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**International Media:**  
**A Critical Reading in the Discursive Strategies of Aljazeera Network**

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**June 2010**

**MA Dissertaion submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature at Abdelmalek Essaadi University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for The Degree of MA in English Language and Literature.**

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## *Acknowledgments*

I feel profoundly indebted to my professor and supervisor Dr. Mohammed Benammi, who has been available to guide and support me throughout the course of this research. Discussing issues with Dr. Benammi has been of a tremendous help to testing my ideas and reassessing my thoughts. Without his assistance, the completion of this work would have been unthinkable. I have been really fortunate to be with Dr. Benammi while preparing this thesis.

I would like also to express my deep and sincere appreciation for my professors Dr. Abdellatif Akbib, Dr. Abderezzak Essrhir, Dr. Jamal Eddine Benhayoun, Dr. Khalid Amine, Dr. Khalil Ennasiri, Dr. Nour Taibi, Dr. Mustafa El Hadri, Dr. Ouzzani, Dr. Faris. All of them have contributed a great deal to enriching my knowledge and opening new horizons for me.

I am strongly grateful to my brother Ahmed Ghailan and Dr. Nabil Jumbert, without whose moral and material support this thesis would have never been possible. Dr. Jumbert provided me with incredible material and was always willing to share with me his ideas and views. I also would like to thank Mohammed El Bakali and Asmae Ghailan for their continuous encouragement and support.

My earnest gratitude is extended to my dear friend Jaouad Elhabbouch, who was a meticulous proofreader while writing this thesis.

I am thankful to my colleagues Abdelaziz Elamrani, Zakaria Benamar, Mohamed El Mejdki, Abdelmjid Essayd, Yassin Elharouchi and all my dear friends and classmates during this Master program.

Finally, I am infinitely indebted to my parents whose wisdom offered me practical lessons in endurance and serenity and whose patience taught me that success is the fruit of hard-work not the gift of intelligence.

***Dedication***

*To my mother and the soul of my father*

## **Abstract**

Following a multidisciplinary approach, this study analyzes the geopolitical functions served by Aljazeera Media Network and the discursive strategies it deploys to attain its objectives. The volatile political environment of the Arabo-Islamic world has, especially in its relation to the West, substantial bearings on Aljazeera's philosophy of journalism. These bearings transpire in many of Aljazeera discursive practices aimed at reflecting, affecting and reshaping transnational public consciousness. The network is dealt with primarily as a novel media institution setting a discourse symmetrically defiant to the discourses of power. The aim is to probe the extent to which Aljazeera scattered, sporadic and seemingly dispersed discursive productions form, particularly during crises and conflicts, a consistent narrative that is aware of whom it addresses, with whom it *argues* and for what purposes it speaks. That is, a narrative that has unifying themes and focal points, which allow, in a way, a systematic pattern of text politics to emerge.

## Introduction

Because of the strategic importance of mass media for global and national powers, international media networks are subject to great pressures to serve the interests of power holders. Regardless of what codes of ethics and editorial policies that a given media institution follows, political and economic powers generally conceal a natural inclination to seek control over it. Control can be exercised either through private ownership as is the case in most Western media networks or through political manipulation in the case of the third world media outlets. Consequently, international mass media turn to be platforms of public diplomacy, foreign relations or mere propaganda. In fact, rather than sticking to some proclaimed standards of bridging the gaps between cultures through communication and dialogue, international mass media end up reflecting cultural biases and wills to power and domination.

Communication and dialogue via mass media between the West and the East, for instance, is enormously shaped up and circumscribed by dominant discourses within each part of the divide. Ordinary people, the main target of mass media, do not themselves invent prejudices and stereotypes about cultural 'Others'; they are supplied to them via discourses that govern the prevailing channels through which they negotiate and articulate their relationships with others. What seems to be at issue is that cultural biases, political interests and struggle contingencies prevail and come together at times to breed bigotry and chauvinism, which pose serious threats to a widely promised rapprochement between different cultures.

Given that most international media networks, in particular, are dominated by Western powers, one particular view of the world is likely to dominate over the others. This domination ends up reinforcing a lack of genuinely constructive exchanges and delaying urgently needed reconciliations. Nowadays, some of the most bloody and disastrous struggles and wars continue to flare up in many parts of the Middle East, Mid-Asia and Africa. Indeed, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, these regions have witnessed colossal events ranging from subjugating their people to colonial annexation and military control, partitioning territories according to the ill-informed needs of the colonial structures, exploiting resources

without trying the least to improve these regions economically and culturally, to persevering in bids to keep them under the grip of the post-colonial hegemony and waging badly-marketed wars, especially after the 9/11 attacks. Using a simple exercise of reason, it can be said that the *Enlightenment*-believing populace in the West, without whose support these colonial projects could not have been realized, can not give their consent to such a wide-scale aggression. So, how did/does it happen?

The answer, indeed the answers, to these problematic may vary and take different directions and can be found in various disciplines of cultural, historical, economic, political studies, to name just few. Yet, some of the most enduring critiques tackling this question are to be found in what Edward Said called Orientalism and subsequent frameworks of Postcolonialism. Concerning the aforementioned question, these critiques manage to allocate insistent attention to the problematic of '*representing*' other modes of being.

In fact, representation is considered a fine thread that contributes much to keep the Western masses in the dark in relation to other cultures and territories. Indeed, it can be deduced that this thread is responsible for much of the deformed knowledge the West holds concerning alien communities. The residues of colonial discourse, these critiques maintain, continue to market those dual conceptualizations such as the 'Self' and the 'Other', 'white'/'coloured', 'superior'/'inferior', 'developed'/'underdeveloped', 'centre'/'periphery' and the West and the rest. What is at stake is not simply the negative labelling circulating within these dualities, in reality it is the conscious or the unconscious reinvention of these polarizations since they might serve the shortest way to win support for power and legitimize material injustice and aggression exercised by the triumphant part of the duality against the subdued.

Orientalism critiques postulates that colonial discourse nurtured and *hardened* continuously the cultural 'filters' of Western people vis-à-vis indigenous peoples of the colonies and the ex-colonies with fresh material. This has made the way easy for enacting seemingly gentle policies, presented under the locally-convincing 'civilizing mission' premises, although they may have been fatally deteriorating in far off colonies and zones of influence. In fact, Western masses have no alternative means to know about the



rest of the world and what inflects its people on its hands. During the early phases of what is known as traditional Orientalism, intellectual authority and academic seniority played crucial roles in maintaining stereotypical images about non-Western cultures. But in the later phases of Orientalism and neo-colonialism, these roles have shifted in momentum to other means of cultural production, notably the media. Instead of working to bridge the gaps and bringing closer various cultures of the world, media has come to be responsible for disseminating and industrialising various cultural tropes and assumptions that resulted in maintaining the gulf between the indigenous reality of things and the widely held opinions about them among Western masses.

The reasons for this state vary according to each particular spacio-temporal case, though generalizations can not be considered an imposed effort. Historical, political, economic and cultural motives form the underlying forces which instruct how certain institutions of cultural production, especially international mass media organizations, represent, frame and codify certain issues and events, especially those not affecting directly Western masses and audiences. The result is the perpetuation of an almost locked-up consciousness vis-à-vis the other and the self, given the prevalence of a very limited number of international media outlets involved in the business of covering global issues.

Yet, with the cessation of direct colonial control, the foundation of international institutions and the development of international communications- due to the exceptional progress of information technology especially in relation to satellites and Internet- it seems that this situation has changed, or is on the way to, and that the glacial impasses are about to be fractured. In this context of a potential positive change in 'exchange' and 'dialogue' between cultures, there appeared voices advocating that the production of knowledge -particularly in relation to media- should be considering a wide spectrum of voices from different parts of the globe. Louder calls demanding the diversification of information sources, instead of relying on unique typologies of narration, emerged to proclaim building balanced political positions and public opinions.

Among these calls there is the famous example of *New World Information and Communication Order* (NWICO), which is considered an imposed attempt by the international community to correct the deficiencies and the flaws of the imbalances of the flow of information between the North and the South. Yet, the laws of market have been always stronger than the laws of international institutions. Multinational media institutions continue to expand even in the South reinforcing a sort of a monologue rather than a more efficient dialogue. Yet again, since information technology has made it accessible to everyone with the means to buy into the global free market, there are now many emerging margins of power that aspire to have their voices heard by the global audience.

Aljazeera Media Network is an example of a global media institution setting a novel paradigmatic line of discourse that is roughly diametrically defiant to the discourses served by dominant international media in relations to international affairs. The network proclaims to counterbalance and challenge existing discourses at the Arab local periphery as well as the Western-dominated view of the world's current affairs in the metropolis. By so doing, the network is compelled to forge an alternative worldview and raise a new consciousness regarding the dynamics of power characterizing either the Arab world public sphere or its international counterpart. The study at hand, however, is not intended by any means to provide an exhaustive investigation of all the aspects of Aljazeera discourse. The aim is rather to probe the extent to which Aljazeera scattered, sporadic and seemingly dispersed discursive productions might display a consistent narrative that is aware of whom it addresses, with whom it *argues* and for what purposes it speaks. That is, a narrative that has unifying themes and focal points, which allow, in a way, a systematic pattern of text politics to emerge.

This study will focus, accordingly, on the inner and the external workings of Aljazeera media Network, with a special emphasis on Aljazeera Arabic and Aljazeera English.<sup>1</sup> The two channels represent the most visible arms through which the network actualises its editorial policies. They provide indeed an extended body of material through which the declared and the undeclared agendas of the network can be

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth AJA and AJE respectively; Aljazeera will be used to refer to the whole media network.

put into a systematic pattern. Generally, Aljazeera network is looked at in this study not only as an institution that provides new information from new perspectives, but also that *defies*, through certain discursive strategies, the very discursive outcomes of confluence between political interests and media interests either in the Arab world or at the global level.

Following analytical trends developed outside and within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the approach adopted in this dissertation is clued-up by a combination of two main dimensions giving shape to the discursive output of a given media institution: political economy and geopolitical position on one hand and discursive strategies on the other. Therefore, in addition to theoretical part, the analytical body of the study consists of two parts: one is concerned with the economic and the political environment of the network and the other focuses on analysing specific programmes of the two main channels of the network. Considering the political and the economic environment in which an international media institution operate is as important as analysing the wording and texts themselves. For this matter, Guthner Kress argues, that “without transcending, decisively, the hitherto relatively rigorously observed ‘boundaries’ of the verbal medium, [. . .] I do not believe that it is any longer possible to give adequate accounts of texts.”<sup>2</sup> Voicing out similar interests, Roger Fowler says: “I think it is about time we stopped saying ‘lack of space prevents a full account [. . .] What are needed are, exactly, full descriptions of context and its implications for beliefs and relationships.”<sup>3</sup> Going beyond the text and language to include the geopolitical environment in which Aljazeera media network operates is given equal importance in this study since these factors have crucial bearings on the overall subversive strategies of the network.

In view of the fact that the Network’s two main channels, AJA and AJE, mobilizes various discursive practices to challenge the *status quo* of discourses of power, the first part of the study outlines what Aljazeera seeks to challenge. This part sheds light on the historical domination of international media by global powers, from the British Empire till the present day Anglo-Saxon media giants. This part tries to

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<sup>2</sup> Guthner Kress, “Representational Resources and the Production of Subjectivity” *Texts and Practices*, Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Malcom Coulthard, Eds. (Routledge: London, 1999), p.20

<sup>3</sup> Roger Fowler, “On Critical Linguistics,” *Texts and Practices*, Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Malcom Coulthard, Eds. (Routledge: London, 1999), p.10

answer questions like who dominate international media, how subservient international media is to imperial projects, what moves are taken by the weaker parts of the world to create a balance and how Aljazeera can be situated in this context. The part seeks also to provide a theoretical framework for the manifestations of discourse and power in international media outlets and to what extent Aljazeera works with an eye on what and how other media institutions say things.

In the second part, focus shall be on the political economy and the geopolitics of Aljazeera media network. This part tries to explore what effects a media environment, ridden with political control and manipulation, have on the discourse of Aljazeera. Special emphasis will be allocated to describe the universe of Aljazeera discourse and how Aljazeera is different from other mainstream media discourses in covering certain issues. Also highlighted is the relationship binding the Qatari power holders and Aljazeera. The aim is to uncover certain manifestations of Aljazeera Network's strategies of defying existing modes of representation deployed in the Arab and the international media in relation to material and ideological conflicts.

In the third part, the study moves to analyse statements by Aljazeera managers and episodes from two programmes broadcasted in AJA and AJE respectively: *Archifohom . . . Watarikhona* (Their Archive . . . Our History) and *Empire*. In this part, the analysis probes to what extent AJA's narration of the historical reflects its subversive stance towards the contemporary Arab post-colonial political conditions. Through a journey into the history of the Arab political unity issues, AJA provides a body of material deeply intertwined with its other daily coverage of certain conflicts, especially the Palestinian issue. The analysis pays attention also to how that intertwinement serves to solidify sentiments of solidarity among distant Arab and Muslim communities. With the *Empire* programme, the analysis seeks to situate Aljazeera discourse on the global map of divergent discourses of representation. Rather than following a path of reading every aspect of the programme, analysis focuses on what the producers themselves say about the programme, where the programme can possibly find its subjects of debate and how does that contribute to showing the subject position of AJE and Aljazeera Media Network by extension. All in all, in as much as

narrating the past is so illuminating in relation to AJA, questioning empires in AJE raises no less intriguing questions about the historical functions of Aljazeera Network itself.

## **I- Theoretical Part**

### **International Mass Media: Structures of Domination and Strategies of Subversion**

#### **1 – International Mass Media in the Context of International Relations**

## a- Sites of Struggle for Domination

In the new age of information, mass media have become a broad field that affects a wide range of social and cultural relations. It is a far-reaching domain that addresses every social sphere from the market yard to the foreign ministry. Jennifer Akin says that the term mass media “includes all forms of information communicated to large groups of people, from a handmade sign to an international news network.”<sup>4</sup> The main characteristic of this type of media is that it targets large numbers of people and institutions from all walks of life. In fact, with the recent massive advent of the internet and satellite technology, mass media affects almost every aspect of social life. People depend on mass media for almost everything; from work information, health tips to weather newscasts.

Interestingly enough, mass media turn to be an inseparable part of people’s lives and beliefs about the world, since it came to dominate the means through which they communicate and articulate their social needs. Van Dijk argues that “most of our social and political knowledge and beliefs about the world derive from the dozens of news reports we read or see every day. *There is probably no other discursive practice, besides everyday conversation, that is engaged in so frequently and by so many people as news in the press and on television.*”<sup>5</sup>(emphasis added). This means very simply that these media are now the producers not only of news but also of the words that people use in everyday life. They coin for them their definitions of things and provides them with systems of evaluation. This is one reason why mass media, especially international media networks, have become extremely important for power holders as it allow for the reproduction of power relations and hegemonic discourses partly through the enforcement of a grip on what is to be said and what is not.

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<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Akin, “Mass Media,” Mar, 2005, <[http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/mass\\_communication](http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/mass_communication)>.

<sup>5</sup>Teun A. Van Dijk, “Media contents: The Interdisciplinary Study of News as Discourse”. n.p. <<http://www.discourses.org/The%20interdisciplinary%20study.pdf>>, p.110

In relation to international networks, some of the immediate connotations of the phrase ‘mass media’ presuppose a simple practice of sharing knowledge, views, and ideas across borders. However, the gulfs separating mass media as ‘innocent’ means of communication and its actual political and cultural functions are getting wider and wider. Before the last four decades, the nature of communication among different parts of the globe was dictated primarily by the priorities and interests of who is in charge of authority in each side participating in the transnational communicative act. Yet, communicating across borders has come, according to Daya Thussu, to “go beyond government-to-government to include business-to-business and people-to-people interactions.”<sup>6</sup> For this is one reason, there are many voices hailing the extraordinary potentials of such a new form of communication to enhance cooperation, dialogue, understanding, equality, human rights, democracy, and to downscale competition, antagonism, confrontation, and war. However, these utopias face infinite and obdurate historical accumulations that refuse to move away and that keep being nurtured every now and then, to a large extent, by the interests of international players in their competition for power accumulation and build-up.

In fact, throughout this history, the build-up of material power – vast territories, economic resources, and military hardware- has been the focal point of most systems of rule. In an almost inevitable context of competition, empires have sought, simultaneously, either to build newer facilities, produce more weapons, train better troops, and protect larger assets, or to destroy rivals’ military capabilities, weaken their strategic garrisons, and neutralize their economic potentials and allies. This has been the norm of cold war relations among empires, since all of them worked, as well, to preserve a seemingly cautionary cordial way of dealing with each other. However, the intensity of competition among global powers has shifted greatly, especially during the last years of bi-polarity and towards the emergence of the uni-polar world-system, to focus more on dominating international mass media. Indeed, international mass media matured in the shadows of the tense international relations, and the legacy of historical rivalry among global powers

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<sup>6</sup> Daya Kishan Thussu, *International Communication: Continuity and Change*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.



for material domination and power inflicted as well the scene in international mass media from its embryonic stages till its full-fledged development nowadays.

During the last five decades mass media have come to play crucial roles in maintaining means of power and accumulating new ones in various domains of competition between different parts of the globe. This struggle was triggered by what global powers have conceived of as the power of the information and its increasingly vital roles in shifting balances of global power. This builds on an old propagandist conception which envisages that the more people you have in your side the closer you are to outshine your rivals. Daya Thussu quotes an American commentator, urging US foreign policy to project an imperial dimension vis-à-vis the use of US abundant resources of cultural production, especially mass media, when he says “the US role should resemble that of nineteenth century Great Britain, the global leader of that era. US influence would reflect the appeal of American culture, the strength of the American economy, and the attractiveness of the norms being promoted. Coercion and the use of force would normally be secondary option.”<sup>7</sup> Emerging in the international scene as another version of a global power with ambitious projects, the US, like Britain, France, and the Soviet Union before, aspires to use mass communication capabilities of persuasion, in which the US leads the world today at least in terms of production scale, as a political tool to further the interests of its free market narrative, its economic model and its cultural discourse.

Passages like these do not fall in a vacuum. Indeed, they surface most of the times as reactions to certain incidents, or in view of opening new frontiers for their producers’ kinfolk in the various fronts of cold, or sometimes burning, struggles involving different global powers and cultures. Basing on a presumptuous belief of self-entitlement to promote the virtues of their culture, the proponents of global powers, old and new, evoke similar calls in view of having their systems of beliefs, norms, and attitudes adopted over the widest possible swaths of the globe. The aim remains to gain as much supporters and have as few foes as possible.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., P.5

While privileging the means of persuasion over the means of coercion, the American commentator is not necessarily calling for that approach because of some anticipated poignant human or environmental consequences, since the coercive option remains always on the table; instead, he is doing so simply because *persuasion* has become, pragmatically speaking, more efficient in realizing the American goals, especially on long terms. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the Americans and the Soviets spending, during the Cold War, dozens of billions of dollars each, simply to win ‘the hearts and the minds’ of potential *followers*. The idea is, in fact, to win ever increasing niches of huge markets, enormous political bodies and mammoth numbers of consumers. In short, the bid is, in Alexander Brand and Stefan Robel’s terms, to establish the *Hegemon*.<sup>8</sup> Those efforts have almost nothing to do with the bare *rhetoric of empire*, seeking to justify the noble mission of ‘bringing light’ to the dark corners of the world, while concealing, in actual fact, all those brazen expressions of epistemic and material violence against the agency-deprived subalterns of the rest of the world. Indeed, the real aim remains to provide support for the interests of foreign policy, which renders mass media no more than another wing of national public diplomacy.

Accordingly, the Cold War era, a crucially telling appellation in the context of competition to dominate spatial and terrestrial airwaves and a tremendously convincing evidence that *megaphones* are no less strategic than ballistic missiles, represents an exemplary prominent phase of history where international media networks and public diplomacy amount to be almost faces of the same coin. Leading a wide block each, the ‘Soviet propaganda’ and the ‘U.S. persuasion’ machineries mobilized unprecedented resources and narratives to influence the public opinion and the policies of potential clients around the world, with massive media campaigns aimed at legitimizing the actions and reinforcing the credibility of each pole. The U.S.-led Western-block with Voice of America, Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe and the ex-USSR-led Eastern-block with Russian Telegraph Agency, Moscow Radio, Radio Peking and Radio Habana, the international airwaves were dominated by constantly clashing discourses and counter-

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander Brand and Stefan Robel, “Hegemonic governance? Global Media, U.S. Hegemony and the Transatlantic Divide”, (2009), <[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p312807\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p312807_index.html)>. p.6

discourses<sup>9</sup>, defining a new age of *media war*. During crises, third world countries- the usual terrain of competition among global powers- are covered almost systematically in way that reflects the lines drawn by the official stance of the concerned global power.

In fact, the proclivity to serve the respective political agenda of each global power- the victim of which in countless of occasions are the long proclaimed ideals of objectivity, neutrality and speaking truth to power- characterises most coverage of international events. Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky argue that events like the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the events and the elections in El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua during the eighties<sup>10</sup> provide hard tests for the impartiality of global media outlets and how independent they are of their governments. Similarly, other colossal events like the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf war in 1991, the 9/11 attacks in 2001<sup>11</sup>, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Israeli operation Cast Lead in Gaza strip in 2008-2009, to name just few, are no exception to the highly politicized way in which they were depicted in Western international media.

With few exceptions, most of these events were presented in a way that is compliant with the positions taken vis-à-vis these events by the governments where each Western media outlet happens to be. To this attest Frederick Howard by saying that:

the bulk of the media in the world are organised along the lines of states [. . .] they are produced in the languages spoken in particular states, their business depends upon markets defined by particular states [. . .] Most of the press and broadcasting are national in scope and concern and ***consequently they report and debate global issues from the narrow perspectives of the national interests with which they identify.***<sup>12</sup> [emphasis added]

But knowing that the official stance of different Western powers, concerning most *developments* in the world, is not always homogenous, if not contradictory, for reasons crucially linked to interests-conflict and power equations, the intervention of international media outlets often comes to win more support for the

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<sup>9</sup> Gilboa Eytan, "Mass Communication and Diplomacy: a Theoretical Framework," *Communication Theory*, Vol. 10 No.3, (2000), pp.275-309, p.279

<sup>10</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (New York: Vintage, 1998), p. 88

<sup>11</sup> Abrahamian Ervand, "The US media, Huntington and September 11," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 3, (2003), pp. 529-544, p. 536

<sup>12</sup> Frederick Howard, *Global Communication and International Relations*, (Wadsworth: Belmont, 1993), p. 65

position of its government and downplay the arguments of any opposing stances no matter how legitimate they are or whose voice they represent. Hence, to the misfortune of objectivity and impartiality, there are always many stifled differing and opposing voices and views, which can hardly reach the domain of public deliberation and debate.

## **b- Inequalities of Power**

Missing in the contest for persuasion, power and hegemony, the so called Third World continues, to a great deal, to play the role of the docile and passive addressee. Deprived of a developed mass media infrastructure, a global political agenda and a sophisticated pool of trained media professionals, Third World countries remain, to a large extent, in a position of dependency on Western Southward media flow of information with no vice versa. Not only denied, thus, a somewhat *original* image of themselves and world events, although most of the tragic events and situations take place there, but Third World countries fall also victim to Western-produced-information, basically tailored in ways to reflect its Eurocentric viewpoint. Masmoudi, a member of the McBride Commission<sup>13</sup> on behalf of Tunisia, contends, in this vein, that “by transmitting to developing countries only news processed by them, that is, news which they have filtered, cut, and distorted, the transnational media impose their own way of seeing the world upon the developing countries.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, they impose their own interpretation and justify, under the *special-effects* of objectivity and rationality, the very stances of their countries regardless of due consideration to some probable tragic consequences. For this reason, among many others, the issue of unequal flow of

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<sup>13</sup>In 1980, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) released *The MacBride Report*, a detailed vision for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) that could enhance media development while correcting the inequalities of media power. The report addressed the imbalances between “communication rich” and “communication poor” nations. In its assessment of various regions, the report identifies the Arab world as one of the “poorest” regions in regards to its communications systems. The *MacBride Report* does not advocate a strict adaptation of Western models. Indeed, the linear view of history, with its “catch-up to the West” logic, does not alone inform the report. The report asserts that “there is no place for the universal application of preconceived models”. This qualification allows for a more nuanced and negotiated view of development that treats Western and indigenous models with equal consideration. The report emphasizes too the gross distortions of power in global information flows without the vague and nostalgic allusions to Western democratic ideals as the ultimate source of justice. Breda PavliC and Cees J. Hamelink “The New International Economic Order: Links between Economics and Communications,” (Paris: Unesco workshops, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Mustapha Masmoudi, “Third World News and Views: The New World Information Order”. *Journal of Communication*, , Vol.29, No. 2 (1979), pp.172-185, p. 172-173

information was once raised in the United Nations General Assembly, through the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Mass Media Declaration in 1978, lobbied for especially by some leading countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, with the aim of establishing some sort of equality in the flow of information between the North and the South. The result was the adoption of the resolution of the *New World Information and Communication Order* (NWICO).<sup>15</sup>

The weight of this resolution is highly significant in the ongoing contest between Northern and Southern claimers of eligibility to narrate the *reliable* story. NWICO, which reproaches how “the freedom of the ‘strong’ and the ‘haves’ had had undesirable consequences for the ‘weak’ and the ‘have nots’ and which “related the growth of international corporations to ‘one way flow’, ‘market dominance’, and ‘vertical flow’”<sup>16</sup>, was and is a challenge to Western control of information and news markets; if by any sense, at least by acknowledging the inequality and by bringing the issue to the global table of debate. Yet this is partly why NWICO was not embraced by all actors in the field of international mass media. Indeed, John Daly argues that “a major reason that the United States withdrew from UNESCO in the 1980's was the anger generated by UNESCO's discussions of a New World Information and Communications Order.”<sup>17</sup> In a similar strategy, Thussu maintains, “the Western news organizations stoutly fought any change in the old information order”<sup>18</sup>, and insisted on those claims flagrantly analogous to the traditional “rhetoric of empire”<sup>19</sup> enmeshed in the precarious hold of telling the story of a muted subaltern from the vintage point of an omniscient Western narrator, by arguing “they were only reporting the reality of life in the Third

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<sup>15</sup> Tokunbo Ojo, “Post-NWICO debate: Image of Africa in the Western Media,” n.d. <<http://web.mit.edu/cms/Events/mit2/Abstracts/TOjo.pdf>>, p. 3

<sup>16</sup> Thussu, *International Communication*, p. 46

<sup>17</sup> Daly John, “The McBride Commission and its Findings,” Sunday, March 12, 2006 <<http://unescomscience.blogspot.com/2006/03/mcbride-commission-and-its-findings.html>>.

<sup>18</sup> Thussu, *International Communication*, p. 46

<sup>19</sup> David Spur, *The Rhetoric of Empire, Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, (Durham: Duke University, 1993)

World – political instability, economic backwardness, human and natural disasters”<sup>20</sup> . . . etc, as if these are the only issues that are there to be covered.

