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**THE IMPACT OF AL JAZEERA TV CHANNEL ON THE PUBLIC  
OPINION OF PALESTINIANS IN PALESTINE AND JORDAN,  
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE PROMOTION OF  
DEMOCRACY**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of Thames Valley University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Robin Kabha

## **Abstract**

This study explores the role of Al Jazeera television channel in relation to Palestinian public opinion in Palestine and Jordan. It shows how Al Jazeera puts democracy and human rights high on its agenda, and that there is a close correlation between the content of Al Jazeera programmes and the political attitudes of the Palestinian audience.

Palestinians rely heavily on Al Jazeera for getting their news. The research shows how the channel has gained credibility among Palestinian viewers, so that its programmes are the most trusted of the principal Arab satellite TV competitors.

The research shows how the channel's news reporting and talk shows have contributed to political awareness among Palestinian viewers, and that they have learnt about democracy by watching Al Jazeera – both how it is working for others and how it might work for them. They have become involved through opportunities to respond by phone or email. The audience acknowledges that the channel has encouraged political participation, such as joining political parties, taking part in demonstrations and voting.

Al Jazeera emerges from this research as a key resource for Palestinian viewers in comparison with other TV channels in developing their attitudes to political and social issues. The research suggests that its television news and current affairs programming play a key part in the formation of Palestinian public opinion.

Al Jazeera has acted as a stimulus to other channels, in the competition to provide the best coverage of stories. As well as encouraging other Arab media to improve their news coverage, it has led a push against censorship and challenged governments in the region to improve their legislation with fewer press controls.

In this way the research suggests that the channel is not only increasing political awareness among Palestinian viewers but also contributing to the development of democracy and human rights in Palestine.

# Introduction

Al Jazeera, broadcasting from one of the smallest of the Arab states, has become the most well-known satellite channel in the Arab world, with a reputation in the region and across the world. As satellite technology has become more widely available in the Arab world, so Palestinians have had a choice of new channels, and have been able to gain a wider range of opinions and perspectives on events and policies both in the Arab world and around the world.

Al Jazeera, with other Arab satellite news channels, has managed to revolutionise the way ordinary Arab viewers receive news of their own countries and international news from an Arab perspective; to make available freer political reporting; to introduce taboo subjects in both political and social areas; and to provide viewers with the opportunity to talk back through phone-ins, faxes and the internet. Their response to this opportunity for feedback shows their level of engagement. All this marks a new era in the political and social lives of Palestinian viewers. The news media and current affairs programmes, including talk shows, are a key resource for Palestinians when thinking about political and social issues and forming opinions. This research therefore deals particularly with the role of Al Jazeera satellite channel in forming Palestinian public opinion in Palestine and Jordan , especially in relation to democracy issues.

The research is based firstly on content analysis of talk shows and newscasts. The subject matter was examined in a quantitative way to produce information on the frequency of topics and the frequency of key words. But the subject matter was also examined qualitatively by looking at a sample of programmes (some transcribed) and the treatment of some specific news events. This provided insight into the editorial policies of the channel and its general presentational style, in relation to its treatment of particular issues and events.

The second approach was audience research, using a questionnaire in 2005 and again in 2008. These were designed to find out how the viewers perceived what Al Jazeera and its

rival channels were providing, and what they thought it had given them, in terms of political understanding, opinions and motivation to engage.

The research makes use of ideas on public opinion, agenda setting, cultivation theory, and the active audience. It attempts to gain insights into how Al Jazeera might be forming Palestinian public opinion and promoting democracy.

The earlier chapters of the research examine the development of Arab media and the new technology, as well as the political situation in Palestine. This highlights the challenge to non-democratic structures and practices posed by Al Jazeera. The later chapters consider the evidence from the content analysis and the questionnaire, and discuss the links between Al Jazeera and Palestinian attitudes.

## **Chapter Outlines**

**Chapter One** outlines the research problem, the research questions, aims, objectives, and the significance of the research.

**Chapter Two** contains a discussion of the relevant research conducted so far by others. The literature suggests that Al Jazeera does have a significant input into political attitudes and behaviour in the region, as one among various influences, although commentators differ on whether its influence is beneficial or harmful.

**Chapter Three** looks at the political background of Palestine, and considers its strengths and weaknesses as a democratic state.

**Chapter Four** examines television history in the Arab world before and after Al Jazeera, and the role of Al Jazeera in revolutionising satellite television in the Arab world. The factors that have shaped the content of Arab news channels, the development of new technology and the emergence of a new audience are also examined in this chapter.

**Chapter Five** examines Al Jazeera satellite channel. How did Al Jazeera start and how did it become what it is now? What is its agenda? What are the major changes brought to the Arab media because of it? What kind of the programmes have made Al Jazeera famous? What has it achieved in the last ten years? What are the criticisms levelled against the channel, and how has it responded? What has it contributed to democracy in the Arab states?

**Chapter Six** looks at various theoretical approaches to the research, particularly ideas on public opinion, agenda-setting, cultivation theory and the active audience.

**Chapter Seven** presents the data findings: firstly the findings on talk shows; secondly on news; and thirdly the results of the surveys.

**Chapter Eight** discusses the findings in relation to the research questions, and links the findings to the theoretical approaches.

**Chapter Nine** draws conclusions and makes suggestions for further work.

**Appendix** This contains some transcripts of programme material; the results of the first survey, the content analysis coding sheets; the numerical data collected; a summary of findings; and the bibliography.

# **Chapter 1: Identifying the Research Focus**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Palestine is an enormously turbulent area of the world. The indigenous people are trying to establish themselves as an independent state, among various conflicting pressures: the demands for democracy (from within and from without), the Islamist movement, and those who see violence as the way forward. At the same time the Palestinian people are in dispute with Israel over borders and control of security forces, and there is no generally accepted version of what Palestine consists of territorially.

To this complex situation is added the presence of the modern media, especially the cross-border Arab satellite TV services. Of these, Al Jazeera has achieved a prominent position, and its role in the difficult and dangerous politics of the Arab world has brought outspoken comment from the Arab world and the international community.

This research sets out to examine the role of Al Jazeera in relation to Palestinian political development and public opinion.

## **1.2 Palestine**

Although Palestine is not at the time of writing an independent sovereign state, we are using this term for convenience to refer to the West Bank and Gaza, parts of which during the 1990s achieved varying degrees of autonomy under the Palestinian Authority.

“The land variously called Israel and Palestine is a small, (10,000 square miles at present) land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. During its long history, its area, population and ownership varied greatly. The present state of Israel occupies all the land from the river Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea, bounded by Egypt in the south, Lebanon in the north, and Jordan in the East. The recognized borders of Israel constitute about 78% of the land. The remainder is divided between land occupied by Israel since the



1967 6-day war and the autonomous regions under the control of the Palestinian Authority. The Gaza strip occupies an additional 141 square miles south of Israel, and is under the control of the Palestinian Authority.” (1)

According to a British census of 1922, the total population of Palestine was 752,048, comprising 83, 790 Jews, 589,177 Muslims and 71,464 Christians. (2) The Palestinians have lost over the 78 % of their land since 1948, and that has caused a huge humanitarian crisis. According to Audeh, Ethelson, and Power (1990) (3), 840,000 Palestinians from historic Palestine lost their land and became refugees inside and outside historic Palestine.

“According to projections made by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in late 2000 there were 7.9 million Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and the diaspora. Of these, 4.5 million lived in the diaspora (*al-Quds*, in Arabic, 11 January 2002). According to UNRWA figures, there were nearly 3.9 million registered Palestinian refugees in June 2001. The lion's share of refugees from 1948 live in Jordan (1.5 million) and in the West Bank and Gaza (1.46 million). In Lebanon there are 380,000 registered refugees, and in Syria there are 392,000 (UNRWA 2001). In Jordan there are approximately 1 million additional non-refugee Palestinians. All numbers and statistics around the Palestinian refugees are potentially problematic, since they are based on UNRWA registration and not all refugees are actually registered with UNRWA. One-third of registered refugees live in 59 refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. The remainder live in towns, cities and villages.” (4)

Palestinians unilaterally declared their independence from Israel on November 15, 1988, but the West Bank and Gaza remained under military occupation. According to the Oslo Accord (1993) Palestinians should have had their own full independence before the end of 1999, but that has never been achieved, up to the time of writing in 2008.

On September 28, 2000, Likud leader Ariel Sharon went to visit the Haram al-Sharif, regarded as Islam's third holiest place. As a result hundreds of Palestinians were injured

and more than seventy killed inside the holy al-Aksa mosque by the Israeli Army, which went on to invade Palestinian-controlled territories and “massacre” defenceless Palestinian civilians, who merely threw stones in self-defence. As a result, Palestinians started a series of public protests, calling it the “al-Aksa intifada”, which is still continuing.

The Palestinians are engaged in a political struggle to have a fully independent state of their own, and as well as trying to build a structure of political institutions. A vital part of this task is to maintain their sense of identity and purpose. One key area is education. The West Bank has 1,953 schools, 55 technical colleges, 26 community colleges, and 12 universities. Gaza has 3 universities. The combined university enrolment of Gaza and the West Bank is 16,000 (5). University education is mostly in Arabic, although science and some social science courses are taught mostly in English. Because of dispersion, Palestinian education lacks a unified cultural base, leaving it up to individual Palestinians and to their cultural institutions to develop a sense of community and identity wherever they live (6). A key factor in building this sense of identity and providing a form of political education is the media.

### **1.3 The presence of Al Jazeera**

There is no doubt that Al Jazeera has broken the mould of Arab television in a number of ways. It was the first Arab 24 hour news channel. The people of the region discovered 24 hour news when CNN covered the first Gulf War. Then when Al Jazeera started in 1996, presenting news from an Arab viewpoint, it was able to capture an audience whose appetite for 24 hour news and current affairs had already been aroused, but who wanted a channel they could identify with more closely.

Al Jazeera is a well-resourced organisation that has reporters in a wide range of locations, so that it is able to provide live coverage and commentary on important events as they develop. Although financed by the government of Qatar, the station is given a very free hand and seems to operate much more like a private company than the government

channels in the region. It has followed a policy of providing uncensored news, giving space to all opinions, and breaking taboos over a wide range of political, religious and social issues. It has been accused of encouraging sensationalism rather than responsible debate, but there is no doubt that it has brought a much-needed breath of fresh air to the discussion of politics and public affairs in the Arab world.

Aljazeera has managed to encourage the Arab media in general and satellite TV in particular to broadcast more and more political debate. Such a thing has had an impact on the Arab political system as many Arab government representatives, including state presidents and prime ministers, appear on Aljazeera, trying to justify their policies and defend their governments from some writer or talk show programme caller, or from some accusation from another state or international organisations such as Amnesty International.

Aljazeera's programme content has managed to create a debate among Arab intellectuals, civil organisations and political parties about democracy issues in their countries (such as free elections, women's rights, Islamism, secularism, and military budget expenditure). Aljazeera has introduced such topics without any censorship, so that the channel has broken with the old Arab media approach of accepting its powerlessness in relation political decision-making.

Al Jazeera makes it much easier for political groups to be heard and reach an audience, and that enables the viewers to become aware of different points of view. This was not possible before satellite TV and Aljazeera in particular. Al Jazeera has also given the viewers the opportunity to express their own opinions freely and make their voice heard.

Aljazeera creates argument, debate, and stimulates public opinion about what it broadcasts. Watching Aljazeera programmes and listening to the callers and to email messages makes clear the variety of these opinions, and shows that the viewers are interacting with what they watch in a way that can only be healthy. Such interaction

reveals that the channel has succeeded in creating greater awareness of the problems of the area.

However, governments have frequently responded negatively. Not only has the channel been criticised by the US, but it has also run into difficulties with Arab states. Most Arab countries operate restrictions from time to time on the movement of Al Jazeera journalists following on from what the country concerned feels to be negative treatment by the channel. The channel has been accused of being supported by the CIA, by Mossad, of being financed by Saddam, and of being a mouthpiece for Bin Laden.

#### **1.4 Questions about the role of Al Jazeera**

This research has its roots in the author's experience working as a freelance journalist for Arab media. He was able to observe at close quarters the workings of the Arab satellite news channels and particularly the popularity of Al Jazeera among Arab viewers. In addition, the author was dissatisfied with the government-controlled Arab television services before Al Jazeera. One exception was Middle East Broadcasting (MBC), which was fairly good compared with the general run of Arab TV channels in the 1990s. The author noticed that Al Jazeera met a need in terms of uncensored TV programmes and modern TV presentation. Al Jazeera presented mostly live programmes, with phone-ins as well as live coverage of events and reporters in the field. These factors motivated the author to investigate this new phenomenon.

The author found himself asking: what impact were these television channels, particularly Al Jazeera, actually having on attitudes to political change and democracy among Palestinians? This became the basic research problem for the current piece of work.

There is no doubt that Al Jazeera has established itself as an important part of the lives of Palestinians – as of many Arabs – but there is a good deal of disagreement about what kind of role it plays.

There are those who see the channel as having a negative influence. They would say that it has gone for sensational material and concentrated on gory pictures of violence, and that this has inflamed anger and hatred, particularly against Israel. They would argue that the channel does not show people with differing views talking over their differences but those with extreme views refusing to listen to anyone else, and that the confrontational element of many talk shows does not promote democracy, where discussion and compromise are necessary. They would argue that the channel's emphasis on the problems of the Arab world saps hope for change and progress. They would say that the channel is becoming more Islamist.

In contrast, those who see the channel positively claim that it has brought into open debate all kinds of social, political and religious issues that were previously never aired. This forum for debate offers access to ordinary people through email and phone-ins. Abuses and corruption have been exposed and taboo areas opened up. The channel has set out to educate the audience about democracy and encouraged active participation. They would say that the channel has toned down its early excesses. •

This research takes a positive view, believing that the evidence points to the strength of Al Jazeera's role as an educator in democratic citizenship, and that the audience trusts the channel and appreciates what it has gained in political awareness and confidence.

In order to create a manageable project this research concentrates on the role of Al Jazeera in increasing political awareness; in promoting democracy; and in forming Palestinian public opinion. It makes use of surveys and face-to-face interviews with the Palestinian public, and content analysis of the news and talk show programmes, in order to be able to measure the Al Jazeera impact and also assess its editorial policy.

The strategy was also influenced by practicalities. Although the survey would need to be carried out in the Arab world, the author has family and contacts there, so that this did

not present a problem. The content analysis could take place anywhere, as long as there was access to a satellite dish for viewing programmes.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the amount of time Palestinians spend watching Al Jazeera; what form does their viewing take; and how does it compare with their viewing of other Arab satellite TV channels?
2. Which channels provide Palestinian viewers with more political news and current affairs programmes, in particular dealing with the possibility of democracy in the Palestine?
3. In what ways does Al Jazeera serve as a medium for public awareness and information among Palestinian satellite TV viewers?
4. Have Al Jazeera viewers in Palestine and Jordan gained a better understanding of democracy from the channel's programmes?
5. In what ways has Al Jazeera influenced Palestinian public opinion, with particular reference to democracy?

## **1.5 Aims and Objectives**

### **Aims**

This thesis aims to explore Al Jazeera in the context of Arab satellite TV, focusing on its role in increasing Palestinian public awareness, shaping public opinion and promoting democracy.

The research aims to survey the development of the news industry since the launching of satellite channels in the early nineties until the present day, highlighting change, achievement and shortcomings. It will consider the issue of Arab satellite TV in the context of political and press freedom in Palestine.

## **Objectives**

1. This study will use content analysis to examine the make-up of news and current affairs programmes on Arab satellite TV, considering both the subject matter and the style and tone of presentation.
2. It will make comparisons between four principal Arab satellite channels. This will give an indication of the agenda of Al Jazeera and its rivals.
3. It will consider Al Jazeera's capacity to involve audiences by providing opportunities for feedback.
4. The study will also use audience surveys to assess how Palestinian viewers use the channels and how they perceive their messages in the context of Palestinian politics.
5. It will throw light on how they perceive satellite TV's influence on themselves in raising awareness and forming opinions.
6. It will indicate how far they feel engaged with both the TV channels and the political issues raised.

## **1.6 The Significance of the Research**

This research tries to analyse in some detail the kinds of messages being conveyed by Al Jazeera news and talk shows. It looks in detail at topics dealt with by the channel over quite substantial periods of time, with particular reference to democracy and progressive reforms. It looks at the presentational style of the most popular and controversial talk show. It considers examples of specific events where television treatment and public response on the streets seems to have been inter-related in some way.

It tries to discover the audience perceptions of Al Jazeera programmes, the sort of relationship of trust that it has built up, the ways in which the audience feels they have learnt about current affairs and democracy in the Arab world, and how the audience feels they have been motivated to become more engaged in the political process. The audience survey, first carried out in 2005, was repeated in 2008, to provide an indication of any changes.

In these ways it tries to get beyond official political responses to the channel (mostly complaints and criticisms) on the one hand, and the generalities of 'popularity' with its audience on the other, and find out something more about what the audience is actually doing with this new material that has found a place in its homes and cafes.

The shortage of detailed information about the audience of Al Jazeera is highlighted in a recent study by Mohamed Zayani and Sofiane Sahraoui, published in June 2007 (7). They write: "There is certainly a receptive audience for Al Jazeera, but determining how much audience share Al Jazeera has is a tricky issue. It is believed that Al Jazeera has no feedback on viewers beyond speculations that it has a massive audience estimated to amount to tens of millions of viewers. Even so, the often quoted raw figure of 40-60 million viewers is hardly helpful for advertising agents and their clients as these numbers do not say much about who is watching what at what time." This means that even after eleven years of broadcasting there is a surprising shortage of detailed information about Al Jazeera, and this has been a major stimulus for the present research.



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## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Al Jazeera: surveying its achievement**

Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar (1) shed light on the background of the network: how it operates, the programmes it broadcasts, its effects on Arab viewers, the reactions of the West and Arab states, the implications for the future of news broadcasting in the Arab world, and its struggle for a free press in the Arab world. Edmund Ghareeb (2) of the American University of Beirut makes the point that it was the “inaccurate and biased coverage of the Gulf War by both Western (primarily CNN) and Arab media [which] spurred the growth of Arab satellite television networks.”

The research on Al Jazeera emphasises that it broke fresh ground with the range of viewpoints expressed. Lawn and Carey (3) write about Al Jazeera news channel as the first Arab satellite news to show “free-ranging political debates (including interactive debates with live phone-ins), provocative hosts (including opposition leaders, dissidents and intellectuals) and sensitive topics (such as the roles of women in the workplace, human rights and democracy in the Arab world, political Islam, sanctions on Iraq and female circumcision). Allowing the Arab viewers to express their views on the airwaves has made the channel a forum for all political sides to debate issues”. Edmund Ghareeb (ibid) echoes this, making the point that “Al Jazeera since its inception in 1996 has raised the ceiling of political and social debate throughout the Arab world”. Ehud Ya’ari (4) sums up the reason for the channel’s success in terms of showing what other channels don’t show – “everything from women’s rights under Islam to the lack of democracy in the Arab world and the pros and cons of peace with Israel”.

El-Nawawy and Iskandar (5) identify the newness of Al Jazeera in terms of a free press emerging from an authoritarian society. The emergence of Al Jazeera in Qatar was a surprise, because there was no semblance there of freedom of expression generally associated with democratic societies. In this way they see Al Jazeera as “a real phenomenon in the Middle East” long before 9/11 and the Bin Laden tapes. El-Nawawy and Iskandar (ibid, 1) comment elsewhere on the way Al Jazeera “strived to maintain its independence as an international free press news network”.

Daoud Kuttab (6) points out: "Satellite TV and the Internet have been a godsend to many of those opposing authoritarian regimes. The independent TV station Al Jazeera made many of these activists known in the Arab world through programmes like *Al-Itijah Al-Muakes* (*The Opposite Direction*), *Aktar men rai* (*More Than One Opinion*), and others. Such technology provides Arab viewers with uncensored and free debate, which may help in raising political awareness".

Ali Alarabi (7) agrees with Daoud Kuttab. According to Alarabi, "The emergence of *The Opposite Direction* and Al Jazeera in general has widened the space of debate in the Arab world by providing an outlet to various opinions and views to be debated and contested freely without censorship. It is perhaps the most popular Arab TV show on television today, viewed weekly by millions of Arabic speakers around the world."

Marc Lynch (8) takes a similar line when he argues that the most important development for the Arab world is not so much the news broadcasts as the talk shows. He identifies democracy as the dominant theme of the channel, with Palestine and Iraq becoming more prominent depending on the ongoing situation.

The popularity of Al Jazeera's programmes is recognised by various researchers. Jeffrey Tayler (9) comments that according to "polls in the Arab press, the most popular talk show on Al Jazeera, the world's most widely watched Arab TV station, is *Al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis* (*The Opposite Direction*)."

Lawn and Carey (ibid) make the point that the Arab public enjoy Al Jazeera. They state that "the majority of Arab viewers watch Al Jazeera for hours on end – or at least keep the network on in the background while doing other things for nearly half their waking hours. It is estimated that Al Jazeera has an audience of over 45 million individuals or 70% of Arabs with access to satellite TV". Hussain Amin (10) reports a national survey in Jordan, which indicated that Al Jazeera was rated the premier network for news and public affairs. Al Arabiya was rated second, and Abu Dhabi TV third.

Hazem Saghiye (11) writes that Al Jazeera is now “in effect the most popular political party in the Arab world” because the station expresses the feelings of loss and failure felt by many Arabs and provides an escape from the difficulties and pressures of their everyday lives. He maintains that, in spite of a history of political failure: “al-Jazeera has helped enable the Arabs, a people with a recent history of domination by colonial powers, to improve their collective morale and self-belief. One important component here is the documentary films that Arabic satellite channels buy from their western colleagues, above all the BBC; another is the debate programmes on Arabic TV that involve Israeli as well as American politicians and journalists, which help to demystify the ‘enemy’ and show him to be a normal human being like the rest of us. All this widens people’s horizons, an important source of confidence.”

Zayani and Sahraoui echo these ideas: “Al Jazeera is the channel of Arab disenchantment, articulating what people want to say but cannot say with a rare sense of audacity. Over the years, it has come to give an outlet to people’s fears and anxieties and to allay much of the anger and frustration many Arabs feel. This side of Al Jazeera transpires not only in its many interactive or call-in programs, but also in its reports and documentaries. Part of Al Jazeera’s mission is ‘to shed light on important eras and crucial stages in the history of the Arab nation which can provide a better understanding of history, which is necessary to acquire a more profound understanding of the present and a better conception of the future’.” (12)

As a result, Zayani and Sahraoui maintain that: “Al Jazeera will go down in history as a turning point in the history of the Arab people, not only as a free medium of expression but first and foremost as an enterprise for rebuilding the self-confidence and dignity of the humiliated Arab masses. It has been speaking forcefully on their behalf, bypassing the perceived apathy of the Arab leaders and opening a channel to those who reflected popular feelings to talk directly to ‘the other’”. (ibid, p176-7)

However, some writers take a very negative view of Al Jazeera. Fouad Ajami (13) is highly critical of the channel, believing that it gives a platform to extremist religious and anti-American views. “Al Jazeera is not subtle television.” “Al Jazeera may be more

independent but it is also more inflammatory.” He maintains that the channel glorifies Osama bin Laden and that “Day in and day out, Al Jazeera deliberately fans the flames of Muslim outrage.” He writes from the standpoint of someone who wants to promote American policies in the Arab world, and discusses ways in which the US could be better at handling the Arab media in order to get its own messages across.

Mohamed Zayani (14) outlines many of the criticisms of the channel, accusations that: “its coverage of the intifada has helped stoke the violence, incite Palestinians to riot, fuel Arab anger, and mobilize support for the Palestinians. Al Jazeera has also been rebuked for inflating the news, exaggerating events and spreading anti-Semitism”.

Daniel Brumberg (15) is also critical of Al Jazeera for oversimplifying political situations and, by giving space to people with extreme views, creating a crude black and white picture. “I have no doubt that this station has framed the news in ways that portray black and white, evil versus good images of complex conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Moreover, by regularly hosting extremist ideologues...Al Jazeera has muddled the boundaries between fact and fiction”. He feels that Al Jazeera is too big and influential to be ignored, but that its programmes need to be constantly examined and challenged.

Lynch (16) responds to critical views of Al Jazeera by insisting that “it is manifestly untrue that the Arab media are dominated by a single perspective.” He points out that the Arab viewers are “relentlessly bombarded” by their media not with crude propaganda but with diverse “political arguments”.

Eric Deggans (17) takes up this idea, but voices reservations about the channel by saying that “Good journalism is often much more than just airing two sides of an issue”. He quotes Ian Docherty of Boston’s WBUR-FM, who also sees this as a problem, but recognises what the channel has achieved: “Ian Docherty also finds the straight reporting of Taliban claims troubling. ‘But within the framework of a very closed society, they’re doing something remarkable,’ he said.”

Mohamed Dourrachad (18), Deputy Director of Abu Dhabi Television, interviewed by Sarah Sullivan, admits that in the pressure to get the story first, the Arab satellite channels have made mistakes. "I think in the rush to get the news first, sometimes we fall into reporting either propaganda or false information. This is something that happens in all stations. It's a very difficult balancing act, to report accurate news, objective news, and at the same time be first to report it. I think Al Jazeera has made mistakes, and undeniably we can't avoid falling into a mistake or two from time to time. This is the business. Even the BBC and CNN make mistakes like these".

Al Jazeera's relationship with other television companies is an area that has produced a good deal of comment. Osama El-Sherif (19) makes the point that "It has redefined the role and responsibilities of regional TV stations, allowing dissidents and victims as well as officials to voice their opinions on various thorny issues". This has not only attracted audiences but also "positively affected government-run satellite and terrestrial TV stations". They have been encouraged to adopt the talk show format and to allow viewers to phone in live with their opinions. "Such progress can be traced to Al Jazeera's influence and can be counted among its prime contributions".

Several writers refer to the way that other channels have been closing the gap and catching up with Al Jazeera. Abbas El Tounsy (20) compares Al Jazeera with Abu Dhabi Television. "Despite being a channel that is not restricted to news, Abu Dhabi excelled over Al Jazeera with respect to the depth of discussion among guests on the programs. This applies to programs like *Confrontation*, *Markets*, or even the reporting programs such as *The Event* or *The News Range*. While presenters of Al Jazeera's programs sometimes do not allow for exploring ideas in-depth and instead shift rapidly from one idea to the other, and while in many cases they interrupt a guest's explanation or elaboration of an important point so as to shift to another guest, Abu Dhabi presenters are more aware of the guest's discussion and allow the viewer to totally grasp the speaker's idea. Their interference with questions serves to deepen the discussion and the real dialogue among the guests. Meanwhile, most of Al Jazeera's programs, except *First War of the Century*, has seemed to be more of a gathering of a number of guests where each delivers his own basic opinion without really engaging in a dialogue with the others."

However, he does allow that Al Jazeera is good at getting its own correspondents on screen, reporting directly from important events.

William Reinckens (21) cites Jon Alterman's point that after setting the news and information agenda in the late 1990s, Al Jazeera has since faced greater competition from its satellite rivals. Tim Golden (22), however, is interested in the closing gap between the satellite channels and state-owned networks: "Media experts noted that while Al Jazeera had been breaking new ground since it was formed in 1996, a big gap has remained between the news produced by it and a few other satellite channels and the far less aggressive fare on the state-run networks watched by most of the region's poor. That gap, however, has all but disappeared in coverage of the Israeli offensive against the Palestinians". This would seem to answer Jon Alterman's (23) anxieties about the possibility of a split between the poor, watching free-to-air stations controlled by the governments, and the well-to-do, watching subscription services providing more sophisticated material. He is concerned that this kind of split would only increase the risk of social instability.

Newton Minow (24) implies that the media competition is not something restricted to the Arab world: "Al Jazeera teaches an important lesson: The global marketplace of news and information is no longer dominated by the United States. Whether the message is one of hate or peace, in the globalized communications environment it is impossible either to silence those who send the message or stop those who want to receive it".

## **2.2 Al Jazeera and the formation of Arab Public Opinion**

### **2.2.1 A new departure**

Many writers discuss the way in which the new satellite channels have increased the general level of political understanding. Khalid Hroub (25) maintains that: "The satellite media in the Arab world have, of course, raised awareness". He is echoed by Hisham Sharabi, (26) who admits that conclusive evaluation is not possible at this point, but still insists that a raising of political consciousness among large segments of the population has definitely taken place. Sharabi (ibid) believes satellite TV has an unprecedented power to change Arab attitudes. He sees the new media as far more powerful than any other recent movement, including the revolutionary ideologies of the sixties and seventies, in being able to alter "consciousness and attitude on a mass scale". Similarly, Zayani's (27) work on Al Jazeera's role in shaping ideas is making the same point. Shamlan Essa (28) also accepts that Al Jazeera has an influence on public opinion. Lawn and Carey (29) take a similar view, maintaining that people are sharing a growing interest in civil societal issues.

One example of the new political awareness and confidence is that people are using the satellite channels to voice their own opinions and criticise politicians. Shamlan Essa (30) makes the point that the new media "have made it possible for the first time for people in the Arab world to criticise their own governments". Marc Lynch (31) also identifies the growth of a fundamentally new attitude. The new shows have "ingrained the legitimacy of disagreement" in Arab society. "Even 10 years ago, there was a real notion that it was wrong to disagree, and if you did, you were being untrue to your Arab identity. Now, because of these shows, you can be a good Arab and disagree." Similarly, Hisham Sharabi (32) comments on a growing tendency to make judgements and take definite political stands. Abbas El Tounsy (33) makes the point that whereas the Arab media used to be the mouthpiece of governments, it is now "impossible to find a correlation between the views promoted by a state or party and those promoted by the corresponding media channels, except in very limited cases".



A second example of this growth of awareness and confidence is in a greater sense of Arab identity. Mohamed Zayani (34) and Hussain Amin (35) both report that the new media have helped to build a greater sense of Arab identity and solidarity – “feelings that did not exist before”, as Amin puts it. Marc Lynch (36) also suggests that Al Jazeera has been a key factor in creating a coherent Arab identity. “One of the key things that Al Jazeera did was to explicitly and implicitly link together everything that happens anywhere in the Arab world into a single, coherent narrative: Egyptian protests, Bahraini arrests of bloggers, Tunisian sham elections - they are all part of the same story, not isolated events. This is the most fundamental impact of the new Arab media. It has been developing for a number of years. It largely has been opposed to US foreign policy. But it has laid the groundwork for the kinds of democratic changes that we can now begin to envision. It's possible, though not certain, that you needed the invasion of Iraq to get what you are seeing today, but you definitely needed Al Jazeera.” Jon Alterman (37) believes that because the region has a common Arab language and culture, cross-border television can create a greater sense of being part of the whole region, and that this regionalisation is taking precedence over globalisation. Another implication of cross-border TV, argues Alterman, is that public opinion becomes much more important. The people become more independent of governments and they in turn are forced to respond to public opinion. He believes this poses particular problems for the US, which has long had close ties with Arab rulers, but no real contact with the ordinary people.

A third effect of the new media, this time on Arab governments, is considered by Simon Henderson (38), who believes that Arab governments are worried that they have lost control of public opinion. Shibley Telhami (39) elaborates this idea, arguing that because increasing numbers of citizens are getting their news from outside their own countries, governments are less certain that they can manipulate public opinion or head-off opposition. Telhami believes government spin will become less effective. Alterman (40) echoes this view, that governments will lose control of public opinion. Najib Ghadbian (41) also believes that satellite TV has undermined government control of what people watch and what people think. He backs this up with a case study of Al Jazeera's coverage of Syrian politics. The study analyses programmes considered sensitive to the Syrian regime, and illustrates how these programmes may be forcing the government to change

its discourse. Mohamed Dourrachad (42) talks about the way in which allowing viewers to express their own opinions freely has resulted not only in criticism of the Americans, but also their own Arab leaders as well as the media. The expression of these views “doesn’t only have an impact on the people, it also has an impact on the leaders...Before, the television stations were reporting to the people what the leaders or the authorities were doing. Now, the TV stations are reporting to the leaders, to the governments, what their people think. It’s a huge shift”.

A fourth example of the new awareness and confidence is political engagement. When asked in an interview by Sarah Sullivan whether he thought the people in the Arab street were reacting differently now than during the first intifada because of greater access to television news, Mohamed Dourrachad (ibid) replied “Definitely. I think the Arab peoples are definitely responding differently”. He puts it down to not just the new Arab stations but also the access via satellite to international news broadcasts. Mohamed Zayani (43) agrees, saying: “Arab satellite broadcasting has helped the Arab street mobilize its efforts to support the intifada... More than any other channels, Al Jazeera has capitalized on the importance of the Palestinian question.” One result of all this is the possibility of a new level of political involvement. Sharabi (44) maintains that political “commitment and action have become possible on a mass scale never known before”. Lawn and Carey (45) suggest, more modestly, that people are demanding more information from the domestic press.

