Sissi regime accused of serving as the mouthpiece of deposed President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood. Finally, Al Jazeera's popularity may be ascribed to its pro-Arab and pro-Islam worldviews, but its continued success will remain contingent upon its innovation and embrace of the new hybrid media ecological system in which technology, political activism and networked Arab publics have converged. This is the future of Al Jazeera.

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