By far, this claim fits perfectly within the frameworks of Modernization theory, later Development theory, which commonly maintains that Western international media are called for to play decisive roles in promoting the transformation of traditional societies and the recently decolonized countries, by pressing them onwards to embrace nothing other than a Western model of modernity. In his *Mass Media and National Development*, Wilbur Schramm argues that mass media must “face the need to *arouse* people from fatalism and fear [. . .] to *desire* a better life.”<sup>21</sup> [emphasis mine] Indeed, he insists that the Western path of ‘development’ must be presented as the most effective way to shake off the traditional ‘backwardness’ of the rest of the world.<sup>22</sup>

However, the flaws in this theory according to others, especially in Dependency theory, are the assumed mutual exclusion of the modern and the traditional lifestyles; as well as the neutrality of mass media force in the process of development, ignoring how media themselves are products of social, political, economic and cultural interests, conditions and developments. What is at stake here is that when a great deal of the hurdles blocking the development of the Third World are themselves deeply related to the historical interaction between the centres and the peripheries, then the internal and external workings of mass media must be scrutinized under brighter limelight.

Therefore, it might be possible to state that NWICO is only one example of Third world attempts to have a say on human issues and international affairs. Other bids include a vast proliferation of satellite TVs and media networks, especially in the last two decades. Some of them are deeply haunted by the politics of representation, others are portrayed as indifferent. Although partly owned by Murdoch’s News Corporation, Chinese Phoenix channel, for example, broadcasts now in Mandarin language to almost 300 million

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<sup>20</sup> Thussu, *International Communication*, p.48

<sup>21</sup> Wilbur Schramm, *Mass Media and National Development*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), p. 27

<sup>22</sup> Loc. Cit.

household.<sup>23</sup> TV Globo, *telenovela* and Telsur, in Latin America, are claiming substantial fragments of the global news markets. But except for Telesur which is predominantly financed by Hugo Chavez's Venezuela, the other media global outlets are linked in a way or another to media multinationals centred in the West. Yet, the boom of international satellite media expansion is nowhere more prominent than it is in the Arab world, where the Saudis launched Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC), which was broadcasting from London before it was relocated to Dubai, Arab Radio and Television (ART) group and recently Alarabiya news channel, as well as a number of other media outlets. Noteworthy here is that the owners of Arab media hold substantial stakes in media multinationals like UPI, EuroDisney, Citigroup, and Apple Computer.<sup>24</sup> So, although they helped modernize the Arab media scene in terms of outlook through the use of sophisticated technologies, their effect in terms of content remained to a large extent narrow.

In fact, with its challenging tone and contents, once AJA hit the air it soon proved as if it was alone in the field and was given an encouraging welcome by viewers from Rabat to Baghdad. Indeed, as Thussu asserts, broadcasters like MBC helped to strengthen a "moderate and pro-Western Arab public opinion,"<sup>25</sup> a case which is almost reversed by Aljazeera discourse. A pro-western Arab opinion constitutes in Eric Alterman's view a vital ingredient for the enactment of any policies by the main external player in the region: the USA, albeit substantially crippled in recent years. Reacting to a foreign policy paper that recommends the US to engage with these media, Alterman says that "at the time when the US government standing in the region is at low ebb, a concerted and sophisticated effort to engage the regional Arab media, and through them the Arab world at large, could reap great rewards", adding that "success in this field could vastly facilitate the execution of the US policy in the region."<sup>26</sup> The idea is that media can be a very decisive psychological tool in carrying out political agendas in a region of *unequalled strategic importance* for the

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<sup>23</sup> Thussu, *International Communication*, p. 71

<sup>24</sup> Loc. Cit.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 212

<sup>26</sup> Eric Alterman, *Who speaks for America? Why democracy Matters in Foreign Policy*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), p.40

superpowers, especially the US, yet it can be at the same time a powerful tool to challenge those very agendas in the Middle East, for instance.

In fact, the Middle East represents an exceptional case of geography, history and polity, making of it a struggle magnet-site and a mine for chasing astonishing headlines and news-stories. Geography has made of it the nearest point to sail or to fly to every corner in the world. One can only have a look on major shipment and traffic multinationals moving their offices from traditional economic centres to Dubai in recent years. History has inflected it with a seemingly eternal struggle between the Palestinians, backed by the Arabo-Islamic world, and the Israelis, backed by the West. Then comes politics which elongated the region's mess and made of it, especially in recent years, a unique case of political tension between the ruling elites and the masses, a notorious failure in terms of development in a number of domains, a prominent area of archaic foreign policy bodies, in spite of a mind-boggling number of institutions, bilateral and multilateral councils and committees. Oil, of which the region holds two thirds of world proven reserves, though worth waging wars for, is not important in itself; however suffice it to know, David Strahan argues, that "oil provides 95 per cent of transport energy and that spikes in the oil price have precipitated every major recession in the last thirty years."<sup>27</sup> To the misfortune of the region as well, at least three major wars that inaugurated this century are still flaming there with unmistakable long-term aftershocks.

The above mentioned factors offer Aljazeera immediate access to a colossal pile of topics to be raised, especially in view of the underdevelopment of transnational media outlets in the region. In parallel, those factors are basically enough to make of the Middle East the site number one for antagonism, confrontation and foreign intervention. Nothing strange then when this explosive region is seen dominating headlines and media coverage all over the world. But the question is what factors influence the way this region, among other Third World regions, is portrayed in the international media? Apart from cultural backgrounds and institutional impositions, the economic relations that control media giants exercise

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<sup>27</sup> David Strahan, "Why the Middle East Matters", Friday, June 1, 2007, <<http://www.davidstrahan.com/blog/?p=28>>. n.p.



substantial authority not only in reporting these regions in a way that reflects the political and the economic interests of their countries but that shapes the world's view in relation to them as well.

## 2- Manipulation of Mass Media

### a- Media Concentration

The end of the Cold War was a landmark towards the emergence of what scholars label sometimes the new world system or the New World Order. One of the main traits of this new world has to do with the celebration of global institutions and multinational companies as the driving forces behind modernization, development and rapprochement. Needless to say, that at the heart of this system or process is seated the notorious issue of the *concentration* of the means of production, whether material or cultural, in the hands of the few. International mass media is not immune to the concentration of ownership and by extension the dominance of particular forms of cultural production and representation. It turns out, thus, to be one of the main structures driving towards the domestication and the acceptance of that new system in every part of the world. Eventually, international media, in particular, end up being a 'cultural industry' with high stakes in markets that have the potential of shaping the world according to the interests of free-market, consumerism and neo-liberal democracy. In fact, the globalization of trade is enormously correlated to international media ownership, dominated by the narrative of a very limited number of Western wealthy groups.

Early in the last century, critics of '*cultural industry*', especially in Frankfurt School under Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, warned against the domination of the public sphere via one particular capitalist ideology that seeks, with the aid of mass media, to create a society tailored to serve its needs.<sup>28</sup> Through an insistent manufacturing of the desires and the needs of consumers of cultural productions, the public becomes almost enslaved to the commercial priorities of the elites dominating ownership of the mass media.<sup>29</sup> More than that, Adorno states that "Everybody must behave (as if spontaneously) in accordance

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<sup>28</sup> Max Horkheimer and Adorno, T.W., "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. (New York: Continuum Group, 1976), p. 121

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25

with his previous determined and indexed level, and choose the category of mass product turned out for his type [ . . . ] the people at the top are no longer so interested in concealing monopoly: as its violence becomes more open, so its power grows.”<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, mass media manipulation by the elites at the international level is prescribed by a powerful intertwinement between political elites and media elites. Unlike most countries in the rest of the world, media in the West is not owned or run by quasi-governmental bodies; it is a matter of *coincidence* between the interests of media companies and the political interests of governments and policy-makers. So far this is not the only coincidence; but, when interweaving between media-ownership and polity-making reaches an almost closed circle of ‘media concentration’ among a restricted elite, then the stakes amount to reversing the ideal goals of mass media- envisioned as enlightening the masses, raising debate and guarding the public against whatsoever abusive acts of individuals or institutions- into a corporate machinery aimed at ‘manufacturing consent’.

In fact, Western media, particularly its international branches, have always been concentrated in a very limited number of information outlets. The French national agency (AFP), the British national agency (Reuters) and the German national agency (DPA), Jaap Van Ginneken asserts, “explicitly divided the world among themselves [ever] since 1859 and served the politics of their respective empires on numerous occasions.”<sup>31</sup> Currently, Thoams Maguire asserts that “the ‘Big 4’ news agencies—Reuters, AP, UPI, and Agence France-Presse—continue their stronghold on international news and therefore reproduce the hierarchies of domination.”<sup>32</sup> In the case of classical empires, media agencies and outlets were so close to their relevant governments as in the case of British Broadcasting Company (BBC) or French Agency AFP which were heavily dependent on their governments’ stipends and finances. Eventually, as in the imperial eras, they are extremely vulnerable to various forms of governments’ and other institutions’ invisible pressure and intrusion, sometimes on a devastating account of neutrality and objectivity. So, if Western

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 38

<sup>31</sup> Jaap Van Ginneken, *Understanding Global News*, (London: Sage Publication, 1999), p. 44-45

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Maguire, "Al Jazeera: Hybridity and Development in the Middle East," *International Communication Association, New Orleans Sheraton*, (2004), <[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p112379\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p112379_index.html)>, p.15

governments positions concerning international issues like ‘peace process’, ‘war on terror’ in the Middle East are to be characterized, at least one-sidedly, as biased, interest-based and sometimes hostile, it follows logically then that these media institutions go after their official lines almost in a verbatim-like manner. What takes place here is not merely the absence of sound decision-making, but indeed it is the massive exertions of caricaturing different peoples and cultures needed to cater for the legitimacy of a certain step taken by an individual or a political body in the West.

That is partially why there is a tendency to antagonism and derision felt by the cultures being mediated and represented whenever there is a state of political involvement of a relevant government and an accompanying media apparatus. Before, Americans themselves were raising complaints to Europeans similar to the ones that Third world cultures, particularly Middle Eastern, are raising right now against the Western media and culture(s), especially against the American ones. Undoubtedly, Americans, for instance, were never content with what Europeans used to tell the world about them, so that the general manager of American Agency (AP) Kent Kooper overtly stepped up once to resent “the manipulation of world news by the European agencies”<sup>33</sup> declaring that:

International attitudes (about the US) have developed from impressions and prejudices aroused by what the (European) news agencies reported. The mighty foreign *propaganda* carried out through these channels in the last 100 years *has been one of the causes of wars*. (Of America), these agencies told the world about Indians on the *warpath* in the West, *Lynching* in the South, and *Bizarre crimes* in the North. For, decades nothing credible to America was ever sent.<sup>34</sup>  
[emphasis added]

If this was the case with Americans in the past, the situation is no less unpromising when it comes to the deformed representation of Third World cultures in the present day. In similar cases, Western media appear to inevitably fall within the spirals of a rampant anti-Other rhetoric. A quick glimpse on the emphasized words above shows how corresponding they are with the terms used in Western international media when reporting about events in the Middle East, Africa, Latinas or Asia. Terms and phrases like ‘crackdown’, ‘corruption’, ‘genocide’, ‘barbaric’, ‘kamikaze’, ‘medieval punishment’, ‘terrorist attack’, ‘enslaved

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<sup>33</sup> Van Ginneken, *Understanding Global News*, p. 45

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Van Ginneken, *Understanding Global News*, p.72

women', 'human-trafficking' . . . etc. prevails the Western news stories and programmes about events in other countries and cultures, denying space for other possible green images lest they square with tourism and destination industry.

Building on the idea that international media operate in line with the state, the crucial thing then is that those derogatory terms and phrases are distributed selectively by the media, depending on who is involved and how he is perceived by the respective government. Consequently, what is lost in the haste to categorise is sound analysis, reasonable depth and humane judgement. In times of crises, one could scarcely find answers to questions like for what reasons one has done what, for whose benefit, and who backs whom and why. Indeed, insisting on exploring and answering these questions is one reason among many that made of Aljazeera a serious challenge to the received categorizations circulated by Western media especially in the US and that is partly why it is stoutly fought.

Still, given that the American media conglomerates dominate the world media today, it raises so many questions as to what has made the situation be reversed. After being the plaintiff, American media has become the culprit. Quite illuminating in this regard is Van Ginneken's insight when she quotes *The Economist* magazine's response to Kent Cooper, which reprimand that "like most business executives, (Cooper) experiences a peculiar *moral* glow in finding that his idea of freedom coincides with his commercial advantage",<sup>35</sup> arguing that international media is geared to serve business and political interest because of the power of capital dominating the whole economic system, forcing media companies to abide by the rules of the market.

This is in fact partially the result of media being dominated by an elitist circle with a great share of capital in the commercial market, which has the potential of reducing a plethora of ideas about an Other to particular political message. Consider for instance that the American media market, with its tens of thousands of local and global televisions, newspapers, magazines and film companies, is dominated

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<sup>35</sup> Howard, *Global Communication and International Relations*, p.175-180

primarily by ten media giants,<sup>36</sup> and the first biggest seven among them appear to hold substantial shares in media companies all over the world (Time Warner Inc., Walt Disney Company, Viacom Inc., News Corporation, CBS Corporation, Cox Enterprises, NBC Universal).<sup>37</sup> This is enough reason for Van Ginneken to say that if “Britain managed to build the largest formal empire, the US also controls the largest *informal* empire”.<sup>38</sup> Equally important, most of these conglomerates are owned by a very concentrated number of families like Newhouse family, Cox family, Bancroft family, McGraw family, Murdoch family, Sulzberger family and Hearst family.<sup>39</sup> The investments of these families are not limited to media sector alone, indeed they expand to every other sector of the American and the global economy from car industry, real-estate to military industry.

### **b- Manufacturing Consent**

In view of the degree of the ownership of mass media it is not surprising to find it turning into colossal means of persuasion and control, serving the private interest. Herman and Chomsky maintain that “the inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices”<sup>40</sup> render these media cartels extremely sophisticated *propaganda* machines endowed with extraordinary accretions of power that enable them “to filter out the news fit for print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public.”<sup>41</sup> The issue here is related to an intense exercise of censorship and ‘gate-keeping’<sup>42</sup> in a widely trumpeted principle of unconstrained access to information in free-democracies.

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<sup>36</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, p. 10

<sup>37</sup> *Media Owners*. n.d. <<http://www.mediaowners.com/>>

<sup>38</sup> Van Ginneken, *Understanding Global News*, p.85

<sup>39</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, p.9

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2

<sup>42</sup> Gatekeeping is one of media’s central roles in public life: people rely on mediators to transform information about billions of events into a *manageable* number of media messages. This process not only determines which information is selected, but also what the content and nature of messages, such as news, will be. *Gatekeeping* theory describes the powerful process through which events are covered by the mass media, explaining how and why certain information either passes through gates or is closed off from media attention. It is essential for understanding how even single, seemingly trivial gatekeeping decisions can come together to shape an audience’s view of the world, and illustrates what is at stake in the process. [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

In similar vein, while exploring some of the historical mergers and acquisitions of big media companies that were signed in the last two decades, making them ever bigger and more consolidated, Ben Bagdikian finds out that “media conglomerates with a global market has led to an unprecedented integration of multiple media which can simultaneously market the *same message* in multiple forms through a dazzling array of new technologies”, arguing that a “ ‘*private ministry of information*’ has emerged in the past 25 years, as ownership of major media has become increasingly concentrated.”<sup>43</sup> [emphasis added] As such, media spectrum in the US, as well as western Europe with a lesser degree, is identical to any authoritarian regime in the third world, where people get moulded almost exclusively with information that suits power holders.

Accordingly, if ministries of information in most Third World countries function predominantly as *overt* systems in charge of monitoring the dissemination of information and knowledge in bid for controlling the general public and insuring the status quo of the ruling regime, the ‘private ministry of information’ in ‘free’ democracies in the West represents a *subtle* system of social control in favour of elitist agendas. Herman argues that “a market system of control limits free expression by market processes that are highly effective. Dissident ideas are *not legally banned*, they are simply *unable to reach* mass audiences, which are monopolised by large profit-seeking corporations that offer programmes supported by advertising, from which dissent is quietly and obtrusively filtered out.”<sup>44</sup> [emphasis added] In this case, the ordinary public is not provided with adequate opportunities to negotiate freely all possible points of view concerning a certain controversial issue.

Consequently, in addition to struggling with covert tactics of censorship by means of “omission and misuse of language”<sup>45</sup>, the ordinary audience is required to tread his path through a tick arsenal of exclusion and inclusion if he is to come up with an original understanding of local issues, let alone global ones. In fact, as Van Dijk argues in this context, “the effort required to attempt to keep the world as it is, the

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<sup>43</sup> Bagdikian, Ben. *The Media Monopoly*, (Boston: Beacon, 1990). 3rd ed. p. 63-67

<sup>44</sup> Edward Herman, *The Myth of the Liberal Media*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), p.118

<sup>45</sup> John Pilger, “Acts of murder”, June 9, 1999, <<http://www.greenleft.org.au/1999/364/18671>>

mythic/ideological effort required day after day to maintain a stasis, is every bit as enormous as the efforts required to change the world.”<sup>46</sup> So, when “you've had somebody say to you for the thousandth time, ‘how come we never hear about these issues in the media’ ”<sup>47</sup> as Svend Robinson exclaims, one starts to reflect on the extent of obfuscation that permeates media behind-scenes when it comes to covering particular issues that might be of paramount importance to the audience.

What suffers in this situation is not only the proclaimed noble quest for dependable truth and sincere information, but also the far-off peoples who might be affected for so long by some unwise decisions and interventions made by Western politicians, aided by media megaphones. Indeed, otherness is consistently foreclosed by Western media networks in such a way that renders this latter irrevocably at the service of power structures, whose ideological manipulation of news coverage is appropriative of the spirit of its mission. The act of appropriation is often channelled into safe harbours whereby media discourse turns out to be symmetrical with the political edifice of dominant discourses, and turns into a colossal body of latent and manifest of ‘anti-Other’ blames.

When you have a major website consecrated to exposing media coverage of one of the major causes of instability in the Middle East and the world at large, i.e. the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the US policy in the Middle East, entitled by a conditional desperate denunciative phrase like “if Americans knew”<sup>48</sup>, ([www.ifamericansknew.org](http://www.ifamericansknew.org)), then it seems clear why such a great deal of disagreement and antagonism is flaring up everywhere about an issue notorious in the world and almost unknown to Americans. The website is so passionate concerning the negative coverage the Middle East peoples receive in American media, and questions why media heavily support the Israeli and caricature the Palestinian, why there is so much bias in favour of Israel and how censorship is practiced to insure that only the Israeli story is being narrated over and over to the American public meanwhile the Palestinian text is astonishingly missing. Certainly, there

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<sup>46</sup> Kress, “Representational Resources and the Production of Subjectivity,” p.25

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Herman, *The Myth of the Liberal Media*, p.74

<sup>48</sup> Full website address is ([www.ifamericansknew.org](http://www.ifamericansknew.org)). The board is chaired by a special category of figures, among them the ex-US ambassador Andrew Killgore and Paul Findley; It is run by Americans “without bias and ethnic ties to the region who would research and actively disseminate accurate information to the American public”.

are, in this regard, countless accusations circulating around the peripheries against the US and the West in general; and their credibility is not, by no way, to be measured by whether they are adequately voiced by the subaltern or tolerably received by the Western *agent*, as long as there is massive and constant application of a market system of propaganda that is capable of keeping one muffled inside a covered pit and the other hearing-impaired.

Similarly, there are so many unresolved issues involving both the centres and the peripheries and which require effective channels of original communication and exchange. The residues of the colonial era are still to be felt in every corner of the planet. Inequality between members of international institutions like the UN is still motivating endless tensions, defining strategic alliances and delaying potential reconciliations. Of greater urgency, too, is that new critical situations, events and developments take place somewhere in the world; some of which are bloody and tragic, and the human and environmental casualties therein fall beyond any *objective rhetoric* of costs counting. As such, disagreement, antagonism and confrontation seem to be by-products of the *interlocutors'* attitudes involved in these situations.

Arguably, so many differences, struggles and wars, especially in the Middle East, are somewhat the active and aggressive expression that pops up occasionally along the contours of a lasting historical *exchange* between the centre and the periphery. Before they stand up to arms, antagonists are already disputing with each other about the objects of controversy. Each camp involved in the controversy launches nationalist calls, invokes collectivist prides, mobilizes rhetorical campaigns and mediates anti-Other accusations giving shape to an idiosyncratic narrative of legitimacy. The end result is two conflicting narratives about one issue. In this framework, Aljazeera media stands for simultaneously a hybrid and an avowed narrative speaking to and on behalf of large sections of the globe's inhabitants. Given that the battle of international media outlets is taking place first and for most in the minds of the people, it appears that there are elements other than concentration of ownership and manipulation that nurtures 'mass deception' and 'thought control'. Linguistic tactics, discursive strategies and ideological formations constitute thus



crucial manifestations of how international mass media claims to objectivity, truth, impartiality and authenticity are to large extent illusive clouds for a discourse of power.

### **3- Between Objectivity and Ideology**

#### **a- The Rituals of Objectivity**

Neutral and responsible representation is the maxim of any Western media institution. Nevertheless, there are dynamics that interfere to redirect the act of representation and make it unavoidably partial, politically sided, and occasionally prejudiced. The overall social discourse, in symbiosis with the local institutional discourse, come to present a version of reality that pragmatically seek to preserve its acceptability among the widest possible spectrum of audience, instead of persevering primarily to inform 'the citizen' and enrich public debate. The ultimate *raison d'être* for that is to sustain the existing symmetry of power equations by means of an effortlessly convincing polemic of objectivity.

To begin with, Western media claim to the principle of objectivity is deeply rooted in Western intellectual traditions of scientific knowledge. The latter appears to be one of the most celebrated achievements relating to scientific *method* that keeps being invoked in every new discipline, each heralding attainment to truth. Correspondingly, Western mass media has inhaled the obsession with objectivity and made of it a building-block in producing and representing objects of knowledge. However, it can be said that objectivity even in hard sciences has lost much of its appeal, since the utilization of objectivity has become a planned framework engineered to regulate a certain phenomenon in a way that is hard to dissociate from socio-cultural influences. Indeed, objectivity status becomes ostensibly more uncertain when it is applied in studying, categorising or simply understanding *social* phenomena and ominously unpredictable when it comes to explaining, representing and mediating *alien* events and cultures. Mass media dwells in this last sphere.

Far from being something out there to be discovered and ‘authentically’ presented, objective truth that Western<sup>49</sup> mass media tries to sketch out cannot be, by any means, considered an incontestable depiction of the real since it is principally a *construction* liable to derailment by a plethora of institutional and discursal forces and practices. The fact is that “ ‘truth’ ”, according to John Fiske, “exists only in the studio” and “depends for its authenticity upon the eyewitness and the actuality film, those pieces of ‘raw reality’ whose meanings are actually *made* by the discourse of the studio, but whose *authenticating* function allows that discourse to disguise its *productive role* and thus to situate the meanings in the events themselves.”<sup>50</sup>[emphasis added ] The intervention of the ‘studio’ between the ‘real’ events and the audience is not to be seen as a mechanical operation with no bearing on the truth that is supposed to be disinterestedly depicted and transmitted.

Apart from *open* ideological interventions which seek to have a particular truth conveyed in certain exceptional circumstances, mass media’s *ordinary* strategies of quoting, commenting, zooming, framing, backgrounding, foregrounding and disseminating messages are in themselves always accountable for crucial parts of how meanings are to be received and reacted to by the targeted audience. In fact, the slightest modification of whatever piece of information in media might cause tremendous changes in perspective, intention and effect upon its original identity. In Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory, even verbatim reporting is considered part of discourse transformation and an invitation of completely new meanings, since “one may bring about fundamental changes even in another’s utterance accurately quoted.”<sup>51</sup> It appears that there is probably no other sensitivity-equal domain where representation management is as crucial and easy at the same time as it is in media. Unlike law or science relatively connotation-free jargons, the floating character of representation in mass media makes of it an industry bent on manufacturing realities and propositions of truth, and renders its celebration of objectivity excessively instrumentalist.

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<sup>49</sup> The use of ‘Western’ in this paper is primarily to emphasise the difference between Western Media institutions and non-Western ones, particularly Aljazeera, although the concepts along which it is used may be applicable to any media organization.

<sup>50</sup> John Fiske, *Television Culture*, (New York: Routledge,1987), p. 289

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Leon Barkho, *Strategies of Power in Multilingual Global Broadcasters: How the BBC, CNN and Aljazeera Shape Their Middle East News Discourse*, (Jonkoping: ARK-tryckaren AB, 2008), p.64

Under this premise, objectivity in mass media is more or less a means in the hands of media practitioners who make use of it in view of “legitimizing their profession in the public eye, protecting themselves and attaining journalistic credibility without necessarily believing in it”.<sup>52</sup> Michael Schudson goes further as to define objectivity only as “a set of concrete conventions which persist” simply because they minimize “the extent to which reporters themselves can be held responsible for the words they write.”<sup>53</sup> These protectionist conventions of objectivity become, in Gaye Tuchman’s terms a “strategic ritual” that serves to guard media practitioners against the risks of their trade.<sup>54</sup> By rituals he means “a routine procedure which has relatively little or only tangential relevance to the end sought.”<sup>55</sup> In fact, routines like verifying facts, presenting conflicting possibilities, supporting truth claims with evidence, using quotes in relation to someone else’s opinion, arranging information from the most to the least important in an *inverted pyramid* style, take much energies of media practitioners and render media a pre-determinately moulded machinery whose productions are hardly unpredictable, in an utter contrast to the insights and illuminations it is expected to generate. As such, objectivity as an end in itself becomes “an illusion”<sup>56</sup>, extremely remote from concretizing realities. Indeed, the disparity between the propagated *objective* representation and the concrete reality is in a way identical to the unbridgeable disparity between semiotic signs as physical entities (*the signifier*) and the objects of which they speak (*the signified*). This is, in fact, what makes the space between the signs of representation and the reality being represented a vast site of differing, and sometimes contradictory, assessments and reactions.

That, again, is one reason why what might appear as an irrefutable objectivity for a Western audience, for instance, can be absolute subjectivity for a non-Western audience. What might appear as a

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<sup>52</sup> Mohammed el-Nawawy, “Arab Media and Terrorism: Is an Objective Journalism Possible? The Case of Al-Jazeera,” *European Journalism Observatory*, (2006), pp.1-54. p..25

<sup>53</sup> Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*, (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 186

<sup>54</sup> Gaye Tuchman, “Objectivity as a Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen’s Notions of Objectivity”, *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.77, No. 4 (1972), p.p 660-679. p.663

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.662

<sup>56</sup> Michael J. Clark, “Illusion and Delusion: The Media and the Natural Scientist”, *Leonardo*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1986), pp. 65-70. p. 67

truth speaking volumes for CNN, Fox News or BBC audiences' might appear as a grievous misrepresentation and probably a *conspiratorial* fallacy in the eyes of Aljazeera audience, for instance. In an attempt to reconcile the argument about the limits of objectivity, El Nawawy coined the term "contextual objectivity"<sup>57</sup> to attest to the fact that there are numerous 'objectivities' depending on the social-cultural milieu within which media outlets operate and on how deeper they might go in contextualizing for their stories. Contextualization allow for much space for the audience to attain to original insights and avoid jumping to judgements that usually relate to biased communal consensus. Indeed, profound contextualization help further challenge the accepted versions of information and pave the way for accepting new objectivities/subjectivities.