Of particular interest in relation to this study is the work of Nouredine Miladi (46). He has studied Al Jazeera and its part in constructing public opinion among the diasporic Arab populations of Britain and France. He concludes that in relation to the British and French Arab audiences, Al Jazeera has not had a direct impact, or created immediate social or political change. Instead it is having a long-term effect, and this is making itself felt in at least three areas. Firstly, it has increased awareness of democracy issues and the principle of people having a choice in their form of government. Secondly, it has raised people’s expectations about the news media, showing that a much freer media offering open debate is possible, and this has had an impact on other Arab news providers. A third area of influence suggested by Miladi is that by offering a platform for opposition

politicians, Al Jazeera has suddenly made them visible to Arabs, so that alternatives to the status quo have entered the sphere of public discussion. As far as Arab public opinion is concerned, Miladi argues that the enormous variety of news sources now available means that “viewers have come to construct their opinion through the ability to choose between various sources of information.” He also argues that the oral tradition – discussion of current issues in homes, cafes and streets – is still a vital strand in opinion-making. In these ways, Miladi sees Al Jazeera’s effect as indirect, and he credits the audience with the ability to create its own meanings.

### **2.2.2 Questioning assumptions about the media and public opinion**

Edmund Ghareeb (47) makes the point that the relationship between the media and public opinion is a subtle one: “The popularity of Al Jazeera and other satellite networks reflects the resilience of a general pan-Arab public opinion over state-run programming tailored to the population of individual countries. As such, the pan-Arab satellite channels are both reflections of public opinion and instruments for mobilizing it”. Lynch echoes this, with his comment that “intense market competition can make it appear that the satellite stations follow mass opinion as much as they shape it.” (48)

The Palestinian journalist Kuttub (49) points out that it has come to be assumed that the new media in general and satellite TV news in particular are representative of public opinion – “playing the role the actual streets of Cairo, Beirut, Damascus and Tripoli once did in channelling Arab public opinion towards national leaderships and the wider world”. Essa (50) goes further. He denies that Al Jazeera represents Arab public opinion, simply because in general Arab public opinion is mostly illiterate or semi-literate, and there is no one Arab point of view. This is so even on the Palestinian issue, which is regarded as the core cause of the Arab world. Hroub (51) points out that public opinion does not operate in the Arab states as it does in Western democracies. Arab regimes are not really interested in responding to public opinion as part of a democratic process. They want to know what is happening on the ground, but their interest in public opinion is more to do with security issues.

Various studies suggest that satellite news and current affairs in the Arab world have created a completely new forum for public opinion. Hafez Al-Mirazi (52), Al Jazeera's Washington Bureau Chief, commented that "Al Jazeera has made it impossible for Arab public opinion to be taken for granted, either by our own governments, or by the U.S. government". He argues that during the second intifada, "the media substituted for the lack of parliamentary life in influencing the governments...The public diplomacy campaign in Washington is a sign that public opinion in the Arab world is not to be taken for granted anymore, and that you have to do something for the Arab world in order to get what you want. I think Al Jazeera should be partly credited for that".

In his book, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, Marc Lynch (53) tries to define this new forum for Arab debate: "...the new Arab public is more than just Al Jazeera. It is defined by the rapidly expanding universe of Arabs able and willing to engage in public arguments about political issues within an ever-increasing range of possible media outlets." "The new media has asserted a claim to represent the authentic Arab voice – to be the one free voice with the ability and the courage to speak out on behalf of the Arabs against both American power and against corrupt Arab regimes. This is a claim to authenticity, to identity, and ultimately to a very real political power." But the problem he identifies is that: "For all its newfound prominence, the Arab public sphere remains almost completely detached from any formal political institution. The political significance of a transnational public sphere disconnected from any effective democratic institution has hardly begun to be theorized...The public arguments and debates are disembodied from any grounded political activity, and cannot easily be translated into political outcomes."

This research follows up the complex issue of Al Jazeera and public opinion, but does not claim to resolve these major questions. It sets itself more limited goals. It uses surveys to explore what the respondents feel about Al Jazeera; how they believe it has affected their interest and engagement in politics; how they think the channel handles violence; and how the channel makes them feel about the future of Palestine.

## **2.3 The New Media and the development of Democracy**

### **2.3.1 Creating conditions in which democracy could develop**

There is a good deal of agreement that the new media are creating, in a variety of ways, conditions in which democracy could develop. The development on satellite TV of lively debate and of opportunities to disagree is helping to build a pluralist political culture in a region which has a tradition of autocratic rule. Bernard Lewis (54) maintains that satellite TV provides something new for the region: “vigorous public debate and disagreement”. Lynch (55) argues that Al Jazeera in particular is providing an unprecedented forum for debate, undermining the Arab status quo by creating a free and open critical space independent of the state. Lynch (56) also makes the point that the new media have made disagreement acceptable, so that it is now possible to be a good Arab and yet disagree.

Mohammad Jassem Al-Ali (57) suggests that “One of the greatest impacts of the new media trend is the appearance of Arab leaderships, in person, in news bulletins and programs of Arab satellite stations”. Jon Alterman (58) is impressed by the appearance of senior Israeli politicians on Arab satellite TV speaking Arabic. He feels that this has opened up the debate enormously, and that satellite TV has created new political realities and new political tools. For authority figures in the Arab world to have to explain and justify their stance on an issue is something completely new. Al-Ali makes the point that: “These practices were unheard of, or uncommon, in the past” (59). He maintains that “Democracy is coming to the Middle East because of the communication revolution. You can no longer hide information and must now tell people the truth. If you don’t, the people won’t follow you, they won’t support you, they won’t obey you” (60).

Several writers feel that Al Jazeera has had a marked effect on government restrictions of the media. Hafez Al-Mirazi (61) believes that “Al Jazeera has played a very positive role in pushing the envelope and giving the excuse to other journalists in the Arab world to tell their own editors, censors, or officials, ‘If we don’t air that story, Al Jazeera will.’ That punches many holes in the iron wall of censorship in the region, by making it irrelevant for a government to prevent its own media from covering a particular story. I

think Al Jazeera has pushed the limits in a way that the Arab media had not witnessed before.”

A related area is the harassment of journalists. The Jordanian journalist Lamis Adoni, interviewed by Tamara Straus (62), commented: “In the 80s people like me were persecuted because we were writing reports critical of governments. I lost my Jordanian passport twice, I was thrown out by the Syrian government, many of my articles were edited out of existence. It was an uphill struggle. So it’s very personally important that Al Jazeera is there, because people like me were slandered, censored, harassed, everything. When I see Al Jazeera, it feels like what I and others worked for has been vindicated, that what we were writing about and what we were punished for is now in the open. Journalists can now say things they couldn’t say before.”

Several researchers emphasise the value of satellite TV in showing democracy in action to an Arab audience. Hugh Miles (63) refers to the way Arab channels have televised political debate taking place in the UK on the subject of the Iraq war. Abdallah Schliefer (64) argues that showing the elections in Palestine and Iraq has stimulated the democratic process in the Arab world. He makes the point: “The great question these elections pose in the consciousness of every Arab, in every Arab country, is: if free, competitive elections can be held in Iraq, despite a violent insurgency and a foreign occupation, then why not here?”

The significance of the cross-border nature of satellite TV is mentioned by Philip Seib (65). He believes that the transnational nature of satellite TV will help democratisation by reducing the isolation of movements for political change. Seib (66) is also interested in the significance of audience size. In contrast to those who feel that in the end TV cannot transform politics (see next section, below) he believes that the large numbers watching satellite TV, with access to divergent information, can create in the end a critical mass which is likely to lead to political change.

There seems little doubt that satellite TV broadcasters have had an impact on the state-run stations. Douglas Boyd (67) shows how in the United Arab Emirates state TV had to

recast its format because of the competition. Alterman (68) makes the point that it was three days before the state-run Saudi TV announced the invasion of Kuwait – something that could not possibly happen now. Walter Armbrust (69) makes the point that Al Jazeera has spread truthfulness to other stations, and also broken the monopoly of the Western media.

Abdallah Schleifer (70) quotes the Palestinian journalist, Daoud Kuttab who commented on a conference where Arab and Israeli broadcasters were both present: “There is no doubt that the opening of the Arab world is an irreversible process... Israelis attending the conference were surprised at the size and depth of change taking place in the Arab world.”

Robin Wright (71) quotes from a report by the U.S. Institute of Peace, a government-funded think tank. “It is the satellite channels that show the greatest potential for ushering in political change in the region . . .” the report says. “Inadvertently or not, they offer a locus for the Arab street to vent, formulate and discuss public affairs. They bring Arabs closer together, breaking taboos and generally competing with each other and their respective governments for the news agenda. All in all, Arab satellite stations have pushed ajar the door of democracy and flanked state monopoly on media.”

### **2.3.2 Can Al Jazeera and the new media help build democracy in the region?**

Some researchers are optimistic. Lynch (72) refers to the shift from an autocratic political culture to a new pluralist political culture, brought into being by the new media. He goes on: “Its importance cannot be overstated, particularly since neither Islamist movements nor the existing autocratic Arab regimes—the two most powerful competing forces in the Arab world—offer a route to liberal reforms. And pro-American liberals in the region, however brave and eloquent, are, on their own, weak and marginal. Al Jazeera offers them what American guns cannot: credibility, legitimacy, influence”.

Lynch (73) also argues that cross-border Arab television and print media have created a public space outside state control, and this is bound to have an effect on people’s beliefs, their sense of political identity and their behaviour.

William A Rugh (74) suggests that the development of privately-owned Arab satellite television in the 1990s has helped to free-up the media throughout the region. He feels a cautious optimism about the role the Arab media can play in the development of democracy.

Ali Al-Hail (75) explores the role Al Jazeera has already played in developing a civil society in Qatar. He maintains that Al Jazeera has “clearly contributed to civil society in Qatar in the sphere of raising women’s awareness of their role within the society. This has been manifested in the Qatari women’s participation in the 1998 municipal election. Al Jazeera has also boosted the demands of the domestic press for more freedom of expression. Needless to say it was Al Jazeera which gave justification for the lifting of censorship from the press. Finally, Al Jazeera has had its main social impact by making Arabs talk about it, and by creating moral panics about its observed effects”.

Various writers have suggested that progressive reforms and satellite television are linked. Hussein Amin (76) argues that: “The link between civil society and satellite broadcasting in the Middle East is becoming more clear and more significant with two simultaneous and related developments: first, the growing importance of satellite broadcasting in the region, and second, the growing awareness of the peoples of the Middle East of civil society issues”. Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani (77), chairman of the board of Al Jazeera, interviewed by Sarah Sullivan, makes the point that: “Al Jazeera is going in the same direction as the state of Qatar in its recent developments, starting with the elections for a chamber of commerce in Qatar, and also municipal elections with women’s participation, as candidates and voters. After a year and a half we’ll have parliamentary elections in which women will participate. I think this direction corresponds with the direction of the media, be it Al Jazeera, or lifting censorship on local Qatari newspapers. The two go together in this stage, and I think the direction of Al Jazeera is a natural one that corresponds with the strategy Qatar is taking at this phase.”

Abbas El Tounsy (78) takes a rather different view, suggesting that the link between the new TV channels and the development of progressive reforms may turn out to be an



uncomfortable combination for Arab regimes. “The Arab satellite channels, although having been originally established by the Arab regimes to act in their interest, have now become one of the most dangerous challenges faced by the Arab regimes themselves. It is the same as when the game of nominal democracy concocted by the Arab regimes to enhance their image before the west turns out to be a tool in the hand of the people to pressure their regimes to apply a real democracy.”

However, there are many writers who are far less confident about the development of democratic and progressive processes. Lewis (79) admits that satellite TV can *contribute* to solving political problems, but not actually *solve* them. Hugh Miles (80) makes the point that lack of democracy cannot be due to lack of information, since information has always been available on the radio. And even if TV makes viewers change their minds, there are no political mechanisms in place for them to do anything about it. Similarly, Zayani (81) is sceptical about the power of satellite TV to produce democracy. He also insists that political systems and institutions have to change. The same point is made by Lynch (82), who emphasises that TV talk shows are not a substitute for political organising and institutions. He is quite definite that Al Jazeera cannot create democracy in some single-handed way. This view is echoed by Khaled Hroub (83), director of the Cambridge Arab Media Project. He makes the point that although people are allowed to express their anger and criticise regimes, “it creates the false perception that we’re now practicing democracy. By clinging to TV screens, people think they’re engaging in the process of political action. But this is imaginary—not actual—politics.” Mamoun Fandi (84) takes a similar view, believing that satellite TV with its phone-ins may create a ‘virtual politics’ producing an illusion of involvement. He even sees Arab governments as “encouraging the trend whereby the media become a substitute for real politics”. Hroub (85) is also sceptical about the level of real political involvement generated by the new media. Phoning a TV programme to vent your frustration may give a feeling of satisfaction, but to see it as really engaging in the political process is a “fallacy”.

Ahmed Bedjaoui (86) insists that a free press *follows* from democracy and the rule of law, and cannot create it. He cites the way in which although there has been recent growth of broadcast media in North Africa which has generated competition among

information providers, it has not altered the political views of the average viewer living in an undemocratic country.

Different sorts of doubts about the inevitability of the development of democracy have been expressed by other writers. Alterman (87) makes the point that: "As control of public opinion increasingly slips away from governments' grasp, those who can organise and mobilize will find a far more receptive environment than at any time in the recent past." He adds that this does not necessarily mean democratisation, because "Islamist groups in the Arab world are among the most modern of political organisations, both in their techniques of organising and in the sophistication of their communication strategies." Naomi Sakr (88) observes negative trends in the region, with governments actually tightening controls over the media. She gives examples of the harassment of journalists, and believes that censorship cannot be eroded by satellite TV, but only by changing political systems.

Alterman (89) suggests that the devotion of Arab satellite TV to spectacle "may help explain why the popular and raucous debates on pan-Arab satellite television channels so far have not translated into changes in Arab politics." The start of satellite TV in the Arab world brought high hopes of democratisation. "When such broadcasts began in the mid-1990s, many saw them as a harbinger of a democratic opening... Yet a decade later, not one Arab regime has fallen at the hands of its people, and few have taken meaningful steps toward democratisation."

He draws a contrast with the much more low-key approach of Egyptian televangelist Amr Khalid, whose talks about deepening the everyday spiritual life of Muslims are without the anger and hectoring found on so much Arab TV. Alterman suggests that Khalid's followers are moved to action – even if only to buy his books and tapes – and feel a sense of greater community. "Creating a personal connection to an audience, as Amr Khalid has done, is vital. Crucial as well is combining belief and action in some way that promotes a feeling of membership. Television has viewers, and politics has participants. Until Arab satellite television can turn the former into the latter, it will remain principally an instrument of entertainment rather than an engine for reform."

Zayani (90) goes further in his negativity. He argues that the cross-border broadcasters such as Abu Dhabi TV, Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera are in fact shaping Arab public opinion in such a way as to support the political status quo, rather than undermine it, in spite of what many in the West believe. An article in *The New York Times* (91) makes the point that the television pictures of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are inflaming the Arab extremists, and as a result Arab states are having to tighten repressive measures and put progressive reforms on hold, simply to maintain their own security. In this way, paradoxically, satellite television and the intifada can be seen as combining to work *against* the development of democracy in the region. The same view is expressed by John R Bradley (92) concerning Al Jazeera's treatment of Palestine. "By emotionally charging the issue, the station is unwittingly supporting Arab regimes." It is doing this by distracting the people from much-needed domestic reform and providing Arab governments with an excuse for military spending.

Saeda Al Kilani (93) also has doubts about how the new channels are operating. She argues that these channels are half-hearted about women's issues, ignore the ideas of Arab intellectuals, and in spite of all the talk about democracy in the Arab world, they have allowed themselves to be leaned on by the United States not to broadcast certain news stories.

Lynch (94) takes a middle view. He accepts that Al Jazeera has aroused both too great an optimism (that it will usher in democracy very quickly) and too great a pessimism (that it indulges in too much sensationalism), but he feels that both views are misplaced. In fact the new Arab media "has eroded state monopoly over information, embedding in its audience an expectation of choice and contention that undercuts authoritarian political culture. Satellite television stations are encouraging a pluralist political culture, one in which individual voices can be heard, disagreements openly aired, and nearly every aspect of politics and society held open to public scrutiny."

This research follows up the issue of democracy by using content analysis to explore Al Jazeera's news programming and talk shows, and by using the surveys to assess how important the channel is perceived to be by the audience in keeping them informed of the

political situation and encouraging them to see democracy as the most constructive way forward. In the process it produces evidence that the audience is positive towards democratic developments (and credits Al Jazeera with encouraging them to adopt this view), but holds a range of different expectations about how things are changing and how things might turn out for Palestine. This area is considered in more detail in the following section.

## **2.4 Al Jazeera and the Palestinians: questions raised by the literature**

### **2.4.1 Has the channel created a sense of hope and offered constructive solutions or ways forward?**

Zayani and Sahraoui (95) maintain that: “Al Jazeera will go down in history as a turning point in the history of the Arab people, not only as a free medium of expression but first and foremost as an enterprise for rebuilding the self-confidence and dignity of the humiliated Arab masses. It has been speaking forcefully on their behalf, bypassing the perceived apathy of the Arab leaders and opening a channel to those who reflected popular feelings to talk directly to ‘the other’.”

But questions remain about whether Al Jazeera is engaging in a constructive way with the particular concerns of the Palestinians. A survey conducted by The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, June 9-11, 2005 (96), showed eight considerations the respondents would use in their choice of candidate in an election. The considerations in order of importance to the voters were: “1) the ability to fight corruption; 2) the ability to reach a peace agreement with Israel; 3) the ability to improve economic conditions; 4) the ability to maintain national unity; 5) the ability to protect refugee rights in negotiations; 6) the name or affiliation of the list; 7) the ability to enforce law and order; and 8) the ability to ensure the continuation of the intifada.” After legislative elections, the respondents would like to see their politicians arranging their priorities in this order: “1) improve the economy; 2) fight corruption; 3) reach a peace agreement with Israel; 4) enforce law and order; and 5) maintain national unity.”

What is interesting here is that maintaining the intifada takes such a low position. Fighting corruption, and creating peace so that the economy can improve appear far more important. The Palestinians already have democratically elected politicians, but they want those politicians to operate more effectively. The question is whether Al Jazeera's handling of the Palestinian situation fits with these aspirations, or whether it emphasises other priorities.

Mahmud Shamman, (97) bureau chief for *Dar Al Watan* and *Newsweek Arabic*, commented at a conference on Al Jazeera in February 2006: "While issues that are critical to the Arab world – Israel/Palestine, Iraq – are being covered, key local issues are sometimes not covered. Al Jazeera has not reported on issues of local corruption, or the rise of prostitution in the Arab world. Before dreaming of becoming international, maybe Al Jazeera needs to become more local." Is it the case that while it covers the violent confrontations of the Palestinian/Israeli situation, Al Jazeera is missing the more nuanced priorities of the Palestinians themselves?

Marc Lynch (98) comments on Al Jazeera talk shows dealing with Palestine: "Almost all Arabs agree about Palestine, meaning that these talk shows almost always reinforced an existing consensus – but in an area where positive progress seems unlikely."

This seems to coincide with the way Palestinians feel a good deal of negativity about their situation. A survey conducted by The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, June 9-11, 2005 (99), showed that "From among eight major areas of public concern, a majority believes that things have either stayed the same or became worse in six areas and improved in one area, while the public is divided in half over one other area. Conditions are the same or worse in the following areas: settlements, economic conditions, democracy and human rights, enforcement of law and order, fight against corruption, and internal relations among Palestinian factions. The only area in which progress is seen is the release of prisoners by Israel. The area in which the public is divided is related to occupation measures such as closures and

checkpoints.” The same survey found that “52% believe that settlement building will increase in the West Bank in the coming years.”

Zayani and Sahraoui (100) suggest how Al Jazeera could move beyond controversy and take a more constructive role: “If the network is to go beyond the reputation it has acquired for ruffling feathers and to envisage a role for itself that is less controversial and more constructive, it has to seek wider institutional support. It has to fall back on a wider system of creativity, including scholars, specialists and freelancers, and to capitalize on centers for research and studies which can tackle issues in systematic and profound ways, provide in-depth analysis and even offer possible solutions....So far, Al Jazeera has lacked a system that weaves innovation into what it does best, and even if there are sources of innovation, they are not tapped into.”

In a situation in which many Palestinians are not optimistic about their future, how is Al Jazeera responding to their hopes and fears?

#### **2.4.2 Has the emphasis on pictures of violence and death created a false impression of the life of most Palestinians?**

There is a good deal of negative reaction by media commentators to the emphasis on death and sensation. For example, in an article in the New York Times Magazine (Nov 18<sup>th</sup> 2001), Fouad Ajami (101) (director of the program in Middle East Studies at the School of Advanced International Studies at John Hopkins University) referred to Al Jazeera’s handling of the al-Dura episode as “incendiary”. “The station played and replayed the heart-rending footage of 12-year-old Muhammed al-Dura, who was shot in Gaza and died in his father’s arms. The images’ ceaseless repetition signalled the arrival of a new, sensational breed of Arab journalism. Even some Palestinians questioned the opportunistic way Al Jazeera handled the tragic incident. But the channel savored the publicity and the controversy all the same.”

A public opinion poll conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (19-21 March 2007) (102) showed that Al Jazeera is regarded very positively by about half of the Palestinian population. 48.4% of Palestinians who watch TV “trust Al Jazeera as the most reliable source of news.” But this leaves a substantial number of Palestinians who have less confidence in the channel. Do they see a mismatch between what the channel shows and what they experience in their daily lives?

#### **2.4.3 Has the channel incited hatred or encouraged violence as a way of reacting to political events? In what ways?**

Hazem Saghie (103) summarises the emotive content of much Arab TV: “Such extreme phenomena as war and conflict, the sanctification of “martyrs”, images of corpses, emotive scenes and the necrophiliac celebration of death and funerals are all much more common on Arabic satellite channels than they are in the day-to-day life of most Arabs. Yet the inflammatory zeal of some correspondents in covering such events is undiminished.”

In an article on the tbsjournal website (Spring 02), Abbas El Tounsy (104) writes that: “All the Arab satellite channels, although in varying degrees, have opened an unprecedented outlet for scenes of the ferocity of Israeli practices against the Palestinians. Pictures of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock appeared frequently in introductions to several programs. With the exception of the Saudi satellite channel, songs about the Intifada and Jerusalem have been repeatedly broadcast on all the Arab satellite channels. Even the Lebanese channels like Future, New TV, and MTV, which usually present light variety programs, have broadcast this type of song, with pictures of Mohammed Al-Dura, funerals of the martyrs, and corpses of the victims in the background.”

Scott MacLeod (105) writing in October 2006 comments specifically on Al Jazeera: “Al-Jazeera won loyal viewers with its on-the-spot coverage of the Palestinian *intifadeh* in 2000, the Afghanistan and Iraq wars waged in 2001 and 2003, and the conflict in

Lebanon this past summer. But the tone of the output was often partisan, and some thought its grisly footage of death and destruction accompanied by angry commentaries took al-Jazeera's journalism toward the realm of incitement to hatred."

Khaled Shawkat (106), writing in July 2006, sees a change in Al Jazeera's approach: "I am convinced that the special status attained by the Qatari Al-Jazeera channel in the Arab and international media is based on the fact that in its early years, it dealt persistently with issues of democracy and human rights in the Arab world, dared to discuss things not spoken of in Arab politics, and exposed the disgrace of the violations and misconduct of the Arab regimes. I am also convinced that Al-Jazeera has in recent years abandoned this direction, for many reasons, and that its current administration is trying to preserve the channel's popularity by distorting Arab public opinion, [which it achieves] by stirring up emotion on sensitive regional issues, such as Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan."

Scott MacLeod (107), writing in October 2006, takes a contrasting viewpoint and states the case for Al Jazeera: "In their defense, the channel's executives say that al-Jazeera is just the bearer of bad news. And there is evidence that the channel has consciously moderated its line over the years, scaling back the Arab flag-waving in its news bulletins and talk shows. It now makes a real effort to include opposing views, including those of U.S. and Israeli spokespersons."

Marc Lynch (108) identifies specific instances where TV material seems to have led to action on the streets. He argues that "the impact of the news coverage has similarly revolutionized political behaviour. News coverage has inspired contentious politics on the so-called Arab street, from the fierce demonstrations sparked by al-Jazeera's coverage of the American-British bombing of Iraq in December 1998, to the intense waves of sustained popular protests over the bloody fighting between Palestinians and Israel in 2000 and 2002, to the demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq in 2003, to the wave of protests demanding political reform that swept from Lebanon through Egypt into the Gulf in the first months of 2005."



A survey conducted by The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, June 9-11, 2005 (109), showed that “a majority of 72% view the Israeli disengagement plan [from Gaza] as victory for armed resistance. Moreover, two thirds of the public continue to view armed confrontations as helping achieve national rights in ways that negotiations could not... If the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza is complete, two thirds would oppose and 30% would support the continuation of armed attacks from the Strip.”

These sorts of findings show that there is a good deal of Palestinian support for a belief in the effectiveness of violent struggle. The question is how Al Jazeera fits into this picture, and whether it has become more or less restrained in its handling of sensitive issues.

**2.4.4 Has its use of a polarised, confrontational approach simply strengthened prejudice, rather than encouraging the belief that democracy is about compromise and negotiation? Is ‘the opinion and the other opinion’ really an adequate basis for democracy?**

Marc Lynch (110) observes that Al Jazeera tends to emphasise the polarity of viewpoints. Zayani and Sahraoui (111) agree, commenting that: “So far, Al Jazeera does not seem to be providing much beyond engaging in what Fatema Memissi calls ‘the art of polemics’, which used to strike a chord with its viewers in the past but is unlikely to do so in the future... What can be asserted, though, is that reality is such that viewers are already being saturated with *déjà vu* Arab politics and will end up expecting more or will tune out of news channels altogether.”

Lynch (112) also identifies a sense of frustration in the audience: “...the new Arab public offers no mechanism for translating its ideas into outcomes... And with that frustration, the public sphere is increasingly consumed with sensationalism and anger, which threaten to undermine its contribution to liberal reform.”

Hazen Saghie (113) is sceptical about the usefulness of Al Jazeera's slogan. "The content of the new stations' programmes is often open to charges of political bias. This is epitomised by the main slogan of al-Jazeera (primarily a news channel, after all): 'the opinion... and the other opinion'. The sense of partisanship that this evokes is the mirror image of the frequent controversies al-Jazeera has been involved in."

On the other hand, Al Umari, Al Jazeera's chief correspondent in Israel and the occupied territories, defends the principle of 'the opinion and the other opinion'. In an article by Asaf Carmel (114), he explains that "For 50 years the Arabs heard the Israeli opinion through a third party, their regimes. We make a point of interviewing as many Israelis as possible, because we respect the viewer's intelligence. Let him be the judge. We don't dictate anything to anyone," he says... Al-Umari relates proudly, 'Al Jazeera has led a big change in the Arab media and has very much expanded freedom of expression. Until we went on the air, no one heard the opposition in the various countries, because there were only official sources.'"

As Khaled Shawkat (115) has pointed out, "The democratic culture in the Arab and Islamic world is still extremely fragile and superficial." For this reason, the contribution made by the media to the political process is of great importance. Talal Okal (116), of *Al-Ayam Newspaper* of Ramallah, Palestine, has spoken of the opportunities for the media to make a positive contribution. "For some time now, the Palestinians had taken the strategic decision to launch negotiations on the Middle East conflict, and Arab society had had the same reaction. The mass media should be actively involved in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict and should give some impetus to the process. At the same time, they should play a crucial role in reporting on those who could help attain the peace. The peace process was multilateral, which involved many aspects. Negotiations relied on the creativity and the willingness of those in the region to look for compromises. In that regard, the mass media could play a positive and active role as it could present the positions and viewpoints of those involved."

Khaled Shawkat (117), however, feels that Al Jazeera is missing a real opportunity. "My renewed interest in Al-Jazeera stems from the fact that, in my view, Al-Jazeera was an

historic opportunity for advancing democracy in the Arab world... and that this opportunity is being lost, if it is not lost already, just as many other opportunities have been missed by the Arabs... Al-Jazeera's current media direction is no longer to aspire to compete with the BBC or CNN in professionalism, independence, and courage; rather, it has become [a channel] affiliated with a political, religious, and ideological organization that strives to spread its views amongst the Arab public..."

This final comment leads on the issues raised by the next question.

#### **2.4.5 Has the channel become more overtly Islamist?**

There are different views on whether Al Jazeera has moved towards a more Islamist position. Itamar Marcus and Barbara Cook (118) describe how "Fatah leaders have accused Al Jazeera TV of being biased in favor of Hamas, and of being subservient to the Islamic extremist movement – the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas has been defending Al Jazeera, calling it reliable and objective." Marcus and Cook quote from the Fatah newspaper, *Al Hayat Al Jadida*, November 4, 2006, which argued that the change "came after Mr. Waddah Khanfar was put... in charge of directing the channel, and he is known for identifying with the Muslim Brotherhood Movement ... there is a systematic media preference for the interests of one Palestinian party [Hamas] at the expense of the Palestinian public..."

Zayani and Sahraoui (119) have a different interpretation of the arrival of Waddah Khanfar. "According to an AFP communiqué, Al Jazeera's board decision to appoint Waddah as the new managing director 'is part of an administrative and professional drive and means that Al Jazeera will now adopt a more moderate and professional policy.'"

"Under Al Ali, the management of Al Jazeera had a personal touch to it, making it a face-to-face conversational organisation....Al Jazeera was constituted of a small and intimate group and operated more like a family business."

“Khanfar’s coming on the scene meant also the introduction of a terminology that has so far been alien to Al Jazeera – guidelines, order, structure, code, organisation, among other concept words. It soon became clear that, under its new management, Al Jazeera is embarking on momentous changes, introducing a system and providing pointers for an organisational model that has been organic, loose, informal and idiosyncratic.”

The Fatah viewpoint is supported by Khaled Shawkat (120), who argues that "Al-Jazeera has been hijacked by the Muslim Brotherhood organization - either at the wish of the channel's owners as part of a certain political game [played] by the Qatari rulers, or out of the lack of awareness of the Qatari rulers, who think that the situation is under control and that even though they have given the Muslim Brotherhood a chance to control Al-Jazeera, for local, regional, and international considerations, they can get rid of them or restrain them any time they want...”

Hazem Saghie (121) also believes that “Alongside politics, a religious consciousness and the propagation of religious values have assumed an important position in Arab broadcasting. This is especially dangerous when advanced technology is made an instrument of an unreformed approach to religious and secular affairs. The outcome – “capitalist” plus “lumpenproletarian” globalisation, exhibitionist consumerism plus religious fundamentalism, is the worst postmodern combination.”

Asaf Carmel (122) presents a more moderate view of Al Jazeera in an article containing an interview with Walid al-Umari, the chief correspondent for Al Jazeera in Israel and the Territories. Referring to al-Umari, he says: “he stands out for his profound acquaintance with Israel and his relatively balanced coverage. Al Jazeera's line is definitely anti-Israeli, but al-Umari refrains from the incendiary reporting that characterizes other correspondents. Thanks to him, viewers from Morocco to Iraq see Israel and its citizens, perhaps for the first time, in an almost unmediated way.”

In same article, Asaf Carmel (ibid) quotes Al-Umari’s explanation of why Fatah is accusing Al Jazeera of being taken over by those with a more Islamic viewpoint: “Up until a year ago the Palestinian Authority was in the hands of Fatah, and that is what was

reflected from our reports. But after the Hamas victory in the elections, a new situation developed, and therefore the senior officials in the movement are getting a lot of airtime.”

Moreover, Islamists themselves can be very critical of Al Jazeera. An article on the *Hearts and Minds* website (123) makes the point that: “Islamists heavily criticized Jazeera for interviewing Israeli officials - broadcasting uncensored statements by Jews about Palestinians. No Arab network had done this before. For this indiscretion it was called an Israeli supporter and traitor.”

Zayani and Sahraoui (124), writing in 2007, perhaps give the fairest overview of the channel. On the one hand, “Al Jazeera is more tame than it used to be” and “is toning down the Fox News-type of populist appeal that has so often stigmatised it during the coverage of certain crises”; but at the same time “it still comes off as the channel of Arab discontent, giving an outlet to people’s anger and frustration about a Middle East that is going through troubled times.”

Additional questions were added to the second survey to throw some light on the issues raised in this section (2.4).

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## **Chapter 3: The Development of Palestinian Democracy**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Democracy can be defined as: rule by the people, expressing their will through elections, which in turn require political parties and the freedoms of speech and association needed for these parties to function. Alongside the electoral process there is the necessary separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers, and the rule of law applying equally to all.

But in reality there needs to be more than these structures. Effective democracy depends on a people who understand and get involved in the workings of their society. It requires an active civil society, which includes a wide range of organisations and activities. As well as an independent media, there will usually be input from trade unions, universities and religious groups, as well as smaller voluntary organisations and self-help groups with particular concerns such as education, welfare or women's rights. Democracy also needs to build on the culture of a particular society. It is not a matter of one size fits all.

It is also the case that there are differences between 'procedural' democracy, which involves the institutions and structures, and 'substantive' democracy, which concentrates on the ideals. It is possible to have a procedural democracy in which the institutional structures are in place, but without the real spirit of democracy flourishing. Both procedural and substantive elements are needed to create a truly democratic state.

Democracy overlaps with human rights, but is not identical. One way of distinguishing is to say that democracy empowers 'the people', while human rights empower individuals. The overlap is indicated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which includes democratic elections as a basic right.

"1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. 2. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country. 3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority

of government; this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held in secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.” Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 21. (1)

The freedom of association and the freedom of speech necessary for democracy to function are also human rights.

But it is also the case that human rights can only be effectively set up within democratic systems, where the executive is also subject to the rule of law. Building democracy and building human rights therefore go hand in hand and contribute to each other.

To build a democracy require an identifiable, free-standing state, yet Palestine has never been an independent sovereign state. Palestinians have been ruled at different times in the last 100 years by the Ottoman Empire, by Britain, by Egypt (in Gaza), by Jordan (in the West Bank) and by Israel. Out of some 6.7 m Palestinians, 3.9 m live outside the West Bank and Gaza (1). It seems remarkable that anything resembling democracy could grow out of this situation, but it can be argued that there are more democratic elements in the political life of Palestinians than in most other Arab states – although at the same time there are considerable problem areas and undemocratic practices. It has also been argued that although there is a strong desire for democracy, it exists more in theory than in practice.

### **3.2 An Outline of Palestinian Political Development**

The present-day sense of Palestinian political identity began with the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1964. In 1967 Israel took over the West Bank and Gaza in the Six Day War, leaving the Palestinians effectively with no state of their own.

In 1969 Yasser Arafat, leader of Fateh, originally a guerrilla organisation, became leader of the PLO, which by the late 60s and early 70s had begun to talk in terms of a

democratic state of Palestine. In 1974 the Arab states recognised the PLO as the 'sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people'. During the 80s the Islamic movement developed, and in 1987 Hamas (an acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement) was formed. The same year saw the outbreak of the first intifada in Gaza and the West Bank, and in the following year (1988) the PLO issued its Palestinian Declaration of Independence.

The end of the Cold War and the changing pattern of international relations had their effect on the Arab world. Arafat lost the support of Moscow and Soviet Jews flooded into Israel. In this changed world delegates of Israelis and Palestinians met in Oslo from December 1992 to August 1993. The outcome was the signing of the Declaration of Principles (or Oslo Accord). This gave the PLO interim powers of limited self-government in the West Bank and Gaza. The situation was further refined by the Cairo Agreement (1994) and Oslo II (1995). A Palestinian Authority (PA) was to take responsibility for security and civil affairs in Gaza and in West Bank towns (Zone A). It also took responsibility for civil affairs in the villages (Zone B). Israeli forces were to be responsible for security in Zone B, as well as over Israeli settlements and all other areas (Zone C). About 95% of Palestinians lived in Zones A and B or in Gaza, although Zone A comprised 3% of the West Bank and Zone C some 70%. (2)

After considerable delays the elections were finally held in 1996 in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem for a Palestinian President and for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). This election was given a pretty clean bill of health by international observers. Yasser Arafat retained presidency of the PA with 88% of the vote, but the election was boycotted by Hamas and the left-wing Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. As a result the PLC was overwhelmingly made up of Fateh members, with a few independents and Islamists. Interestingly the PA cabinet did include independents, Islamists and members of other groups. It also included two women.

In September 2000, Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount (as Jews call it) or Haram al-Sherif (as Muslims call it), and this led to widespread protests throughout the territories,



involving violent confrontations between demonstrating Palestinians and Israeli police armed with live ammunition. This in turn led to the outbreak of the second intifada, which involved a suicide bombing campaign by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and PLO militants.

In 2001, the 9/11 attacks in the US and the declaration of the War on Terror by George Bush in effect gave Sharon (now Prime Minister of Israel) American support for taking a hard line. The result was Operation Defensive Shield, during which Israeli forces occupied towns and cities in all three zones, arresting large numbers and blowing up or bulldozing buildings. Arafat's compound in Ramallah was destroyed, and he was kept under virtual house arrest until his death in 2004, disregarded by the Israelis as having no political significance.

In 2002 Israel continued to act unilaterally and ignore international attempts to find a settlement by starting to build a wall separating Israel from the West Bank, and in the process annexing extra areas of the West Bank and confiscating Palestinian land, causing massive disruption to Palestinian communities.

When Arafat died in November 2004, the PLO chose Mahmud Abbas as its new leader. In early 2005 he was elected President of the PA with a little over 62% of the vote (3) on a 71% turnout (4). Abbas had always accepted a two-state solution, and was prepared to negotiate with the Israelis. The result was a ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli forces and the release of prisoners. The PA took action to stop rocket attacks on Israel from across the Gaza border. Israel went ahead with withdrawing from Gaza and northern West Bank settlements, giving Abbas something to claim as the fruits of negotiation.

In May 2005 the municipal elections were held successfully, and gave another boost to the growth of democracy, especially as Hamas took part. In an article in Al-Hayat, Bakr Abu Bakr wrote: "It is important... to point out what these elections represent[ed] to a Palestinian people still struggling to be free, still fighting Israeli occupation, and exercising democracy... They represent[ed]... first, an assertion of a course and a way of life chosen by the Palestinian people exemplified by freedom, dignity, dialogue,

responsibility, and respect for the will of the people; second, the will and aspiration of many popular leaderships to serve the people...; third, a demonstration of Palestinian solidarity...; fourth, the continuity of Palestinian political struggle towards common goals; fifth, a renewal of societal leaderships.” (5)

In the PLC elections in early 2006, Hamas not only took part but also won a surprise victory. President Abbas and Hamas formed a government of national unity, but fighting broke out in May 2007 between Fateh and Hamas. In June Hamas seized control of Gaza, and Abbas dissolved the coalition government. The result is that the West Bank is governed by Fateh and President Abbas, and Gaza is ruled by Hamas under former Prime Minister Ismael Haniyeh. The takeover of Gaza was met with sanctions imposed by Israel, the US, the EU and others, resulting in a humanitarian crisis in the region.

This history of violence and political struggle seems unlikely ground for the growth of democracy. Yet partly in resistance to Israeli occupation, and partly in response to pressure to take part in the peace process, Palestinians have in fact developed an active political and national life.

### **3.3 Palestinian understandings of Democracy**

Although Yasser Arafat’s Fateh party had its roots in guerrilla activity, by 1968 the organisation claimed to be working for a liberated and democratic Palestine. In 1988, when the PLO issued its Palestinian Declaration of Independence, this cited as its aim ‘a parliamentary and democratic system of governance’. But concerns about the operation of the PA dominated by Arafat, when it came into being, led to the formation of the Democracy-Building Movement, pressing for greater democratic practices in the PA. Clearly, the understanding of the word ‘democracy’ in Palestinian political circles is not simple.

One use of the word has been as a loose synonym for the populist, nationalist struggle – in particular, the sort of resistance to Israeli occupation that boiled over into the intifada

of 1987. Different understandings are found within the PLO itself. On the one hand, its highest decision-making body, the Palestine National Council, was organised with a parliamentary structure, containing representatives not just from Fateh but also from a wide range of different political groups and different areas of the Palestinian diaspora. On the other hand, smaller factional groups saw democracy in terms of having a say in PLO decisions on the basis simply of their membership, irrespective of their small numbers.

Contact with Israel has also had its effect on Palestinian attitudes to democracy. On the one hand it has had a negative effect. Israel, for all its democratic credentials, is seen as repressive, denying Palestinians in the occupied territories their political and civil rights. That the democracies of the West generally support Israel only compounds the problem. On the other hand, Palestinians have not been unaware of the pluralism, free press and parliamentary practices of Israel, which contrast strongly with most Arab states. For all its downside, the occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 1967, has helped produce socio-economic change, encouraging the growth of a Palestinian middle-class who might be expected to be more supportive of democracy. The resistance to occupation has also strengthened the growth of civil society in Palestine – a mass of civil associations of different sorts which create the kind of engagement necessary for the growth of any real democracy. (See the following section for more details of civil society.) The negative effect is a legacy of anger, and large numbers of disillusioned young men who have grown up with an attitude of resentment towards authority.

Those Palestinians displaced by the diaspora, particularly in Europe and North America, have often gained not just education but also direct experience of democratic and pluralist communities. These too have an input into the overall Palestinian understanding of democracy.

In the end we are left with a host of conflicting tendencies. A populist nationalism could swing either way – towards democracy or towards a suppression of democratic freedom in the interests of ‘the cause’. Islamist groups are certainly not interested in the political

pluralism which makes for democracy. Survey results are contradictory. Some surveys suggest that Palestinians in general prefer an Islamic state rather than a democratic one. Other surveys suggest that Palestinians reject the idea that Islam and democracy are incompatible, and that even the traditionally religious would prefer some sort of democratic system rather than rule by an elite. In one survey, around 80% believed in democracy and wanted elections for the PA. A surprisingly high proportion (71.8%) wanted women to participate fully in elections. (6)

Hayder 'Abd al-Shafi, the founder of the Palestinian Democracy-Building Movement, takes a rather negative view, insisting that "we do not have a democratic culture". (7) Ziad Abu-'Amr, a Palestinian political scientist, takes a more positive view. While admitting that Palestinians "do not have a democratic political system", he maintains that they do have a "socio-political pluralist system" with "underdeveloped patterns of democratic thought and practice". (8) This means that there is a good deal of freedom of opinion, but "little institutionalised political accountability". (9)

What all this adds up to is that a) there is a good deal of political awareness and debate among Palestinians, but b) an undefinable degree of belief in/desire for democracy in its fullest sense. As a result, Al Jazeera, with its strong commitment to democracy, has both a receptive audience and an important role to play in developing understanding and encouraging a greater commitment to democratic ideals.

### **3.4 The Development of Civil Society**

An enormously important ingredient in the process of building Palestinian democracy is the strength of the NGOs (non-governmental organisations). There are some 1,000 associations of different kinds, based on charities or voluntary cooperatives, based on work (such as professional associations or trade unions), or based on special interests (such as women's or student groups). Others are linked to health, education or human rights. An important function of these groups is that they provided services which were not provided by the Israeli military administration. (10)

One of the problems with Palestinian NGOs is that as well as providing a valuable network of social support, they also frequently have political connections. For example, Islamic associations with charitable or educational purposes can also be providing resources for Islamist activity. The result of this politicisation of many NGOs is to create tensions between them and the PA. When the PA came into operation it began to provide some of the services previously provided by NGOs, and also became the recipient of funding intended for NGOs. The PA wants to keep track of external funding because of concerns about Islamist and opposition groups, and has felt the need to place NGOs in a more constraining legal framework. All this has caused anxiety in the NGOs who felt they were being marginalized, and puts at risk the development of political pluralism. Women's groups felt particularly uncertain about their future, and whether to operate within PA structures or remain outside.

Rex Brynen emphasises the importance of NGOs, commenting that "Palestinian NGOs are the backbone of Palestinian civil society. Consequently, vibrant and autonomous associational groups will be an important guarantee of future pluralism in Palestinian politics and society." (11)

### **3.5 Problem Areas**

#### **Political parties**

The initial problem with the formation of the PA was that the elections were boycotted by the principle opposition groups, Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. There has long been a plurality of Palestinian political parties, but because of the lack of democratic structures they have not had experience of working within a framework of campaigning, taking part in elections, and holding power. In the event, the cabinet was made up not just of Fateh supporters but also independents, Islamists and members of opposition groupings, but even so, the PA has for most of its existence been closely identified with Fateh.

Nathan Brown (12) has suggested three important requirements in relation to political parties in Palestine. Firstly, Fatch must become clearly separated from the PA. Secondly, parties need to set up transparent procedures for making decisions and selecting candidates. Thirdly, parties which commit themselves to the democratic process need to renounce violence – but as we have seen in Northern Ireland, this can be a long drawn-out process.

It has also been suggested that many Palestinians are tired of the way their political parties operate, and want something better. Khalid Nassif of the Civic Forum Institute has commented: “people want change, and want more participation by political parties. They want real democracy, and they want political parties to function as a fundamental part of that democracy.” (13)

#### Arafat and loss of public confidence in the PA

Once it started operating, the legislative council showed a good deal of independence, but the problem was that Arafat, in his position of President, operated independently and disregarded decisions of the council or delayed ratifying them. Perhaps he saw himself as the figurehead who could unite all the various factions of Palestine, but the result was that the PA came to be seen as ineffective. Another part of the problem was that the role of the PA had never been clearly laid down by Oslo or Cairo.

There is also no doubt that Arafat used the funds from international sources that came with the setting up of the PA to strengthen his own position by way of patronage. James L Gelvin (14) comments: “Arafat was responsible for the corruption endemic to the PA. After all, even though the man may not have been personally corrupt, the buck certainly stopped there. Not only did Arafat temporise as his associates enriched themselves, their families, and their clients at public expense, he blocked the institutional development of the Palestinian Authority that might have frustrated their worst excesses.” In 1997 the Palestinian Legislative Council produced a highly critical report on corruption within the PA. This, together with the failure of the PA to deliver all that was hoped for, led to

disillusionment, and this contributed to a loss of faith in Fateh which eventually led to the Hamas victory in the 2006 election.

### The relationship with Israel

Another problem for the PA has been the relationship with Israel. The PA has periodically felt obliged to clamp down on those thought to be connected with violence against Israeli targets. Public demonstrations, newspapers and political opponents have all faced bans or intimidation, and the PA security organisations have expanded accordingly. As a result, human rights groups have been critical of what they have seen as loss of democratic freedoms.

In the late 90s, the relationship with Israel was deteriorating and there were open clashes between PA and Israeli forces. One reaction by Israel was from time to time to blockade the West Bank and Gaza, and this had very damaging economic consequences. The GNP of the territories declined by over a third in the mid 90s, and this in turn put pressure on Arafat and the PA. (15) As their popularity fell, so their priority became one of holding onto power rather than pursuing democratic development, and this was also reflected in the views of ordinary people, who saw the economy and peace as priorities rather than democracy.

The PA found itself in a no-win situation. In order to make any progress towards establishing a Palestinian state, it needed to deliver the level of security that Israel demanded. But violent groups could always continue to make attacks on Israel, inflaming Israeli opinion, encouraging Israeli hard-liners, and leading not only to retaliatory attacks but also the closure of Palestinian areas causing great economic damage. This in turn undermined the PA's standing with its own people.

Arafat could have suppressed the violent opposition, but seemed to regard taking a hard line as a counter-productive move. He did take action, but stopped short of heavy-handed repression. The militants were undeterred, and in the spring of 1996 launched a series of bombings. This forced the PA to take a much stronger line. Its security personnel rose to

over 37,000 by early 1997 (16), and increasingly there were reports of human rights abuses – arrest without trial, torture and even deaths in custody.

#### An independent judiciary

An independent judiciary was set up only in 2002. Although it has been entangled in disputes with the PLC and the Ministry of Justice, it does have an independent existence. It needs to deal as a priority with the high levels of lawlessness which blight the lives of so many ordinary Palestinians, as well as political corruption and human rights abuses.

#### Poverty

A further problem for the development of democracy is that many Palestinian communities suffer from poverty and lack of security. In this situation their priority is day-to-day survival, and ‘democracy’ can seem theoretical and remote.

#### The present situation

The present (2008) problems of Palestinian self-rule, with the split between President Abbas in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza has been mentioned above in section 3.2. For more details of problems with the security forces experienced by the media, see the next chapter.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The Palestinian people have an electoral process for choosing their president and legislative body. They have an active civil society. They have a strong commitment to freedom of speech and a free media. On the other hand, the PA has lost a good deal of people’s confidence due to inefficiency and corruption. Moreover, the precise workings of the constitution were never clearly set out in the Oslo Accord, and this has contributed to the present difficulties, with a president from one party and an elected assembly from another. Hamas is still torn between its guerrilla roots and its position as a political party in a democratic system, and there are a number of other groups committed to continuing an armed struggle. The ongoing difficulties of the relationship with Israel have led to



considerable expansion of the security forces and in turn to infringements of human rights.

The result, as Rex Brynen suggests, is that “democracy is significantly but ambiguously lodged in Palestinian political discourse.” (17) Surveys have suggested that peace and economic prosperity are the people’s priorities, but in the twelve years since 1996 the democratic structures have not shown that they are particularly effective in providing them. The continuing development of democracy in Palestine needs all the help it can get. Diplomatic action by other states may help at the level of political leaders, but at grass roots level there is clearly a vital role for Al Jazeera, with its commitment to the growth of democracy in the Arab world, and its ability to reach into the daily lives of ordinary Palestinians.

### Chapter 3: References

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## **Chapter 4**

### **The Palestinian Media in the context of the Arab World**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter starts with an overview of Arab media both written and broadcast. It looks at the major differences and changes in Arab media before and after satellite TV technology emerged in Arab countries. Television is considered one of the most credible and influential sources of news among Arab viewers. Today most Arab households have a TV or access to TV at home or at work or at general places such as cafes. Therefore, it is important to discuss television development in the Arab world in the last century in order to be able to evaluate the present role of TV in Arab society. After this overview of the development of Arab media, there is a closer examination of the situation in Palestine.

The established democracies of the world have developed slowly, and the necessary information systems needed to make them work have also developed slowly in parallel. But now an information system (satellite TV) has developed with remarkable speed, and it raises the possibility of unprecedentedly speedy development and change in the political systems of the Arab world.

#### **4.2 The Arab media: an historical survey**

Mowlana (1) has described how traditionally, the Arab world has used different means of communication, such as the mosque, the church, and the market. Professional people, for instance, used to come to markets or bazaars telling different stories as part of entertainment. But the mosque from the beginning was the most influential channel of communication and still plays an important role in informing and orienting Muslim people towards life. Many Islamic political parties used the mosque as an influential space for reinforcing support and winning new members.

Mowlana (ibid) identifies five historical traditions of information flow in the Arab world.

### **i) Traditional media**

Mowlana observes that “mosques and bazaars have acted as media of mass communication. In the modern world, they act as alternative forms of information exchange”, he states. “While there are no statistics on the impact of the traditional media flow, it is clear that this mode of mass communication is very influential to this day.” “Nowadays and in most Arab countries the mosque is controlled by the religious Ministry, which restricts the mosque’s role in intervening with political systems in the country.”

But despite that, the mosque, with its loudspeaker system, has been used as a communication channel. In Palestine, where the author witnessed the first Palestinian intifada in 1987, Palestinian fighters have used the mosque extensively for statements announcing a meeting or strike, or warning the people of the Israeli forces invading the town. Another form of communication is writing on walls. The power of this is shown by the way in which Israeli occupation forces have destroyed, or made the owners destroy, walls painted with what they see as provocative slogans. There was also the use of placards and leaflets in street demonstrations. These forms of communication were important because at that time (the 80s) there were no independent media within Palestine. The Palestinian print media were under Israeli control.

Mowlana (ibid) notes that one of the characteristics of traditional media is flexibility. The traditional mode is timely; it does not operate on a fixed schedule, but rather whenever there is news. There is no licence needed to operate. It is a folk culture, based in the community. It is pluralistic. The traditional mode of media flow has the potential for freedom and democracy. On the other hand, Israeli forces could seize the mosque loudspeaker or demolish walls if they found any writing on them.

## **ii) Colonial tradition**

Mowlana (ibid) states that “the year 1998 marks the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the first newspaper in the Arab world, published in Egypt by Napoleon. After 200 years, the Arab world is still living in the age of colonial media. The colonial mode of communication is important because it stands in opposition to the traditional mode. The colonial tradition of the media brings with it the ideology of the West, including the concepts of nationalism and modernity. Colonial-styled media is characterized by its Western values and its hierarchical and elitist structure”.

Historically, Arab countries were dominated by the Ottoman Empire between the sixteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The first printer to have entered the Arab countries was at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when some churches imported a printer in order to produce religious books. Lebanon was the first country in the Arab world to have a printer in 1610, introduced by the church to print some books in Seryaneal language, but printing in the Arab world in general was not developed as result of several factors.

Firstly, on the political side, the Ottoman Empire did not work for the development of the press in Arab countries, as most of the newspapers in existence at that time were being used as propaganda tools in the hands of the Turkish authorities. The Ottoman authorities did not allow political parties or private individuals to have their own newspaper, and that crucially restricted press freedom in Arab countries.

Secondly, there was a lack of mutual contact between Arab countries and Europe, and the Turkish authorities did not allow the Arab countries to import printers. Religious regulations issued by the Ottoman authorities stated that the printer was a sin from the Satan (2) and that contributed to illiteracy among Arab people. Thirdly, there were economic issues, as most of the Arab countries were living under the Ottoman Empire. A heavy tax was imposed on Arab people beside the misuse of Arab countries' natural resources, and this created a large number of people living under the poverty line. However, things did change with years of struggle by intellectuals and scholars so that

people from the Arab countries managed to force the Ottoman Empire to allow the Arab countries to import the printer. By the beginning of nineteenth century the independent press in Arab countries started to emerge.

Said Essoulami (3), Executive Director of the Centre for Media freedom in the Middle East and North Africa (CMF MENA), makes the point that: "The independent Arab written press did not appear until the middle of the nineteenth century, and notably in Egypt in the cultural and intellectual renaissance of the 1860s and 1870s which was encouraged by the liberal Khedive Ismail, who governed Egypt between 1863 and 1879. In Syria and Iraq, the written press appeared a few years later, but was the victim of frequent censorship, which drove Syrian-Lebanese journalists abroad to Egypt where press freedom was guaranteed. It was these Syrian-Lebanese journalists, bent on resuscitating Arab literature in the name of past Arab glory, who were in the avant-garde of modern Arab journalism and launched newspapers which in turn became models for the Arab press. Such was the case of the brothers Salim and Bishara Takla, who founded 'Al-Ahram' in Cairo".

### **iii) Exile Tradition or Transnational Media**

During the 1970s and the 1980s the Arab world witnessed the emigration of many journalists abroad, as a result of the lack of press freedom and democracy. The majority were from Palestine because of the Israeli occupation, and from Lebanon as result of the civil war. But journalist emigration actually started a long time before in the 19th century, as Mowlana (ibid) points out that: "Exile media emerged as a result of repressive regimes in the Arab world that forced dissidents to publish newspapers abroad. The Arab transnational media in London is the center of Arab media today."

In fact the situation has moved on from this analysis by Mowlana. Slowly but increasingly over the past few years, London has been losing its status as unchallenged capital of the pan-Arab media. Today there are three Arab satellite TV channels operating in London. These are Arab News Network, (ANN), Almustakelah, and Alheware TV. These TV stations are privately owned, but they are not able to compete

with Aljazeera or with well known Arabic TV stations, such as Al Arabyia or Abu Dhabi TV, due to the lack of financial strength. For example, Almustakelah TV broadcasts statements asking its viewers for financial support (4). Moreover, in the last two decades, the Arab world has witnessed a huge investment in building media cities such as those in Jordan, Egypt, and Dubai. Many Arab TV stations now operate from there, and others have moved from London in order to cut costs, such as the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) (5).

Arab countries have suffered lack of press freedom especially between 1960 and 1980, but Lebanon was an exceptional case because of the social composition and multiparty political system in the country. As a result the Lebanese press enjoyed both high technical quality and freedom. During the Lebanese war in 1975 many journalists had left the country for Europe and the USA. The Arab journalists, mainly Lebanese and Palestinian, were employed by Gulf countries in establishing many publications and newspapers in the west, mainly in London, such as *Alhayate*, *Asharq alusat* and many more. (Said Essoulami, *ibid*)

Said Essoulami (*ibid*) comments: "Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Libya all invested in the expatriate press in order to rally support for their power and ally themselves to the most eminent and credible pens in the Arab world. Iraq and Libya funded reviews; the Saudi Arabians funded dailies. Journalists fell over themselves to offer their services to the rich and draw on the benefits due to them, such as cars, houses, or gold watches. A critical press was confined to the limits of the Arab community abroad. Other more powerful dailies and reviews had a regional audience that was much more significant". The result was that much of the information about Palestine in the expatriate and the local press had a very different slant. For example, if Saudi Arabia wanted to criticise the PLO, the story would be published in the expatriate version but not in the local version of the paper, for fear of antagonising local interests.

#### **iv) Nationalistic Media**

Mowlana (ibid) points out: "This tradition of information flow in nation-states can be controlled by government or the private sector and has its roots in Arab nationalism. It is secular, loyal to the government and based on Western models of communications".

By the end of the 1980's the Cold War had ended and democracy was developing in Arab countries, especially Jordan and Algeria. In Algeria this failed after the elections had been cancelled by the Algerian authorities, who went on to seize power from the Islamic party who had actually won. By the beginning of 1990 the Arab media started to take a different attitude towards editorial freedom and the new practice of television journalism. (More details will be provided in the chapter on Al Jazeera below.) The Gulf countries had invested extensively in media and were the first part of the Arab world to utilise satellite TV technology.

#### **v) The Islamic tradition**

With the technological development, religious TV found its way onto the air, with channels such as 'Iqra', which targeted all Muslims around the world. Islam is a universal faith shared between Muslims without any language barrier. This mode has a close tie to the traditional mode, Mowlana (ibid) suggests. Religious media "has an appeal because it is more universal than the nationalistic media."

The advance of satellite technology and the instability of political situations, particularly in the Islamic countries (such as the Iranian revolution and Gulf war) besides the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Palestinian intifada, have influenced the media development in the Arab world towards freedom. Moreover, the media industry in the Gulf countries is more advanced than in some Arab countries because of the oil money.

According to Mowlana (ibid): "There is an increasing awareness of Arab and Islamic identity among governments and publishers in the Arab world. The most widespread debate in Middle Eastern society today is about the role of civil society. People of the region are asking, 'Is Islamic society civil?' This is the most popular debate in the



Iranian and Egyptian media today''. That comes as result of the satellite channels, especially those TV programmes which are addressing taboo subjects.

### **4.3 Arab Television up to the end of eighties**

The broadcasting media in the Arab world, as in many other countries in the world, consists of three categories: government owned tv; political party tv, such as in Lebanon; and privately owned tv, as in some of the Arab countries such as Palestine, where there are more than 40 private tv channels.

The first television stations were established in the Arab world in the nineteen-fifties, beginning with Iraq, Algeria and Lebanon. See Table One below. According to Boyd (4): "The history of television broadcasting in the Arab world goes back to the mid-1950s when non-governmental broadcast operations were launched in Morocco, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia''. Nowadays all Arab countries have at least one national terrestrial and satellite TV channel, as the table shows.

<b>The Country</b>	<b>The year</b>
<b>Lebanon</b>	<b>1956</b>
<b>Algeria</b>	<b>1956</b>
<b>Iraq</b>	<b>1956</b>
<b>Syria</b>	<b>1960</b>
<b>Egypt</b>	<b>1960</b>
<b>Kuwait</b>	<b>1961</b>
<b>Morocco</b>	<b>1962</b>
<b>Sudan</b>	<b>1962</b>
<b>Yemen Democratic Republic</b>	<b>1964</b>
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	<b>1965</b>
<b>Tunisia</b>	<b>1966</b>
<b>Jordan</b>	<b>1968</b>
<b>Libya</b>	<b>1968</b>
<b>United Arab Emirates</b>	<b>1968</b>
<b>Abu Dhabi</b>	<b>1969</b>
<b>Qatar</b>	<b>1970</b>
<b>Bahrain</b>	<b>1972</b>
<b>Oman</b>	<b>1974</b>
<b>Yemen Arab Republic</b>	<b>1975</b>

**Source: Esam Suleiman Musa, 1994 (5)**

In addition Palestine also established The Voice of Palestine and (PBC) Palestine TV in 1993 after the Oslo agreement. At the beginning of the fifties and sixties most of the Arab countries became independent from their colonising country, mainly from the British and French. Arab governments recognised the power of television, with picture supported by sound. Therefore they started to exercise monopoly control over mass communication, particularly over the TV and radio.

Boyd (ibid, p5) points out: "In the early 1960s, taking note of the medium's power in political mobilisation and national development, Arab governments in newly independent states instituted television as a government monopoly". In addition to that the Arab government was the main source of finance for TV, and their employees were considered as part of the public sector in the same way as school teachers.

During the fifties and sixties the Arab world witnessed many destabilising events, such as the war in Egypt in 1956 between Egypt and a Franco-British-Israeli Alliance as result of the Egyptian decision of nationalize the Suez Canal, and the Six Day War of 1967. Yet television in the Arab world never gave any attention to Arab viewers in terms of producing programmes which seriously addressed their wider concerns. According to Mohammed Jassem Al Ali (8), the Al Jazeera channels director: "If we go back in time and review the old prevailing methods of the media organs, we conclude that these organs were used to treating the Arab citizen, whether listener or viewer (at the receiving end), as someone who would accept anything that is presented to him in the form of 'ready media meals'."

This means the Arab viewer was captive to what government TV presented. The Arab governments applied the authority theory to the media system. In other words the media was, and still is, under their control, so that the governments have the monopoly power over mass communication, especially television - as this medium does not need the viewer to be educated in order to understand it. This policy has pushed the Arab viewer, especially the educated ones, to seek other channels for information, such as BBC and

CNN, or international radio, such as Monte Carlo. In this way, Arab viewers have lost their trust in their local media system.

Jassem (ibid) comments that: "Arab media institutions (the old school) were used to treating the Arab citizen, and this is very unfortunate, as a stupid receiver of material, always obliged to take what is being presented before him without any questioning and without giving what he hears a second thought, even if the information was falsified or minimized". In the long term this has proved counter-productive, and even audiences away.

Television in the Arab countries was used as a propaganda tool for promoting government policies, making TV a mouthpiece for the government and remote from viewer interest. Arab governments established Information Ministries to control mass communications through dozens of restrictions, especially on TV and radio. In the early days Arab governments relied on cheap imported programmes from the USA and Europe to fill airspace. The lack of press freedom as well as the shortages of professional staff, and more importantly the lack of finance, are among the most important factors that prevented Arab TV professionals from producing local programmes.

In the seventies the technology started to improve with the advent of colour TV and the video recorder, resulting in Arab viewers using the video extensively for entertainment. On the other hand, Arab viewers had to rely on Egypt which was considered (and still is considered) the Arab Hollywood and the main supplier of Arab TV in terms of movies and entertainment shows, especially during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month. Finally by the end of the eighties, Arab television witnessed a remarkable progress towards real TV journalism. (Boyd, ibid)

#### **4.4 The Development of Satellite TV**

The development of Arab satellite TV has been important for Palestinians, who have been able to watch cross-border Arab TV before there was any Palestinian TV available for

them. Before dealing with the recent progress of Arab television, both in terms of technological change and approaches to TV journalism, it is useful to look at the development of satellite television in Arab countries since the late 1960s. In 1967 Arab information ministers discussed the principles of a satellite network with a view to creating better integration of the various cultural activities of the Arab League, a regional organization created after World War Two (9). In 1969 (Boyd, *ibid*) the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) was set up, made up of most Arab countries except Saudi Arabia. This was because the ASBU was Cairo-based and there was a difficult political relationship between Saudi Arabia and Egypt at the time. It was not until 1974 that more friendly relations were resumed between the two countries.

The Arab Satellite Communications Organization (ARABSAT) was set up in April 1976 (Overview, *ibid*) under the auspices of the Arab League. The aim was to encourage information and meet cultural and educational needs. It was largely financed by the Saudi government, and Riyadh, the Saudi capital, was the base for its headquarters. Initially the project was contracted to the French, but the Ariane rocket used to launch the first satellite failed. After that the project was contracted to the U.S., using the space shuttle Discovery, which successfully launched a second satellite, 1-B in 1985 (Amin & Boyd, (10)). ARABSAT 1-A and 1-B were switched off in 1992 and 1993 respectively (*Satellite Generations* (11)).

In July and November, 1996 ARABSAT launched two second generation satellites, 2-A and 2-B. These high-powered satellites had technical capacities which gave ARABSAT a competitive edge in the region (Kazan (12)). ARABSAT 1-C, launched in 1992. The ARABSAT 3-A, a third generation satellite, was launched in February 1999. This powerful satellite with covers all Arab countries, most of Europe and a large part of Africa.

Not surprisingly, it was the wealthy Gulf countries that were the first to take up satellite broadcasting. The Space Network of Dubai, part of the ARABSAT system, began transmitting in 1992 and reaches nearly a third of the world – ranging over southern Europe, Turkey, India, Pakistan, all the Arab countries as well as the Islamic republics of

the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). It was also the first Arab company to broadcast in the US. (see Elbay, H (11) and Husseini (12)).

In these ways Arab satellite television has recently made a great deal of progress, and it has taken the lead from the state-run domestic Arab television networks. 'The real change is not the emergence of alternative voices in public media, but their sheer variety.' This is the view of Anderson and Eickelman (15, p61).

Since launching in the 1950s, Arab television has been owned and run by governments, mainly non-elected and authoritarian. Even up to the 1990s this was still mostly the case. There were some exceptions to this state of affairs - private television experiments in Iraq, Morocco, and principally Lebanon, where television was initially set up as a joint venture of the state and business. (Boulos (16); Kraidy (17)).

The 1974-2000 war in Lebanon reduced central government power, and this made possible the development of private broadcasting, or 'unofficial' broadcasting in Boyd's phrase (Boyd, *ibid*). The Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (now LBCI, with "international" added to its name) started in 1985 as a terrestrial station, launched by the Christian paramilitary group called the Lebanese Forces. This stimulated the setting up of a large number of private TV stations by those in opposition to the Lebanese Forces. The result was that by 1995 more than fifty TV stations had been set up. (Kraidy, *ibid*).