Had there been a unique universal objectivity, it will be impossible for different media outlets to come up with different portrayals of the same event. El Nawawy locates objectivity "in the eyes of the beholder"<sup>58</sup>, insisting that any Western media institution has its own "inherent biases" and is pressed to appeal to the public sensibilities and the overall scapes of its audiences, be it ethnic, cultural, economic or religious. While mapping some points of convergence and divergence between Aljazeera and its Western global counterparts, he stresses that Al-Jazeera's philosophy, given the amount of controversy it has flared up the world over, suggests that objective " 'truth' is the culmination of multiple conglomerated subjectivities"<sup>59</sup>, which might run, in practical terms, almost on the opposite direction of Western practices of politically rewarding objectivity and impartiality. In similar vein, Marwan Kraidy argues indeed that the discourse of Aljazeera "shows the extent to which the term 'objectivity' inevitably follows the cultural bias and preferences of those who invoke it. U.S. and British media, therefore, hold no proprietary rights over

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<sup>57</sup> Mohammed El Nawawy and Adil Iskandar, *Al-Jazeera: The Story of The Network That is Rattling Governments and Redfining Modern Journalism*, (Massachusetts: Westview Press, 2003), p.28

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. P.28

<sup>59</sup> Mohammed El Nawawy and Adil Iskandar "Al-Jazeera and War Coverage in Iraq: The Media's Quest for Contextual Objectivity," In Allan, S. & Zelizer, B. (Eds.), *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 315-33, p.321

news values and their practical application.”<sup>60</sup> Basing on that, it seems that Aljazeera is not only about information, but it deliver an objectivity based on a cultural bias of its own.

In matter-of-fact terms Western media outlets, Ginneken asserts, focus their “reports on those aspects of perceived reality that all *relevant* audiences would be able to agree upon, and to *set aside* those aspects that relevant audiences might differ about”.<sup>61</sup> [emphasis added] This attests to the fact that objectivity and truth are not in themselves sought-after ideals, lest they coincide with local and private interests of media outlets such as ratings, advertising and other related elitist politico-economic aspirations. The issue here centres on the use of objectivity as a ‘culturally’ justified economic device in bid for securing a faithful audience.

#### **b- Cultural Formations and Institutional Impositions**

Pragmatism is not the only element that intervenes to reroute media truth, economic values like free enterprise and free market, social values like individualism and social mobility, lifestyle values such as materialism and autonomy, ideological values like ‘we have no ideology’ constitute the overall mindsets stipulating for that matter what to be included and excluded from a certain media ‘story’. Jack Newfield, quoted in Schudson, overpoweringly phrase it in this way:

So the men and women who control the technological giants of the mass media are not neutral, unbiased computers. They have a mindset. They have definite life-styles and political values, which are concealed under the rhetoric of objectivity. But those values are organically institutionalized by the *Times*, by AP, by CBS . . . into their corporate bureaucracies. Among these unspoken, but organic, are belief in welfare capitalism, God, the West . . . and perhaps most crucially, in the notion that violence is only defensible when employed by the [our] State. I can’t think of any white house correspondent, or network television analyst, who doesn’t share these values. And at the same time, who doesn’t insist he is totally objective?<sup>62</sup>

Being part and parcel of highly ‘disciplined’ institutions, feeding from reasonably cohesive cultural backgrounds and mediating sometimes overwhelmingly unexpected events and topics, Western media practitioners are left with too little prospects to represent events and alien cultures according to genuine parameters, which are derived from the nature of the object of representation rather from the texture of their own discourse. Roger Fowler argues that “events and ideas are not communicated neutrally, in their

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<sup>60</sup> Marwan M. Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), p. 2

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43

<sup>62</sup> Schudson, *Discovering the News*, p.184

natural structure, as it were. They could not be, because they have to be transmitted through some medium with its own structural features, and these features are already impregnated with social values which make up a potential perspective on events.”<sup>63</sup> Appropriating a certain incident taking place in a non-western context and forcing it to fit into a preordained discursive framework, leads in most cases to devoid it at least of any other possible meaning or interpretation it might allow. So far, there is no great risk, but when the event or object of representation is, for example, an ethnic cleansing whose images send the whole world shivering then reporting is expected to be extremely wary as to how it is going to carefully select its ‘disinterested’ sources, humanely unearth who has done what, and daringly distribute aftermath responsibilities.

Things become worse when any ‘alternative’ way of reading the event is teasingly downplayed and probably demonized if it does not go well with the accepted version of the media institution involved in the act of representation and the accepted audience consensus it safely relates to; thus reducing the chances of wider interpretations and unadulterated cultural interchange on the long run. The nature and the scale of antagonism that Aljazeera English faces, for instance, in its endeavour to enter the US and Canada or its Arabic counterpart in its perseverance to remain at work in some Arab and Islamic countries are cases in point. Unfortunately, one of the enduring end results of that is an ever widening gap between the ‘cultural formations’ of different communities; formations mass media have made their harmonization its primary goal. Accordingly, a potentially original interaction and a probably productive dialogue between dissimilar cultures, say the Eastern and the Western, via various media platforms turns out to be a monologue with one speaker monopolizing the loudspeaker and preaching one side of the story to his relevant audience.

Accordingly, if Western media systems of representation are deflected on one hand by the immediate politico-economic ecologies within which they happen to operate, the ‘discursive practices’ giving shape to their elements of representation, be it news, footage or documentary . . . about non-Western events, originate, on the other hand, in a hoard of epistemic repertoires massively circumscribed by the

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<sup>63</sup> Roger Fowler, *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 25

cultural accumulations of the *will to knowledge and the will to power*. Mass media has developed first and foremost in a Western environment, and its discursive traditions of reporting and mediating events cannot be stripped of most of their diachronic connotations and institutional impositions on objects of knowledge. Crudely speaking, if Western traditional disciplines of representing the ‘Other’ were channelled through some *all-knowing* Eurocentric gaze looking from a vintage point of history, the discursive practices and the subsequent means of semiotization in Western media today keep being hued with almost that same classic socio-cultural spirit that transcends the functions of conveying neutral and *objective* meaning *per se* to undertakings of creating an inescapably chivalric subjective one.

Undeniably, Western international media discourse, and with it the underlying ‘cultural formations’, becomes exceedingly exposed especially in times of crises. In relation to ‘Islam’<sup>64</sup>, for instance, as an ‘Other’ among many ‘others’ of the West, Edward Said insists in his *Covering Islam* that there is in Western media, especially in the US, “a strange revival of canonical . . . Orientalist ideas about Islam . . . --ideas which have achieved a startling prominence at a time when racial or religious misrepresentations of every other cultural group are no longer circulated with such impunity”<sup>65</sup>. For Said the revival of those enduring Orientalist ‘fantastic’ representations of Islam does not come out of the blue; in effect, they are preserved in the cultural memory through the collaboration of various centres of knowledge production. Said’s contention is that “the canonical, orthodox coverage of Islam that we find in the academy, in the government and in the media is *interrelated*.”<sup>66</sup>[emphasis added] Said apologetically concludes that the natural result of the interrelation and conscious or unconscious collaboration of dominant institutions, especially media giants given their vast outreach, in producing one version of knowledge is the “triumph not just of a particular knowledge of Islam but rather of a particular interpretation”<sup>67</sup>, which “in effect canonizes certain, notions, texts, and authorities.”<sup>68</sup> Without mentioning its challenging contents,

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<sup>64</sup> Islam is used in the widest possible sense. It is used to refer to the geography, the history, the peoples and the religion of Islam.

<sup>65</sup> Edward Said, *Covering Islam*, (New York: Vintage books, 1997), p.7

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.169

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.169

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.157

the very appearance of Aljazeera with such a scale and sophistication on the global scene, particularly with Aljazeera English, give the impression of it to be a serious “antithetical [project of] knowledge”<sup>69</sup> seeking to destabilize those Western canonical texts and authorities, not only in relation to Islam as the environment that produced Aljazeera itself and as the favourite interlocutor of Western *authority*, but also in relation to all other non-Western communities all over the world.

In fact, the metamorphosis of canonical knowledge about the West’s Others into the discourse of Western media is due primarily to the fact that media organizations are socio-cultural institutions that have their own *epistemic memories* that prescribe the permissible possibilities of articulating, framing, interpreting and arguing for or against certain issues and topics. No less important than Third World events and issues themselves, these memories have substantial bearing on the forms and contents disseminated by media institutions to their audiences, and consequently on how their audiences see the world. In his *Critical Discourse Analysis*, Norman Fairclough asserts that each “institution has its own set of speech events, its own differentiated settings and scenes, its cast of participants, and its own norms for their combination – for which members of the cast may participate in which speech events, playing which parts, in which settings, in pursuit of which topics or goals, for which institutionally recognized purposes.”<sup>70</sup> This neat regulation of roles and functions of every element that fall within the domain of the institution provides its internal subjects, in this case correspondents, commentators, editors . . . etc, “with a frame of action, without which they could not act, but it thereby constrains them within that frame.”<sup>71</sup> As such, institutions defines not only who is eligible to represent what, but it is indeed also logically endowed with the capacity to dictate every single bit of information that is to be included in or excluded from a certain story.

Like any other institutions, media organizations have their inherent ideological strategies of maintaining the *purity* of their idea and the relations of power for and within which they operate; strategies applied in relation to language and basically in relation to members of the institution themselves. This is

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.146

<sup>70</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, (London: Longman, 1995), p.38

<sup>71</sup> Loc. Cit.



simply to say that institutions have the potential to adjust their subjects to be reliable agents of inclusion and exclusion. Fairclough maintains that institutions construct their “ideological and discursive subjects; they construct them in the sense that they impose ideological and discursive constraints upon them as a condition for qualifying them to act as subjects.”<sup>72</sup> Ideologically and discursively qualified subjects are the ones who have successfully drawn in the “dominant ideological discursive formation (IDF)”,<sup>73</sup> within a specific institution or a socio-cultural milieu at large. On the way to that qualification, the institution does not visibly coerce its subjects to agree to their multifunctional pre-established discursive frameworks, designed primarily to receive whatsoever information about whatsoever issue just to generate at the end the cognitive product it sees fit to its interest; rather, subjects are expected to see these frameworks first “as norms of the institution itself, and second as merely skills or techniques which must be mastered in order for the status of competent institutional subjects to be achieved.”<sup>74</sup> These are, in Fairclough view, “the origins of naturalization and opacity.”<sup>75</sup> The main function of naturalization is to provide a degree of acceptability to some particular ideological representations to the extent that they ascend to the status of common sense. This subsumes the prevalence of “‘naturalized’ ideological representations, i.e. ideological representations which come to be seen as non-ideological ‘common sense’ ”<sup>76</sup>, and opacity renders the serviceability of ideology for the reproduction of power relations almost invisible and without a trace.

### **c- Discourse and Positioning**

Institutional subjects are supposed not only to learn how and when to use certain speech acts, dialogic techniques and discursive strategies but also to ingest the *rules* governing the discourse of certain interrelated institutions to the extent that it becomes almost beyond reach to think outside them. For discourse, according Michel Foucault, is not simply assemblages of utterances, centred around a theme, nor is it simply sets of utterances that emanate merely from a particular institutional setting, but discourse is a

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.38

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.41

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.42

<sup>75</sup> Loc. Cit.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.25

highly ordered and rule-governed structure that stretches beyond the utterance and the institution themselves.<sup>77</sup> One of the main functions of these rules of discourse is to cast legitimacy on or to withdraw it from some types of ideological representations. Central to the nature of any discourse, according to Sara Mills, is its monolithic make-up that is “principally organised around practices of exclusion.”<sup>78</sup> Any alternative or challenging form of representation that does not square with the dominant discourse is inaudibly repelled, on the basis that it is threatening to the status quo of the discourse or the chain of the reproduction of relations of power. This is so because, “discourse”, in Bjerke view, “is liable to change and disruption without realising a particular teleological project”, therefore, any potential undermining force is to be confronted by some stabilising “mechanism preventing social disorder.”<sup>79</sup> The stabilising mechanism usually evolves around the *invention of an excluded antagonist* who “establishes a threatening Other as the symbol of the virtual non-being of the social order.”<sup>80</sup> This allows for the dominant set of ideas and statements of truth, within and outside institutionalized discourses to go unchallenged, to be naturalized and accepted as incontestable common sense.

This is pertinent when accounting for the ideological discourse of “the emergent neo-liberal global order”<sup>81</sup>, whose celebrated motto is that “we have no ideology”<sup>82</sup> and in whose favour Western media giants are structurally compelled to perform and propagate. The fact is that ideology, apart of any pejorative uses of the term, is in essence a mode of representing the world according to a particular interest.<sup>83</sup> Its system of representation is based primarily on a particular way of seeing and interpreting the world in concomitance with certain private or public interest. Consequently, if interest is the driving force behind any ideology, it follows that any representation is ideological in a way or another. However, it must be relevantly added that the use of ideological discourse is a matter of degree, since it “may . . . be a more salient issue for some

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<sup>77</sup> Sara Mills, *Discourse*, (London: Routledge, 1991), p.15

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12

<sup>79</sup> Flemming Bjerke, “Interdiscursivity and Ideology,” *Political Science Research School*, (2008). Aug 21, 2009. <[www.pipl.com/directory/name/Bjerke/Flemming](http://www.pipl.com/directory/name/Bjerke/Flemming)>, p. 6

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* p.11

<sup>81</sup> Norman Fairclough, “Dialectics of Discourse,” n.d <<http://www.sfu.ca/cmns/faculty/Analysis.pdf>>, p..3

<sup>82</sup> Van Ginneken, *Understanding Global News*, p.93

<sup>83</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, p.46

instances and types of media discourse than for others.”<sup>84</sup> For while ideological discourse can be sometimes a mere “discursive manipulation, misinformation, lies, slurs, propaganda and other forms of discourse that are aimed at illegitimately managing the minds and controlling the actions of people with respect to the reproduction of power”<sup>85</sup>, as in Van Dijk, it is in Foucault a site of struggle, although unequally between the powerless and the powerful, in the sense that in spite of the ability of ideological discourse to transmit, produce and reinforce power, it “also undermines it and exposes it, it renders it fragile and makes possible to thwart.”<sup>86</sup> Hence, there are in any discourse inherent fissures visible only to the opposing discourses. Because of their nature that involves primarily interaction via means of semiotisation, discourses are built in relation or indeed in opposition to other discourses.

So, if it is possible to state that the secular discourse of the Enlightenment’s political theory is erected almost brick by brick against the yoke orthodoxies of the church and the Devine-right-rule, and that the feminist discourse is somewhat nestled over every flaw in the discourse of patriarchy, and that the environmentalist discourse is structured in reaction to the official discourses of economic development and that the postcolonial text is painted in different colours aimed at fracturing the whiter-than-snow imperial one, it seems that Aljazeera’s discourse has developed a structure of knowledge diametrically antithetical to the *dependent* Arab local media discourses and to the Western media narrative. This antitheism transpires in the various fronts of representation that involves the West and the rest from hunger in African countries to Afghanistan. In her discussion of the notion of discourse in relation to many discourse theorists, stressing the institutional power imbedded in discourse, Diane Macdonnell comments that “the position does not exist by itself . . . Indeed, it may be understood as a standpoint taken up by the discourse through its relation to another, *ultimately an opposing discourse.*”<sup>87</sup> [emphasis added] In this sense, the discursive practices of Aljazeera seem to have developed in a large measure as dependent on events and discursive frameworks external to it.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.47

<sup>85</sup> Teun A. Van Dijk, *Discourse and Power*, (Houndsmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p.7

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Mills, *Discourse*, p.45

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Mills, *Discourse*, p.43

If Aljazeera, for instance, tries every now and then to take and show pictures of Islamist activists in their moments of glow and smile, regardless of what the occasion is, it does not behave this way haphazardly or unconsciously. It behaves like that in all probability with awareness in mind that the Islamist is very rarely portrayed in positive light beyond the prevalent image of the always angry, thickly bearded and nearly frightening cleric in most local and Western media. Aljazeera also occasionally reverses the mechanism when it comes to portraying Western or Israeli official figures. This makes a huge difference in the intended positions that the institution wants its audience to adopt. Mills, invoking Michel Pecheux, stresses in line with Foucault “the conflictual nature of discourse, that is always in dialogue and in conflict with other positions.”<sup>88</sup> Naturally, discursive practices don not appear in the void, they usually build on each other more often than not with the intent of negating and subverting their semantic and referential capacity.

To go even deeper, discursive practices in media as in other institutions usually envision some other utterances preceding them or some potential other ones that are going to come up. They seem to address certain interlocutors beyond themselves. This is partly what is meant by the dialogic nature of discourse, or what has been baptized as the ‘double-voiced’ discourse in media. Mikhail Bakhtin calls it “hidden dialogism”<sup>89</sup> and he states in this vein that “*although only one person is speaking, we feel that this is a conversation, and a most intense one at that, since every word that is present answers and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible interlocutor, it points outside itself, beyond its own borders to the other person’s unspoken words.*”<sup>90</sup> [emphases added] The utterance of the producer is there but the response of the other is discursively absent. Nonetheless, the critical audience can sense the conversational character of the

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<sup>88</sup> Mills, *Discourse*, p.45

<sup>89</sup> John Shotter , “ Mikhail M. Bakhtin [1895-1975] ,” *pubpages.unh.edu*, June 1996, <<http://pubpages.unh.edu/~jds/Bakhtinquotes.htm>>

<sup>90</sup> Loc. Cit.

discourse as the producer targets other discursively hidden voices and one can sense that the producer even anticipates what their responses would be.

The conversation is largely argumentative and in Bakhtin's terms *internally polemic*, which in a sense represents a visible discursive bid to distinguish itself from others' arguments and in a sense tends to refute the validity of their discursive options. In the case of Aljazeera discourse, for instance, or Alarabiya in reaction to Aljazeera in many instances, the producer or the writer is aware of how 'others' tackle certain issues and how they use similar or different terms in representing the issue of debate. This is what gives that kind of unceasing and invisible dialogue its character and endows it with its subversive load. Bakhtin argues, although in different contexts, that "the individual manner in which a person structures his own speech is determined to a significant degree by his peculiar awareness of another's words."<sup>91</sup> This awareness of the others' stance, embodied in his potential utterance on the other end of the line vis-a-vis a certain issue, is to large extent what triggers a potential polemical debate with them. The intervention to subvert is carried out through inserting, Bakhtin says, "a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own".<sup>92</sup> The new semantic intention that Aljazeera adds to the existing dominant discourses is predominantly subversive and polemical.

In the case of Aljazeera as an institution, it appears to have appropriated and adopted every single element of the Western media, in terms of style, form and technique. But it seeks to make a parody of it in terms of contents and political positions wherever they appear to meet on the global stage. Parody, in Bakhtin's conception, refers to how one party adopts another's discourse "*but* introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly *opposed* to the original one"<sup>93</sup>, [emphases added]. As such, Aljazeera seems to be providing an opposing peripheral 'semantic intention' or 'voice' to the one that inhabits the

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<sup>91</sup> Loc. Cit

<sup>92</sup> James P. Zappen, "Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975)," *Twentieth-Century Rhetoric and Rhetoricians: Critical Studies and Sources*, Ed. Michael G. Moran and Michelle Ballif, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000). pp. 7-20. p.16

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17

original discourse. Nevertheless, this should not by any mean, as Agger Gunhild argues, “be understood in such a confrontational manner,”<sup>94</sup> instead it is supposed to indicate simply that there are “various dialogues and negotiations going on . . . between different systems of representation and narrative.”<sup>95</sup> In fact, Aljazeera discourse could not have achieved such a status at the local level at least without its use of that allegorical spirit of challenging the Western hegemonic discourses and the locally dependent ones. Basing on what is said before, it can be said that the discourse of Aljazeera derive its defining character from factors and elements external to the institution itself. In fact, the highly complicated environment in which Aljazeera operates suggests that the discourse of Aljazeera is dictated primarily by the historical and the political challenges facing the Arab world in its relation to the external world chiefly the West.

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<sup>94</sup> Gunhild Agger, “Intertextuality Revisited: Dialogues and Negotiations in Media Studies,” (1992), <[http://www.uqtr.ca/AE/vol\\_4/gunhild.htm](http://www.uqtr.ca/AE/vol_4/gunhild.htm)>

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

## **Part Two**

### **The Universe of Aljazeera Discourse**

#### **1- Aljazeera Breakthroughs**

##### **a- Aljazeera and the Arab Media Scene**

Without shedding light on issues like Arab media scene before and post “Aljazeera Era”<sup>96</sup>, its political function and its historical interweaving with the Western media, the risks of inadequately highlighting Aljazeera’s strategies of dissent are going to be high. The widespread correlation between the state and mass media in the Arab world renders the former one of the most innovative tools of soft power inhibited in the omniscient apparatus of cementing consensus.<sup>97</sup> Media discourse as a result ends up being a discursive force geared towards reinforcing the legitimacy and sustainability of the system. However, given the widely objectionable historical, political and social situation in the Arab world, media remain a delicate field where the stakes are extremely crucial. This necessitates a tight control, healthy for the official discourse, yet it brews a fertile soil for the emergence of huge waves of counter-discourses and underground ‘counter-scripts’.<sup>98</sup>

Before the emergence of Aljazeera, Arab television has been still confined within the notorious legacies of ‘red-lines’, severe state censorship, rampant self-censorship and a poor social practice of open media. In 2003, the annual and independent *Freedom of the Press* survey noted that “the region with the worst conditions for the media in 2003 continued to be the Middle East and North Africa.”<sup>99</sup> The bad media conditions lambasted here range from lack of sophisticated juridical frameworks and media laws to an ardent adoption of Mamoun Fandy’s model of “everywhere but here”<sup>100</sup> to news illiteracy. Unsurprisingly, these deficiencies are attributed most often than not to official institutions related to the ruling political regimes.

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<sup>96</sup> Marwan Kraidy, “Arab Media and US Policy: A Public Diplomacy Reset,” Jan. 2008, <<http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pab/PAB08Kraidy.pdf>> , p.3

<sup>97</sup> Andrew Hammond, “Saudi Arabia's Media Empire: Keeping the Masses at Home,” No. 3, Fall 2007, <<http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=420>>

<sup>98</sup> Mark Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, AL-Jazeera, and the Middle East Politics Today*, (New York: Columbia University Press : 2006), p.35, (Bloggers in the net are considered the most prominent category in this domain).

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Steve Tatham *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds the Coalition, Aljazeera and Muslim Public Opinion*, (New York: Front Street Press, 2006), p.60

<sup>100</sup> Mamoun Fandy, of the Baker Institute, observes that Arab media, particularly the Arab satellites, operates on an “anywhere but here” model, engaging in detailed reporting of events outside their host countries but being careful to avoid controversial reporting on domestic occurrences. This model was presented along answers to the question “how does ownership of Arab media outlets drive the news agenda?” posed in an “Arab Media, Power and Influence” conference co-sponsored by Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University.



In fact, the very presence of the ministries of information in every Arab country is seen as a hindrance to the development of media and open political deliberation. William Rugh asserts that “every Arab state has a government controlled radio and television organization”<sup>101</sup>, which make sure that the information that is to be disseminated should be abiding by rules engineered primarily to exclude any form of dissent threatening the status quo. Rugh even asserts that “in the majority of Arab countries, the state or state agencies . . . own or operate all television and radio as government monopoly.”<sup>102</sup> In similar vein, Tatham claims that one of the main functions of these state institutions is to monitor and control public deliberation.<sup>103</sup> State institutions would justify their practices, laws and rules on the basis of protecting the common good.

Yet, the duplicity of public-good-argument is betrayed by Lynch’s critique who questions how Arab Broadcasting Union, a pan-Arab institution, refused to tolerate delivering broadcast licences to Aljazeera, while it was far more ready to accredit satellite dance channels showing just about naked women or stations that “broadcast little but near pornography.”<sup>104</sup> The irony is that one of the first political reforms made by the Qatari Emir after the well negotiated white *coup d’etat* against his father in 1995 was the abolition of the Ministry of Information.<sup>105</sup> This unusual move in the Gulf, where “armed guards, sandbags” still surround ministries of information buildings as in Riyadh or Cairo where tanks were deployed to guard official TV stations during an insurgency uprising<sup>106</sup>, set the sails of Aljazeera unusually free.

Another channel through which Arab media is monitored is the nature of media ownership in the Arab world, dominated mainly by members of super-wealthy and *ruling* families that are deeply involved in the global commercial market. In spite of the recently throbbing Arab media sphere, the Saudis control

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<sup>101</sup> William Rugh, *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics*, (Connecticut: Praeger, 2004), p.202

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 202

<sup>103</sup> Steve Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds*, p.61

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 63

<sup>105</sup> Mohammed El Nawawy and Adil Iskandar, *Al-Jazeera: The Story of The Network*, p.35

<sup>106</sup> Joel Campagna, “Pre-empting the Satellite TV Revolution,” Committee to Protect Journalists - CPJ – (2009),

<<http://www.cpj.org/2009/02/satellite-tv-middle-east.php>>.

the market of information by “nearly 75 percent of satellite television in the region.”<sup>107</sup> Al Walid Ben Talal, King Abdullah’s nephew, owns, for instance, Rotana Group and he is a big shareholder in Murdoch’s NewsCorporation that runs FoxNews.<sup>108</sup> The idea is that Aljazeera used to be referred to especially in the heydays of battles in Iraq as the Arab “Anti-FoxNews”.<sup>109</sup>

Alarabiya satellite Channel and its internet website were launched by the Saudi Sheikh Walid al-Ibrahim, brother-in-law of the late king Fahd, who owns MBC conglomerate, and who told Paul Martin of the *Washington Times* that “one of the channel’s main objectives was to get rid of the ‘the Taliban mentality’ ”<sup>110</sup>, in reference to Aljazeera discourse. Tatham comments on that by saying that “the paradox between his [Walid al-Ibrahim] country’s desire for an ‘independent’ news outlet and its fundamentalist Wahhabi teachings, *which form the core of Taliban belief*, is evidently ignored.”<sup>111</sup> [emphasis added] He asserts that many of Alarabiya staff whom he interviewed off-the-record<sup>112</sup> “privately confided that the station owed its very existence to the disputes between Saudi Arabia and Qatar”,<sup>113</sup> with Aljazeera being one of the main reasons for that dispute.

What is to be emphasized here is that this type of political-economy directly affects the discursive practices of the aforementioned media outlets, since it basically decides who the managers and editors should be, who in turn dictates what are the guidelines and the topics to be covered and from which perspectives. This practice is tremendously decisive concerning the discursive outcome. Needless to note that Aljazeera itself was launched under a royal patronage, yet the outcome is hugely different. Aljazeera is working with full cognisance that there are other institutions whose discourse often runs in opposition to

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<sup>107</sup> Thussu, *International Communication*, p. 211

<sup>108</sup> Addy Dugdale, “Crib Sheet: Prince Alwaleed--Saudi Oil Tycoon, Fox News Investor,” Mar 1, 2010, <<http://www.fastcompany.com/1566018/crib-sheet-prince-alwaleed?partner=rss>> .