When the Gulf War started, the need for up-to-date news created considerable interest in Cable News Network (CNN) among Arab audiences. This stimulated the setting up of private television in Arab countries. This began in 1991, when the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) was launched in London by Saudi businessmen backed by the royal family. Private television in Lebanon was originally with a terrestrial network. But this expanded to include satellite a few years later (Kraidy, (18)). In fact Arab non-governmental media has principally involved satellite television. In 1991 there was also the launch of the Egyptian Satellite Channel, owned by the Egyptian government, and as the years passed so a good number of Arab satellite stations, private and government-owned, have started broadcasting. (Amin & Boyd, *ibid*).

The development of satellite TV in the Arab world during the nineties made change possible in TV journalism in terms of both programme quality and talk show subject-matter, so that the most taboo subjects in the Arab world could be treated for the first time - though this did not happen straight away. Satellite TV technology has allowed broadcasting companies to break out of the Arab government monopoly of TV. Arab viewers have gained a new freedom, and now have a real choice of the channels and the programmes they want to watch.

#### **4.5 Satellite technology and its impact on the viewer**

As the literature review has shown, satellite TV introduced changes in Arab TV broadcasting over the past two decades, in terms of the subjects covered and the style of presentation. Nowadays, any countries in the world through satellite broadcasting can instantly exchange information, or find themselves exposed. A satellite receiving-dish of any size can receive hundreds of TV channels broadcasting anywhere in the world, including the Arab News channels (Al Jazeera in Qatar, ANN in London, Al Arabya in Dubai), as well as CNN and the BBC. Through satellite broadcasting, Arab viewers can watch and learn about different cultures throughout the world. The previous broadcasting technology could reach only a limited area in a country or neighbouring countries, which meant the impact of TV broadcasting affected only those living inside the country and the areas immediately surrounding it.

According to Fabio Massimo Galante (19) "Ten years ago one satellite transponder was able to broadcast only one analogue TV programme. Several years ago the same transponder could broadcast 10 digital TV programmes. Today, the same transponder can broadcast up to 80 programmes using new digital coding standards". Therefore Arab viewers can select what they wish to watch, increasing the diversity of viewpoints and opinions from all over the globe. This dramatic empowerment of Arab viewers has taken place over the comparatively short period of just ten years.

Moreover, the advance of satellite technology makes it easy and affordable for small communities or groups with special interests to launch satellite channels. There are the Lebanese Hezbut Allah Group Almanar channel, and Al Alqsa satellite TV, which is run by Hamas from the Gaza Strip. A new channel, called Al Quds, owned by Palestinian business interests, with its head office in London but broadcasting from Beirut, has started operating recently. At the time of writing Fatah is considering launching a satellite TV channel broadcasting from Cairo.

However, media academics make the point that communication technology, and the powers it brings, are no guarantee that democracy will thrive. Denis McQuail (20) writes that media broadcasting can serve to repress as well as to liberate, to unite as well as to fragment society, both to promote and to hold back change.

McQuail identifies media broadcasting as a powerful tool able to: attract and direct public attention; to persuade in matters of opinion and belief; to structure a definition of reality; and to inform quickly and extensively. Are these ideas illuminating in relation to satellite TV in the Arab world?

#### 1. Attract and direct public attention

The media in any society are used as tools for controlling public attention. For example, in Arab countries there is a big debate about human rights and democracy, besides other issues such as the Islamic role in Arab daily life. One of the main things satellite TV discusses deeply is the Palestinian uprising and their resistance against the Israeli occupation. The discussion addresses whether the suicide bombers are martyrs or killers, and that has been discussed on many Arab TV stations. Therefore the media by addressing such matters is attracting viewers and awing their attention towards important current issues, but without necessarily presenting a single viewpoint.

#### 2. Persuade in matters of opinion and belief

Does TV persuade us in matters of opinion and belief, or do we simply use it in order to reinforce our existing opinions? Most people in the US and many in the West generally

saw the events of 9/11 as a horrific act of aggression committed against an innocent country. Bin Laden was regarded as a villain, and his videos did nothing to make people change their minds. People in the Arab world could see clearly the connection between the actions of Israel against the Palestinians and the support for Israel in the US. They might deplore the horrific loss of life on 9/11, but at the same time understood what lay behind it.

Similarly, those people in the UK who opposed the war in Iraq expressed their disapproval *before* the war. The current growth of opposition in the US probably has more to do with sons being killed than media pictures of explosions in far-off places.

How much persuading and opinion-changing the media are able to achieve is still very much a debateable issue, and not as clear-cut as McQuail seems to imply. However, the importance of satellite TV in the Arab world lies not so much in the changing of opinions and beliefs as in providing a forum in which they can be expressed. That is what is creating an impetus towards greater democracy.

### 3. Structure definition of reality

What we are shown as 'the news' is always someone else's choice of what is important. This is what news values and agenda-setting are all about – someone else's sense of 'reality'. Whose reality is being presented on Arab satellite TV?

Herman and McChesney (21) discuss this question in general terms. They make the point that technology in itself is not an unqualified good, and that to achieve positive results it must be used with integrity and professionalism. They state that if media broadcasters "perform poorly, people will be ignorant, isolated and depoliticised, demagoguery will thrive and a small elite will easily capture and maintain control over decision making. Given this power of transforming the culture of societies, the dominant question is who owns the media, what interests are represented and what reality is presented?"



If that is applied to Arab satellite news channels, we find that each channel has a different agenda and financial backer. But although each channel needs to take account of the ownership viewpoint, it does not necessarily promote the owner's view, as is the case with Al Jazeera, where the channel covers sensitive issues, and this in turn causes problems between the Qatari government and some other Arab countries. This issue will be followed up later. Another side to the reality presented is that Arab satellite viewers have the courage to pick up the phone and criticize their own government, something that has never happened before in the Arab world because of the lack of satellite technology.

#### **4. Inform quickly and extensively**

McQuail's final point clearly relates to the ways news channels have broadcast events, especially in the last decade. Satellite technology enables the extensive transmission of live events as they happen. This is because the satellite system provides reporters in the field with uplinks.

Since the last Palestinian intifada, the 9/11 attack on USA, the war on Afghanistan and the war on Iraq, satellite news channels have increased the Arab viewers' interest in news, especially through the Arab news channels. The impact on the viewer, viewer interest in news and the interaction between the news and the viewer through the news channel will be discussed in more detail later.

Satellite technologies have changed the Arab media making them more dynamic and diverse, with an international programme standard. Al Jazeera, with its news coverage, ANN news channels, and some general entertainment TV, such as Abu Dhabi satellite channel and Al Arabya, have all made their current affairs and news bulletins into influential programmes among Arab viewers.

It has become clear to the author from watching satellite TV that during the beginning of the Palestinian intifada and the war in Iraq, some of the Arab satellite channels, such as Superstars and Lebanon-based Future TV, replaced their entertainment programmes with up-to-date news bulletins, and extended their news programmes from half an hour to

more than an hour. They would not do this unless they were aware of a real demand for information.

#### **4.6 An increasingly aware audience.**

There is no doubt that satellite television in the Arab world has increased levels of awareness about many issues concerning the Arab people, such as human rights and democracy, as well as the conflict between Israel and Arab countries which centres on the Palestinian issue. The sheer diversity of satellite TV has been important in creating this critical awareness in Arab public opinion. This is clear from the comments of viewers when they call the talk show programmes and give different views about the subject being discussed. Moreover, the technological developments, in terms of live news and the speed of information access through the internet, have given the Arab viewer opportunities for participation which have created a public sphere among Arab viewers. More details about this public sphere will be covered later, in Chapter 6.

As Anderson and Eickelman (ibid, p59) comment, the effect has been to undermine state monopoly control of information and opinion. "The convergence of media have caused a wider participation in communication through the global information revolution which is permeating the Arab World and bypassing efforts of nearly all governments of the region to control the print and broadcast media. The information revolution in the Arab World features more of everything: media, especially transnational media, information, and erosion of boundaries to communication carefully erected by state monopolies. It particularly erodes attempts to limit public discourse to the promotion of acceptable views."

Whereas Arab people used to talk about controversial issues in private or secret, now their behaviour has started to change. Viewers are prepared to call a talk show programme and express their opinions directly in front of the TV cameras. As a result information technology in the Arab world has created a new generation of viewers who are more educated and aware of what is going around them.

If we look at previous mass communication in the Arab world, we find it follows the model of one sender and multiple receivers, and that is because of the lack of technological availability as well as the undemocratic systems in the Arab world which have continued to keep the Arab viewer captive to what government TV offers. The technological advances have demolished technical difficulties in terms of broadcasting and receiving TV programmes from hundreds of channels, and this gives the Arab viewer choice, and the opportunity for interaction between the TV and the viewer. That is clear from the way talk show programme callers are prepared to debate and discuss on the air.

Moreover the ability of satellite signals to cross borders has united an unprecedented range of viewers, and therefore the impact will be across state borders. As a result we can say that the advance of satellite TV technology has created transnational viewers sharing the same interests. Satellite channels have started competing for the audience, and the media industry in the Arab world is witnessing a renaissance after years of stagnation. Various media projects are getting off the ground in different Arab countries, such as the media cities in Cairo and Dubai, and Syria's recently spawned significant soap opera industry, "which finds markets across the region in the extra broadcast capacity now available". Hani Yarid, 1999; (22).

The new technology has definitely enabled the audience to participate in a new way and created a forum for much freer public discussion of important issues. In that sense, the new media have enabled Arab public opinion to find its voice. But, as various commentators have pointed out, this is not the same as having democratic institutions through which to bring about real change. Free television debate may be a powerful expression of public opinion and a first step in building democratic structures, but it cannot create democracy without these structures.

## **4.7 The Palestinian Media**

### **4.7.1 Regulation**

In theory Palestinian media operate in a very free environment. The Palestinian Declaration of Independence (November 1988) declares that it will use: “a parliamentary democratic system of governance, based on the freedom of expression and the freedom of parties.” In 2002 the Palestinian Basic Law was eventually ratified, and Article 27 states that: “Freedom of audio and visual mass media, printing, distribution and transmission, including freedom of employees working in them are guaranteed according to this basic law and other related laws; ... censorship of the [media] is prohibited and no [media organisation] shall be subject to warning, suspension or termination or the imposition of restrictions, except in accordance with the law and judicial order.” (23)

Palestinian media (print and broadcast) also come under the Press Law of 1995, which provides a guarantee of freedom: “Press and printing are free. Furthermore the freedom of opinion shall be entitled to every Palestinian individual who retains the absolute right to express his opinion in a free manner either verbally, in writing, photography or awing as different means of expression and information.” These principles were reinforced in 1997, when President Yasser Arafat approved a Ministerial Decision that promised “the freedom of opinion and expression to all political and social groups.” (ibid 23)

But in spite of all these high-sounding guarantees of freedom, the reality on the ground is rather different. The wording of the Press Law (1995) is rather vague, using terms such as ‘national responsibility’, ‘national unity’ and ‘information that may humiliate religions or shake confidence in the national currency’. These sorts of expressions allow the security forces to take action against the media when they want.

#### **4.7.2 The Threat of Violence**

In the last two years (2006-2008) the legal restraints on press freedom in Palestine have been overshadowed by other pressures: the threat to journalists of violence or abduction. The national unity government of Fatah and Hamas collapsed in June 2007, when Hamas seized control of Gaza. Since then the West Bank and Gaza have been controlled by different political parties, and this has allowed various violent groups to take the law into their own hands, apparently accountable to no one. Journalists, cameramen, newspaper offices and TV studios have all come under violent attack when they have been critical of the actions of Fatah or Hamas and angered their supporters.

The result of this intimidation is that it is impossible to operate safely as a journalist in Gaza or the West Bank unless you are a supporter of the ruling party. Throughout the Occupied Territories abduction is a real threat for foreign journalists, as it enables militant groups to gain publicity for their demands. Among those abducted by various groups at different times have been Caroline Laurent, a reporter on *Elle*; Alfred Yaghobzadeh, a photographer from the agency SIPA; Yong Tae-young, a reporter for the South Korean broadcaster KBS; Steve Centanni, a reporter for Fox News; and Olaf Wiig, a New Zealander. Most well known is the case of Alan Johnston, the BBC journalist who was held for 114 days by a small militant group, and whose release was eventually secured by Hamas.

A further danger for journalists working in the Occupied Territories comes from the readiness of Israeli soldiers to attack journalists, even when they are clearly identifiable. Journalists have suffered attacks with tear gas and stun guns, and Israeli soldiers have raided the premises of radio and TV stations in the West Bank (24, 25). British television journalist James Miller died after being shot by Israeli troops in the town of Rafah in the Gaza strip. Miller was hit as he was filming a documentary on the army's destruction of hundreds of homes of militants in the Palestinian territories.

### 4.7.3 Print Media

During the years of occupation, the Palestinian print media gradually expanded, so that by 1987, 22 Palestinian newspapers had been licensed (some weekly and some daily), 22 magazines and 40 press services. (26) Some, however, suffered closure or restrictions by the Israelis.

The following chart shows the state of Palestinian print media before the nineties.

#### **Palestine Newspapers and News Media before the nineties**

<i>Name of the publications</i>	<i>Established year</i>	<i>Message and Its content</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Circulation</i>	<i>Its status</i>
<i>Al-Quds (Jerusalem)</i>	A daily newspaper , founded on November 19, 1968	General news with more moderate editorial content	Arabic	30,000 to 50,000	Still publishing
<i>Al-Fajr (The Dawn)</i>	A daily, founded on April 5, 1972	PLO supporter	Arabic	3,000 to 8,000	Closed 1993
<i>Al-Sha'ab (The People)</i>	Founded on July 23, 1972	Communist	Arabic	1,500 to 3,000	February 9, 1993
<i>Al-Talia (The Vanguard)</i>	A weekly, founded on February 27, 1978	Communist	Arabic	3,000 to 4,000	Closed
<i>Al-Nahar (The Day)</i>	A daily, founded on March 7, 1986	PLO with Jordanian influence	Arabic	13,000 copies daily in 1992 and about 2,500 in 1993	Closed
<i>Al-Bayader Assiyasi (Political Threshing Floor)</i>	A weekly magazine founded March 1, 1976	Publishes news and political commentary	Arabic	10,000 copies	closed May 28, 1993
<i>Al-Kateb (The Writer)</i>	A monthly magazine but became a quarterly in February 1993, founded on November 1, 1979	Communist	Arabic	500 copies	Still publishing
<i>Al-Ushbu' al-</i>	A weekly	Sympathetic to	Arabic	1,000 copies	Closed

<i>Jadid (The New Week)</i>	magazine, founded March 31, 1978.	Fateh party (PLO)		1993	
<i>Huda al-Islam (Guidance of Islam)</i>	A monthly magazine, was founded in October 1982	Religious	Arabic	It prints 10,000 copies	Still publishing
<i>Al-Liq'a' (The Meeting),</i>	a quarterly, was founded on May 1, 1985	Christian affairs	Arabic	Not known	Still publish

<i>Nida' al-Mara'a (Women's Call)</i>	A monthly magazine founded on May 1, 1991.	Women issues	Arabic	Not known	Still publishing
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<i>At-Fajr (The Dawn),</i>	founded on April 23, 1980	PLO supporter	English	Not known	Closed
<i>Al-Watan (The Homeland),</i>	founded on 1970	Communist	Arabic & English	Not known	Still publish
<i>Gesher (The Bridge),</i>	founded on June 15, 1986	Moderate	Hebrew	Not Known	Still publih
<i>Al-Anba' (The News)</i>	founded on October 24, 1968	Israeli-occupation sponsored	Arabic	Not Known	Closed January 31, 1985
<i>Al-Mira'a (The Mirror)</i>	October 1, 1982	Israeli-occupation sponsored	Arabic	Not known	December 1982
<i>Al-Huriyyah (Freedom)</i>	a monthly magazine founded in 1959	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).	Arabic	Not known	Still publishing
<i>Al-Hadaf. (The Target/Goal),</i>	a weekly magazine 1969	Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine	Arabic	Not known	Still publishing
Fateh (Palestine National Liberation Movement)	1969 as a weekly bulletin	PLO	Arabic	Not Known	Still publishing
<i>Filastin al-Thawra (The Palestinian Revolution)</i>	established in June 28, 1972	PLO	Arabic	Notknown	Closed

<i>Shu'un Filastiniya (Palestinian Affairs),</i>	a monthly, was founded in March 1971	PLO	Arabic	Not known	Still publishing
<i>Al-Karmil ([Mount] Karmil), a quarterly journal for cultural affairs</i>	a quarterly journal for cultural affairs, was founded in Beirut in the fall of 1981	PLO	Arabic	Notknown	Still publishing
<i>Al-Sinnarah (The Hook).</i>	founded in 1982	Self funded	Arabic	It is and has a circulation of 25,000.	Still publishing in Nazareth
<i>Kul al-Arab (All Arabs).</i>	founded in 1986	Self Funded	Arabic	It has a circulation of 25,000.	Still publishing in Nazareth
<i>Al-Bayareq (The Banners)</i>	founded in October 1992.	Self funded	Arabic	It has a circulation of 3,000.	Published in Baqa al-Gharbiyyeh
<i>Sawt al-Hagg Wal Huriyyah (The Voice of Truth and Freedom).</i>	founded in May 1990 as the mouthpiece of the Islamic movement	Self funded	Arabic	It has a circulation of 25,000.	Still published in the town of Umm al-Fahm
<i>Al-Jadid (The New) .</i>	founded in January 1951.	Self funded	Arabic	It has a circulation of 3,000.	Published in Haifa
<i>Al-Mujtama' (Society/Community).</i>	Founded in 1970	Self funded	Arabic	It has a circulation of 2,000	Published in Nazareth and.
<i>Al-Mawakeb (The Processions).</i>	Founded in 1983	Self funded	Arabic	It has a circulation of 3,000.	Published in Nazareth
<i>Kana'an (Canaanite)</i>	Founded in May 1991 in the village of Taybeh by the Center for the Revival of Arab Culture in Taybeh.	Self funded	Arabic	It has a circulation of 2,000	
<i>Al-Thaqafah (Culture)</i>	Founded in January 1993.	Self Funded	Arabic	Not known	This literary monthly is published in Haifa.



<i>Al-Sharq (The Orient).</i>	founded in 1970..	Receives funding from the Israeli Department of Arab Culture and from the Histaut (Labor Federation)	Arabic	It has a circulation of 2,000	It is published in Shafa Amr
<i>Al-Aswar (The Walls)</i>	founded in 1990.	Self funded	Arabic	It has a circulation of 2,000.	It is published in Acre
<i>Ida'at (Spotlights).</i>	founded in December 1992 by Palestinian poet Samih al-Qassem	Self funded	Arabic	It has a circulation of 2,000.	Published in al-Ramah

**Source: Kamalipour and Mowlana (27)**

This chart shows how fragmented and small-scale most of the publishing operations have been, with the exception of *Al-Quds* and *Sawt al-Hagg Wal Huriyyah*.

However, according to Kamalipour and Mowlana (27), the early nineties were a period of decline. "Hence, in 1993, the number of Arabic dailies declined from four to two, and the only Hebrew newspaper published by Palestinians was closed."

Probably the most successful Palestinian newspaper is *Al Quds* (Jerusalem). It was founded in November 1968 as a daily paper. It adopts a moderate tone, which has won for it a generally sympathetic approach from the Israelis over the years, but since the intifada started it has had to cope with as much censorship as other papers. Its circulation figures are based on claims by the owners, but it has lost circulation since peaking at about 50,000 in late 1987. (27)

#### **4.7.4 Radio and Television**

From 1967 and during the years of occupation, Palestinians were not allowed to run their own radio and television services. However, the PLO did manage to obtain slots to run its own radio programmes from neighbouring states, but often fell foul of the host states and was shut down. At different times in the 60s, the PLO broadcast from Egypt, Algeria, and Egypt again. From 1970-1976 the PLO broadcast from its own transmitter in Syria, but

when the station was destroyed by Syria, the PIO was able to broadcast from Egypt, and in 1977 moved to Beirut. In the 80s the PLO broadcast from Algiers, the Yemen and Iraq. The popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine ran Al-Quds Radio from Syria from 1988 to 1990, when it was destroyed by Israeli bombing. As for TV, Palestinians could receive Israeli TV, or channels from neighbouring states – Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt – which were government owned.

Then in 1993 the Oslo Agreement was signed between the PLO and Israel. From this came the setting up of the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), under which the Voice of Palestine and Palestine TV were set up. The result is that both radio and TV are very much government channels, under the PBC, which in turn is under the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), and so they are subject to government censorship. They do not present a range of political views or criticise the PNA.

At the same time, various factors were leading to the setting up of small private local television stations. There were media professionals who disliked the strictly hierarchical structure of Palestine TV; there were audiences who saw their particular local needs ignored; and there was the new Palestinian Ministry of Information, which was committed to democracy, competition and diversity, and eager for media professionals and investors to set up independent television stations.

The first independent TV station in Palestine was started in Nablus in 1994, run by a student who had built a home-made transmitter. Although he was at first operating illegally, the PLA did not take any action, and eventually the station became officially registered. Local TV stations began to spring up, and found an appreciative audience, who either could not receive Palestinian TV, or else found their own particular concerns ignored. Palestine TV was widely felt to be the voice of the government, whereas local stations could offer alternative views. A UNICEF report (1999) (28) found that nearly all Palestinian homes had a TV set and an aerial to receive private TV stations in their region. By 2000 there were 31 private TV stations in the West Bank and 1 in Gaza.

At a time when the Palestinian people are struggling to maintain a sense of identity and build for themselves a viable nation, the private television channels have played an important part. As Das (29) comments, the private TV coverage has helped create “a feeling of family among the community, providing continual opportunities for identification with the nation through invitations to be present at ‘national’ ceremonies and rituals, ensuring that an ever larger audience can be ever more intimately present.”

### **Problem areas**

#### **a) Resources**

Private TV stations in Palestine vary a great deal. Many of them operate on a shoestring. There is a shortage of educated staff (both in professional journalism skills and TV technology) and a shortage of capital to set up and equip professional studios.

### **Education level of managers and the number of employees**

	<b>Name of Station</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>No. of Employees</b>
1.	Wattan TV	Ramallah/ Al-Bireh	Higher Education	27-30
2.	Al-Quds Educational TV	Ramallah/ Al-Bireh	Higher Education	20
3.	An-Naser TV	Ramallah/ Al-Bireh	Not available	12
4.	A-Sharq TV	Ramallah/ Al-Bireh	Not available	15
5.	Amwaj TV	Ramallah/ Al-Bireh	High Education	27
6.	Al-Istiqlal TV	Ramallah/ Al-Bireh	Higher Education	20
7.	Gama TV	Nablus	Not available	4
8.	Nablus TV	Nablus	Higher Education	17

9.	Al- Jala' TV	Nablus	Not available	Not available
10.	Afaq TV	Nablus	Not available	Not available
11.	Sanabel TV	Nablus	Not available	7
12.	Atlas TV	Nablus	Not available	Not available
13.	Pace TV	Nablus	Not available	Not available
14.	Qasr a-Neel TV	Nablus	Not available	3
15.	Asia TV	Nablus	Not available	Not available
16.	Shepherds TV	Bethlehem	Higher Education	25
17.	Mahd TV	Bethlehem	Not available	26
18.	Bethlehem TV	Bethlehem	Higher Education	25
19.	Al-Amal TV	Hebron	High School	25
20.	Majd TV	Hebron	Higher Education	27
21.	Al-Mustaqbal TV	Hebron	Higher Education	8
22.	Hebron TV	Hebron	Not available	Not available
23.	Qalqilia TV	Qalqilia	Not available	Not available
24.	Baladna TV	Qalqilia	Not available	Not available
25.	A-Salam TV	Tulkarem	Not available	Not available
26.	New Dawn TV	Tulkarem	Not available	Not available
27.	Al-Bilad TV	Tulkarem	Not available	Not available
28.	Central TV	Tulkarem	Not available	Not available
39.	Central TV	Jenin	Not available	Not available
30.	Farah TV	Jenin	Higher Education	23
31.	An-Nour TV	Jericho	Not available	5

\* Number of employees may be inaccurate for taxation reason. It also includes volunteers.

Source: Walid Batrawi (30)

## Equipment used in private TV stations

	Name Station	of Location	Recording	Transmission
1.	Wattan TV	Ramallah/ Al-Bireh	SVHS	SVHS
2.	Al-Quds Educational TV	Ramallah/ Al-Bireh	Digital, Beta and SVHS	SVHS
3.	An-Naser TV	Ramallah/ Al-Bireh	SVHS and VHS	VHS
4.	A-Sharq TV	Ramallah/ Al-Bireh	VHS	VHS
5.	Amwaj TV	Ramallah/ Al-Bireh	SVHS	SVHS
6.	Al-Istiqal TV	Ramallah/ Al-Bireh	SVHS and Digital	SVHS
7.	Gama TV	Nablus	SVHS	SVHS
8.	Nablus TV	Nablus	SVHS	SVHS
9.	Al- Jala' TV	Nablus	VHS	VHS
10.	Afaq TV	Nablus	SVHS	VHS
11.	Sanabel TV	Nablus	VHS	VHS
12.	Atlas TV	Nablus	SVHS	SVHS
13.	Pace TV	Nablus	VHS	VHS
14.	Qasr a-Neel TV	Nablus	VHS	VHS
15.	Asia TV	Nablus	SVHS	SVHS
16.	Shepherds TV	Bethlehem	SVHS	SVHS
17.	Mahd TV	Bethlehem	SVHS	SVHS
18.	Bethlehem TV	Bethlehem	SVHS	VHS
19.	Al-Amal TV	Hebron	SVHS	SVHS
20.	Majd TV	Hebron	SVHS and Beta	SVHS
21.	Al-Mustaqbal TV	Hebron	SVHS	SVHS
22.	Hebron TV	Hebron	VHS	VHS

23.	Qalqilia TV	Qalqilia	SVHS	VHS	
24.	Baladna TV	Qalqilia	SVHS	SVHS	
25.	A-Salam TV	Tulkarem	SVHS	VHS	
26.	New Dawn TV	Tulkarem	SVHS	SVHS and VHS	
27.	Al-Bilad TV	Tulkarem	SVHS	VHS	
28.	Central TV	Tulkarem	SVHS	SVHS and VHS	
39.	Central TV	Jenin	SVHS	SVHS	
30.	Farah TV	Jenin	SVHS	SVHS	
31.	An-Nour TV	Jericho	VHS	VHS	

**Source: Walid Batrawi (30)**

The result is a good deal of variation in programming quality. Some stations produce their own programmes, including news broadcasts. Others mainly re-transmit programmes pirated from other stations (mainly satellite). Some stations have a commitment to education and the development of civil society; others concentrate on entertainment.

The private TV stations depend on advertising revenue to survive, apart from Al Quds Educational TV, which is non-profit making, and financed partly by donations from within Palestine, and partly by international bodies such as UNICEF.

#### **b) Frequencies**

It is a highly competitive environment, in which some stations even resort to jamming their rivals. Partly this is a consequence of lack of clear agreements about frequencies, so that stations are using frequencies already in use.

#### **c) Regulation**

The Minister of Information, through the Technical Coordination Committee, was to set up the rules for licensing TV stations, and these were initially awn up in 2000. These

covered principally ownership and financing, staffing, facilities, programming, frequencies and advertising. However, the volatility of the political situation in Palestine has meant that the Ministry of Information has not penalised stations which have not satisfied the regulations.

The PNA has an ambivalent attitude to private television stations. It recognises that if Israel should attack or close down Palestinian TV, the private stations will remain an important channel of communication for the Palestinian community. This has in fact happened. In October 2000 Israeli missiles destroyed the Palestinian TV transmission dishes, and in January 2002 the PBC building was attacked, and Palestine TV programmes were transmitted by the private TV channels. On the other hand, there have been times when the PNA has been prepared to close down some private stations, arresting staff or owners if they have been critical of the Authority.

In agreements with Israel, the PNA has committed itself to root out incitement to violence, but according to Amnesty International, the prohibition “goes far beyond prohibiting all forms of incitement to violence and terror, and punishes a broad range of of speech including forms of expression protected under international human rights law.”  
(31)

As a consequence, private television stations have suffered harassment and closure by the security forces. The effect has been that these private stations tend to operate their own self-censorship.

## PNA actions against private TV stations (1997-2000)

Date	Station / Name of person	Action	Alleged Reasons
20.5.1997	Al-Quds Educational TV- Ramallah	Jammed	Security
	Daoud Kuttab	Arrested for 8 days	
25.9.1997	Afaq TV- Nablus	Closed	Security
	Issa Abu Al-Iz	Arrested	
16.2.1998	Shepherds (Al-Roa') Bethlehem	- Closed	Security
21.2.1998	Seven journalists working at Shepherds (Al-Roa') Bethlehem	Arrested -	Security and in relation to crisis in Iraq
Feb. 1998	Al-Mahd TV – Bethlehem	Closed	Security and in relation to crisis in Iraq
Feb. 1998	Bethlehem TV – Bethlehem	Closed	Security and in relation to crisis in Iraq
Feb. 1998	Wattan TV – Ramallah	Closed	Security and in relation to crisis in Iraq
Feb. 1998	An-Naser TV- Ramallah	Closed	Security and in relation to crisis in Iraq
18.2.1998	All private TV and Radio stations	Signed a pledge to refrain from broadcasting material related to Iraq	Security and in relation to crisis in Iraq
26.4.1999	Amal TV –Hebron	Closed	Religious
17.5.1999	Shepherds (Al-Roa') Bethlehem	- Closed	Religious
15.9.1999	Al-Quds Educational TV and An-Naser TV - Ramallah	Censored  Arrested for 19	Denouncing Palestinian President and



	Maher Al-Dasouki	days	dangerous security reasons
21.5.2000	Wattan TV – Ramallah	Closed	For protesting against the closure of An-Naser TV
27.5.2000	Maher Al-Dassouki Ayman Bardaweel Walid Batrawi	Held at Police station	Criticizing the closure of TV stations
30.5.2000	An-Naser TV – Ramallah	Closed	Security
1.6.2000	Al-Mahd TV – Bethlehem	Closed	For protesting against the closure of An-Naser TV
	Sameer Qumsieh	Arrested for 3 days	His letter to Palestinian President requesting the opening of An-Naser TV

Source: (32)

On the other hand, as Mowlana (33) points out, the PNA, unlike many other Arab governments, *is* prepared to allow private television to operate and even to show opinions differing from those of the PNA.

#### 4.7.5 Film

Palestinian film-making, and later video production, has largely concentrated on documentaries. Fatah was the first group to set up a film unit, and its first film (1968) was about the aftermath of the battle of al-Karamah. It went on to produce a series of films presenting a Palestinian view of current affairs. They were made in 16mm, and therefore could be shown easily to audiences in refugee camps and commando bases. Other Palestinian political groups have followed Fatah's lead. (34)

During the 1980s some eighteen or more Palestinian films were made, and in 1990 Jerusalem Television Production was set up on the West Bank to make films mainly on educational and development topics. For example, the company worked with the BBC to make a video about the religious movement, and with the Council of Middle East Churches to make a programme called 'Health and the Occupation'.

Most Palestinian films have been made for the domestic market, but some have appeared at international festivals.

Curfews have destroyed the cinema audiences, but have stimulated the growth of the video rental market.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

Some commentators have been very critical of Palestinian media, seeing them as a destructive force, primarily engaged in inciting anti-Israeli hatred. "The raw material for the PA's anti-Israeli propaganda comes from daily life in the PA-administered territories. However, the Palestinian media present a one-sided, extremist view of the situation. Israel is represented as ceaselessly endeavouring to make the Palestinian populace miserable and is "killing" the peace process while the terrorist attacks to which the IDF responds are almost never condemned and no connection is ever made between them and Israel's counter-terrorist activities in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria." (35) This commentator adopts a very anti-Palestinian stance. He does distinguish, however, between the output of Hamas-controlled media and that of the PA and Fatah, but even the latter are seen as adopting anti-Israel incitement at times. But he does tend to lump together all 'Palestinian media'. In fact the media run by the PA is generally free from anti-Israel rhetoric, and would never ask for the destruction of Israel, but argues for the application of the 1967 borders as well as the relevant UN and Security Council resolutions.

A more balanced view would be to see the Palestinian media as having made a valuable contribution to the life of their community, even if they have definite weaknesses. For example, because Palestinian media in general see themselves as defending the Palestinian cause against Israel, they have not adopted an investigatory stance towards their own institutions, or to issues such as the use of development aid.

Moreover, by the early nineties much of the Palestinian press was struggling. Small scale, poorly financed, and censored, it could not hope to withstand the impact of television. Palestine TV is very much a state controlled channel. On the other hand the private TV channels in many cases do not have adequate funding to provide a really professional service, both in terms of equipment and journalistic professionalism, and they have been harassed in ways that have made them adopt a degree of self-censorship.

In contrast, Al Jazeera has the freedom and the resources to provide a television service without these weaknesses, although the increasing dangers for the media of working within the Occupied Territories apply as much to Al Jazeera's journalists and bureaux as to the Palestinian channels. But given the overall background, it is not surprising that it has had such an impact.

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## **Chapter 5: Al Jazeera satellite channel**

This chapter examines the origins and growth of Al Jazeera, together with its approach to TV journalism and its impact on other channels. It looks at the particular content of the programmes which have made it famous, the criticisms levelled against it, and its contribution to the development of democracy in the Arab states.

### **5.1 Basic Facts**

Al Jazeera was founded in 1996 with a start-up grant of \$150 million from Qatar's Emir, Sheik Hamad Bin Khalifa Thani, from the remnants of a failed BBC Arabic television service. The name means "the Peninsular", a reference to Qatar's geography. It began as a single 24 hour Arabic news channel, with its headquarters in Doha, Qatar. It soon managed to set up bureaux in many countries, at one stage 38, although these are frequently at risk of closure if the channel offends the country concerned.

The organisation's mission statement openly states a commitment to freedom of speech, a plurality of viewpoints, democracy and human rights.

The organisation has continued to expand. In 2003-2004 it launched five sports channels. In 2005 it launched a live politics and events channel and a children's channel. In 2006 it started Al Jazeera English, a world-wide English language 24 hour news channel. In 2007 it launched a documentary channel in Arabic. The original news channel and the English news channel are available worldwide on various satellites, and also via the internet.

In 2007 the main Arabic Al Jazeera news channel claimed a worldwide audience of between 40 and 50 million viewers, while Al Jazeera English was reckoned to reach about 100 million homes.

The company was intending to become self-sufficient by 2001, but failed to do so. The Emir continues to support the company on a year by year basis – said to be about \$30m in 2004. It does gain income from cable subscriptions, advertising and making deals with other TV companies, and this accounted for about 40% of the budget in 2000. (1)

## **5.2 The emergence of Al Jazeera**

The Qatar-based and financed channel began broadcasting in 1996 from Doha, the capital of Qatar. Many Al Jazeera journalists and executives used to work for the BBC Arabic Service. This had been contracted to the Saudi Mawarid-owned Orbit Communications, to provide Arabic newscasts for Orbit's main Middle Eastern channel.

Problems started when transmissions were interrupted several times to stop commentary from a prominent U.K.-exiled Saudi dissident, Dr. Muhammad al-Masari. Orbit justified the interruptions by claiming they were due to technical difficulties. The BBC's traditional insistence on editorial independence caused a clash with the Saudi government (and therefore Orbit) over the reporting of controversial matters. In April 1996, the BBC's current affairs flagship, *Panorama*, showed the programme, "Death of a Principle", in the United Kingdom, covering human rights in Saudi Arabia. The programme included footage of the beheading of a criminal according to Shari'a (Islamic) law. As a result Orbit terminated the contract with the BBC.

According to Michael Moran (2) in his article *In Defence of Al Jazeera*: " One day in April 1996, as I headed for my desk in the newsroom at BBC Television Centre, I noticed an odd gathering of journalists in the space beside ours - the newsroom of BBC Arabic Television. There were tear-streaked faces, hugs among staff members and anger as the 250 journalist were told that the network, a BBC partnership with a Saudi company, would be shut down because the Saudis tried to censor a documentary on an execution in their puritanical country. It was a devastating defeat for a brave group of journalists."

The new Emir of Qatar, Sheik Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, through the government of Qatar, hired many of the BBC-trained editors, reporters and technicians to launch a new

satellite TV channel called Al Jazeera (The Island or Peninsula). There were already many types of general television in the Arab world, with some specialized sports and entertainment programmes, but at the time, a dedicated news channel did not exist. Al Jazeera filled that gap, as a channel specializing in news, built on a good deal of freedom available to its journalists (for which the channel is indebted to the Emir), and serving many Arab viewers around the world. The re-employed BBC Arabic TV news staff came from most Arab countries: Qatar, Palestine, Sudan, Morocco, Algeria, Iraq and Syria. They covered a range of different jobs, such as producers, talk show hosts, translators, fixers, librarians, secretaries, and executives, and all spoke together in Arabic. They were a very able and experienced team who rapidly developed a common sense of purpose.

Al Jazeera began operations in 1996 with a small budget. The Qatari government initially contributed \$140 million to finance operations for the first five years, after which the company would supposedly sustain itself through advertising revenue, but there seems little hope of that at present. Nevertheless, it is considered a private company, not a government station. Al Jazeera broadcasts twenty-four hours around the clock, with its news coverage complemented by programmes on finance, culture, religion and sport. The station is received throughout the Arab world and in Europe, and is free of charge, but Arab Americans need to subscribe in order to receive it.

The Desert Fox campaign – the Anglo-American bombing of Baghdad in December 1998 - was the first world event that allowed Al Jazeera with its office in Baghdad to stand alongside international organizations such as ABC, BBC and CNN. Al Jazeera gained an international importance and became a global broadcaster with its coverage of the war in Afghanistan, the 2003 war in Iraq, (especially when it broadcast exclusive news such as the Bin Laden video tapes and images of the conflict), and its coverage of the current Palestinian intifada. Al Jazeera news channel manages to be present where events are taking place, and it distinguishes itself from other Arab satellite channels by transmitting exclusive breaking news stories followed by in-depth analysis of the events.



The result of its commitment to broadcast 'the news as it is' has been on the one hand enormous popularity with ordinary viewers, and on the other, anger and criticism from the governments of virtually every Middle Eastern state as well as from the US. Al Jazeera has had its bureaux closed by countries feeling offended, while the Emir of Qatar has also felt pressure to rein in the station which operates under his patronage. At one point Colin Powell visited the studios to try to gain Al Jazeera support for the American cause in the Arab world.

Since September 2000, Al Jazeera has intensively covered the second Palestinian intifada against the Israeli occupation, and the 2001/2002 war in Afghanistan. Al Jazeera has repeatedly broadcast its 1998 interview with Osama Bin Laden, hosted commentators critical of U.S. policy, and since September 19th 2001 it has been the only station with correspondents reporting from the area of Afghanistan controlled by the Taliban. The war in 2003 on Iraq has made Al Jazeera a credible and independent news source.

In January 2001 the channel launched its website. As well as offering further analysis of issues, the site also provides interactive facilities for opinion polling and discussion forums. It also provides transcripts of the channel's main programmes. In October 2004 the website was recognised by Politics Online as being among the ten websites that are having most influence on political change.

Meanwhile, in 2002 the Pan Arab Research Centre in Dubai published research claiming that more than 35 million viewers in the Arab world watch Al Jazeera every day. (3)

In November 2005, Al Jazeera was singled out for praise by Index on Censorship for its 'courage in circumventing censorship and contributing to the free exchange of information in the Arab world.' (3)

In November 2006 the channel launched its English Language service, with a team of internationally respected journalists and presenters.

Today, as the Literature Review shows, Al Jazeera is generally regarded as one of the most reliable and credible media outlets in the Arab world because of its journalistic independence and freedom, and ability to secure exclusives (such as the Bin Laden tapes). Moreover, Al Jazeera's global reach of between 40 and 50 million viewers has given it arguably the highest global viewership ratings of any Arab channel, on a par with the BBC. (1)

Al Jazeera is also well-regarded by other trans-national media. This is shown by the way in which many television stations around the world show Al Jazeera material during their programmes (with translation or subtitling) when it covers a breaking news story. Zayani and Sahraoui, in *The Culture of Al Jazeera* p31-32 (4), explain how "the BBC signed a news gathering exchange agreement with Al Jazeera and CNN courted Aljazeera into an agreement to use its exclusive material" during the Afghanistan war.

Al Jazeera has used the availability of highly trained journalists and staff to form the first satellite news broadcasting service from an undemocratic country, Qatar. No one expected to hear any challenge to the political status quo from such tiny Arab state. Al Jazeera enjoys tremendous popularity throughout the region for its hard-hitting talk shows and news reporting from an Arab perspective. The diversity of opinions aired on Al Jazeera stands in sharp contrast to the state-controlled and censored media that exist in many parts of the region.

On the other hand, the downside is that Al Jazeera faces a serious economic challenge in obtaining enough advertising revenue to survive.

### **5.3 The Al Jazeera Agenda**

Some people are convinced that the channel provides high quality independent journalism; others see it as encouraging violence and extremism. What exactly does the channel stand for? It has become clear to the author from regularly watching Al Jazeera

TV from 1997 until the present that the Al Jazeera editorial agenda is based on balanced coverage of news stories, and talk shows that give two sides of a story.

Zayani and Sahraoui, (ibid, pp57-59), write at length about the channel's sense of purpose. "When it comes to their role and mission, many Arab broadcasters have been grappling with an identity crisis. Although these broadcasters have a mission, it is for the most part rhetorical. Not so with Al Jazeera, which comes off as uncommonly conscious of its mission."

"Since the coming to the scene of Khanfar as Al Jazeera's managing director, the network has been, more than ever before, conscious of and articulate about its vision and mission, which one finds posted on bulletin boards inside the network as well as on its website: *Al Jazeera is an Arab media service that has a global orientation. With its motto the view and the other view, it acts as a forum for plurality, seeking the truth while observing the principles of professionalism within an institutional framework. While endeavouring to promote public awareness of issues of local and global concern, Al Jazeera aspires to be a bridge between peoples and cultures to support the right of the individual to acquire information and strengthen the values of tolerance, democracy and respect of liberties and human rights.*"

Osama El-Sherif (5) summarises Al Jazeera's mission as follows: "Al Jazeera has broken all the traditional taboos that have kept Arab media on a short leash by openly tackling sensitive political, social, religious and economic issues. Its philosophy rests on a concept that is novel in the Arab world: free speech and allowing people to express their points of view." In the Arab world, where many members of the elite have been targeted and killed or deported from their homeland because of their political beliefs, the talk show strategy is to make all voices heard despite the wishes of governments that would like to silence dissident voices in order to stay in power.

The station is committed to the growth of democracy in the region, and sees itself as having an educational function, laying the foundations for democratic participation. Al

Jazeera regularly broadcasts talk shows about democracy and political reform in the Arab countries. The sorts of issues dealt with have included topics such as: the misuse of states of emergency in the Arab world; reform and referenda in the Arab world; human rights in the Arab world; democracy in the Arab world; democracy and the Arab reality; Palestinian or Arab?; Israeli participation in the Israel elections; Arab democracy between two generations; the relationship between rulers and the ruled in Islam; and so on.

Wadah Khanfar (6) describes the 'Al Jazeera spirit' under four headings. Firstly there is a commitment to journalistic integrity (including informing, educating, setting events in context and distinguishing between reporting and comment). Secondly there is 'the pursuit of man's humanity', which he explains as the challenging of all forms of power that tend to dehumanise people, and the need to be a 'voice of the voiceless'. Thirdly there is a respect for the collective mind of the audience, by which he means a respect for Arab tradition without going to either extreme of cheap populism or elitism. Fourthly there is commitment to diversity, a refusal to be linked to a single cultural or religious identity.

Political participation in decision-making and the democratization of Arab countries is central to the agenda of Al Jazeera, and this frequently leads to criticism of Arab regimes. This in turn arouses the attention of governments and the general public. The public involvement in elections in Arab countries has been considered a very positive sign, and the talk shows have encouraged the public in participating and going to vote. The research shows that the more actively the viewers participate in the talk shows, the more the viewers gain in knowledge of politics, and therefore the more the public get engaged in the political process.

One irony of the situation is that as Al Jazeera increasingly focuses on political reform, its editors acknowledge sharing, unintentionally, an agenda with the Bush administration. Ahmed Al-Shaikh (7), Editor-in-Chief of Al Jazeera has commented, "We are unlikely allies, but if both of us are targeting reform in the Arab world, then it's true."

Al-Sheikh was trained at the BBC, and his account of the channel's ethos is: "Be accurate, factual, be there first – that's not necessarily most important – and be with the human being all the time – you don't stay at the top getting the views of politicians and diplomats." (cited by Amani Soliman and Peter Feuilherade (8).)

The agenda includes not just democratic freedoms but also the questioning of traditional views on social issues. Faisal Al Kasim (9), the presenter of 'The Opposite Direction', has commented: "So when the program came along we started tackling the most sensitive Arab issues be they political, religious, cultural, social and so on and so forth. So I think we have launched into the most sacred cows in the Arab world, but we still have quite a lot to do actually. We can say that Al Jazeera and its programs have been responsible for democracy being the talk of the town now in the Arab world, for human rights being the talk of the town in the Arab world."

Another strand of the channel's agenda is to become the channel of choice for Arab viewers, especially the educated elite. In this way Al Jazeera sees itself as competing head-to-head with Western channels - the BBC, Fox News, and CNN - as well as with other Middle Eastern news services.

Al Jazeera also wants to be channel of choice for politicians. It has managed to attract not just Arab audiences but also Arab leaders. A good example is when the Libyan leader, Muammar Qaddafi, once called in to offer his views on whether Arab nationalism was dead (10). Al Jazeera has scored numerous exclusives. It was chosen by Osama Bin Laden to broadcast his video tape. Al Jazeera prides itself on reporting on the Middle East from an Arab perspective, while drawing on the professional experience of staff who have worked in the western media.

As Joel Campagna (11) points out: "The station is a reliable, professional, and informative news channel that reflects the perspective of its audience but also tries to present all sides of the story. In a region where the U.S. media are viewed as

fundamentally partisan and biased in their own right, the Bush administration's efforts to stifle the channel appear as a hypocritical attempt to smother unwelcome news coverage".

## **5.4 What has been Al Jazeera's impact on Arab media?**

### **5.4.1 Journalism**

Lawrence Pintak (12) has explained how a survey he carried out in 2006 showed that journalists in broadcasting and print 'felt that satellite television had had a "very significant" impact on journalism in the Arab world', creating a feeling of optimism that it was becoming possible to work more freely and independently. He refers to the way in which Egypt's state-controlled television service has started employing independent journalists from outside the company to 'shake things up'.

He believes that 'Arab journalists are defining their own set of standards and practices, not recreating themselves in the image of what has proven to be a deeply flawed Western, and particularly American, media model'. He believes it is an exciting time for Arab journalists, who are redefining their role and developing a fresh sense of professionalism.

### **5.4.2 Television**

Before Al Jazeera, established Arab media never tried to present themselves as an alternative to other Western media, as most of the Arab viewers and listeners trusted radio stations such as BBC Arab Radio services and CNN News channel. When Al Jazeera emerged, it presented itself to Arab audiences as an alternative to Western news media. Al Jazeera has successfully used its staff, especially the ones who come from Western television such as Mr Al Ali (13). The Al Jazeera managing director has talked about the effect of CNN and the BBC in relation to Al Jazeera. He said: "Of course we came with our own ideas and our own perspective. But with regard to these two channels, the background came from the BBC more than CNN. We are closer to the ideas and the rhythm of the reports of the BBC. Al Jazeera, from the idea up to the launch, was built on a staff coming from Arab countries. Maybe they have had experience working with

Western media - they are ex-BBC and ex-US media but all are Arabs. So they take the professional experience from the BBC, but their background as Arabs means we can adopt this experience and apply it to the Arab world. We know the mentality of the Arabs, but we also want the expatriate Arab audience who are used to Western media".

This mix of Western skills and Arab personnel has almost certainly been central to the success of Al Jazeera. The channel conveys a sense of being a truly Arab medium, yet at the same time it has a modern Western style. It has genuine Arab roots as well as coming across as modern, serious and professional – and bearing comparison with the BBC or CNN. An Arab audience can now see news at any time from Middle Eastern, European and American capitals gathered by a large staff of Arab reporters, not translated from a Western news service. Al Jazeera has also managed successfully to provide its audience with live, uncensored and unedited talk show programmes.

There is no doubt that the network has helped to create a far more aggressive and competitive environment in the world of state owned Arab television news, challenging competitors with more live interviews and more correspondents abroad. For decades, Arab TV has been notable for drowsy coverage of unremarkable state visits and presidential activities, and for harsh invective against Israel. In the past few years this has been giving way to lively talk shows and a new sense of competition. Egyptian television, for example, now has a correspondent in Jerusalem, encouraged, perhaps, by Al Jazeera's presence there, and debates many aspects of domestic politics on the air.

Lawrence Pintak (ibid) quotes Muhammed Ayish, chair of the College of Mass Communication at the University of Sharjah, who believes that before Al Jazeera started operating 'The concept of television journalism, as a set of distinctive professional values and practices, was virtually non-existent in Arab world television.'

Some Arab tv companies have even sent staff to Al Jazeera for training. This was the case with the Lebanon-based al Minar TV. Jamal Khashoggi, a prominent Saudi Arabian journalist, (cited by Sharon Waxman (14)), comments: "Al Jazeera is as important to the

Arab media as the introduction of the Egyptian daily *Alhram* was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has changed the way television is being run in the Arab world. Live shows, political debate, contrasting opinions, those all are new in the milieu. Nobody would admit it, but they are doing it because Al Jazeera started doing it."

Al Jazeera's editorial practice has had a positive effect on government-run satellite and terrestrial television stations, who have felt compelled to adopt greater freedom of expression. "'Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa believes in the freedom of expression, the freedom of the press and its independence in the light of global information and new technologies,' says Al Ali. 'Information is no longer a monopoly, especially in the light of satellite and internet communication.'" (cited by Daniel Anderson-Ford (15))

Several commentators have argued that the impact of Al Jazeera on the region's media and news broadcasters has been considerable, with the channel becoming something of a bastion of free press and, more importantly, convincing ruling parties of its benefit. "Al Jazeera has influenced the way all Arabic stations operate, without exceptions, and it has given the television medium ... impact on various levels of the Arabic elite. All the media now imitate Al Jazeera, and space for freedom is increasing day-by-day despite high level opposition." (ibid)

Osama El-Sherif (ibid) comments that: "The concept of talk shows slowly found a place on the programme roster of many of these stations. Many Arab broadcasters have even dared to allow on-air discussion inviting viewers to call in and voice their opinions. Such progress can be traced to Al Jazeera's influence and can be counted among its prime contributions."

Because of its extensive network of correspondents, Al Jazeera's news material is in demand from other stations. Nihal Saad (cited by Sharon Waxman (16)), the anchor for the English language broadcast on Egypt's Nile TV, said: "Egyptian television doesn't have that network of correspondents around the world. If the report is on corruption



people start getting interested in it as a news story, so I will want to sell that news story as well. If this is something wanted in the market, why not sell it?"

In spite of attempts to imitate Al Jazeera, it seems there is no strong Arab satellite television channel which can really compete. Al Ali comments: "Without vanity, and purely from a viewpoint of professionalism, there is no competitor to Al Jazeera in the world, and definitely not in the Arab world. The reason is simple: there is no other Arabic channel dedicated to round-the-clock news as part of its general programming. We are specialised in news for an Arabic audience, and it is difficult to compete with us in this area. Our main competition is with Western stations such as CNN and the BBC."

#### **5.4.3 Print media**

Lawrence Pintak (ibid) believes the change in Arab television 'has also inspired print journalists'. He quotes an Egyptian reporter, Hassan Amer, who has founded a new independent newspaper called al-Fajr (The Dawn). Amer says: 'We can't say the government changed the media, we changed the media. We face pressures but enjoy a lot of freedom now. Even in the national newspapers, there is a lot of change taking place.'

#### **5.4.4 Restrictions remain**

However, in spite of the good news, the work of journalists in the Arab world is still far from easy. A good deal of legislation remains in place to harass and threaten journalists, and there is the ever-present threat of violence from war situations and violent groups.

It would be wrong to think that Al Jazeera had ushered in a new era of total freedom for the press. (See the following chapter for details of legislation in different states.)

### **5.5 What is the content of the programmes which have made it famous?**

Al Jazeera is the only twenty-four-hour Arab news station. Its programming is a mix of the styles of CNN and C-SPAN, with breaking news, investigative reports, debate and call-in shows, hour-long discussions of new books, and commentary from officials and analysts around the world, including the United States, Russia, Israel and France. It

appeals to a wide range of interests and tastes. For example, the author recently caught part of a talk show called "For Women Only," with four women discussing gender equality and discrimination. A caller to the show — who happened to be a man — complained that men are the ones who have been wronged amid all the talk of women's liberation.

Osama El-Sherif (ibid) makes the point that: "The station has become well known chiefly for its political talk shows, where government officials go head-to-head against opposition figures. In most cases these talk shows turn into talk circuses with both sides exchanging insults and accusations. Naturally viewers relish the thrill of seeing both sides engaged in all sorts of verbal bashing, but that is not all that Al Jazeera offers." Programmes such as "The Opposite Direction" and "The Opinion and the Other Opinion" have won a big reputation among Arab viewers around the world by covering all kind of sensitive stories, especially on taboo subjects such as religion, sex and politics, in a region dominated by tight government control of the media.

Perhaps the most popular programme is "The Opposite Direction", hosted by Faisal Al Kasim, a British-educated Syrian who has a talent for drawing out guests with opposing views and goading them to argue fiercely on air. He has pitted an Egyptian supporting normalisation of relations with Israel against another Egyptian who quoted anti-Semitic writings. A woman opposed to the abolition of polygamy walked off the set, incensed by her counterpart's insistence that it was an anachronistic practice. (Cited by Rick Zednik (17)).

Allowing guests to speak freely was radical enough, but then Al Kasim introduced viewer call-ins. Al Jazeera's microphone was not just open, but wide open. Some of his shows have become such shouting matches that some viewers are convinced Al Kasim filters out the moderate voices in favour of extreme ones. Another popular program is "Islamic Law and Life", in which the host, Yusef Al Qardhawi, a Professor of Islam at the University of Qatar, has discussed sensitive topics, such as female circumcision and rules that forbid women to work. (Cited by Rick Zednik, ibid.)

Al Kasim (18) gives a picture of *The Opposite Direction* in action by describing some stormy debate on a sensitive issue: '*The Opposite Direction* is modelled on the *Crossfire* format, but this show is even fiercer and more tumultuous than its western counterparts. In a live, two-hour weekly broadcast, two guests from opposite sides of the spectrum on a variety of political, social, economic, cultural, or religious issues come face-to-face in debate and take calls from viewers. Emotions run high, such as during a recent discussion with two prominent Arab women on polygamy. Egyptian writer Safinaz Kazem, a former-Marxist-turned-Islamist with an acid tongue, stormed off the set after her counterpart, former Jordanian member of parliament, Tojan Faisal, rejected polygamy as an anachronistic practice. Faisal's view is iconoclastic: it contradicts the Koran, and for that reason it could have cost her her life. This show was the talk of the Arab world for months and infuriated the religious establishment. It was also the first time on Arab television that anyone has ever walked off the set in the midst of an on-air broadcast.'

An article in *The Hindu*, (19) about Al Kasim said that 'many people in his native Syria now collect recordings of two things — sex movies and *The Opposite Direction*, his controversial discussion programme aired through the Arab satellite channel, Al Jazeera.'

Al Kasim (ibid) tries to analyse the nature of the political influence of *The Opposite Direction*: 'It is said that Al Jazeera is exerting political pressure on the decision makers of the Arab world. This is true, but only indirectly. Kuwait accused the channel of being behind the demonstrations throughout the Arab world late last year against the American and British bombardment of Iraq. Analysts said that the mere fact that we reported on the situation, with free and provocative reports on the issue, forced Arab governments - which hate demonstrations when they themselves are the target - to allow thousands to take to the streets and voice their opposition to the military operation. So for the first time in modern history, the Arab media played an influential role in politics, instead of being a lackey to it.'

Al Kasim seems to have a bad reputation among Arab governments, and he is banned from visiting certain Arab countries, such as Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. In addition, hundreds of press articles written about the programme criticise the presenter and talk about the role of his programmes in inflaming Arab public opinion. In contrast, the *Bel Arabe* presenter was chosen by *The Washington Post* as the best presenter of a talk show on Arab satellite tv. Moreover, she is welcome in any Arab country.

In these ways, Al Jazeera has attracted attention in the Arab world because it has been prepared to explore issues and offer a platform for opinions that are deeply felt by ordinary people, but up till now have remained largely unexpressed. Moreover, all this has happened with a speed quite different from the gradual development of TV programming in the West. This is what makes the appearance of Al Jazeera uniquely interesting in the history of modern media.

Moreover, the channel soon found itself a player on the international stage. The U.S. became aware of Al Jazeera in the days following the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, and reacted with deep suspicion to the station. The Taliban quickly forced all foreign journalists to leave Kabul, allowing only Al Jazeera, which had a history of covering Afghanistan, to stay. When the U.S. launched strikes on Afghanistan on October 7th, the world wanted what only Al Jazeera had: war video, including live footage of bombs falling on Kabul. Soon the network aired something even more jolting. In a tape that Al Jazeera staffers say was probably recorded about two weeks after September 11th and delivered via many Taliban hands to their Kabul bureau once U.S. air strikes began, Osama bin Laden denounced the U.S. (Rick Zednik, *ibid*)

Suddenly Al Jazeera was not only delivering the news to its thirty-five million viewers, including 150,000 in the U.S., but was telling the world's top story to billions of people around the planet via international media that had little choice but to use Al Jazeera's pictures. It was not simply covering the war; it became an important player in the global battle for public opinion. Al Jazeera also re-broadcast portions of the ninety-minute interview with bin Laden it had aired in June 1999. In that program, the al Qaida leader

said he had "high regard and respect" for the people who bombed U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia in 1995 and 1996. Americans "violate our land and occupy it and steal the Muslims' possessions," he declared, "and when faced with resistance by Muslims they call it terrorism." (Rick Zednik, *ibid*)

## **5.6 What are the criticisms levelled against Al Jazeera?**

Being the first Arab news channel adopting an uncensored breaking-news policy combined with lively talk shows has put Al Jazeera under considerable critical fire from a wide variety of sources.

**It has been attacked by the United States, as well as Britain, for being pro-Palestine and for supporting terrorists.**

Zev Chafets (20) wrote an article about Al Jazeera in the New York Daily News: *Al Jazeera Unmasked: An Arab propaganda machine in the guise of real journalism*. He recommended military action against Al Jazeera. Chafets claimed that: "Al Jazeera is the favourite network of Bin Laden. It provides him with an unedited forum for his calls to jihad." He stated that Al Jazeera is far from legitimate. "It is an Arab propaganda outfit controlled by the medieval government of Qatar that masquerades as a real media company."

Al Jazeera's programming irked the United States so much that Colin Powell expressed concern about its inflammatory rhetoric to the Qatari Emir during their October 3 meeting. Six weeks later, on November 13, a pair of 500-pound U.S. bombs destroyed Al Jazeera's Kabul bureau. (Rick Zednik, *ibid*)

The United States often criticises countries that lack press freedom, accusing them of being oppressive and undemocratic, yet when a particular country makes a great effort towards freedom of expression and democracy, those who advocate military action have it silenced. This irony has not gone unnoticed. Journalists and others in the Arab world see the United States, which touts itself as a symbol of freedom and democracy, as

hypocritical for pressurising Al Jazeera to modify its coverage. "The work of Al Jazeera has been professional and balanced," says Daoud Kuttub (21), director of the Institute of Modern Media at Al-Quds University in the West Bank and an observer of Arab regional media. "As to the Americans, they are completely wrong and apply a double standard. I can see why they are angry but it is not because Al Jazeera is not fair. On the contrary, I think they wish for Al Jazeera to be biased to the U.S."

Moreover, many viewers from Arab states view Western media coverage as extremely partisan, especially where their own countries are concerned. "The lies, falsehood, and enmity with respect to Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. media, particularly CNN, play an extremely bad role in kindling feelings of revenge," a columnist of Jordan's semi-official daily, *Al-Dustur*, argued recently.

But there are also some in the US media who are aware of the problem. Joel Campagna (22) gives the views of Peter Arnett: "'What about the U.S. right wing press that's been [bashing] Arabs?' asks former CNN correspondent Peter Arnett, who himself was a target of U.S. criticism for his coverage from Baghdad during the Gulf War. "Do they rein them in? Do they rein in Fox TV? Are we going to order our own media to rein in its coverage? It's getting out of hand."

Aside from the press freedom implications, U.S. calls for Qatar to censor Al Jazeera may have backfired by sparking criticism from the Arab world at a time when the United States needs the support of people in the region. "'I think this elevates Al Jazeera into an even more powerful organisation than it is," says Arnett. "Simply it's a news source that's threatening the U.S....They don't have any guns. They haven't been traced to Bin Laden."

**It has been attacked by Arab countries for not being supportive enough of the Arab cause and for being pro-Israel, as well as for breaking traditional taboos.**

When Egyptian President, Husni Mubarak, visited the studios during a visit to Doha, Qatar, a couple of years ago, he asked, "All this noise comes from this matchbox?" (See Rick Zednik, *ibid.*) It has antagonised most of the Arab governments including the

Palestinian authority, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco. They have all complained to Qatar about Al Jazeera. As Mary Anne Weaver (23) points out: "Qatar's most effective revolutionary enterprise is Al Jazeera satellite news channel, which explores issues that have long been considered forbidden topics in the Arab world. Al Jazeera has not only changed the nature of broadcast news in the Arab world: it has also given Qatar one of the region's smallest states its loudest voice. Of the Arab League's twenty-two member states, only Lebanon has not yet fielded a protest against Al Jazeera's programming or panellists."

In 1998 the Arab States Broadcasting Union rejected the application of Al Jazeera for membership until the channel conformed with the Arab media code of honour which promotes the brotherhood between Arab nations. Some have even recalled their ambassadors and closed down their bureaux. Kuwait's Information Minister flew to Qatar's capital, Doha, to complain in person after a programme criticised Kuwait for its stand on Iraq. The Algerian government allegedly even went to the length of shutting off power in parts of Algeria rather than allow viewers to watch a debate on the country's bloody civil war. The Jordanian government closed down Al Jazeera's bureau in Amman after a talk show guest accused the late King Hussein of collaborating with Israel. Others have criticised it for using the term "martyr" to describe any Palestinian killed in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Conversely, Syria has accused Al Jazeera of being too close to Israel. The station has also been periodically criticised by governments in the region - including Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Morocco - for giving airtime to dissidents and discussing sensitive issues censored in national media.

This storm of protest has been caused by, for example, the way Al Jazeera has interviewed many of the Israeli officials and journalists including former Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, and peace advocate, Shimon Peres. It was the first Arab station to allow Israeli views to be heard, and consequently was widely criticised across the Arab world. Israeli officials and journalists, banned from other Arab channels, are regular contributors, and Arabic-speaking Israelis count among the audience of Al Jazeera.

Nevertheless, its coverage of the intifada - the resistance of Palestinians to Israel - has made Al Jazeera essential viewing for Arabs. Willing to report news that has angered Arab rulers in a landscape dominated by state-run media, the channel has earned a reputation for editorial independence. Moreover, some in the Arab world have defended the channel. The Qatari daily, *Al-Raya*, accused Saudi Arabia of running a "hidden war" against Al Jazeera (24). The paper front-paged an article saying that Saudi Arabia is planning to chase the said channel and minimise its presence in the Arab Gulf states by encouraging all sorts of pressure on it. It noted a special directive issued by Saudi Arabia preventing Saudi companies from advertising on it, as well as urging the information ministers of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) to boycott it and dry-up its advertising resources. The paper considered that this campaign to "destroy Al Jazeera" is due to the fact that it is an advanced media outlet which is breaking "certain taboos" in the region.

The paper went on: "The information ministers at the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) with the exception of Qatar had stressed in a statement in conclusion of their 13th meeting which was held last Wednesday in Muscat that they blame Al Jazeera TV over some of its programs of defaming certain leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)."

**It has been attacked by Arab countries for being unwilling to criticise Qatar, its paymaster.**

Al Jazeera is subjected to no official censorship, but its critics make the charge that the station's editors are self-censoring, rarely reporting criticism of Qatar affairs. Many have criticised the channel for not looking closer to home, since Qatar is little more democratic than many of its neighbours, and according to Qatari law it is still a crime to insult the Emir.

**It has been attacked for being pro-Taliban.**

In one of many scoops the network has landed during the war in Afghanistan, anchor Ahmed Mansour recently interviewed a Pashtun leader, Sheik Abdurrah Rasul Sayyaf, whose support will be key in any post-war Afghan government. However, Sayyaf took



Al Jazeera to task for what he called biased coverage. "The general perception here in Afghanistan is that Al Jazeera has crossed the line in their reporting," he said on the air. "They were very protective of the Taliban. I hear your reporter . . . all the time, and he always reports what the Taliban does, but he never tries to come and see the villages and towns burned by the Taliban." Mansour responded that the network's reporters have tried to get access to these areas, but have been denied.

### **Treatment of material; choice of material**

The channel has been criticised for sensationalism – going for clashes of personality to create exciting television, without throwing much light on the issues. It has been attacked for using the label 'martyr' for anyone who dies in a cause, which critics see as a way of glorifying the dead, particularly Palestinian dead. Al Jazeera prides itself on being a voice for those without a voice, yet it has been pointed out that it has ignored the plight of immigrant workers in the Arab world.

### **Its response to these criticisms.**

Al Jazeera has long stated that its current affairs programming is designed to "offer a platform for divergent viewpoints and analyses." In an interview from Qatar, *Al-gazer's* editor-in-chief, Ibrahim Hilal, vigorously denied that the network has a point of view. "I think it's nonsense to accuse us of being anti-America, or anti-Northern Alliance," he protested. "It's our credibility. If we touch our credibility, we lose everything we have." (Cited in Sharon Waxman, *ibid.*)

The criticism it has received has angered Al Jazeera staff, who have roundly rejected most of the accusations and maintain that their reporting is objective and includes all points of view. "Osama Bin Laden, like it or not, is a party to this present crisis," news editor Ahmed Sheikh told the BBC. "If we said that we were not going to allow him the air time, then we would have lost our integrity and objectivity and our coverage of the story would have become unbalanced."