<sup>109</sup> Issandr El Amrani, “US, a Cold Welcome for Al Jazeera International,” (2006) <<http://www.tbsjournal.com/ElAmrani.html>>.

<sup>110</sup> Steve Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds the Coalition, Aljazeera and Muslim Public Opinion*, (New York: Front Street Press, 2006), p.74

<sup>111</sup> Loc. Cit.

<sup>112</sup> Off the record: comments made off the record are not intended to be published or used by a journalist but only for background or further investigation, protecting the source. Sandra Anderson, et al, *Dictionary of Media Studies*, (London: A & C Black, 2006) p.162. Comments delivered in this way are usually done in condition of anonymity to make sure their identities remain unknown except for the interviewer.

<sup>113</sup> Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds*, p.74

its own. This forces it to make different choices: a distinct repertoire of vocabulary, a different set of ‘points of reference’ with the audience, and a special category of sources and guests.

A mere glance on the titles of AJA’s live programmes and mottos clarify some discursive features of its media text and the extent to which they reflect on the confinement of the ‘conventional’ Arab media scene and on what way Aljazeera treads to make a breakthrough. Indeed, the programmes’ titles suggest somewhat alternative metaphors for what AJA might stand for. One of the connotations of *Al Itijah Al Mou’akis* (The Opposite Direction), for instance, whose title shows an orientation toward disagreement for its own sake, is that the culture of political difference and dialogue were almost absent in the traditional media practice. It also echoes the criticism levied against the widespread culture of absolutism and concluding arguments. In Lynch’s view, the programme, vocative and populist as it is, “marks the spirit of the new Arab public hints at the priority of political controversy over a commitment to democratic process.”

<sup>114</sup> However, the program, which is the mostly viewed among the programs of the mostly viewed free channel in the Arab world<sup>115</sup>, remains a platform for multiple voices which reflect the multiplicity of an Arab world riveted by political, economic, and religious differences.

*Bila Hudud* (No Limits) suggests first and foremost that the new media, represented by Aljazeera, is determined on toeing redlines and breaking taboos. It connotes also that the number of issues however sensitive they are is not going to be restricted no matter what the circumstances are. Here is a practice that has been almost unheard of in Arab television before Aljazeera. Similarly, *Hiwar maftouh* (Open Dialogue), *Akthar Min Ra’i* (More than one Opinion), *Minbar Aljazeera* (Aljazeera Pulpit), suggest a Habermasian commitment to the Arab and non-Arab public spheres, to open debate among multiple positions. They all provide a stage for different shades of opinion about the many inadequately corroborated matters of dispute in the Arabo-Islamic world. In fact, in as much as this tendency towards the democratisation of dialogue, which was wastefully neglected before, have the potential of disseminating

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<sup>114</sup> Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, p. 78

<sup>115</sup> Qusaibaty Olivia, *Media Under Pressure: Al-jazeera Toeing the Red Lines*, (US: Booksurge, 2006), p.13

new positive social values, it has the potential of fomenting unwelcome ones in the Arab context, like the perpetuation of constant political anger and rage. The overall impact of these programmes cannot be ignored, especially in relation to deflating a longstanding socio-psychological pressures and probably turning media an alternative arena to do politics instead of active practice.

Most importantly, in view of the overwhelming political and historical conditions in the Arab world, the debates in these shows appear to be loaded with comments, phrases and comments that challenge the Arabo-Islamic condition especially in relation to the Western aspirations to domination. The debates often offer platforms for the invocation of “views or concerns about Western imperialism.”<sup>116</sup> The latter issue constitute the favourable dwelling of Aljazeera’s talk shows and programmes, since it provides it with an opportunity to radically galvanize the nature of the relationship that binds the West and the rest of the Arabo-Islamic world. In fact, these shows appear to be oriented to shift upside down the deep seated tools of debate in conventional media in the Arab world especially in relation to the West.

#### **b- Challenging Imported Mental Structures**

Aljazeera’s challenging strategies do not seem to suffice by critiquing the Western imposed structures of power but also their influence even on the Arab *mental* structures and elements of thought. This so, it appears, because a no less important issue concerning Arab media situation is its long tradition of borrowing from the West. In fact, Arab media is still dependent on American and British media traditions of expertise, technology and training. This dependence brings about a heavily loaded discursive tradition right into the Arab context of mass media. Yet, of central importance to this section is that Arab media dependence on the West does not only concern technology, expertise and a shared market, but the crucial thing is that it borrows the Western conceptual and linguistic elements with which they frame their narratives and their audience’s perceptions consequently. Noha Mellor talks in her *The Making of Arab News* about a huge practice of borrowing of "loan phrases" from the English media register and how they

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<sup>116</sup> Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, p. 79

permeate Arab media vernaculars.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, terms and phrases like the following abound in Arab media vernaculars.

Axis of Evil	محور الشر
Moderateness	اعتدال
Suicide- bombing	تفجير انتحاري
Terrorism	إرهاب
Bush Administration	إدارة بوش

These sample terms did not appear first in the Arab media. They were borrowed only when they dominated the headlines in the Western media discourse. Holes Clive says that “much of the news reporting in the Arab media is in the form of rapidly produced and often rather literal translations of English or French language news *agency* reports.”<sup>118</sup> [emphasis added] Quick and unconscious translations, primarily because of pressures of time and space, make Arab media almost an unconscious machine bent on Arabizing words that are capable of doing things and creating “phantoms, fears, and phobias, or simply false representations”<sup>119</sup>, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s terms. Consequently, Arab Media end up domesticating alien conceptions and canonical images, which have the potential of carrying crucial connotations, within cultures linguistically and historically different.

This simple and trivial fact as it might seem can result in hindering the ability of the constituents in the Arab World to communicate with each other about various issues, while each one of them amazingly wonders, how can it be that his interlocutor does not understand or agree with him about something as clear

<sup>117</sup> Noha Mellor, *The Making of Arab News*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p. 119

<sup>118</sup> Quoted in Mellor, *The Making of Arab News*, p.118.

<sup>119</sup> Quoted in Barkho, *Strategies of Power in Multilingual Global Broadcasters*, p.8.

as daylight? Yet, both of them might be in all probability heedless of the fact that they may be using basically not the same shared ‘syntax’.

Consequently, the Arab productivity in terms of comment and argument is pushed to a voiceless language, since the outcomes of the discussion are already determined by the use of non indigenous codes and signs. In his book *Contemporary Arab Ideology*, Abdellah Laroui echoes the same issues and interest when he states concerning the overall Arab mental structures that “we all live, socially and culturally, under an external influence. We think by means of their concepts, and we express ourselves with styles and examples all derived from a reality that is not ours. If we don’t start a precise and severe analysis of all the mental instruments that we use, how can we be certain, when we speak, that we really express what is in our minds”.<sup>120</sup> (trans mine) Laroui is not taking a protectionist or a conservative stance towards the West as the words may convey, he is simply pointing to the fact that Arabic-speaking communities should be aware that their arguments of discussion are built on a “structure imported from another society, which functions as a model to guide praxis”<sup>121</sup>.

The idea is that translations like the ones mentioned before are not neutral vehicles of knowledge, since they have the potential of canonising the very conceptions, attitudes and received representations that Arab media proclaim to deconstruct and challenge. Accordingly, as much as that tells about the Western contribution in the promotion or the degradation of Arabic language, it tells no less amounts about what incurred the ability of Arabs to encode their intentions as ‘originally’ as they want within their overall universe of discourse. This is not meant to say by any means that the performance of Aljazeera can or has the potential to go as deep as to reverse this level of influence and dependency on the ‘importation of words, notions and concepts’. This is a historical accumulation. Yet, Aljazeera takes pains to work around this form of ‘cultural dependency’. So instead of using some frequently resorted to terms like “axis of evil”, “terrorism”, “moderate countries”, “extremist groups” “militant groups” “terrorist” . . . etc which are used almost freehandedly in other media outlets, Aljazeera accompanies them systematically with a “*so called*”

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<sup>120</sup> Abdellah Alaroui, *Contemporary Arab Ideology*, 2ed. (Casablanca : Arab Cultural Centre, 1999), p.26.

phrase so as to warn the audience that the term should not be taken at face value. This strategy provides Aljazeera before anyone else with a tool to direct debates and representations of events into unconventional contours. Indeed, AJA might be at the forefront of providing currency to indigenous and alternative modes of representation like “resistance”, “martyr”, “axis of resistance” . . . etc.

In other occasions, Aljazeera addresses this concern with language in a direct manner in certain programmes as it did in one episode of the controversial programme *Al Itijah Al Mou'akis* (The Opposite Direction)<sup>122</sup>, where the Lebanese writer and poet Rafik Rouhana argued against the ‘purist’<sup>123</sup> stance of the programme promoter Faisal Al Kasim and his other guest Ali Akla Arsan. In this episode, Al Kasim tries to frame the debate by bringing Israel into the debate right from the beginning, asking “why did Israel ‘bring to life a dead language while the Arabs are killing a live one?’” (trans mine) One can ask what does Israel have to do with the degradation of classical or modern Arabic? One reason seems to be a direct message to a historically prepared Arab audience, intended to frame the debate and the audience’s conception with at least the idea ‘that unless you act to save your language you shall never be a ‘match’ to Israel’.

Furthermore, the question carries a harsh blame against the Arabs; who are supposed to be, if Aljazeera model is to be followed, the Arab rulers, and marginally the peoples. The rulers are supposed to be the ‘guardians’ of some form language on which they have no control. The hyper politicization of debate does not add much to Al Kasim’s argument. Yet, the manner of foregrounding this topic and other similar ones shows nevertheless the itinerary that AJA discourse treads to address the deepest spots in the hearts of its targeted audience. The term Israel serves more or less like a catchword that can easily attract the attention of Arab viewers and cast new dimensions that square with AJA overall strategies of inserting resistance and challenge almost in every issue, from language to media itself.

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<sup>122</sup> “Himayay Al lurra Alarabiya Al Fusha,” *Al Itijah Al Moe'kis*, June 5, 2008 <<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/>>

<sup>123</sup> Purists are a category of linguists who adopt a conservative approach to language. They argue that language should be protected from change on the basis that changing it amounts to loss of the cultural memory of a given linguistic community. Opponents of this trend believe that language is naturally liable to change with time.

In fact, Arab mass media would not only abide by ‘red-lines’ and reinforce domestication of imported mental structures while debating major issues of interest, but it was catastrophically absent from covering major events taking place in its immediate environment, such as the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War in 1991. “That such a cataclysmic event could occur” Tatham exclaims “with not a single regional media organisation capable of reporting it became in itself a stimulus of change.”<sup>124</sup> In fact, it is legitimate to argue that there are other no less tectonic events which go unheard off and that need to be covered.

Tatham goes further than that to report that “to escape the mediocrity and banality of state media, many English-speaking Arabs watched the war through CNN or the BBC, often on illegally-owned satellite dishes.”<sup>125</sup> Accordingly, in view of this powerlessness coupled with the economic condition, the stifling political environment, and the unprecedented amount of dependency on the western powers even in security matters—the case of Gulf countries, it seems that the issue does not require a sharp imagination to infer how Aljazeera team, most of whom were exiles with a record of activism against their original governments<sup>126</sup>, and the Qatari deep coffers capitalized on these conditions to appeal to a wide audience and build a global reputation in a record speed.

In fact, the very appearance of AJA in 1996, before it developed to a giant global network, was due to a large extent to the very constraints that it continues to seek to challenge. Aljazeera came partially as the result of a failed media partnership between the Saudis and the British. Ian Urbina says that “the so-called CNN of the Arab world, Al Jazeera wouldn’t exist if it were not for Qatar’s knack at taking advantage of Saudi shortcomings.”<sup>127</sup> The station was launched a few months after the BBC’s Arabic television service closed down due to the editorial meddling of Orbit Communications, a Saudi company and a partial owner in the BBC Arabic service. When the company sought to censor a documentary about executions in

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<sup>124</sup> Steve Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds the Coalition*, p.83

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65

<sup>126</sup> Hugh, Miles, *The Inside Story of the Arab News channel that is Challenging the West*, (New York: Grove Press, 2005), p. 333

<sup>127</sup> Ian Urbina, “Al Jazeera: Hits, Misses and Ricochets,” *Asia Times* Dec 25, 2002. <[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/DL25Ak01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/DL25Ak01.html)>.



Saudi Arabia, “the staff walked out and the station pulled the plug”.<sup>128</sup> This incident led high calibre personnel to be left in the street. Eventually, they went to Qatar which embraced them wholeheartedly. Miles says that the emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani “agreed with the editorial board that Aljazeera would be independent of his control and that if he were ever to break this pact the result would be their mass resignation”.<sup>129</sup> This is not to say that Aljazeera discourse has nothing to do with the Qatari polity. As shall be shown later, there is a great degree of resonance between the Qatari political behaviour and the underlying discursive strategy of Aljazeera. Yet, it seems that Aljazeera size has outshined the tiny emirate and managed to outrace established international media institutions in their own game.

### **c- The Struggle Over/Within the Rules**

In every industry or field there are rules to be followed for any participant if he is to function in a way that guarantees his sustainability. In the field of international media there are rules that organize the game between older players. Newcomers like Aljazeera have to play according to the rules. To become an acknowledged player Aljazeera, however, dissuades focusing on singers, fans and advertisements. It is compelled to focus primarily on conflicts and hot spots. That is so because the unwritten rule has it, it appears, that the media coverage spotlights more the breathtaking atmosphere of conflicts and wars than the tedious making of reconciliations and negotiations. Yet, all Western-dominated international outlets cover conflicts, what makes Aljazeera different? It seems because it tries to change the rules.

For a number of reasons, Western media can not help but covering conflicts from a dominant Anglo-Saxon perspective. They are, to use Chomsky’s phrase, all expected to “rally around the flag”<sup>130</sup>, in time of crisis; otherwise accusations like anti-patriotism and disloyalty have the potential of preventing them to live the day if they were to choose the opposite direction. In the contrary, Aljazeera has the luxury of newness and budget to position itself against that very Anglo-Saxon stance. This is the case, because the position adopted by any institution is relational; i.e., it can hardly stand by itself nor can it preserve its

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p.3

<sup>129</sup> Miles, *The Inside Story of the Arab News channel*, p.28

<sup>130</sup> Herman and Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent*, p.15

continuity without constantly peering at its reflected face on the mirror of some other institutions external to it.

When it comes to institutions involved in the industry of semiotization and representation, the study of field, John Levi Martin maintains, should focus on charting the “regularities in individual action by using the position of an agent within a given field.”<sup>131</sup> This strategy helps in accounting for the configurations of discursive behaviour of various international media institutions within the field. This so because field, in Victor Turner’s terms is, “an ensemble of relationships between actors antagonistically oriented to the same prizes or values.”<sup>132</sup> Most participants in the field of international media tread divergent paths in bids for winning the same ultimate target which is the ‘hearts and minds of the audience’. Thus, the essential nature of field appears to be based on struggle and competition. The struggle between international media institutions is semiotic and discursive and the natural ring of this struggle is eventually the mind of the audience.

This is why it may be rewarding to contrast some of Aljazeera discursive practices with those of other players in the field of media and other related fields with special emphasis on the ‘conflicting’ representations since they provide unique opportunities to disclose the deep-seated backgrounds of the parties involved in their struggle over semiotization. In the outbreak of the Israeli ‘Operation Cast Lead’ in 27 September 2008, FoxNews, BBC and CNN, run their coverage of the war, i.e. news, talk shows, footage and commentary under the tagline<sup>133</sup> ‘The war *in* Gaza’. This phrase frames, overshadows and accompanies the viewer’s interaction with the information about the conflict in every instant the issue is being talked about. One main resulting assumption is that the Western audiences, having a very limited access to details, take it for granted that the war is like any other war in the volatile Middle East, involving two equal powers.

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<sup>131</sup> Martin, J. L. “What is field theory?”, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 109, No 1, (July, 2003), pp. 1-49, p .13

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in Martin, ‘What is field theory?’, p.22

<sup>133</sup> Tagline: a short secondary phrase attached to the title of a film that expands on its nature and helps to capture audience attention. Anderson, et al, *Dictionary of Media Studies*, p.238

Aljazeera, by contrast, run its coverage both in AJE and AJA, under the tagline ‘The War *on* Gaza’. Given that it was the only channel present in the battlefield because of an Israeli blackout<sup>134</sup> on international media, Aljazeera highlighted the human issues, presenting its coverage as a merciless military attack on a disarmed community. This incident highlights the features of the relations that these institutions have towards each other and their respective bases of audiences. Regardless of what the tagline is, the exclusive images of the Israeli assault provided by AJA in the Arab and circulated globally by AJE infuriated not only the Arabs diasporas but also the ordinary Westerners. Besides, the two channels forced a number of Western media outlets to use its edited images; and left others busy discussing how journalistically ethical it is to show those graphic images of violence.

Given this competitive environment, the struggle between media institutions and their involvement in the events centres not only over broadcasting the most persuasive argument, but also over “the definition of the legitimate principles of the division of the field”<sup>135</sup> itself, that is; the struggle is “both over and within the rules”<sup>136</sup>, and the winner dictates the rules of the future discourse. If Western media, especially CNN, forced all transnational media to play by its rules in the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War, with its heavy reliance on US official sources and its exclusive access to victoriously filmed missiles and jet fighters taking off <sup>137</sup>, Aljazeera boosts now, after its unthinkable scoops<sup>138</sup> in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine, that it is ‘setting the news agenda’ by focusing on the civilian areas where those missiles and fighters strike. One result of that is that Aljazeera imposes on other media outlets to mould their focus of coverage according to its lead and to walk away from the easy-going jobs of presenting carefully packaged news to include more serious and conscious debate.

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<sup>134</sup> Black-out: a period during which no news stories may be reported, imposed by a government or other organisation. Ibid, p.25

<sup>135</sup> Marti, “What is field theory?”, p. 33

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 43

<sup>137</sup> Kristina Riegert, "The Struggle for Credibility during the Iraq War," *the International Communication Association*, (April 2009), pp.1-30, p. 7

<sup>138</sup> Scoop: a story that appears in only one newspaper. ‘US politicians have made no secret of their deep hostility to the TV station [Al-Jazeera], whose scoops have included exclusive interviews with Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaida leaders as well as videos showing masked terrorists beheading western hostages.’ [*The Guardian*] Anderson, et al, *Dictionary of Media Studies*, p. 207

In fact, the achievement of Aljazeera in this field is reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu's criticism of media negative roles in informing the public. Bourdieu's engagement himself in the field of media and journalism was to a large extent an attempt to challenge what was perceived, especially in France, as the 'Anglo-saxon' invasions and the unwelcome drives of "sensationalized, depoliticized and trivialized news."<sup>139</sup> This drive in the global media, dominated primarily by the 'Anglo-Saxon' media giants, led Bourdieu to embark on in impassioned public intervention especially with his book *On Television*, which "served as a wake-up call for many around the world that there was nothing *natural* about an advertising saturated, audience-ratings-driven media culture."<sup>140</sup> [emphasis added] The problem is not with this trend per se, but what other forms of media it pushes to the margin and with what scale?

The fact is that, according to Lynch, where a globalized media prefer "to exclude much of local politics, citizen activism, public policy analysis, and deliberation", the new Arab media, particularly with Aljazeera, include "for the first time exactly those things."<sup>141</sup> If it happens, for instance, that the Western dominant media discourse, imitated for various reasons in a reluctant manner by most Arab and Islamic countries especially in the wake of 9/11 attacks, prospered by mobilizing rhetorical arguments to sell 'the war on terror' to the then frightened public, Aljazeera built an exceptional reputation by digging in issues like the legal justifications of the wars, the economic motives behind them, the cultural biases intervening in the process and the potential human cost. Morris, a former CNN's News Editor who works as editor for Aljazeera, puts it this way:

We have to come up with alternative ways of covering the story that are . . . outside the Anglo-American sphere of thinking. . . . we've got to come up with a different angle, we've got to report this from the people and from a perspective that is very different from the English perspective perhaps sort of the Anglo-American axis that I think exists between the BBC and CNN.<sup>142</sup>

The emphasis on a different perspective in media coverage of global issues is extremely telling when it comes to measuring the extent of influence which the 'Anglo-American' perspective used to exert on the

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<sup>139</sup> Orayb Najjar, 'New Trends in Global Broadcasting: "Nuestro Norte es el Sur" (Our North is the South),' *Global Media Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 10, (2007), p.6

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>141</sup> Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, p. 52

<sup>142</sup> Quoted in Barkho, *Strategies of Power in Multilingual Global Broadcasters*, p.85

global awareness of events. This influence has gone beyond public to persuade high-rank officials themselves involved in world events, as was the case with the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak when he talked about CNN beating diplomatic channels in delivering news of the outbreak of the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War.<sup>143</sup> In fact, Aljazeera's struggle to reverse that influence from angles aimed at thwarting the traditional perspectives of Western media could not and cannot go without consequences.

Undoubtedly, Aljazeera managed to challenge the Western discourse and revolutionize Arab media scene, through breaking political taboos, democratization of public debate, fomenting Arab expectations and covering various conflicts. Indeed, as much as it urged calls for taking the Arab media and the Arabs seriously in the West,<sup>144</sup> the network has angered almost every Arab government. Arab governments object to Aljazeera's critical coverage either by summoning their ambassadors in Doha or taking measures independently, such as closing its offices, confiscating journalists' equipment and material. In five years since its inception, the Qatari diplomats received about 450 complaints from Arab states, all asking to tone down their channel.<sup>145</sup> Yet, the Qatari answer is almost always similar to the one offered by the Qatari foreign Minister to Reuters saying that: "Aljazeera is not an official channel; we just help it financially, like Britain helps the BBC."<sup>146</sup>

This unyielding reaction pushed some governments to resort to extreme measures to censor information being disseminated to their people about issues constituting their primary concerns. Paul Cochrane relates in his "Saudi Arabia's Media Influence" how Al Jazeera was seen as so controversial "that at one point Saudi Arabia banned men from watching television at cafes to prevent public discussions of what was on".<sup>147</sup> In Algeria, the civil war between Islamist fundamentalists and the authorities claimed unknown numbers of human casualties, including entire families, writers, intellectuals and journalists. In

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<sup>143</sup> Abderrahim Foukara, "Al Jazeera: A Culture of Reporting," *Layalina Productions*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (2009), pp.1-3. P.1

<sup>144</sup> Mark Lynch, "Taking Arabs Seriously", *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2003, <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles>>

<sup>145</sup> El Nawawy and Iskandar, *The Story of the Network that is Rattling Governments*, p.114

<sup>146</sup> Steve Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds the Coalition*, p.69

<sup>147</sup> Paul Cochrane, "Saudi Arabia's Media Influence," *Arab Media Society*, No 3, Fall 2007. <<http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=421>> p.4

fact, the lawlessness and the atmosphere of insecurity and fear that characterized the civil war kept investigative reporting at bay. When Aljazeera programme *Al Itijah Al Mou'akis* (The Opposite Direction) hosted in January 27, 1999 two guests, a dissident diplomat and an exiled journalist and the other a leftist representative of the government; the Algerian government “decided to cut electrical power in several major cities, including the capital, to prevent the Algerian viewers from watching this one programme.”<sup>148</sup> In this context, Douglas Boyd says “possibly the biggest impact of Aljazeera regards the realization that political leaders can no longer be protected by government-owned or inspired media.”<sup>149</sup> This is an example of how simple flying words can be serious threats not only to opposing words and utterances but to real material powers.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, AJA strategies of coverage threatened even to cause serious problems to the military ‘Operation Freedom’ and the American ‘information campaign’ to win the hearts and the minds of the Arabs and Muslims. During the bombings and the battles, a degree of loss and destruction occurs, but the American military naturally wants only a sanitized reporting of events, since letting media loose might turn a “victory into a nightmare as it did in Vietnam.”<sup>150</sup> Aljazeera proved very troubling and provoked the highest American military officials. Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld both complained to the ruler of Qatar that Al-Jazeera was “virulently anti-American and should be reined in.”<sup>151</sup> More than that, the British newspaper paper The Daily Mirror published exclusively a leaked memo of a Tony Blair’s meeting with George W. Bush in 2005 in which the latter suggested to bomb Aljazeera headquarters in Qatar. The meeting was at the time of an intense assault by U.S. Marines on the Iraqi insurgent stronghold Fallujah.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> El Nawawy and Iskandar, *The Story of the Network that is Rattling Governments*, p.114

<sup>149</sup> Quoted in El Nawawy and Iskandar, *The Story of the Network that is Rattling Governments*, p.37

<sup>150</sup> Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds the Coalition*, p. 53

<sup>151</sup> Katerina Dalacoura, “US Democracy Promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: A critique,” n.d. *International Affairs*, pp.1-17 .p.11

<sup>152</sup> Kevin Maguire and Andy Lines, “Bush Plot To Bomb His Arab Ally, Madness of War Memo,” *Daily Mirror* , Nov. 22, 2005, <<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/top-stories/exclusive/>>

In fact, the American military was impatient vis-à-vis Aljazeera, and Bush's suggestion was not the first attempt of retaliation. The US has already bombed Aljazeera offices in Afghanistan in 2001, shelled the Basra hotel where Aljazeera journalists were the only guests in April 2003, killed Iraq correspondent Tareq Ayoub a few days later in Baghdad and imprisoned several Aljazeera reporters.<sup>153</sup> Certainly, there are tremendous other events that accompanied Aljazeera experience since its launch. All of these events contributes to the development and the expansion of Aljazeera in different directions and trends rather than others, yet all of them share the subversive and challenging tone that characterize the network since its inception.

The network has now a flag in numerous fronts of knowledge and it provides a platform for speakers from all sides and addresses all colours of the spectrum. Certainly, a project of knowledge production can not be erected with one single satellite channel whatsoever its influence might be on the geopolitical map of the region and the global manifestations of competing discourses. It needs a strategy of diversification of its structures and bodies. Hence, in addition to AJA, the network now includes Aljazeera international satellite channel, which broadcasts from four global centres in Washington, London, Doha and Kualalampur, marking a 'contra-flow' of information from the traditionally muted South towards the North and the Western centres of knowledge themselves.

The network has also a dedicated channel for documentary programmes and a website which boasts to be the mostly browsed in the Arab world. It has established also a state-of-the-art centre for media training (Aljazeera Media Training and Development Centre), competing with the traditional Western media centres and making sure a new generation of media practitioners with a Southern philosophy of journalism are practicing globally. The network has developed too a centre for strategic studies (Aljazeera

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<sup>153</sup> *Jeremy Scahill*, "The War on Al Jazeera," *The Nation*, December 1, 2005, <<http://www.thenation.com/issue/december-19-2005>>

Centre for Studies), which organises conferences and publishes in Arabic and English. The centre sees one of its main missions as to “deepen the Arab awareness of the existing civilizational challenges.”(trans mine)

<sup>154</sup> The very use of the phrase civilizational challenges in the Arabo-Islamic context immediately brings to the fore that these challenges are not going to be far from those appearing on the screens of AJA and AJE in their coverage of Iraq, Palestine and other burning areas. Hence, given the nature of the work of the centre, Aljazeera opens a new front to address social strata probably inaccessible by other means.