**In spite of all the attacks, it has achieved enormous popularity and gained critical approval. Excluded from the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ABU) because it didn't "conform to the code of honour of the Arab media," Al Jazeera is nevertheless watched avidly in private by many who despise it publicly. The channel has become wildly popular and is the biggest media phenomenon to hit the Arab world since the advent of television. It is also the biggest political phenomenon.**

Critics of Al Jazeera, including many Arab journalists, say that even when cultural disparities are taken into account, its credibility is hampered by slanted coverage and a tendency toward sensationalism. These critics say Al Jazeera is tailoring its approach to suit the preconceptions of the Arab audience. (Sharon Waxman, *ibid*, 15)

However, to Al Jazeera's defenders, the station is a reliable, professional, and informative news channel that reflects the perspective of its audience but also tries to present all sides of the story. It has been seen as a blast of fresh air blowing through the stultifying and restrictive state-controlled news broadcasts that have characterised broadcasting in the Arab world.

### **5.7 What has Al Jazeera achieved in the last ten years?**

Janil Azar (25) argues that in the last ten years there has been considerable achievement. Firstly the company has continued to grow and develop into a major media player on the Arab scene and also on the international level. It has increased its offices and staff across the world. Secondly it has become a trusted source of news and opinion among Arab viewers, and attracts large audiences. Politicians and those with influence who have appeared have found themselves in a new situation, being challenged and having to defend their policies. Thirdly it has resisted physical and verbal attacks, and continued to pursue its policies. Fourthly, in the process it has broken taboos in connection with a range of social issues. Fifthly it has woken up Arab media and officialdom. Most important of all is probably Al Jazeera's promotion of democracy, and this is examined in the next section.

## **5.8 Al Jazeera and the promotion of democracy in the Arab world**

### **Introduction**

The development of modern telecommunications has provided the Arab public with the opportunity to develop their ideas about politics and their attitudes towards government. It has encouraged them to demand their rights, such as voting, and forming political parties and civil organisations. It has encouraged the rights of minorities and women. Saudi women, for example, are still not allowed to drive. Media campaigns about democracy and its benefit have been the major topic on Arab satellite tv, especially Al Jazeera, which has worked to open up Arab public opinion as a matter of policy. Through these campaigns Arab media have managed to create Arab awareness about political issues and human rights and freedoms.

The new dimension added by Al Jazeera to news reporting and debates on current Arab political issues has been the space devoted specifically to democracy. The programmes make it possible for Arab viewers to express their opinion as well as learn from the programmes about the issues that concern them and what they should do to promote democracy in their own countries.

### **Features of Al Jazeera which promote democracy**

#### **The Al Jazeera Agenda**

Al Jazeera put the promotion of democracy and human rights high on its agenda. From the beginning the channel committed itself to presenting subject-matter related to the development of civil society. Programme content was intended to inform people about building a pluralistic democracy. It wanted to provide programmes rich with knowledge about democracy in order to raise awareness of political life within society as well as to increase knowledge of history and politics, and create a better comprehension of the current political set-up. Al Jazeera gives the opportunity for representatives of all views to talk on its programmes, on a basis of mutual respect. It is committed to peaceful ways

of solving political conflicts. Such messages passed through the Al Jazeera programmes should have a definite impact on the viewers in the long run.

Al Jazeera programmes have managed to create a debate among the Arab intellectual and civil organisations as well as political parties about democracy issues in their countries, issues such as women's rights, Islamism, secularism, and military budget expenditures. Al Jazeera, by introducing such programmes without any censorship, broke the status quo by which the Arab media in general were failing to critically examine political decision-making. The external pressure from forces such as the US (which is constantly demanding political reform in the Arab world) and the new media (especially Al Jazeera), besides the internal pressures against Arab governments, have all speeded up the process of change in Arab countries.

Al Jazeera has also presented itself deliberately as an example of good practice in free media to the Arab world.

### **Providing information**

This research shows that many survey respondents said they have learned a lot from Al Jazeera's political programmes. One area where Al Jazeera has had a particular impact is elections. It has shown images of women voting in some Arab countries, and has given extensive coverage to the election process in Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and elsewhere. This means that non-democratic countries, or countries which have never witnessed an election, have started to consider introducing elections. For example, the Saudi government has said that women will be able to vote in the 2009 elections.

Al Jazeera's investigative reporting has produced documentary programmes dealing with torture in Arab prisons, and interviewing Jordanians, Palestinians, Algerians, Iraqis, and Egyptians. For example, as recently as February 2007, Al Jazeera's correspondent in Cairo was arrested because of the programmes she was making about torture in Egypt. Simply the possibility of this programme being made forced the Egyptian government to investigate such allegations.

The people's right to know has been reflected in Al Jazeera's coverage of the wars in Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine, in particular by showing exclusive images of the war victims.

Moreover, the competition created by the multiplicity of Arab satellite tv channels increasingly provides the viewer with a huge amount of information, especially on political and reform issues.

Al Jazeera also includes transcripts of the channel's programmes on its website, so that viewers can access its news bulletins over the internet and consult previous discussions.

#### **A platform for a plurality of views**

Al Jazeera proved to be an ideal medium for democratic interaction by giving organizations in civil society as well as ordinary people the opportunity to express their feelings and grievances in representative discussions and in phone-ins.

#### **Engaging viewers and encouraging the development of political views and understanding**

Al Jazeera creates argument and debate, and stimulates public opinion about what is broadcast. It is enough to watch Al Jazeera programmes, listen to the callers and to the email messages being received, to realise the variety of these opinions, and the fact that the viewers are interacting with what they watch in a healthy way. Such interactions reveal that the channels have succeeded in creating public perceptions about their countries' problems.

For example, the civil war in Algeria aroused blame from most callers for the Algerian government for not going ahead with the election result in 1991. The Islamic party won the election at the time but the government cancelled the election result and arrested the Islamic party leader. Al Jazeera in many programmes mentioned Algeria as an example of the way that limiting democracy and not respecting peoples' choices leads to civil war.

Also Al Jazeera's programmes deal with parliamentary life in the Arab world and its effect in solving Arab problems. Many MPs appear regularly on Al Jazeera, from countries such as Palestine, Algeria and Jordan.

### **Challenging politicians**

Al Jazeera's approach has encouraged Arab satellite tv and the Arab media in general, to broadcast more and more political debate. This has had an impact on the Arab political system, as many Arab governments, state presidents and prime ministers feel compelled to appear on Al Jazeera, trying to justify their policies and defend their governments against some writer or talk show programme caller, or against accusations from some other state or organisation such as Amnesty International. There is some evidence to show that channels which allow programme guests no opportunity to criticise their leadership gain little influence within the Arab political system. Criticism helps to create the potential for political change and development in Arab countries.

### **Encouraging participation in the democratic process**

As the survey research shows, Al Jazeera is widely watched by Arab viewers for its credible political stance and its provision of education in democratic processes. When Al Jazeera covers issues such as corruption, economics, the environment, Arab states and their defence and security policies, or the right to vote, the underlying message from these programmes is that the Arab people must change their attitude towards their governments by all peaceful means to build a better future. This does not mean that Al Jazeera is going to change Arab political systems, but that Al Jazeera provides programmes that help Arab viewers realise that if they want a better future then they should start by demanding changes.

An example shows how the Arab people have started to put what they have seen into political action. People have joined demonstrations against governments or political parties. Arab politicians have taken this seriously, especially when Arab public opinion starts to emerge on many an Arab street and be heard on the tv screen. That can be seen

in Palestine and Lebanon, where many political parties enjoy huge support from the people.

### **Stimulating other channels**

Al Jazeera's fresh approach to politics, exploiting media freedom by showing exclusive events and talk show programmes dealing with taboo subjects, proved enormously popular. As a result more Arab countries now invest heavily in tv programmes to compete with Al Jazeera, and a few of these countries have established 24 hour news channels such Alkabriah, Alarabia, Alrai in Kuwait, and Nile News in Egypt. In addition there are a few channels getting financial support from Saudi Arabia, such as Al Mustakellah tv in London. These channels follow the rules laid down by the financial provider. For example, ANN (Arab News Network) is financed by the Refat. As a former Syrian official said, the freedom of the media is still determined by the regime.

### **Challenging Western attitudes**

The channels manage to show the unbalanced news being presented in some western countries, such as the USA. The USA claims to be promoting democracy in the Arab world and yet at the same time is not prepared to respect the public choice. A good example of this is the Palestinian government. The Hamas party won the last elections, but the government has been boycotted by USA and Britain. People are asking why the West does not respect our choice. Why we should accept them if they don't accept us? The double standard of USA policy on Arab issues prevents Arab people taking seriously the USA call for political reform and democracy. People also realise that since 9/11/2000 the USA in some ways has started practising some of the third world way of censoring its own media and imprisoning without trial, in totally undemocratic ways.

As a result, while USA calls for reform in the Arab world, Al Jazeera's programme guests, Arab democracy activists and reformers argue that such an attitude does not excuse the decades of US policy that were geared towards maintaining stability in the region - US support for Israel, the seige of the elected Palestinian government, and the invasion of Iraq, which destabilised it and caused civil war. Arguably the USA is not

interested in real democracy in Arab countries as such a move might clash with its interests in the region. The best example of that is the 2006 Palestinian elections.

### **Other features of Al Jazeera**

Al Jazeera managed to recruit tv reporters working in the field in Arab countries to ensure an interesting coverage of Arab events from an Arab perspective.

It has promoted democracy among the viewers by activities such as the Al Jazeera International Conference for Democracy at its headquarters. This is held annually and publishes recommendations, which also appear on its web site.

Al Jazeera's new 24 hour English news channel, which recruited top journalists from around the world, is intended to present Arab issues to the international community, and raise the profile of a specifically Arab perspective on the region.

Al Jazeera is available on all the satellites, which makes it easy for anyone who wants to watch it. This has probably contributed to the fact that despite the huge competition between Al Jazeera and its Arab rivals, it has stayed number one for Arab viewers in most previous surveys and also in this research.

There are also Al Jazeera channels showing sport and children's programmes. The viewers' access to these channels might also change their perceptions of their lives and make them more aware, educating them about current issues.

### **Progress**

With heavy Aljazeera programme criticism of Arab regimes, some Arab governments have demolished their information ministries and started to put considerable investment into establishing new satellite TV but with little editorial freedom. Nevertheless, the important thing about this is that it has started a privatisation of the media – the first step towards a free media in the Arab world - which has already started in the form of the



Media City in Dubai. Editorial freedom might take many years before the Arab media reach the level of western media in terms of freedom.

It is true that Arab political life still needs to go a long way to reach full democracy, but progress has been made. For example, the last elections in the Arab world involved women. Kuwait and the United Arab Emirate for the first time allowed women to vote and to be candidates – something regarded as one of the basic democratic and human rights. However, Al Jazeera, with some other Arab channels, regards democracy in the Arab world something inevitable, even though in real life a lot of things need to be done before such a wish is realised.

Watching Al Jazeera for few months makes you realise that the channel is trying to educate people about democracy, and to bring the issue of democracy into the public sphere. Programme guests frequently mention the last Palestinian elections as one of the best in the region, and ask why any independent Arab country should fail to have such elections. Such a message makes it obvious that the channel is working slowly towards changing the viewers' perceptions of their countries. Also it shows clearly that the only solution to the love-hate relationship between Arab peoples and their rulers is to gradually establish basic democratic processes in these countries.

Although political tension in Arab countries is very high, there is hope for the future in what happened in 2005. The Palestinians, Iraqis, and Saudis held elections. The Kefaya movement in Egypt gained huge media coverage and this resulted in an early elections in Egypt. The Lebanese people demonstrated, forcing the Syrians to withdraw their army from Lebanon. In Bahrain there were demonstrations for political rights and constitutional change. The right to vote was extended to Kuwaiti women. Such developments indicate that democracy is breaking out in the Arab world but very slowly. It has come from the people's awareness, which has been stimulated by many factors, including the media, and outside factors such as the US intervention in Arab countries' politics. In the end, however, lasting change can only come from inside not from outside.

Philip Seib (26) is cautious about what Al Jazeera has achieved in connection with developing democracy. Before people can practice democracy there need to be various institutions and structures in place, and lively debate in the media cannot be a substitute for this. He does accept that the media have a role to play: 'The news media can, however, serve as a valuable stimulus, helping to galvanise activism and aiding in the construction of an intellectual framework that gives coherence to reform efforts.' Moreover, to make democracy a reality, the public has to participate and become engaged. This too is something the media can encourage, but cannot make it happen.

Nevertheless, Seib does admit that change is in the air, and that the media are an inevitable part of this. 'Reform seems to be developing momentum, sometimes on the level of headline-grabbing politics, and sometimes on a more incremental basis, as with the more significant presence of women in Kuwaiti politics. The news media played a critical role in all this; satellite television showed Egyptians, Syrians, and others that real elections were taking place in Palestine and Iraq, and showed Saudi women, among others, that Arab women in some countries might actually be allowed to hold positions in government (as in Bahrain) and even drive cars.'

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## **Chapter 6: Media Theory**

### **6.1 Effects Theories**

#### **6.1.1 Introduction**

This study tries to discover the part played by Al Jazeera in influencing public opinion and promoting democracy among Palestinians. Demonstrating any sort of media effect is notoriously difficult. This section looks at some of the principal media effects theories and approaches that relate to the present study in varying degrees.

#### **6.1.2 Public Opinion**

'Public opinion' is a term in frequent use, but it has no single, generally agreed definition. It can be seen as the views of a group of individuals concerning a current issue, held by such numbers and with such conviction that they are capable of influencing the powers-that-be.

Allport (1) defines public opinion as follows: "The term public opinion is given its meaning with reference to a multi-individual situation in which individuals are expressing themselves, or can be called upon to express themselves, as favouring or supporting (or else disfavouring or opposing) some definite condition, person, or proposal of widespread importance, in such a proportion of number, intensity, and constancy, as to give rise to the probability of affecting action, directly or indirectly, toward the object concerned."

But does this understanding of how society functions actually apply to the Arab states? Khaled Hroub (2) makes the point that public opinion does not operate in the Arab states as it does in Western democracies. Arab regimes are not really interested in responding to public opinion as part of a democratic process. They want to know what is happening on the ground, but their interest in public opinion is more to do with security issues.

On the other hand, Mohamed Dourrachad (3) believes that things have changed. Allowing television viewers to express their own opinions freely has resulted not only in criticism of the Americans, but also their own Arab leaders as well as the media. The expression of these views “doesn’t only have an impact on the people, it also has an impact on the leaders...Before, the television stations were reporting to the people what the leaders or the authorities were doing. Now, the TV stations are reporting to the leaders, to the governments, what their people think. It’s a huge shift”. This suggests that the new media have enabled public opinion to operate in a way more like the Western model.

However, Marc Lynch (4), using the phrase of Habermas (1989) (5), ‘the public sphere’, argues that although Al Jazeera and the other new media in the Arab world have created a real forum for debate, the lack of institutions through which to move that debate into action has led to real frustration.

“For all its newfound prominence, the Arab public sphere remains almost completely detached from any formal political institution. The political significance of a transnational public sphere disconnected from any effective democratic institution has hardly begun to be theorized...The public arguments and debates are disembodied from any grounded political activity, and cannot easily be translated into political outcomes.”

Other commentators have also noticed the disconnection in the Arab world between the wide-ranging debate opened up by the new media and real political engagement. Writers such as Khaled Hroub and Mamoun Fandi have suggested that the new media have created something of an illusion – a ‘virtual politics’.

Nevertheless, even if public opinion in the Arab world does not have the same level of influence on those in power as it seems to do in mature democracies, it is still possible to explore what Palestinians think about democracy and a range of related issues, and how far these views coincide with what is offered by Al Jazeera. Shamlan Essa (6), for example, denies that Al Jazeera represents Arab public opinion, simply because in general Arab public opinion is mostly illiterate or semi-literate, and there is no one Arab

point of view. He reckons this is so even on the Palestinian issue, which is regarded as the core cause of the Arab world.

A further problem is how public opinion relates to the media, which is also an area of debate. It is argued that influence moves in both directions. For example, Marc Lynch remarks that “intense market competition can make it appear that the satellite stations follow mass opinion as much as they shape it.” (ibid). Zayani and Sahraoui comment (7): “In many ways, Al Jazeera draws much of its energy from the affinity it has with the Arab viewer... As such, Al Jazeera affects and is affected by Arab public opinion; it listens to the beat of the street and capitalizes on an existing public discourse, giving people what they want while at the same time shaping that which they want.”

Edmund Ghareeb (8) also makes the point that the relationship between the media and public opinion is two-way: “The popularity of Al Jazeera and other satellite networks reflects the resilience of a general pan-Arab public opinion over state-run programming tailored to the population of individual countries. As such, the pan-Arab satellite channels are both reflections of public opinion and instruments for mobilizing it”.

This makes it very difficult to determine cause and effect. This research tries to get round the problem by using the surveys to discover the audience’s own perceptions of whether their attitudes have been influenced by television material.

In practical terms there are at least three useful ways of approaching the concept of public opinion.

1. Survey research. It is possible to see public opinion in terms of what can be measured by surveys. Public opinion in this sense therefore consists of the answers given to surveys which can be shown to be representative, and is the aggregation of a sample of individual opinions and beliefs.

2. Elite opinion. Another approach is to identify public opinion as the views held by elite groups – the educated and informed who have responsible positions in society. Their

opinions and attitudes feed into debate about important issues, in the media, and in government policy discussions. This approach connects with ideas about opinion leaders. (See below, Two-Step Flow.)

3. A social-psychological approach. This approach has been developed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (9). She sees public opinion in terms of what people perceive to be generally acceptable behaviour or attitudes, and in the light of this they feel obliged to conform if they want to remain accepted. The theory thus makes use of the psychological need for the individual to be accepted, as well as the functioning of the mass media in providing a sense of what are the currently accepted values and opinions. Noelle-Neumann went on to develop the idea of the 'spiral of silence'. If individuals feel their views do not fit with the dominant attitudes, they are likely to remain silent to avoid being isolated. This makes the dominant attitude appear stronger, which has the effect of reinforcing it still further – hence the spiral effect. However, this way in which public opinion operates is seen as resolving potential conflicts in society and holding society together.

The scope of this present research has meant that 'public opinion' is used to refer to the results of surveys. Some of the questions used relate to the context of television viewing, and the part played by group discussion of ideas presented on TV programmes, so that the role of opinion leaders is touched on, but it was not possible to interview elite members of the Palestinian community within the constraints of this project.

Noelle-Neumann's approach is very relevant to Palestinian attitudes towards Israel. One can imagine that there might be Palestinians who would want to take a softer line, but feel forced into the spiral of silence by political and religious opinions which they see expressed on Al Jazeera and in other media. The question in the survey on whether the Israeli viewpoint should be given airtime on Al Jazeera touches on this. The large minority who insisted that it should suggests that the privacy of the surveys shows up opinions that might not otherwise be expressed. However, to explore this in any depth was beyond the practicalities of this study.



### 6.1.3 Two-Step Flow

In the 1940s Lazarsfeld did some work on American voters to assess the impact of the media (*The People's Choice*, 1944) (10), and found that the effect of the mass media is not direct. Instead it is frequently mediated to us through opinion leaders, who might be members of our family, friends or work-mates. The mass media are seen as influencing us through our social groups, and the direct effect is limited. This was followed up by another study in 1955 (Katz and Lazarsfeld: *Personal Influence*, 1955) (11), which looked not just at political choices but also at choice in other areas such as products, films and fashions.

Some of the main ideas to emerge from this work are:

- The media have very limited direct effect.
- Social groups play an important part; the audience are not just isolated 'atoms'.
- There is room for the views and decisions of opinion leaders.
- Opinion leaders have more exposure to the mass media, but are not totally dependent on the media for their views.
- Opinion leaders operate at all levels in society.
- Opinion leaders may lead on only one issue.

The strength of the two-step flow theory is that it sees media effects operating within the social interactions of people's everyday lives. Its weaknesses showed up when it was used as a basis for campaigns to introduce modern farming methods into rural communities in the US, and failed to produce the desired results. It became clear that the model ignored important factors such as the influence of big business or government. Moreover the model does not make clear exactly how the opinion leader and the follower interact. It also seems to assume that the way we choose our politicians, our clothes and our entertainment is the same process in each case. Nevertheless, the work on two-step flow moved media effects theory on from a belief in an all-powerful media to an awareness of the whole range of mediating factors which are part of the equation.

To identify the role of opinion leaders in the formation of Palestinian political attitudes would have required much more sophisticated investigation than was possible within the

constraints of this research, but this approach is touched on through the survey questions on the social context of viewing. A group of friends watching a television talk show in a café would be susceptible not only to the opinions expressed in the programme but also the comments and opinions being expressed at the same time by their more knowledgeable or more confident friends.

#### **6.1.4 Cognitive Dissonance and Selective Perception**

In 1957 Leon Festinger published *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (12). He argued that because we feel the need to produce consistency in the knowledge and views we have, we devise strategies for coping with material that does not fit. Klapper (1960) (13) applied these ideas to the way we react to the media. If we are presented with information or attitudes that do not fit our existing mind-set, we will consciously or unconsciously take one of three steps. We will avoid the material – change channels or skip the newspaper article (Selective Exposure); we will interpret the material so that it fits in with what we already believe (Selective Perception); or we will blot it out by forgetting it (Selective Retention).

This approach is clearly of interest to a study of Al Jazeera. The channel prides itself on presenting ‘the opinion and the other opinion’, and sees this as a way of being even-handed and promoting debate. But particularly because the viewpoints expressed are often extreme ones from both ends of the spectrum, it could well be that audiences are simply blotting out the views they cannot accept, rather than being encouraged to see things differently. However, to follow this up would need in-depth interviewing to discover how audience members reacted to specific programmes.

### 6.1.5 Uses and Gratifications

This approach assumes that we use the mass media on an individual basis to satisfy our own personal needs. The audience is seen as active, not passive, selecting and using programmes, newspapers, etc., for specific purposes. The audience is regarded as purposive and in control, and the same programme may meet different needs in different people.

Katz (1959), quoted in McQuail (1984) (14) sums up this approach:

"Such an approach assumes that even the most potent of mass media content cannot ordinarily influence an individual who has no 'use' for it in the social and psychological context in which he lives. The 'uses' approach assumes that people's values, their interests, their associations, their social roles, are pre-potent and that people selectively fashion what they see and hear to these interests."

One of the earliest workers in this area was Herzog (1944) (15), who studied women who listened to radio soaps, and came up with gratifications such as 'a sense of belonging', 'acquiring insight into self and others', and 'experiencing emotional release'. McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) (16) studied responses to radio and TV material, and came up with four types of uses and gratifications. The media provide *diversion*. This includes escaping from the daily routine and from anxieties. Secondly the media provide *personal relationships*. Fictional programmes can provide virtual relationships as well as providing topics for conversation with friends. Thirdly the media can contribute to the growth of *personal identity*, by encouraging people to reflect on their own lives and problems. Finally the media provide *surveillance* – an overview of what is going on in the world.

There are problems with this approach, particularly the stress on the individual response and the neglect of the social dimension. Moreover, there is actually little agreement about what are basic human needs. It is also assumed that users are purposeful when in reality they may be casual – just watching a programme because it happens to be on. Asking viewers about their motivation and the rewards they get can be misleading, as their real motives may remain unconscious.

Nevertheless, the theory has relevance to the functioning of Al Jazeera. Several critics referred to in the Literature Review stress the importance of Al Jazeera in reinforcing a sense of Arab identity and providing a unified narrative of Arab experience in the Arab world. Mohamed Zayani, Hussain Amin and Marc Lynch argue this. (See 2.2 above.) Other studies have also mentioned that the channel has provided a means by which Arab pain and frustration about many issues can find expression. Hazem Saghiye believes the station's popularity lies in the way it expresses the feelings of loss and failure felt by many Arabs and provides an escape from the difficulties and pressures of their everyday lives. But he also suggests that: "Al Jazeera has helped enable the Arabs ... to improve their collective morale and self-belief." (17) This view is echoed by Zayani and Sahraoui. (See 2.1 above.)

This research touches on this theory when the survey asks whether respondents are given a sense of hope about the political future or the reverse from their watching of Al Jazeera, and why they watch the channel if it brings them bad news.

#### **6.1.6 Cultivation Theory**

In the 1970s, after a period in which the direct effects of the media had been played down, there was a swing back towards a belief that the media do exercise some sort of real influence. Cultivation theory was developed by George Gerbner at the Annenberg School of Communications in the US. The approach is concerned principally with television, which is seen as having a gradual, long-term effect on the formation of our understanding of society. The theory maintains that television teaches us what the world is like in terms of social behaviour, social norms and social structures, and that this perception is built up cumulatively from the whole range of TV output. In the process it also reinforces the status quo, and therefore has a political effect.

Gerbner has concentrated on applying this theory to the presentation of violence on television. He asked respondents to quantify the amount of violence in real life according to their perceptions, and then compared their answers with levels of real violence and violence on television. He found that the viewers' perceptions were much closer to the

TV scores than the real life scores. He concluded that the disproportionate amount of violence on television leads to the perception that the world is more violent than it really is, and this in turn increases people's fears and strengthens the law-and-order lobby.

Gerbner's approach has also been applied to the treatment of women and minority groups, firstly to identify the extent of stereotyping, and secondly to argue that once again the status quo is being reinforced. In this way cultivation theory does not see the media as changing beliefs and behaviours so much as 'to ensure the longevity of an existing social structure based on a particular set of beliefs and values' (Ruddock, 2001) (18).

The theory has been criticised for presenting the viewer as the helpless victim (like the much earlier hypodermic needle model). It also assumes that all viewers respond in the same way rather than working out more individual meanings.

Nevertheless, this theory is of considerable interest in connection with the present research. The idea that the media can gradually drip-feed ideas and assumptions about society over the long-term is clearly relevant to this investigation into the influence of Al Jazeera on attitudes to democracy among the Palestinian population. But there are also problems. It is possible to produce generally agreed measures of 'violence' both in real life and in television programmes, but 'democracy' is much more difficult to pin down, and, as the last chapter showed, Palestinian understandings of democracy vary a good deal. It is simply not possible to compare measures of democracy or belief in democracy in the same way that Gerbner compares measures of violence. This research tries to get round this problem by asking respondents to assess the level of attitude change (or not) which they have experienced, coming at it from a variety of angles, namely: their interest in politics; their involvement in politics; changing opinions; learning about democracy and human rights; being convinced about the value of democracy and human rights, and so on.

A further point is that whereas one of the main strands of Gerbner's work is that media messages reinforce the existing social structures, this research is trying to establish the

extent to which Al Jazeera is an agent of change. If that could be established, then it would suggest that television is working rather differently in the Arab world.

This research involves two audience surveys, carried out in 2005 and 2008. As a result it is possible to make some comparisons of attitudes over a period of time, and this could throw some light on the 'drip-feed' effect.

### **6.1.7 Agenda setting**

In his study of the media and American foreign policy, Cohen (1963) (19) made his famous remark that the news "may not be successful in telling people what to think but it is stunningly successful in telling people what to think about." This is the central idea of agenda setting. The influence of the media is seen in terms of its capacity to foreground certain issues and ignore others.

John Fiske (20), in his *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, writes: "Agenda-setting is a term used to describe the ways in which the media wittingly or unwittingly structure public debate and awareness. A committee usually has an agenda: a list of topics to be discussed in descending order of importance. Anything not on the agenda is not normally discussed. Media agenda-setting refers to the way that the media, particularly in news, current affairs and documentary output, have the power to focus public attention on a defined and limited set of selected issues, while ignoring others. One result is that some topics are widely debated beyond the media in the public sphere, while others are ignored. In the first instance agenda-setting refers to the question of what topics the media present to the audience, and second how information on those topics is presented".

#### **Salience**

The importance given to a particular issue by the media is referred to as 'salience'. According to McCombs and Shaw (21) "an element of the agenda-setting theory is that the media have three functions that affect the salience of objects. The first is status-

conferral, which is the media's ability to confer status on individuals in the public eye. The second concept is stereotyping, where the media can focus on, promoting and perpetuating, certain attributes of an issue or person. The third concept is image-making, which affects the salience of individuals, issues, and their attributes."

### Framing

A story is presented to the viewers through what is called in agenda-setting theory "framing". James Tankard (22) defines a media frame as "the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of *selection, emphasis, exclusion* and *elaboration*." By framing, the media provide the audience with a way of interpreting the story, determining what kind of story it is and what they should think about it.

Gitlin (23) argues that news frames are, "principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters" Robert Entman (24) sees framing as providing 'causal interpretation' and 'moral evaluation' of issues. If that is applied to Al Jazeera's talk show programmes or its newscasts, the framing is the way the news editors, producers and presenters handle material in a way that conveys assumptions about *what* is important and *in what way* it is important.

### Priming

The theory was developed further by Iyengar and Kinder (1987) (25), who developed the idea of 'priming'. This suggests that not only does the media foreground particular issues, but it also reminds the audience of particular items from their political memories and in this way creates the criteria by which they make political judgements. They concluded that the media functions not so much by persuading people as by "commanding the public's attention (agenda setting) and defining criteria underlying the public's judgements (priming)." (ibid, page 117.)

McCombs and Shaw (1972) (26) applied agenda-setting theory to the study of the 1963 US presidential election. They examined newspapers, magazines and television coverage

of the campaign, and compared this with audience views about the importance of various issues. They concluded that there was a good match between the importance given to issues in the media and their importance in the minds of respondents.

One problem with agenda setting theory is the difficulty of defining an 'issue'. Connected with this is the fact that news events often have very different time scales (for example, a bomb attack on the one hand and a slowly developing famine on the other). The central problem with this theory is that although research can show a correlation between the media agenda and the audience's agenda, it is not clear which is the direction of influence, or how exactly the process might be operating. Furthermore, as Rogers and Dearing (1987) (27) point out, there are at least three different agendas which are all interacting with each other: the concerns of the media, the public and the government.

There is also disagreement about the cause of agenda setting. Some people see it as a deliberate ploy by those in power in order to maintain their position. Others see it as an inevitable outcome of the structures of power and the mass media. Whatever the root cause, it is possible to identify some of the factors involved. Firstly the power groups in society are themselves sources of news and have privileged access to the media. Secondly the news media are subject to all kinds of pressures – proprietors, finance, deadlines – which limit possible approaches. Thirdly, underlying any society is a dominant ideology, powerful assumptions which are taken for granted and never really get examined. For this reason, particular ways of approaching social issues may seem so 'obvious' or 'natural' that no other approach is considered.

Agenda setting theory is very important in connection with the present research. One of the main planks of the argument is that Al Jazeera gives a high priority to democracy issues and the political development of Palestine. This is demonstrated through the content analysis studies. The survey attempts to establish a correlation with the audiences's sense of what is important in terms of political development.

The difficulty of this exercise is stressed by McQuail (28), who points out that in order to show a causal connection, "we need a combination of content analysis of party



programmes, evidence of opinion change over time in a given section of the public (preferably with panel data), content analysis showing media attention to different issues in the relevant period, and some indication of relevant media use by the public concerned.”

### **6.1.8 The Active Audience**

In the 1980s there was a marked shift in media effects theory, a move away from seeing the media as exerting a powerful influence and the audience as rather helpless. Instead, the audience came to be seen as much more powerful, having choices about how it interpreted media texts and made its own meanings. Audiences were no longer seen as an undifferentiated mass, but as operating within much smaller social groups, much more complex and diverse than previously thought.

In order to pursue research along these lines researchers developed new techniques to discover what people were doing with the media, often using in-depth interviews to gain detailed personal accounts of how people interacted with the media, and the part it played in their lives.

In the 1970s Stuart Hall (29) had developed his model of encoding-decoding. He proposed that although a media text was polysemic, offering a variety of meanings, the dominant ideology of society imposed a preferred meaning. As the audience came to decode this text, they could interpret it in a range of ways, depending (primarily, in Hall’s view) on their social class. They could adopt a dominant, negotiated or oppositional reading of the text.

David Morley’s study, *The Nationwide Audience* (1980) (30), put this model to the test. Morley showed the same edition of the BBC’s early evening magazine programme *Nationwide* to different groups of people. Each group was made up of people from a similar background, such as bank managers, full-time trade union officials, apprentice printers, engineers and metallurgists, general literacy students, and so on. The groups already existed in schools, colleges and universities.

The different responses of the groups as they emerged in discussion afterwards served to illustrate the three kinds of possible readings. For example, the bank managers so totally accepted the underlying assumptions of the programme that they did not even notice that it was adopting a particular attitude to society. Their discussion was concerned with the presentation of the programme, which they disliked. Theirs was a dominant reading. The shop stewards, on the other hand, were so infuriated by the attitudes which the programme took for granted that they could not contain their indignation as they watched it. Theirs was an oppositional reading. An oppositional reading of a different kind came from a group of young black students, who found the programme boring because it did not seem to bear any relation to their own lives. Another group consisted of trade union officials, who felt able to accept the basic agenda set by the programme but disagreed with the treatment of particular issues that touched on their trade union experience. This was a negotiated reading.