Aljazeera network moved in also into the sphere of activism when it launched Aljazeera centre for Public Liberties and Human Rights, which is presided by Sami Al Haj, the ex-Aljazeera cameraman and the former prisoner in the notorious Guantanamo Camp. The network organises also themed film festivals, with special emphasis on issues related to conflicts, Palestine and childhood. These institutions constitute ever expanding arsenals whose bodies are working hand-in-hand to promote a new culture: “The culture of Aljazeera”.<sup>155</sup> With a concerted strategy of diversification of the means and media outlets, Aljazeera is becoming a global institution developing independently cultural models of its own that is capable of competing with the most established cultural centres and media institutions. Here is a culture which hinges on the ability of the network to get the most out of alternative models of organizational and economic developments as decisive factors in gradually eroding the dominant discourses while breaking through an increasingly hostile environment. Hence, the interest of the following chapter is what makes of a media network a big troublemaker to global powers and what makes Qatar, a supreme American ally in the region, bear all this burdens. Additionally, does Aljazeera serve any ideology and if any how does it resonate with the Qatari polity?

## 2- The Geopolitical Functions of Aljazeera

### a- Aljazeera as a Means of Power

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<sup>154</sup>Aljazeera Center for Studies, “Alrro’ia Walahdaf,” 2006, <tp://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/>

<sup>155</sup> Mohamed Zayani and Sofiane Sahraoui, *The Culture of Al Jazeera: Inside an Arab Media Giant*, (London: McFarland & Company, 2007), p.7



In order to partly understand the reasons for which Aljazeera is maintained, it is relevant to look into the Qatari political status in the region. Located in an extremely volatile region between two ideologically and historically hostile big theocratic regimes- Saudi Arabia and Iran, Qatar, an almost unknown semi-island before the emergence of Aljazeera sitting over the world's second biggest reserves of natural gas, remains, like all the other Persian Gulf countries, "traumatized of the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq Saddam in 1990."<sup>156</sup> (trans mine) While sheikh Hamad's father used to consider that the interests of his country are better served in conformity with the political and the cultural clout of bigger neighbours, mainly Saudi Arabia, the new Emir tends to make of Qatar, a peninsula of no more than 12 thousands square kilometres, a genuinely independent and sovereign state "known and remarkable."<sup>157</sup> (trans mine) Thus, the Qatari power holders seem not to have had the conception of launching Aljazeera basically for some altruistic motives of love for a pan-Arab third-worldist 'cause', but primarily as a strategic leverage to their own policies related to firmly marking Qatar on the global map and gradually introducing it as an alternative leader with a multifaceted political agenda in the geopolitics of the region.<sup>158</sup>

Aware of the power of media in the age of open spaces, the Qataris have been investing heavily to make of Aljazeera a strategic means of protection and marketing of the Qatari ambitions. Yet, that investment does not mean control of the network, since the key element of its power rests on the freedom to report rather than direct manipulation. In fact, the Qatari power holders are heedful and bound, according to Ibrahim Helal, director of news programs at Aljazeera international, to "forsake their influence in the Middle East and beyond if they tried to control editorial output."<sup>159</sup> But, when asked about what then is the interest of Qatar to have Aljazeera, Helal said: "Qatar ... doesn't have a lot of influence in the region. So to keep having Aljazeera as an objective, accurate source of information is like having a nuclear weapon

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<sup>156</sup> Christian Chesnot and Antoine Sfeir, *Orient-Occident, le choc? Les Impasses Meurtrières*, (Paris : Calmann Lévy, 2010), p.141

<sup>157</sup> Robert Menard, *Mirage et Cheikhs en Blanc : Enquête sur la Face Cachée du Qatar, le Coffre-Fort de la France*, (Paris : Editions dumoment, 2010), p. 123

<sup>158</sup> René Naba, "Qatar: Un Rebut de Luxe pour Recyclage Haut de Gamme," Paris, 05.02.2010, p.5

<sup>159</sup> Barkho, *Strategies of Power in Multilingual Global Broadcasters*, p.48

... And to enjoy the power of having a nuclear weapon you stop thinking of using it, because once you use it you lose it.”<sup>160</sup> The value of this weapon is its power to deter and not to destroy. This explains why Qatar is adamantly defending the ever expanding Aljazeera and funding it, though it has already proved to be economically unviable.

However, Aljazeera, as a shielding tool, has grown far bigger than it was anticipated and it has become probably a guiding force behind many of Qatar’s diplomatic moves. When the performance of Aljazeera threatens to undermine the strategic efforts of the Qatari diplomacy, the Qatari power holders “occasionally and overtly deploy their power to nip at the network to force it to toe shifts in their strategic political alliances.”<sup>161</sup> During the early years of Aljazeera, Saudi Arabia was one of the objects of its harsh criticism, so the regional economic and political hegemon reacted in part by putting the “brakes on any company with business in the kingdom from advertising on the channel”<sup>162</sup>, thus preventing the channel from reaching financial autonomy. So, when the relations between the two GCC members went extremely unfriendly, Aljazeera was the only source for its nearly 50 million viewers on the ‘secretive’ world of the Saudi monarchy. In November 3, 2007, Aljazeera aired a daring programme –Sawdae al Yamamah- about Al Yamamh deal in which illicit payments of hundreds of millions of pounds that Britain’s biggest arms dealer, BAE systems, had made to Prince Bandar bin Sultan, a powerful Saudi ruling family figure.<sup>163</sup> This incident caused tremendous damage to the already edgy diplomatic relations between the two countries.

However, in October 2007, the rival monarchs, the Qatari Emir and the Saudi King, resolved their political differences in an unprecedented visit by the Emir. Eventually, Qatar would prevent Aljazeera from criticizing the Saudi monarchy and Saudi Arabia would notify its extensive television networks and “empire

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 48

<sup>161</sup> Robert F. Worth, “Al Jazeera No Longer Nips at Saudis,” *New York Times*, Jan, 4, 2008, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/04/world/middleeast/04jazeera.html>>.

<sup>162</sup> Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds the Coalition*, p. 68

<sup>163</sup> “Saudi Prince ‘Received Arms Cash’,” BBC, June 7, 2007, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/6728773.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6728773.stm)>.

of paper”<sup>164</sup> to halt attacks on Qatar. “Repercussions were soon felt at Aljazeera,”<sup>165</sup> writes the New York Times. Hence, one of Aljazeera newsroom employees wrote in an email that “orders were given not to tackle any Saudi issue without referring to the higher management”; consequently, all Saudi previous “dissident voices disappeared from our screens.”<sup>166</sup> This is one example, among many, which shows how Aljazeera itself is twisted in a number of occasions not “to think of itself outside politics”.<sup>167</sup> (trans mine) Indeed, Menard exclaims how can a man who used to be responsible for sponsorship apparatus in the ex-Qatari government, Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer al Thani, is now the chairman of the board of directors of the Network.<sup>168</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising to see Aljazeera applying a self-conscious auto-censorship that takes into consideration the overall political environment in which it operates. Hence, its discursive strategies are bound to noiselessly change and adapt when faced with stronger prospects that amounts to issuing existential threats to its own discourse.

### **b- Qatar and Aljazeera: Cultivating the Paradox**

The political behaviour of Qatar appears to characterize a unique category of Arab political practice at least for the last two or three decades. It is a multifaceted policy oriented to establish Qatar as a country in good terms with all sides. Yet, how successful it is in maintaining those friendly relations remains open to all possibilities. One of the likely paths to delineate the trajectory of the Qatari policies is to see how it negotiates its relations with opposing powers and movements and what possible manifestations of those policies find their ways into the discourse of Aljazeera.

At a time when most Arab governments consider establishing diplomatic relations with Israel almost a heresy and a threat to their own legitimacy, Qatar moved to break the ice and set off unofficial relations

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<sup>164</sup> Yousri Fouda “Imbratoriate Alwarak wa Alhaouae,” *www.doualia.com*. Mar 12, 2010, <<http://www.doualia.com/2010/03/12/yosri-fouda-empires-de-papier-et-de-lair/>> .

<sup>165</sup> Worth, “Al Jazeera No Longer Nips at Saudis,”

<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Barkho, *Strategies of Power in Multilingual Global Broadcasters*, p. 49

<sup>167</sup> Yves Gonzalez-Quijano, “Réflexions Sur la Révolution de l’Information dans le Monde Arabe,” *Centre de Recherche sur la Mondialistaion*, Nov. 8, 2009, <<http://www.nonfiction.fr/article-2922>>.

<sup>168</sup> Menard, *Mirage et Cheikhs en Blanc*, p. 85-86

with Israel and allowed the opening of a not-much-known Israeli commercial office in Doha. However, in addition to severing the Israeli presence in Qatar after the extraordinary Arab summit in 2009 concerning Gaza, which was summoned by nobody other than Doha itself, it appears at the same time that Qatar is one of the most Gulf countries that support the Islamist groups, at least morally, in Palestine and Lebanon, the bitter enemies of Israel. Regardless of the set-backs of that openness for Qatar and the various accusations it has garnered against it, the flexibility in decision-making and the ability to launch unusual initiatives is a characteristic of its foreign policy.

Similarly, while Aljazeera appears to be one of the most critical pan-Arab and global media networks of the Western, especially the American, activities in the Middle East, Qatar remains the host country of the American military base in El Udeid, which includes the headquarters of the American Central Command –CENTCOM, responsible for the supervision of the Middle East and large parts of Africa and Mid-Asia. A great deal of military air operations against Iraq and Afghanistan were and are conducted from this base. To the misfortune of these military operations, however, Aljazeera was the only media network to refuse covering the war from the perspective of the ‘embedded’<sup>169</sup> reporters who accompanied coalition units during military operations. Consequently, Aljazeera reporters aired the most damaging images to the coalition operations in the conflict zones and the very images that the American army would have filtered out had Aljazeera accepted to be among the imbed.

No less important, Qatar maintains its good terms with the Americans and to some extent with the Israelis, yet it does not seem hesitant to maintain no less friendly relations with the Iranians. With the Iranians, the Qataris share a very close geography, a substantial Shiite minority in Qatar and most importantly one of the biggest natural gas fields in the world, Northfields, which is being developed jointly by both countries. This explains, partly, why the Qatari motivation to join forces with the US to squeeze Iran is distinct from the rest of the Arab countries. When dealing with the Islamic Republic of Iran,

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<sup>169</sup> Embed: a war reporter who officially accompanies an active military unit and is able to report any information that does not endanger national security // verb//, to officially assign a reporter to accompany a military unit during a war. Anderson, *Dictionary of Media Studies*, p. 80.

Aljazeera tries, similarly, to keep a safe distance either from clearly identifying with or openly critiquing the Iranian stances vis-à-vis Israel, the US or the West in general.

In some occasions, Aljazeera editor chooses to air the most intoxicating ‘segments of verbal threats’<sup>170</sup>, which the Iranian heads of state declare against their ‘enemies’, but in others the channel show’s promoters try to distance themselves from Iran by directing questions to their Iranian guests and proponents, phrased in ways that maintain a degree of scepticism of the Iranian activities in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine or the ones related to Tehran’s controversial nuclear programme.<sup>171</sup> The first strategy may probably be interpreted as rendering the channel providing a bonus service to the long-standing psychological war between Iran and its many opponents and the second strategy allows Aljazeera to appear as maintaining its stance of neutrality and perhaps appealing to the fears of its mostly Arab audience of an expanding Iranian influence in the region.

Indeed, Qatar proved adroit at manoeuvring between rivals and achieving ends where huge powers failed. Now that Aljazeera has developed into a regional spark of influence, Qatar seems equally about to secure a foothold within the club of regional policy-making heavyweights such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. As an example, the Arabs, the French and the Americans all failed to bridge the gap between the opposition and the March 14 Alliance during the boiling months in Lebanon after the war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006. But, Qatar successfully intervened and saved Lebanon another potentially bitter civil war. The outcome was acceptance of dialogue arbitrage rather than the gun, and also acceptance of an armed Hezbollah which was a corner stone in coming to terms with the ‘rejectionist’ discourse of ‘resistance’. Qatar has made also remarkable moves towards peace-building in the-much-bemoaned but the hardly-anything-done-for region of Darfur.

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<sup>170</sup> Ahmadinejad said once: “Our military forces will *cut the hands* of whoever wants to attack us before he presses the trigger” (trans mine). “Ahmadinejad Youhadiro Min Aye Hojoum”, *www.aljazeera.net*, Aug. 22, 2008, <<http://www.aljazeera.net/News/archive?ArchiveId=1099592>>, Other statements celebrating the power of the Iranians are to be found in other episodes of *Ma Waraa AL khabar* July 5, 2008, <<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/A892AF4F-4595-42C2-99C2-079B3A131F50.htm>> and the *Opposite Direction* “The Western Campaign Against Iran,” Oct. 7, 2007, <<http://www.aljazeera.net/Channel/archive/archive?ArchiveId=1078714>>.

<sup>171</sup> *Ma Waraa AL khabar*, “*Tabadul Layouranium Bayna Iran, Turkeya wa al Brasil*,” May 17, 2010, <<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/6B4516DE-840A-4B71-AB62-4E5CC485B167.htm>> .

In fact, it is hard to believe the Qatari foreign policy could have achieved such a status without a heavy reliance on “the Democratic Republic of Aljazeera.”<sup>172</sup> Aljazeera have been always on the spot to report on those conflicts and on the Qatari moves to meddle with them. Regardless of what local and immediate gains, the Qatari foreign policy profile accrues from these moves, the Qatari initiatives are portrayed through Aljazeera as an achievement in a region already ridden with conflicts and where an unprecedented *vacuum of power* is increasingly looming, especially after the American intervention in Iraq, where the US, according to Zogby International, has lost much of its global reputation and moral weight<sup>173</sup> that enable it to intervene as an able referee. It is this political environment that allows Qatar to function in such an acrobatic manner.

No less important, Qatar tries to keep the most advanced relationships with the European countries especially France, but the Qatari Emir spares no opportunity to denounce the European policy towards the Middle East. Upon an invitation to deliver a speech in the European parliament, the Qatari Emir addressed the audience and defiantly questioned the European stance towards the last Palestinian general elections in which the Palestinian militant faction Hamas won the race. He asked reproachfully, "is this not a double standard: to demand free elections, and then object to the results? ... Instead of rewarding the Palestinian people for practising democracy, something rarely witnessed in our region, they have been punished for it" by the international embargo.<sup>174</sup> Needless to say that the Emir could not be unaware of the Western view towards the militant Hamas which won the elections, but his speech, which gives a special emphasis to this issue, tries to cast a legitimacy on the Islamist activism, in the face of a dominantly opposing Western discourse. Indeed, this behaviour seems to be a systematic character of most of Qatar's interventions in relation to any issue that involves the struggle between the Arabs and the Israelis.

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<sup>172</sup> Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, p. 25

<sup>173</sup> Dafna Linzer, "Poll Shows Growing Arab Rancor at U.S", *The Washington Post*, Friday, July 23, 2004, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn>>

<sup>174</sup> *Europen Parliament, External relations*, Nov. 15, 2006 - 14:28 <<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do>>

Accordingly, the use of a double language on the part of the Qatari government raises so many questions about the integrity of this policy. Indeed, Menard claims that the level of liberty offered to Aljazeera is not by any means equalled by a liberty of press at the Qatari domestic level, where most journalists are non-citizens and who work under a threat of being deported at any time red-lines are crossed.<sup>175</sup> In similar vein, the Moroccan journalist Ahmed Charai from *l'Observateur du Maroc* exclaims how can the Emir continue to cry Arab unity and Palestine while his country was at the heart of the war on Iraq? He ends up to the fact that Aljazeera is no more than a façade, which is capable of financing sports projects that are unaffordable even for a country like France.<sup>176</sup> Nevertheless, the political economy and the duplicity of the Qatari foreign policy are not enough to judge Aljazeera. The Palestinian quagmire represents a unique test to identify some aspects Aljazeera's discursive strategies.

### **c- Aljazeera: Between “Moderateness” and “Rejectionism”**

When it comes to the Palestinian issue, reflecting upon Aljazeera discourse would reveal a great deal of consonance between the latter's discursive strategies and the Qatari announced inclinations and political manoeuvres. Like the Qatari relations with Israel, Aljazeera also opens its platforms for Israeli officials and citizens to address Arab publics. Probably, this is the first time that an Arab television allows the Israelis into the Arab living rooms. Naturally, this is why Aljazeera was approached with great suspicion and this is why there were big question marks about the Qatari policy. Aljazeera have been accused by Arab commentators, according to Mark Lynch, “of being everything from a CIA operation to a Mossad one, from a bin Laden outlet to a Saddam apologist, from an agent of Islamism to an agent of secularism.”<sup>177</sup> However, by resorting to its strategy of ‘the opinion and the other opinion’, Aljazeera has been generally able to dissuade those accusations by giving voice to the ‘naturally’ opposing views of each and every theory.

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<sup>175</sup> Menard, *Mirage et Cheikhs en Blanc*, p.82

<sup>176</sup> Ahmed Charai, “Qatar : la Face Cachée d'un Emirats,” No. 80, Mai 28, 2010, *L'Observateur du Maroc*, p.19

<sup>177</sup> Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, p.41

The chief remark about these accusations is that there is almost an absolute dichotomy between them all. Arguably, the network can be either a 'Bin Laden outlet' or 'Mossad operation', it can not be both at the same time. Generally, all of these accusations are far from accuracy, hence neither of them is true. Nevertheless, all of them share one desperate want: to pin down the driving 'ideology' behind this unusual institution and the people who keep generously funding it. Certainly, Aljazeera has already achieved some local commercial and public relations' goals for the Qataris, but that is not enough to categorize such a phenomenal network. One has to look also at some of the dominant contents of Aljazeera to see how it builds its discourse in relation to the pan-Arab public sphere and its problems.

One of the shortest ways to do that is to see the typology of coverage it allocates to the Palestinian issue. The extensive coverage that Aljazeera gives to the Palestinian issue cannot be considered a coincidence. El Nawawy, among many others, asserts that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have haunted the Arab "socio-political consciousness over the past sixty years."<sup>178</sup> The centrality of the issue can still be seen at least in how influential it is in defining the political lines, power camps and government positions vis-à-vis wider issues like 'militant Islamism', 'moderateness' and 'resistance'. Therefore, it is not strange to see this issue dominating almost one third of AJA's talk shows, news reports and bulletins.<sup>179</sup> This coverage increases in scale and intensifies even more in tone when there are escalations of violence between the Palestinians and the Israelis in numerous occasions.

During the Second Intifada, Aljazeera ran repeatedly the clip of Muhammad al-Durra who was filmed being shot in the abdomen of his father. These pictures became the network's emblem of the Intifada. El-Nawawy and Iskandar says that the reoccurrence of this specific picture "had a deeply galvanizing effect on the wider Arab public . . . Arabs everywhere became desperate for bulletins from the Occupied territories."<sup>180</sup> No less unrelentingly did Aljazeera moved on to broadcast the Israeli strikes in Ginin and

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<sup>178</sup> El Nawawy, "Arab Media and Terrorism: Is an Objective Journalism Possible? The Case of Al-Jazeera," p.34

<sup>179</sup> Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, p. 80

<sup>180</sup> El Nawawy and Iskandar, *Al-Jazeera: The Story of The Network That is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism*, p.73



Nablus and many other parts of the Palestinian territories. The same strategy was applied during Operation Cast Lead in Gaza and many other minor events in the area.

But what is to be emphasised is not just these footage and other temporal bulletins, but it is the heated debate and the accompanying far-reaching historical, religious and political contextualization that these occasions of gory violence ignites in the screens of Aljazeera for several weeks if not months. The story turns out being covered from every single angle, and Aljazeera seizes the opportunity to provide the Arab audience with a tremendous body of details that are far from being easily and attractively accessible elsewhere. Overtime, the accumulating knowledge of the ordinary Arab audience sees the scale of awareness of the issue, among many other related Arab issues, upgrading from an distanced and uncertain question of ‘whose land is it: the Palestinians’ or the Israelis?’ in the previous years before Aljazeera, to an awareness of detailed and minute issues and geographical locations<sup>181</sup>: Israeli check points, settlements, ‘security/segregation wall’, Gaza Strip, and other pieces of knowledge.

Noteworthy as well concerning this point is that AJA, in particular, tries incessantly to frame its debates and reports on the issue of Palestine within the premises of an Arab official system’s inability to ‘uplift’ the Palestinian side in the face of a ‘globally backed Israeli power’. Citing a number of Aljazeera talk shows and programmes on the issue, Lynch argues that the centre of attention remains “not only the issue of war or peace with Israel, but how that confrontation reveals the wider deficiencies of the existing Arab order.”<sup>182</sup> In fact, the shows’ guests and even Aljazeera anchors usually use the opportunity to reveal every flaw in the Arab official political practice, from lack of democracy, human rights, freedom of speech to development, as reasons for why Arab governments are weak and by extension can not help the Palestinians.

More than that, during the last Gaza war, Aljazeera became part of the Arab governments’ problem. The outlet was accused of siding with Hamas in what is called the latter’s coup against Fatah in Gaza Strip. At that time, the door for the ‘battle of words’ among the Arabs was widely opened in an unprecedented

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<sup>181</sup> Abdesattar Kasem, “Aljazeera Tarfaou Alwaey Alrabi,” Oct 31, 2009, <<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/>>

<sup>182</sup> Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, p.81

manner. Alarabiya channel was accused in turn with providing a clout for Fatah, while the secretary general of Hezbollah entered the battle and called the channel 'Alibriya', referring to the channel's discourse as encouraging to Israel.<sup>183</sup> At that time, two distinct Arab discourses became remarkably visible or indeed two camps "moderateness" and 'rejectionism'. Consequently, the verbal split turned into a political decision in the Arab League extraordinary summit in Doha, with severe consequences for the Palestinians. While Aljazeera moved straightforwardly to focus its lights on the dynamics that prevented the 'moderate' Arab governments from attending the summit, it would not take long for another serious accusation to emerge.

This time the Egyptian newspaper Al Ahram added Aljazeera in its list of the perpetrators of "the great conspiracy against Egypt"<sup>184</sup>, in which it included Iran, Syria, Qatar, Hamas, Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood. After a long series of implicit accusations, the Egyptian foreign minister will come to imply that the channel follows the ideology of Muslim Brotherhood and that it believes in the idea that armed struggle against Israel is "the only path available for the nation, even if this entails the killing of every single person in the land of Egypt."<sup>185</sup> Certainly, this statement can not be taken away from the feeling in official Egypt that Qatar is trying to hijack the lights from Egypt's political and cultural leadership in the region. However, because the Egyptian official media focused to a large extent on attacking critics of Egypt's approach to the Gaza crisis, the "manner in which government editors-in-chief attacked critics ended up hurting the regime's image even more."<sup>186</sup>

In fact, with every new step or service, Aljazeera, like Qatar, proves to be a stern trouble-maker because of its style of including this dominant issue of Palestine within the structure of its discourse. Towards the end of 2010, AJA was preparing to appear with a new front-page and a new style. Among the

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<sup>183</sup> "Almoamara al kobra ala Masr", *arabtimes.com*, April 18, 2009  
<[http://www.arabtimes.com/portal/news\\_display.cfm?Action=&Preview=No&nid=2845&a=1](http://www.arabtimes.com/portal/news_display.cfm?Action=&Preview=No&nid=2845&a=1)>

<sup>184</sup> Ibid..

<sup>185</sup> "Interview with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu Al-Gheit", *MEMRI TV*, March 11, 2010,

<<http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/0/0/0/0/0/2420.htm>> . N.B. this website itself has its own motives to focus on this excerpt by Ahmad Abu Al-Gheit.

<sup>186</sup> John Lloyd, "The politics of Impartiality," *The Financial Times*, Feb 13, 2009, <<http://www.mail-archive.com/zestmedia@yahoogroups.com/msg06400.html>>

changes that were said to be emphasized is the idea of revisiting certain areas and topics previously covered by Aljazeera during conflicts but where things are calm ‘by now’. This new strategy is reflected in what Ahmed el-Sheikh described during the November 2, 2009 episode of Aljazeera program “Hada al Assabah” (This Morning) as a sort of “consulting the headlines of yesterday”.

*On the same day*, Aljazeera featured in “Montasaf Al Yawm” (Midday News) the Emir of Qatar rebuking, after the silence of all sympathetic voices, about the unchanged situation in Gaza -under embargo at that time for more than two years- and blaming the heads of states who met in Sharam Elsheikh after the last Gaza war in a bid to stop the bloodshed and the suffering, for doing nothing to help the Palestinians. Simultaneously, Aljazeera keeps running, during the whole day, a bulletin in the moving line in the bottom of the screen that the Emir is *reminding* the Arabs and the international community that the embargo on Gaza continues. This incident of convergence between the new emphasis of Aljazeera on the past events and the *positions* of the Qatari government shows partly how these two institutions work at arm length concerning this particular issue. It also shows how Aljazeera is trying to put together the pieces of a scattered political text about the Palestinian issue in relation to Israel.

Aljazeera frames its reports and debates about Palestine within the premise also of uncovering the internal and the external workings of Israel. With this extensive coverage of the Palestinian quagmire, Aljazeera becomes not only a window for the Arabs and the international public sphere on the workings of the Israeli Army, but also a powerful subversive microscope tracking the Israeli inside story, Israel’s history, its relations with the international community and its main centres of backing in the West, especially in the US. A typical case, among a huge number of programmes addressing the Israeli power, can be found in the 5 April 2010 of Fi Alomk (Indepth) show, presented by AJA anchor Ali El Dafiri, under the title: “the American-Israeli Relations”.

Along this programme, the producer runs, after few minutes from initiating the interview with Azmi Beshara, a report contextualizing for the topic. In the report, the voice-over<sup>187</sup> sketches in an abrupt, assertive and conclusive tone how key American commercial institutions, think-tanks, political bodies and social groups convene to “make of the American interests in the Middle East inseparable of the Israeli interests.”<sup>188</sup> The voice-over scans the development of the Israeli lobbying efforts in the US while the accompanying images swirl along showing logos, names and headquarter-entrances of institutions dominated by those lobbies like AIPAC, Bank of America, Citigroup, NewsCorp, American Enterprise Institute and the like.

By dominating similar institutions since the early Jewish emigration to the US, the commentator concludes, “this minority has become the most powerful one among the numerous immigrant minorities to the US.”<sup>189</sup> (trans mine) The commentator does not seem to let go without reminding the audience that the investments of this minority are not by chance geared to prevail in the sectors related to “manufacturing the American public opinion”<sup>190</sup>, i.e. the manufacturing of dominant discourse, at least in relation to Israel and the rest of the Arab world.

Azmi Beshara moves to detail this relation between the US and Israel through confident statements reinforcing what has been said during the commentary. He seems to stress mainly the extent to which the ‘Zionist lobby’ is efficient in securing the interests of Israel, by making it the primary beneficiary of most American aid programmes to the external world, and making those interests necessarily, according Beshara, in defiance not primarily of the interests of the Palestinians but those of the ‘Arab-nationalism’. Generally speaking, the knowledge that is being invoked in the show seems to spin a specific interpretation that squares with most of the Aljazeera shows and programmes dealing with the subject. Immediately after this

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<sup>187</sup> Voiceover /noun/ a voice track added to a piece of film from someone who is not seen to be speaking in the footage, such as a commentator or one of the participants speaking later. Abbreviation VO. 2. the voice of, or the words spoken by, an unseen narrator, commentator or character in a film or television programme. Anderson, *Dictionary of Media Studies*, p.251

<sup>188</sup> “Al alakat Al amrikiya Al esrailiya,” *Indepth*, , April 5, 2010 <<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/6A1B5E06-BDFB-455C-B142-E800B44BFC66>> 5/04/2010>.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

episode, AJA runs the advertising clips for another thematically similar episode of another programme dealing with the main Israeli external intelligence body: the Mossad and its ability to infiltrate the Arab security systems.

This detailed coverage of the Palestinian issue, the Israeli potentials and its lobbies does not fall in vacuum. So, can it be said that Aljazeera show promoters do not have some previous knowledge of most of their guests answers when they ask them about various issues related to the Palestinian issue? Not at all. Aljazeera, like any other media outlet, is aware that people resort to their preferred channels to look, as maintained by Naomi Sakr, “not for information but for confirmation” of what they already know<sup>191</sup>: a service provided generously by Aljazeera guests. Aljazeera can not but work in concomitance with the expectations of its audiences otherwise it loses them. If it can be said again that a pan-Arab outlet like Aljazeera is capitalizing on the Arabs’ sensitivity towards a ‘perplexing adversary’ who continues to overwhelm many of their countries, it appears that the issue is justified from a ‘media efficiency point of view’. But how can it be justified in view of the historical and political weight of Qatar? Any country, no matter how benevolent and wealthy it is, can not afford investing with such a scale just aimlessly.

When Jamal Abdalnaser created Radio Sawt Al Arab (*The Voice of Arabs*) to celebrate the triumphalism of Arab-nationalism against the West, ‘Arab retrogression’ and Israel, the leader was provided with enormous resources, backed with vast populations and galvanized by great civilizational accumulations. So, the discourse of his radio was in open wars with the discourses of his material enemies. But when it comes to Aljazeera, it seems that Qatar, except for recourses, has almost none of that. So what does the nature of its paradox-based foreign relations and Aljazeera coverage of the Palestinian issue say? It seems as if Qatar and Aljazeera, with the latter far more influential, are propagating a new definition of what a position should the Arabs develop vis-a-vis Palestine and Israel in the contemporary era and what an awareness should the international public spheres develop in relation to the conflict in view of the existing power equations. A relation that should, it appears given the extensive coverage of the Israeli

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<sup>191</sup> Naomi Sakr, *Arab Media and Political Renewal*, p.5

activities by Aljazeera, to be based first and foremost on an understanding first of this ‘adversary’: an understanding that starts with breaking taboos about issues and that should be based, away of bombastic emotions, of its garrisons in the West.

Although it should not be oversimplified that while Radio Sawt Al Arab was beating the drums of victory over Israel in the 1967 war, Abdunaser’s Army was already breaking down, Aljazeera has by now destabilised some of the discourses that supports Israel. Certainly, Israel has no problem with Aljazeera operating from ‘its territory’, but it has the entire problem with Aljazeera broadcasting in the US, Canada and the West in general. In a conversation with Said, Salman Rushdie points out that those working as "Israel's defenders" in the US and who are backed crucially by American media, continue to silence Palestinian voices and dismiss the very historical presence of Palestinians as a people.<sup>192</sup> Rushdie remarks that no American paper was willing to publish Said's rebuttals, while it appeared in British and Israeli press.<sup>193</sup> The power of Israel, Aljazeera seems to suggest, is not in its army or economy but in the discourse supporting it in those centres of power.

During the rally to ‘war on terror’ after 9/11, the American media, feeding on a Huntington thesis’ success in relation to the newly discovered Islamic world, everything on Islam was published by the American media from “Islamic theology, hairstyles, and even weather maps” to ‘Islamic terror’ but the ongoing bloodshed during the Intifada was almost muted.<sup>194</sup> This is what Ervand Abrahamian calls: analysing international politics and “*international relations with politics taken out.*”<sup>195</sup> But with Aljazeera the situation is completely different. Ahmed Sheikh, Aljazeera’s editor-in-chief, says:

when it comes to conflict in general we are not so sensitive as they (the BBC and CNN) are because we are not afraid of the Israeli pressure ... (which) made them put that sort of list (special Middle East glossaries) down ... We are not neutral, I am telling you, because we cannot equate between the two, victims (Palestinians) and victimizer (Israel).<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Youssef Yacoubi, “Edward Said, Eqbal Ahmad, and Salman Rushdie: Resisting the Ambivalence of Postcolonial Theory,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 25, 791.p .812-391 .pp ),5002(

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p.197

<sup>194</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, “The US Media, Huntington and September 11,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Jun., 2003), pp. 529-544, p.8

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* p.8

<sup>196</sup> Shawn Powers and Mohammed El-Nawawy, *Mediating Conflict: Al-Jazeera English and the Possibility of a Conciliatory Media*, (California: Figueroa Press, 2008), p. 26

The glossaries alluded by Sheikh are more or less area-specific dictionaries used in media institutions like the BBC to insure that every word said by the journalist squares with the overall discursive strategy of the institution vis-à-vis this issue. Therefore, Aljazeera is conscious of these strategies and it seeks to destabilize their very reception in the West.

Unsurprisingly, because of its focus on the Israeli practices, Aljazeera, especially AJA, is stoutly fought in the West. Hence, one of the most rigid obstacles that prevent the American public from experiencing a different view is that most of the companies operating American cable and satellite television networks refuse to broadcast Aljazeera signals. Indeed, a huge effort of campaigning is mobilized to prevent the channel, using 'pre-emptive' and phobia engendering labellings like 'Bin Laden channel', 'the channel that shows beheadings' or 'hatred TV'. As a response Aljazeera English team launched a public relations battle, including a "grassroots website- IwantAJE.com- against lobbyists anxious to keep the channel off US television line-ups."<sup>197</sup> But the irony is that they are mostly pro-Israel lobbies in the US and Canada which work hard in order to pressurise their telecommunications authorities not to accept Aljazeera's applications to broadcast there.

In fact, Aljazeera constitute a serious menace aimed at 'eroding' a well established discourse that used to safely portray 'eternally unsolvable conflicts' from an 'interested' and cavalier Western perspective. But in spite of these ambitions, Aljazeera has seen many of "youth errors."<sup>198</sup> Nevertheless, "we cannot take of Aljazeera what it has achieved"<sup>199</sup> at least within thrab domestic level. Aljazeera leaves no stone unturned to mobilize masses and crystallize transnational Arab consciousness. In AJA, the Palestinian plight is not the only rallying flag used to critique existing dominant discourses and political stances, the reinvigoration of problems buried in the far past and dark areas of the Arab history in relation to the West

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<sup>197</sup> Rowena Mason, "Al Jazeera English focused on its American Dream," *The Telegraph*, Mar 24, 2009, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/mediatechnologyandtelecoms/5039921/Al-Jazeera-English-focused-on-its-American-dream.html>>

<sup>198</sup> Chesnot and Sfeir, *Orient-Occident, le choc?*, p.141

<sup>199</sup> Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds*, p. 63

constitutes as well one of the favorite tools of establishing continuities between the past and the present and solidifying cultural solidarities among Arab people.

## **Part Three**

### **Broadcasting Back to the Centre**



## **1- Archifohom . . Watarikhona (Their Archive . . Our History): Back to the**

### **Beginning of the Story**

#### **a- Why history?**

Two main reasons favour this choice. The first is that historical content in Aljazeera text embodies a seminal ingredient of its programming. A quick look at the many titles that consist of historical material is enough to show how prevalent this theme within the overall text-politics of Aljazeera. Although a dominantly news and current-affairs channel, AJA alone broadcasts at least three programmes which feature contents purely related to history: *Arshifohom . . watarikhona (Their Archive . . Our History)*, *Shahid ala Alasr* (Witness on the Era) and *Maa Haikal* (With Haikal). Additionally, a number of the channel's other shows deal occasionally with historical issues related mostly to the pan-Arab and Islamic modern history.

The second reason is related to the audience. When asked what kinds of programmes attract Arab viewers, Marwan Kraidy said that the most popular Arab television programs have been “those with the following features: historical or political resonance.”<sup>200</sup> The reasons for the interests Aljazeera's audience have developed in relation to this programmes are to be found mostly in the rhetoric of Arab unity, i.e. the rhetoric of a common history and a common destiny, which motivate a “sense of common identity strengthened in modern times by opposition to Western intervention.”<sup>201</sup> Indeed, this is partly what makes Marie Gillespie remarks that the essence of Aljazeera discourse is to speak “for and to the Arab world. A notion of joint destiny is said to bring Arabs together.”<sup>202</sup> Accordingly, one of the questions which surface

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<sup>200</sup> Marwan Kraidy, “Arab Media and US Policy,” p. 5

<sup>201</sup> Halim Barakat, *The Arab world: Society, Culture, and State*, (California: University of California Press, 1993), p.44

<sup>202</sup> Marie Gillespie, “Al-Jazeera, Sceptical Cosmopolitans and Transnational Identifications,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 32, No.6 (August 2006) , pp. 903 – 921, p.905

in this context is what discursive reasons legitimize history being revisited so extensively and dominantly in Aljazeera?

It appears that Aljazeera's invocation of history serves several discursive functions that square with the channel's declared aims of providing an alternative to the mainstream perspectives on events. In view of the fact that most of Aljazeera programmes focus on extremely controversial issues involving the contentious relationship between the East and West in the Arab history, from Imperialism, colonialism, Israel to the Arab postcolonial conditions, Aljazeera's endeavours are thus situated in no territory other than *the mere cleavages of struggle* between Western unceasing attempts to dominate the region and the local attempts to repel them. Indeed, because it is expected to consider the sensibilities of its mostly Arab audience, who has developed unwelcoming attitudes towards the West, Aljazeera's utilisation of history becomes not only a statement about history, but also an active tool of creating history.

In his " 'Today in History': Acre Falls to the Crusaders", Rymond Ibrahim seems innervated by a five minute segment broadcasted in AJA about the atrocities committed during the fall of the historical Palestinian city of Acre (in Arabic Akkaa) in the hands of the Crusaders. "Amidst the images of suffering and slain Palestinians, Iraqis, and Afghanis", Rymond regretfully maintains, "the message was clear [. . . ] the hated Crusaders were back again, doing what they've been doing ever since the Crusades."<sup>203</sup> That the atrocities in Acre were being tied up with what was happening in the rest of the Arabo-Islamic world, represents for Rymond a huge distortion: "continuity was established [. . . ] Arab viewers were reminded."<sup>204</sup> Certainly, not all of AJA viewers may feel the same regret as Rymond; quite the contrary.

Nevertheless, regardless of how Rymond feels towards the short segment, what is of interest here is the symbolic implications of this *continuity and reminiscence* in relation to AJA's quest for a suitable 'beginning' to reflect on the present by re-reading the past. As the historical programmes make evident, the channel usually does not go that far as to re-invigorate the events of the crusades and similar events. AJA

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<sup>203</sup> Raymond Ibrahim, " 'Today in History: Acre Falls to the Crusaders,' Aljazeera Reminds viewers," July 12, 2008 <<http://www.jihadwatch.org>>

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

focuses mostly on some colonial and post-colonial conditions, which casts a specific perspective on the contemporary struggles of emancipation especially in the Arab world. AJA re-narrates mostly the history of colonialism and the Arab postcolonial conditions, which provides AJA with an opportunity not only to reflect on the typology of power relations between the East and the West but also to address the very similitude of the past and the present.

In the various episodes of *Arshifohom . . . Watarikhona*, dealing with historical details related to political unity problems in the Arab world, Aljazeera seems to suggest that the ‘beginning’ should be, more or less, with revisiting “the *failure* of the many attempts to build a project of political unity between the Arab countries.”<sup>205</sup> Undoubtedly, re-reading the issue of the Arab unity is neither a new nor a finished project in the Arab intellectual and political arena. Nevertheless, with Aljazeera, the issue is being tackled through a novel medium, combining symbolic images and emotive special-effects, which have the potential of instantly and deeply engaging its audience into its own ‘reflections’, ‘conclusions’ and ‘judgements’. With these added effects, the programme represents a renewed attempt to re-narrate the contentious story of the Arab unity project in the lights of the challenges it faced because of the unceasing attempts to abort it by various imperial and private interests.

To start with, it might be relevant first to provide a brief synopsis of one of the ‘files’ of the show. The file is entitled “Ahlam Alwahda Walitihad” (Dreams of Unity and Union), and it consist of six one-hour episodes, broadcasted consecutively from April 7, 2008 to May 28, 2008. The episodes deal with events and developments linked to the issue of Arab unity since the first scattered attempts by Sharif Hussein of Mecca till the fully-fledged cry to unity between Arab nations led by Egypt’s Abdunnasser. Throughout the episodes, the voice-over focuses on two main obstructions that have been endemic to every attempt to create any sort of effective unity among the Arab countries: the constant manipulation and blockade of imperial powers and Arab internal rivalries over leadership. From the outset, the stated aim of

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<sup>205</sup> “Ahlam Alwahda Walitihad,” *Arshifohom . . . watarikhona*, May 7, 2008, <<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/CDD0D32B-CB44-4B75-83CB-DEB6EE4C3DF4.htm>>

As it will be more practical, the episodes of the programmes will be referred to from now on by using episode 1 or 2 or 3 . . . etc. The complete reference will be provided in the bibliography.

the 'file' is two-throng: to chart divergences and convergences between political 'romanticism' and 'realism', 'ideology' and 'pragmatism' as well as between the 'unchanging wills of imperial hegemony' and the 'interests of the local Arab communities'.

Under the light of the programmes' title *Arshifohom . . watarikhona*, the first irresistible question that comes out is: what motives favour doing 'archaeology in a site far away from the historical terrain of the events spoken about'? On the way to prepare these episodes, Aljazeera research team, aided by a number of Arab and Western historians, chases official documents, ambassadors' letters and telegraphs, media reports and politicians' recorded deliberations and conferences in a number of Western think-tanks, national archives, libraries and foreign ministries records. The team refers very rarely to Arab documents and records. Seen in this light and in parallel with Aljazeera's other vocative attitudes, this strategy aims at decomposing parts of the riddles that enclave the issue of Arab unity which amounts to represent an alluring metaphor of the Arab aspiration to emancipation and an emblem of "challenging imperial domination."<sup>206</sup> Hence, given the controversial nature of the Arab unity issue, this strategy serves a least two main purposes: first, it avoids what Said describes as the politics of blame that characterize a great deal of the productions of Third World and Arab intellectualism, in particular, about the issues of East-West encounters<sup>207</sup> and second, it offers an opportunity for the Arab audience to have an encompassing experience vis-à-vis the *internal* workings of the imperial machinery via its inherent records related to the issue of Arab unity.

Accordingly, launching research efforts in Western archives, represents in a sense a *reversed* expedition aimed at exploring the self by a detour of the "Other", who was during the last two hundred years the one who launched initiatives of research, exploration and subjugation. In fact, this strategy aims at reflecting the European narrative upon its own political view of the East and eventually contributing to the provincialization of European discourse of authenticity, truth and universality. Starting from the title of the programme itself *Arshifohom . . watarikhona* (Their Archive . . Our History), it appears that it brings back to the fore issues related to the atmospheric schisms and polarizations between the East and the West

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<sup>206</sup> Tarik Sabry, "In Search of the Arab Present Cultural Tense," Naomi Sakr, *Arab Media and Political Renewal*, p.154

<sup>207</sup> Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique*, No. 1, (1985), pp. 89-107. p.103

and between the rigid juxtapositional attitudes in both sides. In fact, the very use of the pronouns ‘Our’ and ‘their’ condenses a huge bulk of the ongoing vortex of argumentation about the inequalities of East-West encounters. Certainly, it is hard to tell that the AJA’s research team who prepared the episodes still hold to these and other related polarities as fixed entities in place and time, in the very manner in which they were critiqued extensively by Edward Said. Had it been the case, it would have been unlikely at least to expect some unsympathetic criticisms directed at the Arab internal rivalries in the team’s introspections regardless of the imperial intervention.

Basing on the idea that narrating history is a social construction that proceeds according to the prevailing ideologies in a given era<sup>208</sup>, Aljazeera’s research team is somehow equal to the storyteller who tries to put together the pieces of a story for purposes of narrating(making known), educating (raising consciousness) and dialoguing (arguing for and against). The first episode starts with a subtitle “from the onset of the line”<sup>209</sup>(trans mine), alluding to the fact that the episode is going to start from the first day the idea of Arab unity appeared; yet the first intervention of the voice-over refers to Jamal Abdunnasser as “the most prominent mental image”<sup>210</sup> of a nationalist leader who sought to establish a united-Arab-body from the Atlantic till the Gulf. The voice-over puts forth that the dreams of Arab unity often collide with the imperial “assault” and the dreams of the Empire.<sup>211</sup> (trans mine) Indeed, most of the episodes highlight how that collision terminated every Arab attempt to unity since the cooperative approach of Sharif Hussein of Mecca until the confrontational approach of Jamal Abdunnasser.

In relation to Sharif Hussein, Aljazeera seems to reopen debate on the traditional suggestion that the East, heedless of strategies of power, believes in persons while the empire moves according to the interests of the institutions and the calculations of power equations. During the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Sharif Hussein of Mecca sought the help of the British, engaged at that time in the struggles of First World War,

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<sup>208</sup> Nandita Batra and Vartan P. Messier, “Narration, Memory, History: An Introduction,” 2007, <<http://www.c-s-p.org/Flyers/9781847181145-sample.pdf>>, p.3

<sup>209</sup> Episode 1

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Loc. Cit.

to establish an independent Arab state that includes most of the Arab provinces under the Ottoman Empire. Sharif Hussein and the British High Commissioner Henry McMahon embarked in a famous exchange of letters negotiating a deal by which the former can get a vast united Arab state while the latter guarantees both a friendly ruler and a substantial Arab help in favour of the British during the war.

Concerning this exchange of letters, which lasted from July 1915 till March 1916<sup>212</sup>, the voice-over refers to James Morris who says in his book *The Hashemite Kings* that

the suggestions of McMahon, included in his letters to Hussein, were powerfully worded so that they should be convincing for the Emir to cooperate with the coalition [during the war], yet they maintained a degree of obscurity that would enable the British government to manoeuvre and delay when its turn comes during the negotiation phase that is normally due after the war.<sup>213</sup> (trans mine)

This statement sheds light on what attitude the British diplomacy holds in negotiating with the Arabs and it makes clear how ill-informed was Sharif Hussein about the intricacies of decision-making back home in London's official circles.

Hence, the episode seem to simplistically pose the question: how can such a unity be built under colonial rule? With regards to the imperial powers' manipulation of the Arab disempowered local leadership, the episodes use heavily loaded phrases like "aborted [Arab]dreams", "futile exchange of letters"<sup>214</sup>, "deceit and contradiction", "ambiguous and delayed promise in Paris"<sup>215</sup> (trans mine), and a number of other doubtful labels. These phrases cast an *ethical* and emotive shade on the relationship between the East and the West. The *politically* young, innocent and inexperienced East is portrayed as a gullible and docile prey in the hands of the old and emotionless empires. The ethical shade becomes a mitigating tool; a tool of disapproval and challenge.

Hence, the aforementioned labels and phrases may go further as to anticipate the impossibility of a unity gained through *negotiations* and promises. Yet, the idea is not just in getting to know what the aim was behind those promises made to Hussein of Mecca at least, but it is related to how they become, with Aljazeera, part of a continuum. That is, how contemporary novel terrains and premises allow for the

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<sup>212</sup> Loc. Cit.

<sup>213</sup> episode 2

<sup>214</sup> Concerning MaCmahon-Sharif Hussein's messages the second episode cites James Barr's book *Setting the Desert on Fire* in which he argues that there was a strict British ban that amounts to a systematic concealment of the Arab origin of those messages.

emergence of apparently similar historical outcomes to transpire over and over. As such, Hussein represents not only a historical figure with a prominent visibility in the Arab collective history, but the most probable implicature of *Their Archive . . . Our History* hinges on the inevitable breakdown of a specific strategy of negotiating with the Empire either in the past or the present.

### **b- The Historical Interrogates the Contemporaneous**

Given that the episodes target a contemporary Arab audience, who has become, through an extensive exposition to various media, almost accustomed to the terminology and the ambiance of negotiations, talks, processes and ‘roadmaps’ especially in relation to the non-stopping conflicts in the current Middle East, the issue then can not help but raise old/new questions on how one person or one family can try alone to forge the future of the whole of Arabia, Iraq and the Levant at least without the accord of other Arabs and in accordance with the very powers that seek to keep these regions under its colonial stronghold. Then it is not surprising to see how AJA research team comes to question even the integrity and unanimity of Sharif Husain vis-à-vis his claim of seeking the interests of the Arab unity.

The second episode, referring to some opinions, maintains that “Sharif Hussein wanted to preserve the interests of his family which were not necessarily compatible with the interests of the global Arab interests of unity; as such, he found himself a captive of the British.”<sup>216</sup> The episode cites also Hussein’s son Abdullah saying that his father “fears that he will, as well as his family, be stigmatized with disgrace or be subject to the retaliation of those who did not understand the objective of rebellion [against the Ottoman Empire] and who see in that only a destruction of a great Islamic power without replacing it by another.”<sup>217</sup> (trans mine) Obviously, this excerpt highlights what the feeling has become in Hussein’s circles about the fate of the ‘promises’ and the Arab project of unity.

By highlighting this issue with an accompanying thrill-movie-like sound beats, Aljazeera is one way or another reflecting on the present by shaking contemporary political positions in which similar

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<sup>216</sup> episode 1

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.,

‘conciliatory’ strategies are called for. Bakhtin argues, once a speech act or an utterance is pronounced it "cannot avoid becoming an active participant in social dialogue"; that is, “one cannot speak without getting into an argument.”<sup>218</sup> In a similar vein Adam Hodges believes that “the interconnectivity of discourse is central to both the reproduction of truth claims as well as the *subversion* of truth claims.”<sup>219</sup> [emphasis added] In this case, Aljazeera seeks to argue with and even challenge certain truths claims and some versions of reality by resorting to history.

In relation to the Palestinian issue, for instance, there are sections of the Arab and the Palestinian people who advocates ‘negotiations’ as a path to liberation. In fact, if many of AJA’s guests, rebuking negotiations, use acoustically similar denouncements to the ones used by AJA such as ‘futile negotiations’, then Aljazeera’s labelling of Hussein-MacMahon historical exchange as ‘futile letters’ unsurprisingly squares with the major aims of challenging a contemporaneous discourse of negotiations. So, by emphasizing the ‘discouraging’ outcome of Arab attempts to reach independence and unity through powerless negotiations with the Empire, AJA strategy seems to rhyme with Said’s unyielding “commitment to never let a dominant myth or viewpoint become history without its counterpoint.”<sup>220</sup> Indeed, AJA happens, especially under the light of the emotional lexicon it uses while covering issues related to Palestine, to embody an explicit adoption of Said’s strategy of “sleeplessness”<sup>221</sup>, in his endeavour to undermine the very mythology that seeks to obfuscate the experiences “of suffering, dispossession, denial, death, and elimination.”<sup>222</sup> By extension, reinvigorating history becomes a fervent gesture expressing camouflaged dissatisfaction with all who oppose Said's thesis from Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, to Martin Kramer who attacked Said for “being deliberately anti-Western and anti-American.”<sup>223</sup> These are in fact the very accusations directed against Aljazeera in the West. Joseph Massad, citing Bhabha as an example,

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<sup>218</sup> Ken Hirschkop, “Is Dialogism for Real?,” *Social Text*, No. 1 (1992), pp. 102-113, p.5

<sup>219</sup> Adam Hodges “The Dialogic Emergence of ‘Truth’ in Politics: Reproduction and Subversion of the ‘War on Terror’ Discourse,” Vol. 21 No. 1 (2008), <[http://www.colorado.edu/ling/CRIL/Volume21\\_Issue1/paper\\_HODGES.pdf](http://www.colorado.edu/ling/CRIL/Volume21_Issue1/paper_HODGES.pdf)>

<sup>220</sup> Youssef Yacoubi, “Edward Said, Eqbal Ahmad, and Salman Rushdie,” p.15

<sup>221</sup> Edward Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), p.25

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25

<sup>223</sup> *Loc. Cit.*



says that Said is critiqued for “ignoring the internal procedures of violence and control of such movements like Hamas and Islamic Jihad.”<sup>224</sup> Massad even makes an unmoved association between “Bhabha's charge of Said's ‘rage’ and passionate solution to the Palestinian question to the standard Zionist attacks on Said's work, and to the Israeli government's notions of security.”<sup>225</sup> Symbolically, in view of this figurative coincidence between AJA’s discourse and Said’s thesis, the intervention of AJA can not fail then to intervene in the argument about the Palestinian issue in a way that goes beyond specific issues to include every muted voice related the Arab struggle for emancipation.

In fact, AJA comes to make the verily ignored pronouncements either directly in its daily coverage of the issue of Palestine or seeking discursive validity through a profound journey into history. Accordingly, historical content becomes a *visible* subtext for Aljazeera’s pedagogy of mediating conflicts like the Palestinian-Israeli, and most other conflicts flaming throughout the Arab world, in which two conflicting forms of power and discourse are involved at least, say the colonialist and the anti-colonialist. The fact is that the idea of a ‘different perspective’ which Aljazeera boasts turns out to be in this context a consciously biased intervention taking a clear stand towards the past and towards the present.

More than that, the way AJA represents the relationship between Sharif Hussein and his plans with the British echoes a great deal of the positions adopted by many of the dissident voices appearing on its screens in the contemporary era. Most of the time these voices condemn the receptive way in which Arab governments handle their relations with the global superpowers especially the U.S. The historical creates a sense of “immediacy”<sup>226</sup> in relation to the Arab audience as well as to the many voices lamenting the *dissolution* of the Arab dream of an effective unity. Hence, what might appear on AJA’s screen as a legitimate contribution to the democratization of Arab public dialogue becomes a strategy of promoting a “literature of combat” to use Frantz Fanon’s terms. Its combative tone leaks out through its inclination to mould a new “national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and

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<sup>224</sup> Loc. Cit.

<sup>225</sup> Youssef Yacoubi, “Edward Said, Eqbal Ahmad, and Salman Rushdie”, p.15

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p.15

bondless horizons; it is a literature of combat [. . .] expressed in terms of time and space.”<sup>227</sup> Indeed, as much as Fanon called for the ‘instrumentalization’ of various forms of art to cement the achievements of the struggle against the ‘*comprador*’, the use of history in AJA is celebrated with a profound intensity capable of creating a pan-Arab critical consciousness in an era of deep historical implications.