Morley's research confirmed that people were free to construct widely different meanings from the same media text, but that social class could not explain all the differences (as two working class groups had reacted quite differently). He later accepted that other social factors such as age, gender and ethnic group played a part.

This idea of audience freedom to construct their own meanings was followed up in the 80s in various studies, including work on women's use of women's magazines and television soaps. Ien Ang's study, *Dallas* (1985) (31), considered the pleasure women gain from soaps, and argued that "gaining pleasure from the media and popular culture is actively constructing meanings that subvert reactionary or patriarchal media messages." (32)

The idea that audiences gain a subversive pleasure from interpreting media texts in resistant ways is argued by Fiske in *Television: polysemy or popularity* (1986) (33) and *Television Culture* (1987) (34). Fiske's approach effectively dismisses the idea that the media have power; instead the power lies with the audience.

David Morley followed up his work on the active audience with *Family Television* (1986) (35), which was based on interviews with 18 working class families in London. He found that television and its meanings was tied up with the social structure of the home, its power relations and patterns of behaviour.

Active audience theory has been challenged on various grounds. Critics point out that terms such as 'activity', 'meaning' and 'pleasure' are used imprecisely. The audience responses used as data by Ang and Fiske are small and unrepresentative. The approach ignores the issues of truth and fairness in reporting political events.

An active audience approach, with the need for in-depth interviews with respondents, is beyond the scope of this research. But the theory raises interesting issues relating to the Arab world. UK audiences have been watching television for some 50 years, during which time it has gradually become much more sophisticated. Al Jazeera, with its slick, 21<sup>st</sup> century style, burst onto the Arab street only 12 years ago. Has the Palestinian audience developed the same capacity for reading their own meanings into a media text as Morley and Fiske claimed to find in the UK? Secondly, what *is* the dominant reading of Al Jazeera programming? There is room for semiotic analysis of Al Jazeera material. Thirdly, stemming from Morley's *Family Television*, how does the structure of the Palestinian home affect the meanings that are given to television programmes, and in particular, how is the understanding of TV by women affected by the social structure of the home? The survey for this research contains questions on the context of viewing, but does not claim to make a detailed active audience analysis.

## **6.2 Methodology**

### **Content Analysis: a note on methodology**

Content analysis methods are used extensively in social science research. In the case of the Mass Media, the method helps the researcher to analyse how particular issues are presented. Content analysis helps the researcher to present an objective account of the material and identify the underlying aspects of the message. It is possible to show how the media concentrate on particular issues and how much time is devoted to such messages.

The content analysis sections of this study involve primarily the analysis of Al Jazeera talk shows and Al Jazeera newscasts, with a brief look at some current affairs material, comparing them with other Arab satellite news channels. In this analysis a principal topic being studied is the presentation of democracy.

Jackson (36) observes, "content analyses are particularly effective at assessing the content of the message that a particular instrument (i.e. television) is communicating".

Holsti (37) offers a broad definition of content analysis as, "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (p. 14). Under Holsti's definition, the technique of content analysis is not restricted to the domain of textual analysis, but may be applied to other areas such as coding student drawings, or coding of actions observed in videotaped studies. Content analysis is a method for summarizing any form of content by counting various aspects of the content such as TV programmes.

Walizer and Wienir (38) "define it as any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information" Content analysis, though it often analyses written words, is a quantitative method. The results of content analysis are numbers and percentages. Kerlingers (39) defined the content analysis as "a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables". The main reason for doing the content analysis is to

make the link between programme content and its impact on the viewers. Such a method provides accurate information about the situation been analysed.

The difference between content analysis and audience research is that content analysis shows the causes of the phenomena while audience research shows the impact or the influence. Additionally, content analysis provides an empirical basis for monitoring shifts in public opinion. For instance data collected by this research can be objectively compared to data collected at some point in the future to determine if there are any changes related to Al Jazeera's impact.

### **6.3 Conclusions**

This chapter has shown how various media theories touch on the present study in different ways. However, the most relevant theories are agenda setting and cultivation theory. Agenda setting lies behind the use of content analysis and the surveys to determine whether there is a correlation between the salient programme topics and the audience's perception of their attitudes and attitude change. Cultivation effect lies behind the use of two surveys to measure attitude change over a period of time.

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## **Chapter 7: Findings**

### **7.1 Talk Shows: Content Analysis**

#### **7.1.1 Subject matter: general impressions of programme content**

Through regular viewing of Al Jazeera programmes in the last four years the author became aware that Al Jazeera talk shows cover general political issues such as democracy and human rights, besides specific regional issues such as Palestine and Iraq. Corruption, torture, polygamy and terrorism are among the taboo subjects the show has aired - topics that have never previously been discussed in public among Arab people in their own countries. In this way the talk shows on Arab satellite news channels offer critics of Arab regimes a platform for their views.

Furthermore the talk shows addressed current issues in the Arab world which were considered vital and urgent. Palestinian issues occupied more than 46%, followed by Iraq and Afghanistan. The Arab news media - Al Jazeera and its competitors - have defined democratic reform as a core Arab issue. Al Jazeera has sought to give voice to a deep Arab frustration with the perceived failures of Arab regimes. In 1999 alone, almost a dozen Al Jazeera talk shows criticized the absence of democracy in the Arab world.

Before the war on Iraq, Al Jazeera talk shows addressed many issues such as corruption in Arab governments, the role of the intellectual Arab in improving the political system in their countries, Palestine and immigration, the policies and role of USA, and many more. Since the start of the Iraq war the programmes have started to cover different issues. Al Jazeera seems to have moved on from focusing on political reform and the role of democracy in these societies, to building awareness in Arab viewers of the broader political landscape.



### **7.1.2 Treatment**

#### **The role of anchorman: Introductions**

One newspaper interview (1) catches the tone of Al Kasim's presentation: 'Faisal al Kasim has been annoying Arab governments for eight years and loving every minute of it. At the forefront of groundbreaking Arabic satellite station al Jazeera since its inception in 1996, the presenter and his weekly political theater have been hard for them to ignore. "Why is it that..." his voice always blares in the trailers for the show, *The Opposite Direction*, as his arms gesticulate wildly. "Why is it that Arab regimes failed to condemn the pictures of abuse of Iraqi prisoners?" he began on a recent episode about the US prisoner abuse scandal. "Is the torture in Arab prisons not a hundred times worse than Abu Ghraib?"'

A more extended example from the show of 5-9-2006 gives a picture of the style of the introductory presentation. Al Kasim starts by saying "Is there any rational Arab who believes the US promises for developing the Middle East? What did we gain from the USA policy and projects? The destruction of Iraq, making Palestinian life a hell, the destruction of Lebanon, the dividing of Sudan and the taking of Afghanistan back to the Middle Ages? They threaten Iran and put the whole region on the edge of war. Each time USA wants to cover up its horrible policy against the Arab people, Condoleesa Rice announces that a new Middle East is about to be born. Israel promised to destroy Lebanon and take it back to the Stone Age. Is this project just a duplicate copy of the new Middle East which Sharon and Perez dreamt of - the butcher of Kana, and the criminal of Anaked Alkadab during the war on Lebanon? Is someone asking do we need a new Middle East drawn by the Israeli military forces and its bulldozer, and the USA fascists who produced Abu Ghraib prison, Guantanamo, and the secret flying of prisoners? Where is the reform process they promised, if our leaders become more aggressive towards their own people after they renew their 'insurance policy' on their political system by multi-million transactions with the White House? But on the other hand, why should we rely on foreign projects? Why we don't we create our own projects? Why do we hold the USA responsible for reform in the Middle East? Is the USA, which tried to spread democracy in the Middle East as in Iraq, to be an example for the whole region?"

This shows how challenging and provocative Faisal Al Kasim can be in the way he opens the show, with his trademark style of insistent questioning.

This next example is from a show dealing with Arab elections. Faisal al Kasim started the programme by saying: "Reducing margins of victory by two or three percent, this is how Arab elections and referendums are developing. Do Arab leaders think that they can trick their people with small reductions in their margins of victory in elections, by reducing their official vote rigging from 99.99 percent to 97 or 95 percent? When will they stop this farce and this cheap theater? Do any of these leaders wonder why the Arab world is crying out about the leaders' double-talk about elections, saying one thing here, and another elsewhere? Has anything changed after hundreds of referendums and elections have been fabricated in the cellars of Arab intelligence agencies? When will the people tell these regimes that have no shame that enough is enough? The young and the old in Ukraine turned out to protest about elections in which incidents of fraud did not exceed one percent. Meanwhile Arab votes are robbed year after year and no one has the courage to so much as speak up about these violations. When will [Arab leaders] realize that if they had true elections they would get negative 99.99 percent of the vote? To what extent are [Arab leaders] wasting millions of dollars on election charades?"

(2)

Once again he uses a challenging style full of questions, forcing the viewers to react and engage with the issues, and ask themselves, 'Yes, why...?' The subtext of these introductions is 'It's alright to ask questions. You too can ask questions.' If Al Jazeera is able to encourage a questioning spirit it will have transformed Arab societies, tied for so long to the silent acceptance of authority. Al Kasim also shifts his ground in startling ways, so that viewers are jolted into attention and forced to ask themselves which side they themselves are on.

### **The role of anchorman: Conducting debate**

This comment comes from a newspaper interview (1): "Al Kasim's format -- two guests representing two opposite sides of an argument -- is novel in the Arab media although the formula has been used on Western airwaves for years. And an argument it often is, with guests and callers hurling abuse at each other as tempers fray. Al Kasim admits he does his best to stir the debate, despite feigned attempts to stop the insults with his stock phrase "People. People." The show has often been cut short as guests more used to public niceties and private intrigue of Arab politics storm off in fury from the public forum.

### **The debate: Confrontation**

The same newspaper interview with al Kasim commented: "Viewers have been treated to such delights as Egyptian feminists out-shouting radical preachers and exiled Lebanese warlords incandescent over criticism of one-time Israeli ties. 'I could do a calm, sober program, but I know the viewers wouldn't watch. No one would watch a dead program,' al Kasim says with a certain pride."

The actual style of debate is shown very clearly in a transcript of a show on 2/1/07, in which al Kasim discussed the execution of Saddam Hussain with two guests, Mashaan al-Jabouri and Sadeq al-Musawi. (3) (See Appendix for the transcript.) The guests make no attempt (and are not encouraged by Al Kasim) to pick up and answer points made by their opponents. Instead, they are intent simply on stating their own position. In this instance the programme appears to have little interest in real debate: what were Saddam Hussain's real achievements, and what were his real failures? As a result it may make exciting television, but may not be a good way of encouraging political literacy.

### **The debate: more extended exchange of ideas**

In contrast to the previous extract, a transcript (4) from a talk show on 26 July 2005 shows a much greater degree of engagement between the guests. (See Appendix for the transcript.) Wafa Sultan is an Arab-American psychiatrist. She and Bin Muhammad both have space to develop their ideas, and they actually respond to each other's statements. Although quite heated and still highly polarised, this is far more of a real debate than the

previous extract. Both parties list what they see as the brutalities and atrocities committed by the other side, but at least they have the opportunity to present their evidence at length, and so give the viewers some material to stimulate the formation of their own opinions.

### **7.1.3 Detailed content analysis**

The objective was to identify the material on Al Jazeera talk shows that may promote democracy and public awareness in Arab countries. In particular, this section sets out to examine:

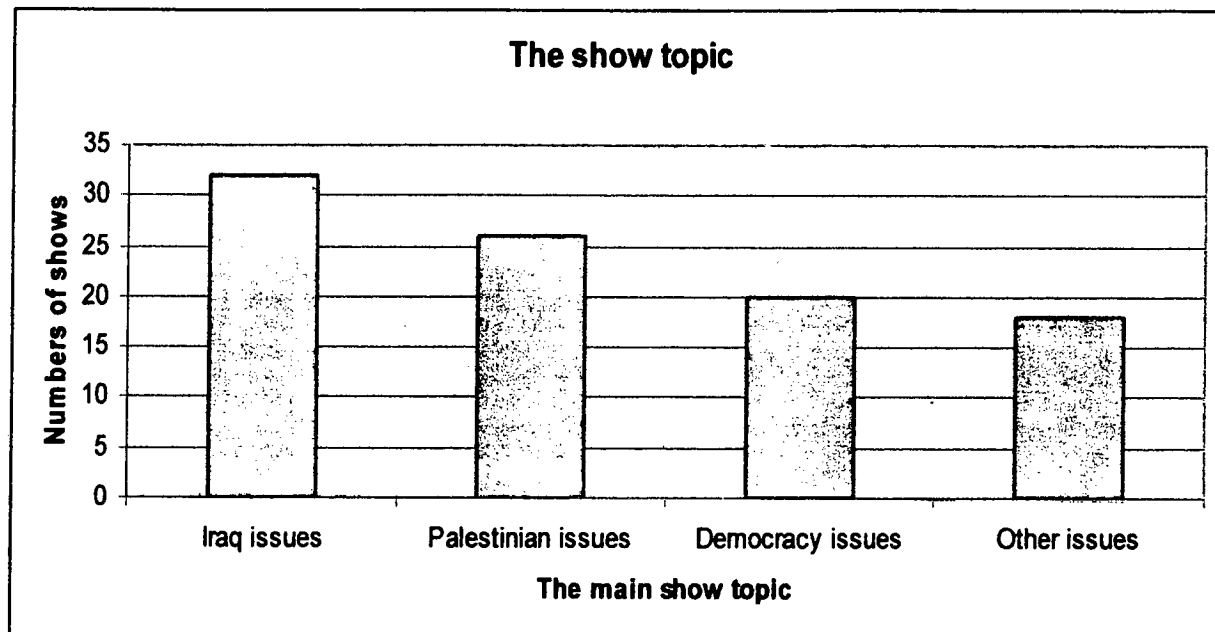
1. The frequency with which particular topics are dealt with;
2. The background of the various guests (which relates to plurality of views);
3. The frequency of various words and terms which relate to democratic development;
4. The way in which *The Opposite Direction* approaches democracy in the Arab world;
5. The frequency of Palestine as a topic on talk shows;
6. Some comparisons between *The Opposite Direction* and *Bel Arabe*.

#### **7.1.3.1 The frequency with which particular topics are dealt with**

##### **Procedure**

Over the two-year period, January 2003 to December 2004, the author watched four talk shows each month on Al Jazeera to identify the topic under discussion. If it was not possible to watch a given show, the author used the internet to find out about the topic of a particular show. The show topics were grouped under four broad headings: issues relating to Iraq; issues relating to Palestine; issues relating to democracy more generally; and other issues. The bars in the following chart show the number of shows concentrating on these four topic areas.

**Table 1: Al Jazeera Talk shows: Topics/Issues for Discussion**  
**January 2003 - December 2004** (Four talk shows each month.)



Iraq issues included: the sanctions on Iraq, Iraqi opposition, the weapons inspectors, the war on Iraq, the torture in Iraq, Saddam's trial, elections in Iraq, Iraq resistance, the civil war in Iraq, corruption in Iraq, etc...

Palestinian issues: the Road Map, Palestinian government, Palestinian elections, Palestinian resistance, Jenin camp massacre, Palestinian corruption, the Arafat siege, etc.

Democracy issues: the role of political parties in Arab countries, human rights in Arab countries, women's rights, Arab public opinion, elections in Egypt and Lebanon, the Syrian opposition, Algerian elections, etc.

Other issues covered: politics: globalisation, Islamic politics, civilization conflict, Islam, fanatics and terrorism; and social issues: sex, education, religion, etc.

The figures show the crucial importance of Iraq and Palestine: 60% of total programme topics dealt with the crises in these two areas. Apart from this the concentration of

interest is on democracy and civil organization, which together make up 20% of the programme's topics in the last two years. (2003-2004). As democracy issues overlap with Iraq and Palestine, this means that something like 80% of programme topics have a connection with the development of democratic societies.

### 7.1.3.2 The Background of Talk Show Guests

**Table 2: Talk Shows in general: Guests in 2003/2004**

<i>Guest Type</i>	<i>Percentage of total guests 2003</i>	<i>Percentage of total guests 2004</i>
Cabinet ministers and State leaders, such as the Libyan president	9	9
Religious leaders	4	7
Experts, Journalists & Academics	19	23
Members of Parliament	14	7
Political party/organization official	25	23
Public Interest groups	11	13
Non-governmental Organizations	18	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The table shows that most of the guests are from the elites of society. They are well known and are the decision-makers or influence decision-making. Nearly 40% are directly involved in politics and with the inclusion of religious leaders that comes to nearly 50%. Their comments will carry some weight with the viewers even when they do not agree with them. Two groups score a surprisingly low percentage – members of government and religious leaders. It is not clear whether, because these two groups already control their own channels of communication for promoting their ideas, Al Jazeera deliberately makes a point of going elsewhere. On the other hand, those representing various public interest groups and non-governmental organisations figure in the chart at 31% - nearly a third of the guests – which means that alternative voices and interests are given a considerable platform by Al Jazeera.

### **7.1.3.3 The Al Jazeera Talk Show *The Opposite Direction* 2003/2004: Word Count**

The purpose of choosing these words and phrases is to see if Al Jazeera promotes democracy; if it encourages violence; to see if Al Jazeera talk shows reflect the reality of Arab public interest; and to explore messages reaching Arab people which may change their awareness.

#### **Procedure**

##### **Samples**

The author watched Al Jazeera talk shows for two years and then coded the words referring to Arab democracy in general, as explained in the table coding sheet. (See below and Appendix.) Purposive samples were used in this analysis, covering the twenty-four month period 1/1/2003 to 31/12/2004, and the nine month period 1/1/08 to 1/10/08. Purposive samples were chosen as these meet the researcher's aim of identifying the topics and the words used over this period of time. The talk shows debate issues, whether on the news agenda or not, and so the analysis is based on a script and not a visual recording, since the show is made up of debate with a guest, not on visual proofs or investigations.

##### **Coding**

A coding method for verbal references to democracy issues in Arab countries was designed. The analysis code was based on Selective Reduction, the central idea of content analysis. This has been described as follows: "Text is reduced to categories consisting of a word, set of words or phrases, on which the researcher can focus. Specific words or patterns are indicative of the research question and determine levels of analysis and generalization". (5)

By reducing the text to categories consisting of a word, set of words or phrases, the researcher can focus on, and code for, specific words or patterns that are indicative of the research question. The author quantitatively analysed the programmes sampled by using a

computerised coding frame. This was designed to establish the overall frequency of Arab issues and democracy in Al Jazeera talk shows. The coding frame was designed to establish the overall frequency. The author used conceptual analysis in order to examine the strong presence of democracy issues addressed by this particular talk show, by counting the words and coding them for the existence of certain topics: human rights, democracy in the Arab world, Arab leaders and dictatorship, democracy in Iraq, democracy in Palestine, torture in the Arab world, women's rights, elections, the role of political parties, civilization, conflict, Islam and the West, Arab public opinion, peace and democracy in Palestine and Iraq, as well as swear words.

**Table 3: Word count of usage of particular words by the host and guest in the 48 talk shows (January 2003 – December 2004)**

<b>The Show Topic</b>	<b>Word frequency 2003</b>	<b>Word frequency 2004</b>
<b>Iraq</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>620</b>
<b>Democracy</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>1800</b>
<b>Palestine</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>1170</b>
<b>Human rights</b>	<b>999</b>	<b>1999</b>
<b>Arab public opinion</b>	<b>1400</b>	<b>1800</b>
<b>Torture</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>1880</b>
<b>Elections</b>	<b>1309</b>	<b>1909</b>
<b>Women's rights</b>	<b>1114</b>	<b>1714</b>
<b>Terrorism</b>	<b>959</b>	<b>1597</b>
<b>Resistance</b>	<b>1132</b>	<b>1932</b>
<b>Intifada</b>	<b>786</b>	<b>686</b>
<b>Freedom</b>	<b>1700</b>	<b>1230</b>
<b>Dictator</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2688</b>
<b>Conflict</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>1870</b>
<b>Media freedom</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>2100</b>
<b>Civil rights</b>	<b>1900</b>	<b>2600</b>
<b>Minority rights</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>1810</b>
<b>Press freedom</b>	<b>1762</b>	<b>2582</b>
<b>Traitor</b>	<b>2300</b>	<b>2760</b>
<b>Swear words</b>	<b>1876</b>	<b>2314</b>
<b>Elections</b>	<b>1870</b>	<b>2875</b>
<b>Intelligence service</b>	<b>1543</b>	<b>2987</b>
<b>Fake election</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>2799</b>
<b>Referendum</b>	<b>1654</b>	<b>2267</b>



<b>International legitimization</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>2765</b>
<b>Colonialism</b>	<b>1232</b>	<b>1987</b>
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2945</b>
<b>Political freedom practice</b>	<b>1876</b>	<b>2376</b>
<b>Political opposition</b>	<b>1809</b>	<b>2793</b>
<b>Civil organisations</b>	<b>1873</b>	<b>1984</b>
<b>Zionism</b>	<b>1732</b>	<b>1862</b>
<b>Violence</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>2283</b>
<b>Multi political parties</b>	<b>1765</b>	<b>2634</b>
<b>Political/conscience prisoners</b>	<b>1983</b>	<b>1286</b>
<b>Demonstrations</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>1872</b>
<b>Public opinion</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>2292</b>
<b>Peace</b>	<b>3300</b>	<b>1800</b>
<b>Right of self determination</b>	<b>2876</b>	<b>3675</b>

The first point that emerges is that words and phrases referring to democracy are repeated many times.

The word or phrase which was used most frequently (3675 times) during 2004 was *right of self-determination*, by a margin of 23% above the next most frequently occurring phrase. This suggests that there is a considerable groundswell of opinion among the movers and shakers of the Arab world who appear on the talk shows, as well as among the ordinary people who watch in large numbers, that believes that the way forward lies with free elections and human rights.

The next group of words or phrases used most frequently (between 2500 and 2999 times) during 2004 was made up of: *intelligence service, occupation, election, fake election, political opposition, international legitimization, traitor, dictator, multi-political parties, civil rights* and *press freedom*. Apart from *occupation*, (presumably referring both to the US involvement in Iraq and also to Israeli settlements), all these expressions continue the theme of the development of democracy through a choice of political parties, proper

elections, an opposition able to challenge government, a free press, and freedom from the oppression of tyrannical rulers and their secret police.

What is also interesting is which items come low in frequency use. *Zionism* came 27<sup>th</sup>; *Palestine* 36<sup>th</sup>, *Intifada* 37<sup>th</sup>, and *Iraq* 38<sup>th</sup> (out of 38 items checked). This shows that the issues which appear to dominate the Arab political landscape when seen by Western eyes do not in fact preoccupy the Arab states and their peoples to the same extent. Their priorities seem to be far more concerned with their own struggle for greater freedom and self-determination.

Oddly these results seem to contradict the findings of Table 1 above, which indicated the dominance of Iraq and Palestine as show topics. Presumably what is happening is that even when the stated theme of the show is Iraq or Palestine, the actual discussion keeps coming back to issues of democracy and self-determination. This would explain why the word count emphasises those ideas rather than Iraq or Palestine.

If we look at these figures in terms of the percentage change from 2003 to 2004, they provide further insights into the relationship of the media and politics. The phrase which increased in usage more than any other was *torture* (by 394%). Presumably this was as a direct result of Abu Graib and the treatment of Iraqi prisoners by the Americans. *Media freedom* increased by 162%; *democracy* by 125%; and *human rights* by 100%.

*Democracy* came to prominence mainly because the USA with its coalition forces failed to find the weapons of mass destruction which they had claimed Iraq possessed, as well as the ability to launch an attack on any country within 45 five minutes. That was used as one of the main reasons for the USA and Britain deciding to invade Iraq, The reason proved to be untrue, and later the United States changed its tune by talking of the new Arab world built on political reform, starting from Iraq. This was to be an example for other countries to follow.

*Media freedom* and *human rights* could also have been increased by the situation in Iraq, as well as being part of the ongoing concern for greater democracy. The significant

increase of these words in 2004 indicates the priorities of the Arab public, especially after some of the Arab countries had staged elections.

Further down the list (in order of percentage increase from 2003-2004) at 7<sup>th</sup> position is *Palestine* (+75%) and at 9<sup>th</sup> position is *terrorism* (+67%). This probably reflects the deteriorating situation in the relationship of Israel and Palestine, as these gained a higher profile than *women's rights* (12<sup>th</sup> position with 54% increase) and *minority rights* (13<sup>th</sup> position with 50% increase). Women's rights are not surprisingly gaining a higher profile, especially in the Gulf countries, where women are still not allowed to drive a car or travel without permission from their husbands, especially in Saudi Arabia.

Some items dropped in frequency of usage: *Iraq* (-18%) and *peace* (-45%). *Freedom* dropped by 28%. The word was used more frequently in 2003 because of the beginning of the war in Iraq, as commentators on the Iraqi position who appeared on Al Jazeera, including supporters of the USA policy, insisted that the USA was coming to the region to set people free from Saddam Hussain.

#### **7.1.3.4 Content analysis of *The Opposite Direction***

The author monitored *The Opposite Direction* from January 2003 to December 2004. The table below summarises the occasions which dealt with the development of democracy in the Arab world.

**Table 4: Content Analysis of *The Opposite Direction***

The show date	The show Topic
25/2/2003,	<b>Why have Arabs become the joke of the world?"</b> 1-The responsibility of Arab leaders for Arab nation collapse. 2-The USA democracy offers to Arab people 3-The responsibility of the Arab intellectuals in the case of Arab collapse 4-The role of Arab regimes in corrupting the Arab people and societies.
30/9/2003	<b>The political and governmental reform in Arab countries</b> 1-The measurement of real intention of Arab regimes in reform 2-Which form of reform must be applied in the Arab countries? 3-The reasons for rejecting reform from the West imposed on Arab countries 4-The way of reform and change through the Arab regimes.
09/12/2003	<b>The political opposition and the Arab regime</b> 1-The reason of why the Arab opposition asks for help from outside to get the government down 2- Outside help is between treason and duty 3- The weight of Arab opposition in the eye of Arab people. 4-The future of Arab opposition and its relations with the outside.
30/12/2003	<b>The royal and the republican regimes in the arab world</b> 1-The reason for demanding the return of royal regimes 2-The reason why the West is targeting the republican regimes 3- Evaluating the power given by the constitutions to the leaders. 4- The differences between the republican system and the royal system in the Arab world.
30/3/2004	<b>The Arab summit and the reform in the Arab countries</b> 1-The frustration of the Arab people 2-The reform issues and the how the Arab regimes deal with them. 3- The role of the Arab league in the reform of Arab countries

25/5/2004	<p><b>The future of the reform projects</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- The project of the big middle east</li> <li>2- The reasons for the projects reform</li> <li>3- The honesty of the American projects</li> <li>4- The coup and the white revolutions</li> </ol>
16/12/2004	<p><b><u>The Arab elections</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1-The situations of the Arab elections and how to deal with them.</li> <li>2-The democracy between necessity and applying difficulties</li> <li>3-The Arab regime and the fake election</li> <li>4-Democracy in the Arab world as well as beyond.</li> <li>5-The responsibility of the ruler and the people regarding the lack of democracy</li> </ol>

What these programme outlines show is a real concern for the development of democracy in the Arab world and the ongoing struggle to find the best way forward. The programmes do not offer the illusion of some quick fix. Instead, they face the problems of how to react to outside 'help', the tension between constructive opposition and treason, the issue of 'fake' elections, the responsibility of both rulers and people for the building of democracy and the broader picture of how the Arab world generally should work together. This shows an impressive and mature approach to the issues facing the area and to the need to promote political awareness in the viewers – needed to produce a foundation for real democracy in their societies.

### 7.1.3.5 Coverage of Palestinian issues on Al Jazeera talk shows January to October 08

**Table 5: The number of times Palestinian issues were covered in Al Jazeera weekly live talk shows from 1/1/2008 - 1/10/2008**

The programme's name	Democracy and internal issues (eg corruption, reform, political conflict, civil war)	Israeli occupation and Palestine	Human rights in Palestine (eg the case of the border between Egypt and the Gaza strip)	The Palestine economy and the siege; social problems, culture, sport, science, and the arts
<i>The Opposite Direction</i>	3	1	2	1
<i>The Opinion and the Other Opinion</i>	4	3	1	2
<i>Open Dialogue</i>	2	2	3	1

This table moves us forward into 2008, and shows that Palestine and its various problems are being given a prominent position on Aljazeera live talk shows - more than two times a month, excluding other Aljazeera programmes which touch on a variety of Palestinian topics. This is approximately twice as many shows on Palestine as in 2003-2004 (see Table 1 above), and reflects the way that Iraq no longer dominates the news.

#### **7.1.4 An example of viewer engagement**

An example of a particular discussion held on *The Opposite Direction* helps to show how the programme engages the viewers (6). The topic being debated was whether Arab elections are a waste of time and money. The two guests were Bsayyis from Tunisia and Sa'd Jabber, a London-based Algerian lawyer connected with the Centre for North African Studies in Cambridge.

Viewers were able to phone or email their opinions as the discussion progressed, so that they could change their minds as they heard the developing argument. The changing balance of opinion was shown on-screen. However, the programme did not restrict the viewers to simple yes/no responses. Later they were able to phone in comments and express more subtle reactions to the topic. For example, 'one caller said he despised the status quo but felt compelled to protect it anyway, because the alternatives are worse for Arab societies, and because democracy only serves the interests of the West. "I prefer the presence of a dictator," he said. "Democracy has killed 100,000 Iraqis in a short period." He also contended that the West has double standards on Arab democracy: "Bush demanded that the world have nothing to do with Arafat, may God have mercy on him, even though he was popularly elected, while demanding that the world deal with Ayad Allawi, even though he came [to Iraq] on an American tank.'" Drawing viewers into this level of engagement with issues is without doubt an educational process and can only be of benefit to the Arab population in the Middle East.

#### **7.1.5 Comparing Al Jazeera's *Opposite Direction* with Al Arabyia's *Bel Arabe***

Although each channel presents its own talk shows there are significant differences. The big difference between the channels lies in what subjects are raised and how much freedom is allowed to the show's presenter. Major television hosts have a licence to question the guests as long as they play within the channel policy rules. The Al Jazeera talk show *The Opposite Direction* and *Bel Arabe* on Al Arabyia news channel are both

highly successful shows that a large number of people watch. But there is no doubt that there are differences in the content and format of the two programmes. The research shows a rather different concept of the talk show on the two channels.

(i) Many people consider Al Jazeera's talk show *The Opposite Direction* as an entertainment show. That is clear from the way the host, al Kasim, presents his theme by reading the introduction in an excited voice, and by the way he tries his best to provoke the two guests to oppose each other in order to push them to speak in anger, sometimes swearing, or heavily criticising a certain politician or figure in the Arab world. More than 97% of the show guests come to the studio, and only rarely does the presenter use satellite links or travel to different countries for the programmes. In addition to that the programmes always involve two guests.

In contrast Al Arabyia's talk show *Bel Arabe*, presented by Jozel, is quiet. She is a calm person and asks questions which can sometimes be embarrassing to the guest, but without provoking the guest to be so angry or furious. This creates a completely different tone of programme. In further contrast to Al Jazeera, 70% of the interviews use satellite link, and only rarely are two guests interviewed on the programme.

(ii) *The Opposite Direction* seems to range over a great many controversial issues from current events, whereas *Bel Arabe* seems to be more selective and concentrate more on particular issues, such as the impact of the Lebanese election on the Arab political system.

(iii) On Ajazeera's *The Opposite Direction*, the guests sometimes swear or make insulting accusations such as 'You are a traitor' or 'You are a spy'. Such things do not take place on the Al Arabyia talk show.

(iv) Al Arabiya in general, and its talk shows in particular, interview more moderate and liberal Arabs, while Al Jazeera presents the most controversial guests.



(v) Neither show uses a sign to indicate that they are for adults, necessary as sometimes the guests used bad language. Both shows make use of short films or reports from outside the studio. (In contrast, the Al Jazeera talk show *Open Dialogue (Hewar Maftuh)* uses different locations rather than the studio.) Both shows use two commercial breaks.

## **7.2 News: Content Analysis**

### **7.2.1 Procedure**

This part of the research began with the selection of programme samples to be studied. After choosing the channels for this study, the author taped the four newscasts of each channel over the time periods explained below. The author used 4 video recorders and satellite a receiver in order to tape the newscasts of each channel.

### **Sampling Technique**

The researcher used purposive sampling based on a specific time frame to collect episodes from the four satellite TV channels. According to Collins & Robson (7): "The principle of selection in purposive sampling is the researcher's judgement as to typicality or interest. A sample is built up which enables the researcher to satisfy her specific needs in a project". That means that purposive sampling is a commonly used approach for project evaluation. "A purposive sample is one which is selected by the researcher subjectively. The researcher attempts to obtain sample that appears to him/her to be representative of the population and will usually try to ensure that a range from one extreme to the other is included."

Since the study was done on a limited time frame, the researcher defined the specific dates of the TV newscasts to be analysed: two-week newscasts of the four Arab satellite news channels, Al Jazeera, ANN, Nile News and Al Arabyia, beginning on Monday and ending on the Sunday of that week. The time frame started on Monday 14 January 2003 to Sunday 27 February 2003, since the newscasts run from Monday to Sunday. The second sample was taken from 1 June 2008 to 1 September 2008. All in all the researcher evaluated four newscasts on each channel with a total of sixteen newscasts a day. Each newscast was one hour, making a total of 224 hours of programming. This intensive approach, examining days in depth over many hours, allowed the researcher to get a sense of how satellite news is constructed throughout the day. The researcher's strategy was to study more than one channel in order to get more programs examined. The researcher

monitored and coded the satellite news programming continuously from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. universal time.