All in all, empires have their own agendas, so what might seem a *betrayal* in the eyes of Arabs is in a sense a systematic behaviour in the eyes of the empire itself as it is applied with parties across the board. Variations are to be judged by the denominator of interest. For this is what makes Denis Ross, Washington’s special envoy to the Middle East, says that “the British played a cynical role because they offered promises to all parties.”<sup>228</sup> (trans mine) At that time the Zionist movement was pressing hard to have a state of its own; so the British “promised”, according to Ross, “the Arabs who deal with them to gain independence and unity”, yet they promised at the same time, “the Jewish leaders independence[sic <sup>230</sup>.”<sup>229</sup>]

AJA insists on showing that that was not the only contradiction on the part of the British, for while they were keeping Hussein busy with promises they were preparing with the French for what came to be known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement of partition. In the fourth episode, a historian intervenes to comment concerning the current state of Syria, saying that there was “great danger in the partition [. . .] Indeed, this is what happened; we see nowadays a small Syria, Lebanon under the French influence [. . .] This is a partition that was hoped to be avoided, however that never happened and this is somehow a disaster.”<sup>231</sup> Here, Aljazeera brings one of the interviewees to propose that nothing has changed in the present, saying that “the scheme continues till the present day without doubt; yet it has changed in terms of style. The small borders are no longer important, but the interest is in the riches buried underneath the earth.”<sup>232</sup> (trans mine)

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<sup>227</sup> Frantz Fanon, 5<sup>th</sup> ed, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (London: Penguin, 2001), p.193

<sup>228</sup> episode 3

<sup>229</sup> At that time the Zionist has no material or internationally acknowledged state to gain ‘independence’.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> episode 4

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

A statement like this hits one of the central themes of the six-episode programme, which seeks through *an* arrangement of the pieces of history in a way that reflects directly on the present. Here, AJA's voice-over and the other voices that flutter in its orbit glide to play the role of Fanon's storyteller. For Fanon, the storytellers

who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental. There is a tendency to bring the conflicts up to date and to modernize kinds of struggle which the stories evoke [ . . . ] The method of allusion is more and more widely used. The formula 'This all happened long ago' is substituted by that of 'What we are going to speak of happened somewhere else, *but it might well have happened here today, and it might happen tomorrow*<sup>233</sup> [emphasis added]

That the allusion to the present is made so explicitly, especially in view of the heated argumentation about the economic motives behind some military interventions in the region on Aljazeera screens, shows how Aljazeera excavates history to justify its discursive stance while simultaneously providing its supporters with 'evidences' and discrediting its opponents positions. The argumentation about the past becomes a polemic about the present where affinities between the two can not be mistaken.

In fact, the episodes tackling of the issue of Arab unity leaves no spot- in the Empire's pragmatism and electivity in relation to the Arab leaders- unhighlighted. Indeed, they seem intent in most of their evaluative phrases on reflecting upon how the Empire used to look at "the Arab rulers and kings only in terms of how useful they were"<sup>234</sup> (trans mine) to fulfil its projects with the least efforts and expenses. Mathiew Huze talks about how Britain was willing to "use systematically its Arab contacts to destroy the Ottoman Empire"<sup>235</sup>, (trans mine) which was the only remaining hindrance to the British in the Middle East. Further than that, AJA highlights how the Empire was not only manipulating the Arab leaders but also trying to pit them against each other by intensifying differences among them, thus planting the seeds of self-destruction in any agreement about unity among them.

After the rise of Al Saud in Hijaz (today's Saudi Arabia), the installation of the Hashemite King Faisal in Iraq and King Abdullah in Jordan by the British in agreement with the French, the thwarting of

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<sup>233</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p.193

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p.193

<sup>235</sup> *Loc. Cit.*

the dream of unity was officialised by two kings.<sup>236</sup> The third episode talks about how “the Saudis have an inherent dislike for the Hashemite”<sup>237</sup> and they feared the idea of establishing a strong united Arab nation at least in their north.<sup>238</sup> Indeed, one of the interviewees in the third episode moves to abruptly conclude that

the truth is that the old empires, especially Britain which has a very rich proficiency in this domain, worked always on igniting animosity not only between the Arab states but precisely between the Arab rulers using various means including the feelings of enmity between clans, which were on the way to unite, or between the descendant tribes of the Saudis or the Hashemite, for example.<sup>239</sup>  
(trans mine)

Linking the political divisions among Arab rulers in the past and presenting them as one of the obdurate obstructions to Arab political cooperation, is addressed in all probability to the present that has not by coincidence certain affinities with the past. In fact, this shows that the discursive strategy of AJA, which relies extensively on historical material, targets the consciousness of an audience with specific cultural and political character.

Aljazeera seems to adopt a radical Fanonian mission aimed at the “crystallization of national consciousness.”<sup>240</sup> This mission, Fanon says, will end up disrupting “styles and themes, and also creat[ing] a completely new public.”<sup>241</sup> In a sense, it aims, in Suzane Kassab words, at “radicalizing critique and examining the past endeavours for enlightenment and liberation.”<sup>242</sup> Hence, one of the possible outcomes of AJA invocation of the Arab seemingly eternal dilemma of non-agreement is that it contributes hugely to the erosion of much of the conspiracy thinking prevalent in the Arab world.<sup>243</sup> The fact is that, as of one the commentators in the episodes maintains, “there is no other region in the world which spoke about unity more than the Arabic-speaking world, but there is no region in the world failed as this region”<sup>244</sup>(trans

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<sup>236</sup> episode 3

<sup>237</sup> episode 2

<sup>238</sup> episodes 2-3

<sup>239</sup> episode 3

<sup>240</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p.193

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., p.193

<sup>242</sup> Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative perspective*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p.20

<sup>243</sup> Marvin Zonis and Craig M. Joseph, “Conspiracy Thinking in the Middle East Political Psychology”, Vol. 15, No. 3 (1994), p.444

<sup>244</sup> episode 4

mine). Nevertheless, Aljazeera seems as well to hold the stick in the middle, especially when it introduces Abdunasser's project of pan-Arabism.

When Aljazeera underscores the issue of Abdunasser, it becomes not only a commentator or a detached storyteller who performs his piece and leaves in peace, but it becomes part of the elements of change in the external world. In this context, Aljazeera introduces Abdunasser with his messianic rally of salvation of the wretched of the Arab earth "as a threat no only to Imperialism and Zionism but also the Arab rulers themselves"<sup>245</sup> who came to fear him more than any other threatening power. The introduction of Abdunasser comes as an act of filling more a deficit of heroism than for creating the conditions of unanimity among the people in the conflict driven Middle East. The symbolic intervention of Abdunasser is to be considered, in view of what has been said before, as a rallying flag aimed at having a specific message conveyed, empowering a certain discourse and discrediting another.

For apart from the requirements of catering for the interests and the sensibilities of an audience with specific cultural and political aspirations, this intrusion of Abdunasser once launched becomes a 'speech act', which is performed like all other pronouncements of the episodes 'to do things' and change the world. When Aljazeera decides to use what Abdunasser stands for as a form of resistance, it must have an intended message aimed at having a particular change effect on the already going on debate in various arenas about the Arab political dispersion. Aljazeera's verbal intervention becomes "a living utterance",<sup>246</sup> which seeks to counter a discourse claiming that the Arab obsession with resistance is no more than a novel manifestation of the Arab traditional utterly baseless 'conspiracy thinking' or simply another local discourse which maintains that Arab-nationalism counterfeit the interests of the new Arab nation-state.

Consciously or not, Aljazeera enters the world of polemics to defend certain claims and retort others. As an example, Burry Rubin maintains concerning the overall Arab thought that "the analytical emphasis on 'resistance' rather than reform builds on a strong foundation: a half-century-long indoctrination that all

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<sup>245</sup> episode 5

<sup>246</sup> Loc. Cit.

problems in the Arab world are caused by Israel, the United States, and the West.”<sup>247</sup> Given the coverage that Aljazeera allocates to ‘put the blame on these very last powers’ both in its history programmes and in its daily treatment of conflicts of the Middle East, makes of it not a form of showing facts and information but a huge megaphone beaming-back not only to similar aforementioned statements but even against their social, historical and ideological foundations. When Aljazeera broadcasts a show on “Iran-Contra affair” enacted by the CIA to topple down the democratically elected Muhamed Musadak<sup>248</sup> of Iran or when it brings Mohammed Hasanin Haikal to use exactly this operation later as ‘plain’ proof “against those who believe that there is no conspiracy”<sup>249</sup>, it ceases to be a impartial player in world politics but a material role-player. Eventually, the polemic of AJA turns to be a discursive fort bent on solidifying the various traits of camaraderie and common belonging among the Arab and Muslim communities engraved by continuous assaults of empires old and new.

### **c- Strengthening Sentiments of Common Belonging**

Aljazeera’s investment of history help, in symbiosis with its alterity-proclaiming-coverage, cements the feelings of a common-belonging among the Arab and Muslim communities in the areas of the Middle East, North Africa and the Arabo-Muslim diasporas over the world. It is probable that the material and even historical bonds between these communities are thinner than might be perceived, but the strategies of articulation deployed by Aljazeera contribute hugely to create a sense of camaraderie among these communities.<sup>250</sup> In this context, Khalil Rinnawi argues that “while a new sense of community emerges, past history is rewritten or ‘reimagined’ to be more positive and/or relevant to current attitudes.”<sup>251</sup> Indeed, Aljazeera’s re-reading of history is above all similar to the work of an author who has his own inherent inclinations and cultural affiliations, thus rendering the work a powerful tool aimed at cementing cultural

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<sup>247</sup> Barry Rubin, “Arab Politics: Back to utility,” *Middle East Quarterly*, (Winter 2007), pp. 53-62. p.55

<sup>248</sup> The National Security Archive, “*The Iran-Contra Affair 20 Years On*,” Nov 24, 2006, *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book*, No. 210, <<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB210/index.htm>>

<sup>249</sup> *Maa Haikal* (With Haikal), “Nadariat Al Moamara (Conspiracy Theory)”, April 13, 2007 <<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/5771A5C4-07A4-40E8-93C0-C09D95E4A455>>

<sup>250</sup> Khalil Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism: McArabism al-Jazeera, and the Transnational Media in the Arab World*, (Maryland: University Press of America, 2006), p.195

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

ties among “imagined communities”<sup>252</sup> within unifying frameworks guided through a resistant pan-nationalistic identity.

In fact, imagined communities, in Benedict Anderson’s understanding of ‘nationalism’, have never been something related primarily to a specific closed geographical region. In this new sense of community, people come to see themselves as “groups who live parallel to other groups [. . .] Most people who belong to these groups will never know, meet or even really understand the people in their parallel groups, but they imagine that they are a community with a ‘deep horizontal comradeship.’”<sup>253</sup> These communities are more of an idea, a psychological state than a factual material relationship. But for imagined community to emerge there must be catalysts. In the case of the Arab world, Rinnawi talks about an emerging nationalism fuelled primarily by the contents of media networks like Aljazeera. Through processes of re-invoking issues related to what is perceived as a common Arab history and ‘common destiny’, Aljazeera solidifies a sense of common belonging different Arab groups “because they all participate in the same socio-ritual of mass media.”<sup>254</sup> In fact, “this new medium is the foundation of a new Arab consciousness and the development of ‘new/old collective identities’”<sup>255</sup>, since it constitute the material manifestation of a ‘virtual’ link between the historical origins of the majority of these Arab groups.

Central to this new consciousness of a common belonging is identification with other groups through the sensationalized or emotive footage; i.e. “using footage that is clearly meant to stimulate an emotional response, which ‘allows audiences to experience deeper forms of engagement.’”<sup>256</sup> Unsurprisingly, AJA’s coverage of the war in Lebanon in 2006 and on Gaza in 2008/2009, which afford it with special moments to invest heavily in showing historical content related to these conflicts, is considered a landmark in the history of the channel and the history of these groups as well. Consequently, the images of Abdulansser, other historical and contemporary leaders or the images of massacred children in Khana or Gaza come to

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<sup>252</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1991), p. 4

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65

<sup>254</sup> *Loc. Cit.*

<sup>255</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p.9

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22

work together to intensify a specific type of identity and belonging. In this context, Marie Gillespie argues that “Al-Jazeera is helping to forge a transnational political consciousness, which contributes to the formation of a politicized identity. The images shown by Al-Jazeera create profound anger and sadness and become objects of contemplation while intensifying realities.”<sup>257</sup> “Rather than desensitizing<sup>258</sup> audiences”, Gillespie argues “these images have mobilized a political consciousness.”<sup>259</sup> In fact, the shared identity that is emerging and being articulated through Aljazeera is a by-product of long and short term processes in the Arabo-Islamic world, “including the failure of Nasserite pan-Arabism; a period of state-state disengagement and isolation, marked with increasing foreign intervention, inflicted both by state regimes and international actors.”<sup>260</sup> These conditions and developments constitute, in reality, the raw material from which Aljazeera picks and chooses the elements and the phrases of its text-politics, aimed at challenging the imperial material and cultural hegemony.

The result is that the historical content ends up being only one argument in a coherent argumentative text, no matter how hard Aljazeera tries to cast a façade of diversity and heterogeneity. Its text seems to reveal a unifying theme that permeates almost every work of Aljazeera not only as a channel but as whole media network. As an example, a journalist may become a writer in a co-authored text or even a ‘soldier’. This state squares with Aljazeera strategies when it honours Selwadi, a journalist who was handicapped in Gaza and was honoured in Aljazeera international film festival 2010. He was not honoured simply as a journalist but as somebody who “holds in his heart the spirit of a principled fighter who does not retreats.” part of the Aljazeera Here, the ‘soldier’ enters the battle of words and images and becomes ) (trans mine<sup>261</sup> text which seizes every opportunity to celebrate it at international forums and conferences.

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<sup>257</sup> Gillespie, Marie. “Al-Jazeera, Sceptical Cosmopolitans and Transnational Identifications,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 6 (August 2006) , pp. 103 – 121. p.107

<sup>258</sup> Desensitisation: the theory that repeated exposure to something shocking such as violence will lead an audience to be less affected by it. Compassion fatigue “Yet, no matter how well-intentioned, the frequent broadcasting of the brutal images of war may bring about a progressive desensitisation and brutalisation of those viewing them.” [John Peacock, *The Independent*] Anderson, *Dictionary of Media Studies*, p.62

<sup>259</sup> Marie Gillespie, “Al-Jazeera”, p.108

<sup>260</sup> Rinnawi, *Instant Nationalism*, p.16

<sup>261</sup> *Aljazeera Film Festival*, “Mihrajan Aljazeera Yabdaou Bisabie Haya” October 9, 2010 <<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/54F918FA-42FA-40D3-AED2-E52E1847DC21.htm>>



Indeed, these programmes contribute hugely to the general texture of Aljazeera discourse which seeks to address the contemporary condition through its critical engagement with the historical outcomes, to challenge the status quo through the orientation of pan-Arab national consciousness and to win the support of Arab audiences wherever they happen to be. New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman summed it up best when he said "[Al Jazeera] is not only the biggest media phenomenon to hit the Arab world since the advent of television, it is also the biggest political phenomenon."<sup>262</sup> But with the advent of AJE, it appears that the phenomenon is going global with no seeming intentions of bowing to pressures or refining the subversive strategies to fit the new space. Indeed, with programmes like *Empire, People & Power* and *Listening Post* it seems that the strategy has only metamorphosed in a different medium. Although predominantly run by a staff that has Western origin and training, the Arab and Third-worldist 'perspective' remains prevailing in most of the channel's coverage, reporting and orientation. It represents in a sense the perfect Southern equivalent of Western 'partisan media' outlets.

## **2 - Mapping AJE Discursive Strategies**

### **a- Challenging Discourses of Power**

With close to 70 news bureaus worldwide, AJE -- the world's first global English language news channel to be headquartered in the Middle East-- is already accessible in over 110 million households worldwide.<sup>263</sup> AJE managed to distribute its content via multiple video sharing websites like youtube, facebook and twitter, making its discourse accessible to anyone with a connection to the new technology.<sup>264</sup> In fact, AJE came in a critical historical juncture where information technology has made it affordable, at least theoretically, for people around the world to have an instant access to information. But it is also an era where the concentration of media ownership in the hands of the few has blurred the boundaries between

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<sup>262</sup> Josh Rushing, *Mission Al Jazeera : Build a Bridge, Seek the Truth, Change the World*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.126

<sup>263</sup> "Corporate Profile," June 03, 2009, <<http://english.aljazeera.net/aboutus/2006/11/2008525185555444449.html>>

<sup>264</sup> Aljazeera pages are available in many similar websites. This is a novel technique that enable Aljazeera messages to infiltrate the widest electronic chat rooms where people gather with millions.

the interests of media networks and the interests of power centers.<sup>265</sup> Here comes AJE to introduce itself in the global media scene as part of a ‘global’ third-worldist media discourse that has the “declared purpose of revolutionizing the global newscape”<sup>266</sup>, i.e. to destabilize the current state of the global media and by extension the powers sustaining them.

Nevertheless, every new comer to whatever field of competition is aware, as mentioned before, that he has to play according to the rules developed by his predecessors to manage the game among them and secure their interest and profitability. The new comer is aware, at the same time, if he is to reach a status of preeminence within the field, of the need to target the subversion of some of the very rules of the game so as to make them suit his own status as a beginner and achieve a substantial breakthrough. This appears to be one of the main tenets of what AJE is about.

Before moving to analyze some of AJE’s programmes like *Empire* as landmarks in an extended discursive practice, it might be relevant first to situate AJE discourse within the global map of media discourses through investigating declarations and statements by its own power holders such as high-rank directors, managers and executives. For in addition to the discursive output of AJE, their statements help mapping the institution’s starting points, its ideological underpinnings and its future objectives. This is because power holders in media institutions have substantial stakes in deciding which stories to be aired, which wording to be used, which sources to be quoted and which views, opinions to be given priority and for what purposes and strategies. Hence, their role relates to every segment that makes it to the screen, the website or other outlets of the institution.

Noteworthy here is that most of AJE staffs, who belong to more than 40 ethnic backgrounds<sup>267</sup> and trained in major Western media televisions, came, as Ronnie Lovler says, “aware that something new and exciting was in the offing [and ] were also eager to get on board.”<sup>268</sup> This eagerness is coupled with a huge

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<sup>265</sup> Van Dijk Teun A., “The Mass Media Today: Discourses of Domination or Diversity?”, n.d. <<http://www.daneprairie.com>> p.25

<sup>266</sup> Powers and El-Nawawy, *Mediating Conflict*, p.29

<sup>267</sup> Lovler Ronnie, “What’s in a Name: The reputation of Aljazeera English in the United States”, *Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication*, (Aug 2008), <[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p272377\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p272377_index.html)>. p.5

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5

initial budget of 1 billion dollars, which, according to Veronica Pedrosa, an AJE presenter in Kuala Lumpur, enables AJE to report “without a kind of projection of who its viewer is. It’s not just concerned with viewership and ratings as CNN and BBC worldwide.”<sup>269</sup> This means simply that the channel is capable of disentangling its output from the cobweb of the commercially-driven reporting procedures; i.e. “it doesn’t have stockholders it needs to answer to.”<sup>270</sup> Because of its sizable and remarkably market-independent resources, AJE is not subject to the economic pressures that have resulted in a decline in the quality of one of the precious jewels in the crone of ‘modernity’: freedom of speech.

Financial pressures play a crucial role in many Western media networks which are thus structurally forced to cater for the interests and the expectations of the economic and political elites which constitute its main base of consumers and provide, at the same time, according to Van Dijk, its “preferred actors of news reports and TV programs.”<sup>271</sup> In AJE, this constraint is almost absent given many reasons: the most crucial among which is the deep pockets of the Qatari Emir, which makes AJE correspondents “never hear the word budget.”<sup>272</sup>

This financial freedom enables AJE to think more independently or even radically of its mission. Indeed, it seems that it has assumed the colossal task of revitalizing a huge field which, it believes, has become overwhelmed by disabling routines and strict guidelines, especially when dealing with conflicts and wars that render media caught in the crossfire of power interests. Speaking about AJE’s mission, Nigel Parsons, the former AJE managing director, said:

This was a chance, a blank piece of paper to do things differently. And I do think that we have shaken up a *very tired old industry*. I do think we have raised the bar. Everyone said that there was nothing different to do or be done. I think to a large measure that we have achieved what we have set out to do. We do provide more analysis. We do provide more depth. We do cover untold stories.<sup>273</sup> [emphasis added]

Among the issues raised by Parsons in this passage are the opportunity provided by AJE to *shake* an ailing industry and its potential to offer a new start in terms of providing in-depth analysis and telling the *untold*.

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<sup>269</sup> Powers and El-Nawawy, *Mediating Conflict*, p.31

<sup>270</sup> Lovler, “What’s in a Name,” p.5

<sup>271</sup> Van Dijk, “The Mass Media Today: Discourses of Domination or Diversity?,” p.33

<sup>272</sup> Zayani and Sahraoui, *The Culture of Al Jazeera*, p.10

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.* p.10

Focusing on the untold in relation to other international media outlets is in fact reminiscent of any radical criticism directed against the major media networks in the West. The point is that Parsons makes clear what AJE is about and counters those who have accepted to live with the idea that it is beyond anyone's reach to revitalize some frozen discourses in Western media.

Unquestionably, in other mangers' words, the mission of AJE takes a more concerned tone. In his opening address to AJE, Waddah Khanfar, general director of Aljazeera network, argues that the mission of international media in general and AJE in particular is "to outgrow the superficiality of the 'media of immediacy'<sup>274</sup> that is characterized by aspects of carelessness, an inclination to reductionism, forgone conclusions, unfair biases, and an incessant quest for insignificant out-of-context information."<sup>275</sup> Khanfar seems vehement in contending with these flaws that has become presumably inherent to media. In fact, in as much as this statement tells about AJE, it tells no less about what AJE thinks has befallen its immediate competitors in Western TV stations and other media.

In the same opening address, Khanfar argues that journalism is a soft power, which is "often coerced by other powers that don't refrain from infringing upon its space and repeatedly trying to use it to serve their political and economic interests."<sup>276</sup> The significance of these statements lies not in what criticisms they put forth, since criticisms can be found in many text books about media in the west, but their significance lies in their relevance to reflect on the discursive position taken by AJE in relation to dominant discourses. That is, how AJE outputs are going to be to a great extent a material translation and articulation of these thoughts. So, regardless of questions related to 'will', 'can' or 'whether' AJE is going to actualize them in the form of news stories and programmes, these thoughts put the agenda of selection or the road map. AJE output ends up unfolding the inbuilt identity of this institution vis-à-vis other institutions in the field. Accordingly, it might be rightfully deduced that the main target of this channel is not information per

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<sup>274</sup> Immediacy: how recently a news story being reported actually happened, a key news value. <[www.media-dictionary.com/definition/immediacy.html](http://www.media-dictionary.com/definition/immediacy.html)>

<sup>275</sup> Wadah Khanfar, "Opening Address," Updated in April 25, 2007, <<http://english.aljazeera.net/aboutus>>

<sup>276</sup> Loc. Cit.

see, but more relevantly the information that has the potential of exposing and challenging the very economic and political powers seeking to ‘abuse’ the field of media.

One of the possible ways to do that is by focusing, AJE seems to suggest, on covering the traditionally under-reported areas especially in the South and parts of the world that have often been marginalized or altogether neglected by Western mainstream media. Indeed, the new thing with AJE, Robert Fulford argues, is that it is the first truly *global* in scope, as the other media outlets in the West remain simply *international* in a strict sense.<sup>277</sup> Hence, it is not surprising to see AJE being touted as the voice of the South beaming at the heart of the North. Ibrahim Helal, AJE’s deputy manager for news and programmes, presents an elasticized philosophy of the South. He explains: “The ‘South’ here is not meant to be geographical. It is symbolic. It is a lifestyle because in the West, you have a lot of South as well. In Britain, you have South. In Europe, you have South. The South denotes the voiceless in general.”<sup>278</sup> The Souths of the metropolis are probably, in AJE’s conceptions, those areas and topics that do not find their ways to be in the mainstream international media in the West. Accordingly, in the long run, AJE will focus, for instance in *People & Power* programme, not on governmental activities and high culture in the West but on the homeless sleeping in the streets of big cities in the US,<sup>279</sup> minorities and racism, White Power<sup>280</sup>. . . etc.

In relation to the southern hemisphere in general and the Middle East in particular, AJE is going, according to this conception, to focus on those aspects generally reported from a Eurocentric view point. Furthermore, in a time when Western mainstream media’s inclination to vilify cultural ‘Others’ has become almost proverbial, reducing the South to ‘uncivilized backwardness’ and Islam to the ‘veiled threat’, it appears that AJE seeks to subvert this very paradigm of gratifying the self by demonizing the Other. In view of the fact that this paradigm is one of the discursive manifestations of solidifying hegemonic

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<sup>277</sup> Robert Fulford, “Many Networks are International. This One is Global,” *The National Post*, May 22, 2010

<sup>278</sup> Powers and El-Nawawy, *Mediating Conflict*, p.34

<sup>279</sup> *People & Power*, “Homeless Hero,” Feb 3, 2008 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4ownH4dg3s>>

<sup>280</sup> *People & Power*, “White Power,” Jan 13, 2010

<<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/peopleandpower/2010/01/201015124739316797.html>>

discourses, AJE looks exceptionally aware to relate not only to promulgating a distinctive perspective on different issues, but to seeking as well to counter the very cultural, institutional and political motives that have reinforced all the stereotypical aspects of hegemony in relation to cultural Others.

Originating from the 'Global South', AJE demonstrates a plain model of what Naomi Sakr describes as a contra-flow action. Sakr defines contra-flow as a condition where "countries once considered clients of media imperialism have successfully exported their output into the metropolis."<sup>281</sup> In similar vein, Sakr argues that "contra-flow in its full sense would seem to imply not just reversed or alternative media flows, but a flow that is also counter-hegemonic. Theories of hegemony suggest that counter-hegemonic media practices are liable either to be incorporated into dominant structures or marginalized in a way that neutralizes the threat they pose to the status quo."<sup>282</sup> Addressing the issue of counter-hegemonic discourses, Khanfar bluntly puts it: "Our philosophy of reporting is human sentiment paradigm rather than the power center. We shift away from the power. Actually, our relationship with power is always to question power, rather than to give power more domain to control. We have to empower the voiceless, rather than to empower the pulpit [...] or the powerful only."<sup>283</sup> If it happens that the humanitarian side of conflicts, flashpoints and wars is often violated by the military branches of power, that is all the best for AJE, at least from a purely journalistic perspective. And if it happens also that the major conflicts in the world are burning "our region"<sup>284</sup>, to use Khanfar terms, then this brings Aljazeera to the faultlines of struggle.

But the question is which particular power is alluded to by Khanfar? AJE is not an underground communist agitation unit or a military regiment; it is an institution that belongs to a field whose powers are limited to a large extent to 'cultural capital', i.e. effective signs, symbolic images and significant words . . . etc. So, it uses equipments that belong to the fields of conversation, dialogue and discourse. Hence, AJE can not go beyond targeting a power, which in Foucault's words, "produces; it produces reality; it produces

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<sup>281</sup> Naomi Sakr, "Challenger or Lackey? The Politics of News on Al-Jazeera," *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra-Flow*, Ed, Daya Kishan Thussu, (London: Routledge, 2007), p.p. 116-132, p.116

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., p.117

<sup>283</sup> Powers and El-Nawawy, *Mediating Conflict*, p.35

<sup>284</sup> Khanfar, "Opening Address,"

domains of objects and rituals of truth.”<sup>285</sup> That is, the power of discourse which provides on behalf of the audiences their tools of perceptions and their systems of evaluation.

In relation to the Middle East, Khanfar laments how, during conflicts, “images have invaded the screens as weapons of disinformation and disorientation.”<sup>286</sup> For him, most media working in the Middle East suffices by a ‘stop and stare’ attitude and as such becomes part and parcel of the situation. The reason for him is that media has chosen to side with the political elite<sup>287</sup> instead of sticking to its principles and seek how “international and regional politics compounded by the social and cultural dynamics of societies in the region”<sup>288</sup> are the direct causes behind the situation in the Middle East. To be noted in his words is that he places international politics on the top of the list of the culprits in the misery of the Middle East. When international politics is mentioned in the wording of AJE and the context of the Middle East, it brings with it a cluster of unwelcome connotations, among which political interventions and pressures, coercion, exploitation, immorality and injustice to name just a few. Arguably, if this connotations constitute the ‘latent tendencies’ of the practitioners in AJE, it becomes almost clear what material powers they are going to try challenge. Consequently, in view of AJE’s declared aims, abound resources, diverse staff and challenging attitude, programmes like *Empire* and *People & Power* provide a distinct opportunity to examine how AJE constructs its media texts, how it discloses its subject positions, how it seeks to challenge hegemony and how it negotiate cross-cultural differences.

### **b- *Empire*: Essentializing Difference**

The one-word title of the monthly programme *Empire* refers, if put within the overall ‘deviant’ coverage and AJE focus on most postcolonial societies, like Africa beyond the images of “wars and genocides”<sup>289</sup>, would shed light on what point of reference AJE uses to question the *Empire*. With the Middle Eastern origin of AJE, the term *Empire* in AJE seems to derive its challenging load from the

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<sup>285</sup> Quoted in Lise Marken, “Culture + Power: Synthesizing Hall, Carey and Foucault for a Cultural Understanding of the Power of the Press,” *Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication*, (2007), pp. 20-32, p.20

<sup>286</sup> Wadah Khanfar, “Opening Address”, Updated in May 25, 2007 <<http://english.aljazeera.net/aboutus>>

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Makgetla Tumi, “Al-Jazeera's fresh eye on Africa,” Nov 25, 2005 <<http://www.mg.co.za/article>>

vernacular of ‘writing back to the centre’ that echoes the spirit of postcolonialism’s strategies of subversion of Western tendencies to domination and hegemony. So, the background from which the selection of topics and issues will not be far from the concerns and the interests of postcolonial writers and neocolonialism critics, especially with the clear stated aim of questioning “global powers and their agendas.”<sup>290</sup> Not least important in this context is that the presenter of the programme is Marwan Bishara, who is a brother of one of the staunchest critics of the Israeli and the American policies in the Middle East: the Palestinian Azmi Bishara. Hence, with a Palestinian memory, background and experience Marwan Bishara, himself presented as “Al Jazeera's senior political analyst”<sup>291</sup> and as a “leading authority on the Middle East and international affairs”<sup>292</sup>, is a fact illuminating in this context since the questions are his and the debate is directed by him. The use of Bishara in the programme is somehow an evident intervention to empower the local voice within a forum or a platform addressing the global audience in the language of the Empire.

Apart from ideologically open media outlets like Venezuela Telsur and Iran International, it is improbable to come across a programme like this with the title *Empire* in Western media. This fact increases the predictability of the arguments to be used, the referential points to be alluded to and the frames to be highlighted. Accordingly, the programme *Empire* represents one of the milestone components defining the ‘subject position’ of AJE within the general map of competing discourses in the field of international mass media. Concerning positioning, Davies and Harre argue that:

Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. At least a possibility of notional choice is inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in.<sup>293</sup>

In this context, the subject position is looked at from the point of a conscious positioning taken by the subject. Consequently, if western international media is located in the assumed geography of the empire,

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<sup>290</sup> “About empire”, Dec. 24, 2009 <<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/>>

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harre, “Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves”, *Journal of the Theory of Social Behaviour*, (1990), Vol. 20, pp. 43-65, p. 47. N.b. Subject position is relevant to various forms of subjectivity. It relates to individuals like a woman in relation to man, groups like feminist groups and identity politics groups or an institution like militaries or media institutions themselves.



the programme *Empire* configures certain elements of AJE's discourse which can be seen almost diametrically defiant to most mainstream media's intended messages. The opposition becomes visible when it comes to dealing with the issue of the West's relation to cultural Others. Basing on Derrida's idea of difference and in view of how AJE managers stresses AJE as an alternative 'media of depth' to 'media of superficiality' and a 'media of the told' to 'the media of the untold', then *Empire* comes to embody an epitome of what it means to define oneself by what the dominant Other is not.<sup>294</sup> This so, because the symbolic presence of the programme brings the debate back into one of the central battlefields of argumentation between the plethora of hegemonic artilleries of persuasion mobilized by the West and the myriad of strategies of resistance deployed by the *rest*. However the subject position of AJE is not necessarily a fixed category, indeed it is dynamic and in the way it seeks to challenge power it establish work for reconciliation. This is so, because when the issue is a natural disaster, it is unexpected to find stark differences in messages between AJE and other global media. Opposition emerges most often than not when there is a deliberate exercise of power, a military conflict or an identity-politics spat, especially if it relates to the Middle East. Then, almost a tendency to resist through coverage is expected in AJE.

Accordingly, it is not surprising then to see the programme defining its objectives within the premise of resisting global powers. Hence, the power to be questioned in *Empire* can be a state or a "corporate, military or economic" giant.<sup>295</sup> The programme states openly how it seeks to delve precisely on critiquing these giants of power that "strive to dominate everything from international security and finance to communications and the news itself."<sup>296</sup> A statement like this is hardly expected to be explicitly included in the definitions of TV programmes for themselves in major media networks in the West. When it comes to how the programme distributes its episodes, it appears that 12 out of 16 episodes broadcasted till now focus on issues related to the relation between the superpowers and the Middle East, with titles ranging

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<sup>294</sup> Loc. Cit.

<sup>295</sup> "About empire", Dec 24, 2009, <<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes>>

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

from “US and Al Qaeda”, the “War on Terror from a Muslim Eye”, “Iran: Influence or Threat?” . . . to “What Future for ‘Greater Israel?’”

Regardless of what arguments are resorted to by the guests from whatever political stance concerning these issues, the debate is already given a specific frame that seeks to orientate reception of this issues by English-speaking audience. The aforementioned titles are usually presented in a very attractive manner accompanied by well targeted images, sound effects and comments. A quick look on these titles reveals a clear inclination of *Empire* to inaudibly bring the *debates* onto the point zero, where certain for granted attitudes in the West are challenged. In relation to Iran, for instance, *Empire* phrases the title of one its episodes about the issue in the form of a question that seeks in addition to casting a shade of neutrality to fracture almost a political dogma in the West which is more or less: ‘Iran is certainly an *evil* how can it possible to question whether it is not a threat? Or, in relation to the Arab-Israeli relations, Israel is oasis of democracy in a desert of dictatorship” how can it have aspirations to expansion?

Similar attitudes to these have become almost the direct result of vilification strategies of various degrees deployed by Western media, especially in times of preparing the battlefields for ‘eminent’ clashes. Hence, *Empire*, among other programmes and news items, seeks to complete the picture of AJE by seeking to negate the deep seated attitudes and eventually Western media strategies in relation to cultural Others. More than that, the programme stresses again in its profile the problematic of ‘dominating the news itself’ by the superpowers, and thus allocates, in addition to other special programmes, an episode to debating the phenomenon of “Media Wars”. Within the previous context of negating attitudes and strategies of Western media, the episode tries to problematize the space between a constant propaganda and what remains for Western media to say about objectivity and pluralism of expression.

### **c- “Media Wars”: Speaking Truth to Power**

In this episode, Bishara hosts four relevant guests: Christine Ockrent, CEO of France24, Greg Dyke, former director general of BBC, John Owen, department of International Journalism in City University, and Richard Gizbert, presenter of AJE’s programme *The Listening Post*. Apart from the latter two guests,

Ockrent and Greg's presence is symbolic because they are there not only as managers of their immediate institutions but also as heads of the biggest media institution since the British Empire in the case of BBC and of the significantly recent media institution of France in the case of France24. Both these two countries are still global powers and they can not fail by any means to be among those powers targeted by *Empire*.

Before initiating the discussion, Bishara presents, as usual, a short introduction and a voice-over offers a dense synopsis -coupled with landmark images- related to the historical development of international media. Bishara puts it bluntly this way: "global media has been dominated firstly by traditional superpowers and more recently by new high-tech giants who are increasingly dominating almost all forms of media."<sup>297</sup> In parallel, he states openly: "propaganda, often labelled a so-called battle for hearts and minds, has long been an essential tool for superpowers such as the US."<sup>298</sup> The conflation of propaganda and domination in this introduction can not fail to be directed at showing how empires resort to their soft power to complement what their hard powers can not alone manage to achieve, thus derailing the mission of media as neutral medium. But the critical question is what messages does *Empire* aspires to convey to its audience by raising this issue?

On the basis of what has been said previously and basing on the idea that one's utterance can hardly hide "its intense sideward glance at someone else's words"<sup>299</sup> or more significantly in this context his unspoken words, the readily predicted message is at least: not only the 'rouge ones' use propaganda but the objectivity-celebrating 'free world' too. To convey a similar message in a remote area in the affected peripheries by the domination of the empire is almost expected, but to be debated at the heart of the metropolis amounts to uncovering the great sinner, to use Ben Bagdekian insights in his critique of an American media dominated by a 'corporate propaganda' that buries no less that it discloses. He expresses his worry by saying that "there is a disturbing pattern of the missing realities. It is the main media sin."<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> *Empire*, "Media Wars", Aug 27, 2009, <<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/empire>>

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Robert A. Morace, "Dialogues and Dialogics," *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (Summer, 1993), pp. 73-91. p.74

<sup>300</sup> Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly*, p.4

Under this light, *Empire* seeks to dispel the myths of truism circulated in Western media about the real terrain of various struggle.

Media wars, information wars and battles for ‘hearts and minds’ all echo almost the same thing: behind any war there is propaganda. To bring this issue with a negating tone means very simply that AJE is pointing to the simple fact that these powers use propaganda to maintain power. But the free world does not acknowledge resorting to the use of propaganda or psychological war even if it is willing to ascribe it to totalitarianism. Noam Chomsky answers to that by saying:

Propaganda is to democracy what violence is to totalitarianism. [So ], for those who stubbornly seek freedom around the world, there can be no more urgent task than to come to understand the mechanisms and practices of indoctrination. These are easy to perceive in the totalitarian societies, much less so in the propaganda system to which we are subjected and in which all too often we serve as unwilling or unwitting instruments.<sup>301</sup>

Without doubt, *Empire* production team’s mere inclusion of the issue of media wars, especially in view of AJE’s legacy of disturbing and enriching the flow of ideas across the world, appears to be aware of the Western media proclivity to ‘thought control’. Indeed, this inclusion itself represents an act of emancipation since it can be part and parcel of reacting to the very ‘practices of indoctrination’ used stealthily in Western media.

The irony is that the title of “Media Wars” is highly indicative in the context of AJE, since at the heart of the modern phases of these wars lies AJE itself. The first address put forth by Bishara to the head of France24 comes as the following: “you have complained before about British and American domination of 24/24 news, but what about France’s domination of the Francophone world of television?” and the second is “do you see France24 a reflection of France’s foreign policy?” Regardless of what her answer is, the frame is already cast within the lexical field of domination and what it entails. For although she refuses the way Bishara puts ‘domination’, she refers to the relationship of France24 and France policy as similar to that of Britain and the BBC. This latter is presented in the voice-over’s introduction with a prominent picture of BBC’s Foreign Service which used to project the pomp and ceremony and truth claims of the

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<sup>301</sup> Noam Chomsky, “Propaganda, American-Style,” n.d. <<http://www.zpub.com/un/chomsky.html>>

traditional British Empire. The power of the historical image here has somewhat the potential to devoid whatever verbal assertions coming after from the guests.

Interestingly too, both Christine Ockrent and John Owen both point to the fact that AJE is no difference in the context of domination. In fact, there is a crucial difference, which is that AJE has no material empire behind it. This fact has substantial bearings on the priorities, objectives and strategies of the institution. Indeed, Richard Gizbert alludes to the fact Aljazeera Arabic was among the chief reasons for the return of the state funded international media.<sup>302</sup> A clear example can be seen in the sudden and simultaneous emergence of 24 hours news channels funded by the nation-state in major powers including Russia with RussiaToday, France with France24 and China with CCTV. Even Iran has launched its international station: PressTV. Interestingly enough, all these channels have a special period of time where they broadcast in Arabic, which is a fact that attests to the increasing interest of these powers in overcoming other global networks ‘reporting’ on behalf of them their views concerning this region. The remarkable thing is that they all claim impartiality and neutrality towards Arab issues, while they are in fact structurally impelled to simply propagate the state policy of their respective countries.

Significantly enough, the allusion in *Empire* to old and new empires is not by chance since the most visible intervention of empires in the present day is in the Islamic East, which represents in a sense the most hot spot in the world primarily because of its strategic importance. This implied backgrounds constitutes somehow one of the basic starting points of *Empire*. Bishara puts it this way: these superpowers “launch wars and they search for love and to be understood.”<sup>303</sup> The allusion to the US funded Alhurra and other media outlets that serves the interests of the empire is made clearly in the episode. This fact attests to how important the public image has become for superpowers. Nevertheless, to be debated within the frame of *Empire* is to subvert the very claims of truth mobilized by the US to convince its Arab audience of its

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<sup>302</sup> Sakr, Naom, ed. “Approaches to Exploring Media-Politics Connections in the Arab World,” *Arab Media and Political – Renewal*, p.1

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.,

messianic and civilizational plans. As such, *Empire* seeks to forge a meta-discourse on Western media discourse itself, with the aim highlighting how information or knowledge has become a manufactured commodity that has almost nothing to do with knowledge per se as much as it is a close ally to the ‘will to power and domination’.

More than that, AJE has a special programme concerned with what media, especially in the West is concerned with. The *Listening post* is indeed a specialized meta-discourse by AJE on media discourse since it is concerned mainly with scanning what are the interests and priorities of the contents in media. The strategy of the programme reflects almost the same challenging and questioning tendency of *Empire’s* “Media Wars” episode. The programme’s coverage ranges from issues like the media *spin* in the Iraqi elections,<sup>304</sup> telling the Afghanistan war story is to a large extent a “declaration of strength”<sup>305</sup> and how “it took an earthquake to get Haiti into the headlines.”<sup>306</sup> These issues exemplify to the systems of inclusions and exclusions implemented in Western international media and their counterparts used in AJE. When they are looked at in detail, they reveal a degree of symmetry in strategic defiance on the part of AJE, which appears to foreground, as Thussu says, “a perspective that the BBCs of this world try to avoid.”<sup>307</sup>

Indeed, AJE seems to have attained to engaging alternative discourses, breaking monopolies of discourse for ‘no longer one side talks to all people’ and challenging stereotypes not only about the South and the East but first and foremost about Aljazeera Media network itself. The presence of AJE in the language of the West allows the Middle Eastern network to overcome mediating representations of it like Daniel Pipes who warns the Canadians of the channel, describing it as “an Islamist, antisemitic, pro-terrorist.”<sup>308</sup> Further than that, it might be said that with the aforementioned strategies, AJE managed to challenge some of the paradigms of Western media, which in spite of its celebration as the fourth estate

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<sup>304</sup> *Listening Post*, “Media Spin on the Iraqi Elections,” Mar 19, 2010, <<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/listeningpost/2010/03/201031918554191284.html>>

<sup>305</sup> “Telling the Afghanistan War Story,” *Listening Post*, Mar 6, 2010, <<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/listeningpost/2010/03/201036134126998230.html>>

<sup>306</sup> “Media Coverage of Haiti,” *Listening Post*, Jan 25, 2010, <<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/listeningpost/2010/01/201012213711850215.html>>

<sup>307</sup> Thussu, *Media on the Move*, p.77

<sup>308</sup> Daniel Pipes and Charlotte West, “Al-Jazeera in Al-Canada?,” Aug 1, 2004, <<http://www.danielpipes.org/2013/al-jazeera-in-al-canada>>.

statement, has, according to Van Dijk, its own taboos like: “poverty in rich countries and its causes; everyday racism . . . cultural ethnocentrism; the position of women in our societies (and not only in Muslim society); the consequences of imbalances in world trade; and the legacies of colonialism and ongoing forms of neo-colonialism”.<sup>309</sup> Added to this is the emphasis of AJE on the Israeli relations and backing institutions in the West, which remains a hard task to do for other Western media outlets. These tendencies have already achieved certain aims. El Nawawy argues in his study of whether AJE is a conciliatory medium that “the more months viewers had been watching AJE, the less dogmatic they were in their thinking.”<sup>310</sup> In fact, in view of the manner with which AJE perceives of its mission and the choice of its subject position, it can hardly be said that dominant media discourses will remain immune to challenge in the ‘age of information’ either by AJE or other media institutions.

## Conclusion

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<sup>309</sup> Van Dijk, “The Mass Media Today,” p. 14

<sup>310</sup> Powers and El-Nawawy, *Mediating Conflict*, p.8

Undoubtedly, the world of global media is still characterized by an infamous imbalance of information flow between the North and the South. By dominating most media productions, the West is entitled to export not only information and knowledge but also a discourse of power reinforcing hegemony and eternalizing dependency. If it can be stated that international media outlets are compelled to align with the political discourses of their respective states, Aljazeera Media Network seems to have developed a tendency to subvert that very alignment via various challenging discursive strategies. Embodying a unique experience of media 'contra-flow' from the South towards the North, the network has managed to make a burst-through by revolutionizing media discourses either in or outside the Arab world. The fact is that Aljazeera has adopted all methods, styles and tactics of the discourses of power and domination just to use them at the end to critique, challenge and dismantle their essences of being and empower, propagate and promote alternative discourses.

The network was born in extremely strategic areas that are torn apart between conflictual interests and strategies of power. Every global power from Britain, U.S, and Russia to even China and Iran has substantial stakes in the area where it is compulsory for them to guard their interests against competing powers. Because of the nature of their work, these institutions are more exposed to these areas, than any other centers of knowledge production in the West. Accordingly, they constitute the elected institutions of knowledge production best entitled to perform the task of authenticating and legitimizing measures taken by their respective states to remain on the saddle. When things get out of control in times of crises, wars and conflicts, their mission amounts to be open propaganda, even if that means vilifying and demonizing cultural Others, silencing dissenting opinions and caricaturing contrasting voices, empowering thereby the powerful at the expense of the weak. Here comes this study that unravels how Aljazeera challenges those imperial interests by questioning their validity and legitimacy, exposing contradictions between their declared positions and their actions and challenging media discourses that nurtures them in the face of public accountability.



Returning to the hypothesis put-forth at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that the discourse of Aljazeera media network is exceptionally loaded with strategies of dissent and subversion. Dissent transpires in the network's systematic endeavours to embolden traditionally neglected and underreported point views, topics and vernaculars in relation to various controversial and disputable issues. Its strategies of subversion obtain their character from these same dissenting attitudes. Since dissent is historically marginal and peripheral, with Aljazeera it is becoming the dominant voice, if not the mainstream. The network is a media institution; it is not a political organization, so it can not but derives its material from and relies on existing peripheral political positions with the aim of pitting them against pre-existent dominant discourses of power. Hence, Aljazeera ends up having a discourse of its own with prominent characteristics, strategies and positions.

For the sake of providing an analysis for the articulations that give shape to the discourse of Aljazeera, this study has given account to the geopolitical environments in which Aljazeera operates and the discursive strategies it deploys to fulfill its missions. The challenging network emerged initially in the Arab world where media environment, especially television, was characterized by a tight political control and a rampant practice of censorship. While televisions were almost a direct reflection of the official discourse of the ruling elites, Aljazeera was entitled to overcome this situation given many reasons, among which was a pressing need of the Qatari emirate for an international voice and the availability of high caliber Western-trained professionals to run the network and challenge the status quo. In addition to that, a fertile political scene fraught with conflicts, offered the network an immediate access to highly marketable fresh information from which to project its outlook on the Arab political situation and world politics by extension.

Indeed, with a carefully thought arsenal including a plethora of satellite channels with bureaus around the planet, a number of websites and an increasing number of training centers, film festivals and regular forums, Aljazeera seems to have attained a status that is potentially endowed with enough power to exert substantial influences on various domains of knowledge production. Indeed, it has managed to outshine numerous discourses via a strategy of media outlets' diversification, targeting various social strata

ranging from children to politicians. Concerning its two main news channels, AJA and AJE, the study focused on how they serve to propagate an alternative discourse that is fully aware of the on-going dialogues and disputes concerning extremely urgent issues. The two channels are found to be taking part in the debates concerning wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Somalia and Pakistan, the global war on terror, the Iranian nuclear dispute with the West along with many other hot issues involving the use of power and the resistance of power. The participation of the two channels is not by action, but naturally by showing certain images instead of others, allowing the 'dissident' to speak and dealing with dominant discourses with suspicion.

In addition to sequencing sporadic and dispersed statements, episodes, and mottos, this study used samples from AJA and AJE as a primary material that is representative of the discourse of the network. The episodes about the issue of Arab unity from the programme *Archifohom . . . Watarikhona* and the episode concerning media wars from the programme *Empire*, represent a typical case study for providing a close analysis of how Aljazeera projects its philosophy of 'upholding civilizational challenges' and questioning power. In *Archifohom . . . Watarikhona*, the study has shown how narrating the Arab past by Aljazeera is partly a strategy to challenge the contemporary Arab political condition. Given the wording and the accompanying special effects, the episodes demonstrates that the use of historical material in AJA is concomitant with postcolonialism's endeavours to crystallise transnational Arab consciousness in relation to the historical and the contemporary imperial mores that defines the West's claim to authenticity, truth and universality. With *Empire* in AJE, an almost similar attempt is enacted by Marwan Bishara to question and challenge the contemporary strategies of various forms of global empires. The irony is that this episode is taken as a sample that does not only question military or economic empires, but that seeks also to expose media empires themselves: Aljazeera's competitors.

This study has attained to many conclusions the most apparent of which are the following. First, almost in symbiosis with the seemingly paradoxical political behaviour of the Qatari policy, Aljazeera is keen to avert giving signs of alignment with whatever political movement either in the Arab world or the

West. It broadcasts conflictual views almost in all its media outlets, allowing a platform for a galaxy of voices: Islamists and secularists, nationalists and liberalists, conservatives and progressives as well as rejectionists and moderates. Yet, this does not mean that the network has not agenda of its own; indeed, its ideology is best explained in terms of challenging dominant discourses. Second, the network makes large strides in breaking a number of political taboos either in the Arab world or in the West and it shows a systematic inclination to look for areas where silence and blackout prevails. With its talk shows particularly, AJA toes the lines of debate on political, social and historical issues affecting people from North Africa to the Persian Gulf. At the global stage, mostly in the West, AJE appears to be trying to initiate debate on hardly covered issues like the struggle of minorities for emancipation against oppressive powers, the intertwinement of media and imperialist agendas and the Israeli lobbies influence, for instance, on the US foreign policy in relation to the Middle East. Third, Aljazeera managed to outrace established international media institutions in informing the world and become even a reference for them concerning many burning issues.

In fact, Aljazeera represents a unique experience of international media that has made of the network not only a prominent media phenomenon but also one of the biggest political phenomena that can not be easily ignored. No influential political body, sensitive diplomatic effort or strategic military operation can deal with issues particularly in the volatile Middle East without taking heed of the presence of this institution. This has made of Aljazeera itself news worthy of being covered and debated either in the Arab periphery or the Western metropolis. In fact, Aljazeera discourse pose to the network tremendous political, commercial and operational challenges either in the Arab world or in the West. Apart from partly explaining the vital necessity of taking this type of media seriously particularly in view of the decisive sway it has come to wield over the Arab and even international political discourses, the discourse of Aljazeera appears to be by far a reflection of the Arab political, historical and cultural atmosphere. Indeed, it typifies by now the fulcrum of Arab populist political discourse especially in its uneasy relations to hegemonic and dominant powers.

This study has shown that the establishment of the institution of Aljazeera is more of a result of the geopolitical, economic and cultural environment of the Arab world and its relation to the West than of any other speculative propositions about the serviceability of Aljazeera to the interests of a tiny country like Qatar. Certainly, Aljazeera has gained unthinkable prestige for Qatar, but this remains a by-product of an institution that is known in the world more than the country itself. It is not finances alone that fuels Aljazeera's rocketing breakthroughs and scoops, a pool of media professionals, with specific political and cultural backgrounds, continues as well to give momentum to an institution that has gained a reputation probably more for the controversies it ignites than for reasons of professionalism and objectivity.

This is the case because the network leaves no stone unturned in its endeavours to highlight previously unheard off view points. But, since foregrounding alternative perspectives passes by questioning existing and conventional ones, Aljazeera embodies a typology of narration that is conscious of operating in the fault-lines of clashing discourses and political positions of varying power structures. Hence, Aljazeera is now one major player among many others who have their say on so many issues and areas, ranging from debates on democracy, to conflict zones and media reformations themselves.

Accordingly, this dissertation has investigated that Aljazeera's industrialization of news, programmes and debates constitutes regularities that are geared to serve identifiable aims and purposes. It has been argued that the Aljazeera's objectives and missions are envisioned to al large extent within the premises of challenging certain widely propagated discourses aimed at maintaining the status quo of power. So, while Aljazeera could be expected to cover Western soldiers' bodies returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, other international media networks would probably be debating the Western armies' efforts to implement 'peace' and 'stability' via fighting 'Islamic terrorists' and 'rogue countries'. Indeed, the network has shown that it is extremely aware of how other media institutions in the Arab world or the West choose their wording, select their topics and exclude dissent.

Interestingly, Aljazeera appears to have built its philosophy of giving 'voice to the voiceless' on exactly those exclusions implemented in other media outlets. The end result is that the discourse of

Aljazeera ends up embodying a body of utterances that are symmetrically defying to the system of exclusion used in other discourses. Aljazeera does not seem to give much attention to objectivity and impartiality when it comes to issues related to empires and their relations with the Middle East and Islam. In reality, it appears to be bent on subverting the very 'reserved rights of the West to define objectivity and impartiality', by focusing on those areas and topics that provide hard tests for the positions of Western media outlets and their governments' respective political positions by extension. With similar strategies, Aljazeera opens new frontiers of debate among cultures and among media practitioners themselves. These strategies represent the sum of a philosophy of looking at the world's hot issues and problems from new perspectives. They reveal to what extent Aljazeera believes in the idea that the world is ill-informed and hence less capable of resolving problems, if it is not ominously vulnerable to complicating them.

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