The aim was to obtain a range of newscasts to reflect the diversity of the Arab media system. Factors considered in making the selection were as follows:

Ownership of the channel: e.g. state-controlled, private, public

Political position: e.g. government, opposed to particular political parties, supporting particular parties

### **Coding Data**

This stage came after the recording was completed. The coding involved identifying the different kinds of programme material: story frames, interviews, live events, studio guests, story length, field interview, anchor reads, Arab affairs (such as Palestinian issues and Iraq issues) and so on. Basically the analysis studied the time devoted by each TV station to the story.

#### **1. The television channels**

Four Arab satellite TV channels were used: Al Jazeera, Al Arabyia, Nile news, ANN Arab News Network.

#### **2. Newscasts**

The research made use of the formal news bulletins on the various channels, and these are always clearly labelled by the broadcasters; for example, Al Jazeera's *Al Jazeera This Morning*, ANN's *News at 9*, Al Arabyia's *The News Hour*, Nile News' *The 24 News Event*.

All the stories in the newscasts that were selected were coded. (See Televisioni Coding Sheets in the Appendix.) This included:

#### **1. The story frames, live interviews, live events, studios, commercials, recorded report.**

2. Story frame length in seconds, Guest Interview in studio, Field reporter comments via link on pictures, Guest interview through satellite, Guest interview through telephone, Field report from the channel's correspondent, Field interview, Anchor reads, Live Event.

3. Topics on satellite news: Arab affairs, Palestinian Issues, Iraq Issues, Domestic, Foreign Affairs, Accidents/Disasters, Business news, Science & Technology, Lifestyle, Sport, Other.

### **7.2.2 Showing graphic images**

Showing images of dead or wounded soldiers and civilians during a war is essential in giving the viewers a complete picture of the horrors of war. Not showing these images would mean hiding a big part of the truth. It seems Al Jazeera news is determined to show a complete range of war images as a part of its policy of covering the news, though at the same time the channel tries to show that there is balance in its approach.

Arab viewers have got used to seeing violent images nearly every day in real life in Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon because of the conflict in the region. As a result of that, Al Jazeera's policy of showing images of the war does not have the same shocking effect on Arab viewers as on Western countries' viewers. Following on from this, governments around the world have tried to exercise pressure and impose censorship on the channel's war coverage. Censorship and restriction may succeed temporarily in hiding much of the bloody reality of the war, but it has since become public knowledge. Al Jazeera has proved that the authorities cannot always influence the media to shape opinion as they would like.

Broadcasting such images is part of the editorial decision-making by the channel. Arab news channels use a range of graphic images to show the security situation in Iraq and Palestine. Al Jazeera's graphic images are more powerful than Nile News or Al Arabiya. From watching the four Arab news channels (Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, Nile News, ANN) the author notices that there is strong competition between Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya to broadcast the strongest images.

Al Jazeera also shows images representing both sides in Iraq. Al Jazeera on many occasions has shown American soldiers killed in the war, and that has caused a conflict between the channel and the US, as well as Britain. Most of the images of human casualties shown on Al Jazeera are close-up pictures.

It seems that showing such pictures is central to the channel's policy of showing the event as filmed. The US administration led by George W Bush accused Al Jazeera of broadcasting images as propaganda against US policy in the Arab world. However, in order to gain a representative sample of the kind of pictures Al Jazeera news channel broadcasts, the author has observed the channel's programmes over the last three years.

### **7.2.3 Presenting conflict: the War in Iraq**

In 1991, during the first gulf war, CNN was the only international news channel allowed by the Iraqi government to broadcast from Baghdad. Because of that privilege CNN became well known around the world for its exclusive pictures from Baghdad. CNN at the time was broadcasting dramatic images, such as those showing the Al Mariah shelters where more than three hundred Iraqi were killed by US army missiles.

Similarly, Al Jazeera had the opportunity to be the only channel broadcasting from the Taliban-controlled zone in Afghanistan. Al Jazeera broadcast exclusive images about the war as well as the Bin Laden video tapes, and this brought the channel to the attention of the world.

However, the scenario in the second war on Iraq was different in that most of the international media were present in Iraq and all the channels were competing for the pictures and news. Al Jazeera again succeeded in presenting exclusive pictures of dead bodies of US soldiers captured and UK soldiers killed in Iraq, as well as pictures of Iraqi dead and captured. This shocked Americans, but Al Jazeera managed to grow its audience through the war by broadcasting such images and information that other networks did not have, or did not have the will to show. Al Jazeera referred to US and

UK forces in Iraq as "invading forces", not "forces of aggression" - the standard phrase on some Arab TV, such as Al-Manar Lebanese Hezbollah movement and Iraq's TV.

The remarkable thing about the war in Iraq in terms of news coverage was that alongside the military campaign there was strong competition among Arab media to be the first to bring the most dramatic and horrific pictures to people's television screens. Al Jazeera, with the other Arab satellite channels, managed to broadcast live events with the latest pictures about the war, and this made a huge impact on Arab viewers. This was clear from the Arab viewers' calls to the talk-show programmes.

More than 60% of Al Jazeera live programmes and talk-shows dealt with the war at the beginning of the war crisis. (See 7.1.3.1 Table 1.) Despite the criticism of Al Jazeera from Arab and Western governments which has made Al Jazeera into a political issue for some governments, that publicity has helped the channel to get attention from the Arab viewer and to increase its audience.

What was the real picture? The thesis author has watched the Arab news channels (mainly Al Jazeera) to reach an overall picture of the way Arab news channels have covered the war on Iraq. Al Jazeera and other Arab news channels successfully managed to cover the story and provide Arab viewers with the news in order to maximize public knowledge about the war and the growing role of the US in their countries. With the rising death toll among Iraqis and the destruction of one of the biggest and most historic Arab capitals, Baghdad, the Arab public started to demonstrate in their own countries, demanding that their governments take action against the war. At the same time Al Jazeera with its talk show and current affairs programmes managed to encourage the Arab people to demand political change in their own countries. The growth of feeling against the war and the occupation, together with the decline in Arab people's trust in their own countries' leaders, was quite clear from the people's demonstrations, through viewer phone-ins and talk-shows, and through print media. Therefore Al Jazeera has become a forum for airing political differences rather than a tool of propaganda for a

particular government. But to give a good picture of what Al Jazeera broadcasts, the author will examine particular events in detail.

### **Example 1**

The Iraq war images broadcast by Al Jazeera on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2003 to its 35 million viewers across the Arab world were horrific pictures from the Iraqi city of Basra after US bombardment, and the positions of two Islamic groups in Iraq's Kurdistan. The victims were civilian: more than 50 people dead and many more injured. One of the images was of an Iraqi child with the head blown off. Such images raised the anger of Arab people, and experts believe Al Jazeera's broadcasting of such images has had a big influence on Arab public opinion. These images have not been shown on US or British TV. According to reports from Washington, the US authorities are imposing total blackout on these reports and the images of the victims. (8) From the beginning of the war on Iraq, both the governments of the US and Britain have imposed restrictions on their media preventing the broadcast of such images to the public in order to avoid any reaction from inside or outside their countries.

### **Example 2**

Dramatic scenes of the war on Iraq led to increased demand from Arab viewers for better coverage. As a result, Al Jazeera managed to recruit many Iraqi freelance journalists in addition to its existing reporters in the main cities. Because of that the channel's newscasts were able to cover events where they were happening. For instance, the channel was the first to broadcast live when the US army with a few hundred Iraqis started to demolish Saddam's statue in al-Firdaus Square in Baghdad on April 9th, which was the first symbol that the Iraqi regime had fallen.

### **Example 3**

"The residents of Falluja are asking 'Where is the Iraqi Governing Council?'" said the visibly shaken Al Jazeera correspondent. "They are asking why the Iraqis are not protecting them. Residents of Falluja call on the Arab world to intervene and lift the siege

on this town of 300,000. They ask where are the Arab leaders in this time?" he said, before throwing himself to the ground as a plane flew overhead. (9)

#### **Example 4**

Photographs of Abu Ghraib prisoners were among the most dramatic and horrific pictures broadcast by Al Jazeera and TV stations across the world. Such images destroyed the reputation the US as one of the most democratic countries in the world among Arab people and its friends in the region, such as Egypt and Jordan, as well as Gulf countries. The events were seen not as an aberration, but as part of a systematic pattern of abuses, the true face of the occupation. Al Jazeera with its report about the pictures indicated that there are still many new allegations of abuse yet to come out.

#### **Example 5**

At the beginning of the war Al Jazeera managed to broadcast footage of dead U.S. soldiers and American prisoners of war who looked scared, through an interview with an Iraqi TV reporter. Showing this image on Al Jazeera angered U.S. officials, who viewed it as humiliating to the prisoners. The channel halted the broadcasts, at least temporarily, after American officials asked that they stop until the families of the prisoners had been notified.

#### **Example 6**

The US bombing of Al Jazeera newsrooms in Kabul and Baghdad in the last war killed one of its news correspondents, Tariq Ayoub. Abu Dhabi television showed people carrying Tariq Ayoub in a blanket. He died after sustaining injuries during the attack on Baghdad.

In these ways Al Jazeera and other Arab news channels have provided a picture contrary to U.S. and British claims that it has been a bloodless, costless and clean war. The channels showed the death, destruction and pain of war on all sides, by full coverage of press statements and conferences held by U.S., Iraq, the United Nations, the Arab



League, the European Union, the French, British, Egyptian, Saudis and by other officials. The Arab broadcasters have reflected the multiple realities throughout the war that are not covered routinely by the U.S. news networks. They have carried on despite the fact that some of their reporters have been beaten by Kurdish forces, banned by Iraqi government officials, and reprimanded almost daily by U.S., Iraqi, Kuwaiti, Saudi, Jordanian and other state and military officials at press conferences.

#### **7.2.4 Presenting conflict: Palestine**

In the case of Palestine during their intifada, Arab TV, especially Al Jazeera, managed to broadcast breaking news of the uprising day by day. Al Jazeera played a crucial role in promoting the Palestinian cause. Al Jazeera focused on Palestinian news throughout the war on Iraq, and kept its news correspondents and its freelance journalists in the Palestinian cities.

Furthermore, Al Jazeera regularly broadcast Palestinian president Arafat's message from his siege compound – a verse of the Koran in which the prophet Mohamed talks about the holy mosque and how the people's lives there defend the mosque until the judgment day. On the other hand Al Jazeera also regularly broadcasts the Israeli prime minister's speech in his controversial visit to the Alqsa mosque in September 2000. Surrounded by thousands of Israeli police he said: "I came here with a message of peace. I think we can live together with the Palestinians." Sharon's visit was the reason for the current Palestinian intifada.

#### **Example 1**

One of the most emotional and horrific images broadcast by TV around the world and by all Arab TV stations (Al Jazeera kept broadcasting it nearly every day) was of the Israeli army shooting a young Palestinian boy, Mohamed Al-Dura, while his father was trying to protect him with his body. The boy's death was broadcast live and caused heavy criticism of the Israeli government. Al Jazeera has shown how the Palestinians attack Israelis in their cities, mostly by suicide bombers, and how the Israeli air force uses Apache

helicopters to retaliate, causing death among civilians. Not a day has gone by without the Arab media and Al Jazeera broadcasting images of Palestinian lives destroyed by the Israeli army, or pictures of Palestinian fighters attacking Israeli military targets.

### **Example 2**

On Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2002, 01:01, Al Jazeera started its newscast by saying: "At least fifty Palestinians died as martyrs, among them thirty in Jenin, yesterday, Saturday, in an Israeli military campaign against the West Bank, and during attacks and incidents in Gaza, according to information provided by Palestinian sources. Meanwhile, five Israeli soldiers were killed, four of them in Jenin where violent battles have raged, and the fifth in the Gaza Strip in a Palestinian attack that left the two attackers martyred dead. In the Jenin refugee camp in the north of the West Bank, that Israel began to attack on Wednesday, more than thirty Palestinians died as martyrs under the gunfire of the Israelis during violent battles with Palestinian fighters. A Palestinian who had put on an explosive belt was also martyred near the city of Jenin. As the camp witnessed violent battles, the Israeli military commander said that they had completely cut off the Palestinian fighters and that the attack would continue until they have been forced to surrender or have been killed. Residents of the camp who spoke by telephone with Al Jazeera said that bodies of martyrs are strewn about the streets and that the wounded are bleeding to death without anyone being able to take them to hospitals. The Palestinian leadership called on international organizations to intervene immediately to rescue Jenin camp from what they called a massacre with which it is threatened at the present time." (10)

"The battle of Jenin camp was broadcast live by Al Jazeera and ANN as some Palestinian residents and fighters were in touch via mobile phone. Moreover, the channel managed to get some of the camp residents phone numbers and called them. Both channels kept up to date with the situation in Jenin camp during the Israeli attack. One item shown on Al Jazeera was the story of 29 March 2002. A Palestinian man described how the Israeli force invaded the camp with tanks and Apaches, entering Jenin in the morning and opening fire on his house leaving his pregnant wife and two children in the house dead.

A view from the top of the Hawashin district of the Jenin refugee camp. Armoured Israeli bulldozers flattened the entire Hawashin district, completely demolishing more than 100 multi-storey homes in this area of the camp. The destruction in Jenin refugee camp left some 4,000 persons homeless, more than a quarter of the population of the camp.” (11)

### **Example 3**

On Friday 29 March 2002, Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, sent his troops in the deadliest assault so far on the Palestinians. Tanks surrounded Yasser Arafat's office, and a massacre of Palestinians began in Ramallah, Jenin, Nablus, and countless towns and villages across the West Bank. Al Jazeera, in its broadcasting on that day, and through very well organised reporter and freelance work, covered all events. Yasser Arafat spoke to the world through the Al Jazeera satellite channels. 'I'll die a martyr,' he said. 'We want a million martyrs for Jerusalem.' That speech was exclusive to the channel and Al Jazeera made good use of it. The channel replayed Arafat's words over live images of Palestinians being gunned down in the streets. Over the next ten days hundreds of thousands of Arab people in Arab countries went onto the streets, demonstrating against Israel and the US. Mass protests exploded all over the Arab world, from Jordan to Morocco, Yemen to Lebanon, and even in Kuwait. Al Jazeera broadcast live all the mass protests. In Cairo, Egyptian students tried to go out of Cairo University into the streets but they could not do that because the Egyptian Police Force stopped them. In Lebanon, Jordanian people went onto the streets shouting, 'A million martyrs for Jerusalem'. In Saudi Arabia, where any form of protest is banned, Saudis drove to nearby Qatar and Bahrain to demonstrate and attack everything American, such as McDonald restaurants.

In Cairo, Egyptian students gathered across campuses to hold rallies. An attempt was made to push into the street, but the demonstrators were stopped. Jordanian students also tried and were pushed back. A day later students in both countries succeeded, waging daily pitched battles with the security forces. In Egypt, the major non-Nato US ally and home of the US Fifth Fleet, the US ambassador called on students to observe a minute's silence for Israelis killed in suicide attacks. The students reacted with fury. By the end of

the week one of them was dead, killed by a rubber bullet, and the US embassy was ablaze. The protests spread across the country. In Alexandria police killed a student and arrested sixty. The protesters started calling on Mubarak, the Egyptian president, to resign calling him "Coward, you client of the Americans" and 'We want a new government because we have hit rock bottom'. In Egypt a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet was set on fire.

On 4<sup>th</sup> September 2002, Al Jazeera showed Egyptian students tearing American and Israeli flags in Alexandria, Egypt. (12)

#### **Example 4**

On Monday 1 April 2002, the Israelis cornered 200 Palestinians in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Al Jazeera broadcast pictures of smoke rising from around the church. The Pope condemned the Israeli siege. The next day all Catholic schools in Lebanon were on strike. Shi'ite Islamic activists and French-speaking Christian school students marched on the same demonstration. Secondary school students organised meetings and voted to strike. They marched from school to school, and sat down outside. The mass protest against the Israeli occupation force extended to some capital cities in Europe, such as London, Paris and Rome, and also to New York. Such a move scared Arab leaders and they start demanding that the US put pressure on Israel. Mubarak addressed the nation on television. He said that Washington had a 'special responsibility' to rein Israel in: 'that is why I sent two messages to American president George Bush...urging the American administration to exert its maximum effort and use all its diplomatic power.' Mubarak's statement was considered to have considerable political impact on the Arab leaders.

May 11 2002. Al Jazeera kept its viewers up-to-date with news about the siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The Al Jazeera team in the city at the time was led by its reporter Guevara al-Budeiri, who reported almost every hour. Guevara in her different reports during the siege in the city tried to be objective by describing the situation there as the city was completely under curfew with no water or electricity.

Guevara in her report showed footage of Nativity Square, streets with their broken lamp posts, tanks, armoured personnel carriers, taxis and cars with tapes attached forming the letters 'TV', ambulances, a group of Buddhist monks slowly beating drums, and kids, together with the sounds of the occupation force jeeps' loudspeakers: 'mamnou'a el-tajawoul' (forbidden to go out). Another scene of the Al Jazeera report showed Palestinian people on the street pushing a small carrier with Red Cross markings. At the distribution place one woman said that she never thought she would ever accept an aid box; but after so many weeks of the Israeli siege she was not ashamed anymore.

A sequence on Al Jazeera showed bullet holes around the small 'Door of humility' in the Nativity Church. An historic part of the church was burnt after the Israelis threw a bomb inside killing three Palestinians. Their bodies, according to witnesses, were left stranded in front of the Church of the Nativity as troops prevented ambulance cars from reaching the victims. "We eagerly like to see them becoming more human," the church priest said.

Al Jazeera shows many people in tears when they see the Palestinian militants who come out of the church waving from a distance to their family members, to whom they cannot say goodbye normally. All those rounded up are stripped, blindfolded and handcuffed before being taken away to detention centres. Guevara with her sad voice ended her report with the words: "This is Guevara al-Budeiri, Church of the Nativity, occupied Bethlehem," emphasizing "occupied."

### **Example 5**

Al Jazeera broadcast images from Ramallah, Yasser Arafat's headquarters. Despite the week-long siege Yasser Arafat remained defiant. He rejected Sharon's "offer" on Tuesday to provide him with a "one-way ticket" out of Ramallah. "Is it my homeland or his homeland?" Arafat asked in an interview on Al Jazeera. "We (Palestinians) were rooted here even before Prophet Abraham... and I have declared before that I prefer to die as martyr." Arafat also lashed out at Israel for re-occupying Bethlehem and targeting its churches and mosques during the advance. "Can you imagine? Can you believe it? They are attacking the Church of the Nativity and burning and demolishing other mosques and

churches.” Arafat insisted Sharon carried out his attack only after receiving a green light from Washington. “The whole world knows that Israel does not act and cannot act without America's agreement.”

### **7.2.5 Comparing four news channels**

What are the differences and similarities between the four satellite news channels: Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, Arab News Network and Nile News? This research shows that Al Jazeera is well ahead of its rivals in using live satellite interviews, despite the high cost, in order to give more credibility to its news stories. The research also shows Al Jazeera concentrates heavily on Arab news, and this is one of the reasons that Al Jazeera is the first choice of most Arab viewers, according to the surveys in this research. Al Jazeera news pays less attention to other areas, such as life style and sport, and this is due to the fact that Al Jazeera has three sport channels, which provide viewers with up-to-date sports news from events and matches around the world.

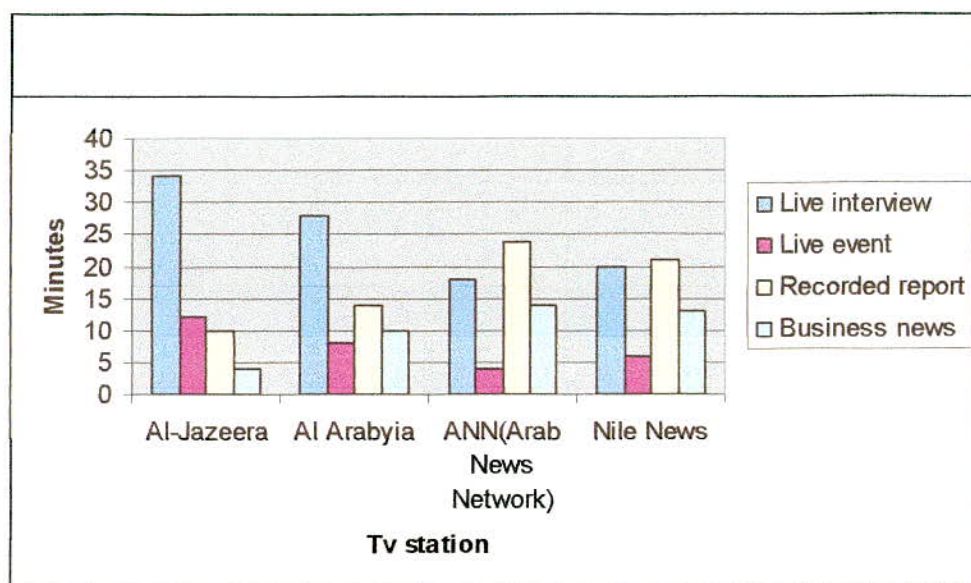
The underlying political ideology and agenda of each channel emerges from the selection and handling of news stories. This becomes clear in the case of all the channels being studied. However, there is the additional dimension of considerable differences in editorial freedom. Al Jazeera enjoys considerable editorial freedom. For instance, it is permissible for interviewers to ask guests tough questions. Editorial freedom and the challenging of guests is more restricted on Alarabyia and ANN, and even more tightly restricted on Nile News. It seems that Al Jazeera devotes so much time to Arab affairs in order to keep the Arab viewers more involved and attached to its programmes. Al Jazeera avoids repeating the same story on its newscasts without updating it in some way – perhaps by means of a live interview from the event or with an expert in the studio. This happens especially on its prime time news, and in some cases Al Jazeera follows up the news story minute by minute.

### 7.2.5.1 The news story frame: Prime time news

The table below shows Al Jazeera's newscast frame compared with other channels. This helps to show the particular features of Al Jazeera's news which give it the edge over other channels.

**Table 6: The Prime Time News Story Frame**

Sample: 2 hours per channel per day over 2 weeks (= 112 hours)



A detailed look at news presentation on Al Jazeera shows that of 28 hours of news bulletins studied, only 25 percent of the newscasts consisted of written and edited packages. 75 percent of the newscast time on Al Jazeera is conducted in the form of "live interview and live event" mode. This involves the news presenter and a guest or an expert providing analysis. This could involve politicians - including Israelis - celebrities or ordinary people. The rest of the time is devoted to voice-over and recorded reports.

It has been noted that during live interviews between an Alajazeera correspondent and the anchor, neither shows much sympathy, especially if there are horrific images of victims after, say, bomb attacks in Palestine or Iraq. However, that does not mean they are taking sides. On the contrary, the story is packaged depending on how correspondents frame the

reporting. Packages are more focused when live reports or interviews concentrate on background causes, the details of the event and the reactions to it.

The reporter plays an important role in covering the event, and that gives the channel more credibility in its coverage. The reporter's role is mostly to do a live report, talking extemporaneously, describing the live event, with sound bite quotations and other sources, which play down the role of the reporter as the main source of information. Live events on Al Jazeera occupied 20%, and that is a significant number for satellite TV during the time period sampled.

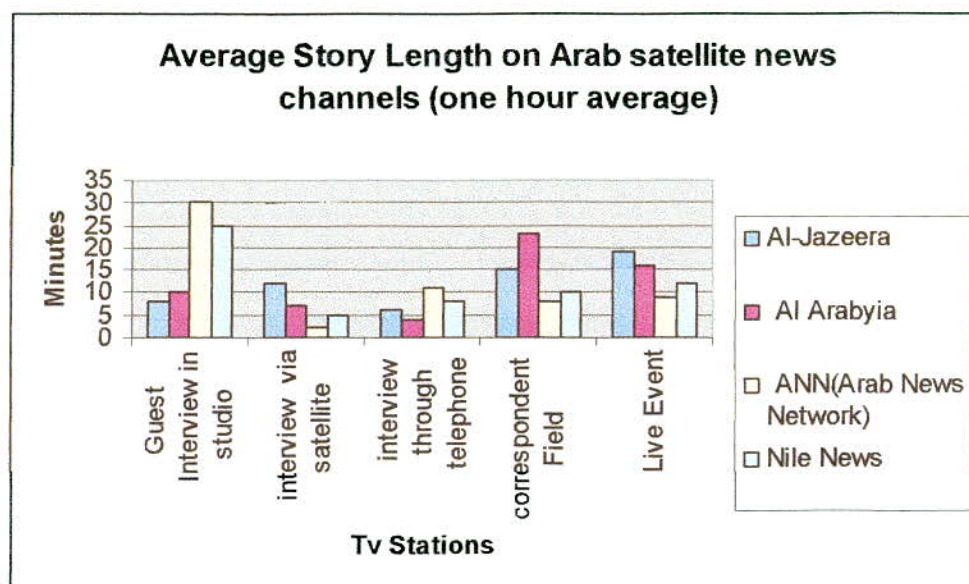
Furthermore, unedited live interviews and unscripted reports are shown on Al Jazeera more than on similar channels. Additionally the reporter on Al Jazeera needs to be available all the time, day and night, talking to the sources. Al Jazeera newscasts present more extensive information about the news stories compared with the other news channels. For instance, on the four Arab news channels (Al Jazeera, Al Arabyia, ANN Arab News Network, Nile News) in four main newscasts, 59 percent of the stories cited an identifiable story source, while 89 percent of stories on Al Jazeera had that level of sourcing, such as interviews or stand-ups. A stand-up gives the viewers the fresh and up to date news, unlike a sound bite where the news story becomes less interesting to the viewers.

Reporting on the other channels is less well resourced, and that means that viewers of these channels receive less detailed news stories compared with Al Jazeera, which gives more time and more varied resources to its news coverage, including, for example, the reporter providing a stand-up live interview after his report. Other channels concentrate on edited news stories and reports, and rarely use live interviews after the reporter has delivered his piece. Content analysis reveals that Al Jazeera presents different points of view, and that is one of the reasons why its live interviews are long compared with other channels. Another point is that Al Jazeera and Alarabyia are more disciplined and professional in keeping their news reporters' opinions out of the news story in order to be balanced and impartial.



## 7.2.5.2 Story Length

**Table 7: Average Story Length on Arab satellite news channels**  
(in minutes per hour)



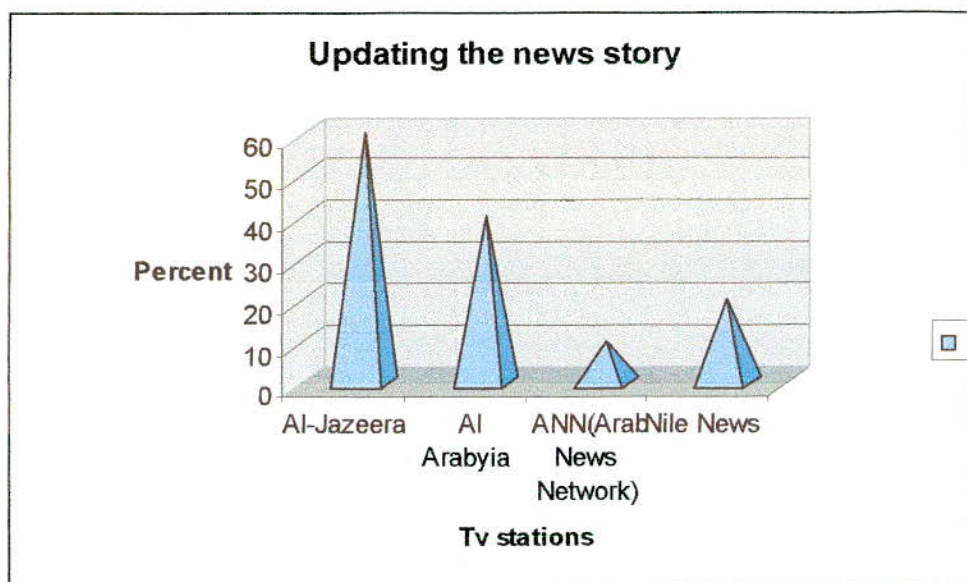
Interviews on Al Jazeera, the primary and most detailed means of communicating, occupied on average twenty-six minutes per hour. As the table shows, satellite interviews and live events are used to create longer items on Al Jazeera than on the other channels. Live events occupied on average 19 minutes per hour, showing that Al Jazeera provides more information about an event or news story. This reinforces the channel's credibility since live coverage is always more compelling, and also suggests that it is taking issues seriously. Live coverage also gives audiences the impression that they can assess a source for themselves. The problem, though, is that there may be only one source heard in a piece, the only point of view offered. The lengths of field interviews on Al Jazeera news are different from other channels, and that is because of Al Jazeera's network of news resources. Single-guest interviews are used extensively by ANN because of its financial constraints. It costs less for the channels to use this method than to use a satellite link. Overall the above figures reveal that each channel presents its newscast according to its available facilities and agenda.

The above chart also shows the news story sources, which in turn provide the viewers with more points of view about an event or story. Al Jazeera takes a leading position among the various channels in using multiple sources for a news story, making the audience aware of the different angles of the news story sources and therefore increasing the knowledge of the audience and encouraging them to develop their own opinion about what they have watched. The prime time evening news is rich in its news sources, making use of news correspondents and live interviews. These packages are more comprehensively sourced, and they give the viewer the power to evaluate the information for themselves. Al Jazeera managed to be the first channel to use multiple news story sources to make it more interesting and encourage debate.

### 7.2.5.3 Updating the news story

**Table 8: Updating the News Story (over 2 weeks)**

Sample: 2 hours per channel per day over 2 weeks (= 112 hours)



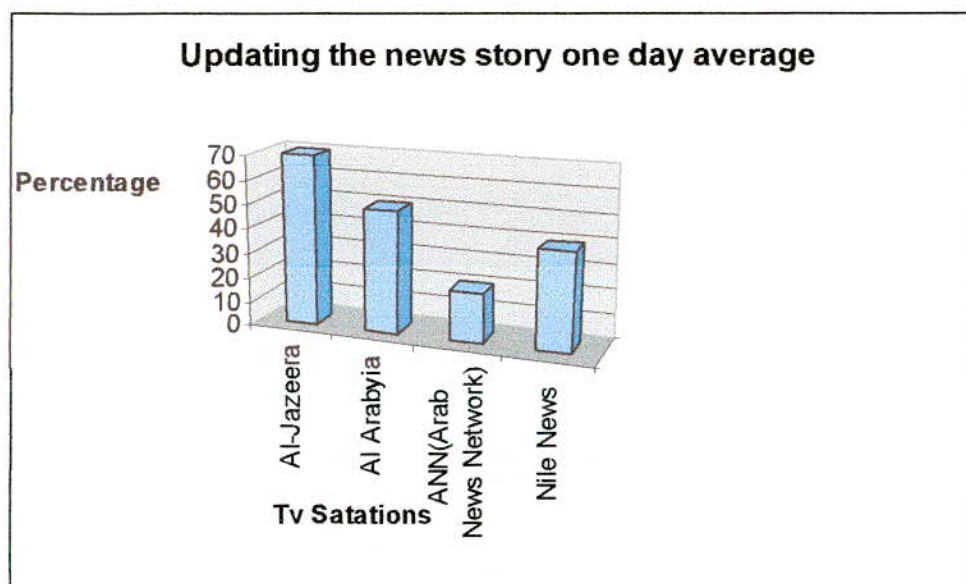
Al Jazeera tries to present any news story as the latest rather than as a repetition, but this is obviously recognized by the audience if there is nothing new about the story. Ways of updating news stories are different from one channel to another, and this is related to the

availability of facilities such as reporters and satellite bookings. Al Jazeera followed by Al Arabyia comes first in keeping news stories up-to-date.

Al Jazeera broadcasts all the time and covers many events around the world, with a broad news agenda, updating the news stories throughout the day. On other news channels, such as ANN, 95 % of the newscasts repeat the same news, sometimes with slight updating of the news story.

On Al Jazeera, 65 % of their news material is updating. This is followed by Al Arabyia news at 45%, Nile News at 25% and ANN at 5%. With some of the news items, Al Jazeera uses the 'breaking news' label as a sign that it is up-dating the story. An example would be the story about the health of Palestinian president Yasser Arafat. The channel kept the viewer up-to-date and used live interviews with its correspondent Walled Alomare in Ramallah.

**Table 9: Updating the News Story (over 1 day)**  
Sample: one day's newscasts with the total of 8 hours



The above table reveals that 70% of stories on Al Jazeera are updated, followed by Alarabyia and Nile News and finally ANN. Aljazerera provides continuously updated coverage, especially with the breaking news.

Any channel which provides continuous updating of its news stories is employing huge resources in terms of technology and communications networks, and making use of freelance journalists in addition to its full time staff. As recently as February 2007, Al Jazeera was the only channel covering the civil war in Somalia, providing breaking news for nearly two weeks before other channels even moved there. The other channels tend to repeat their stories with little updating.

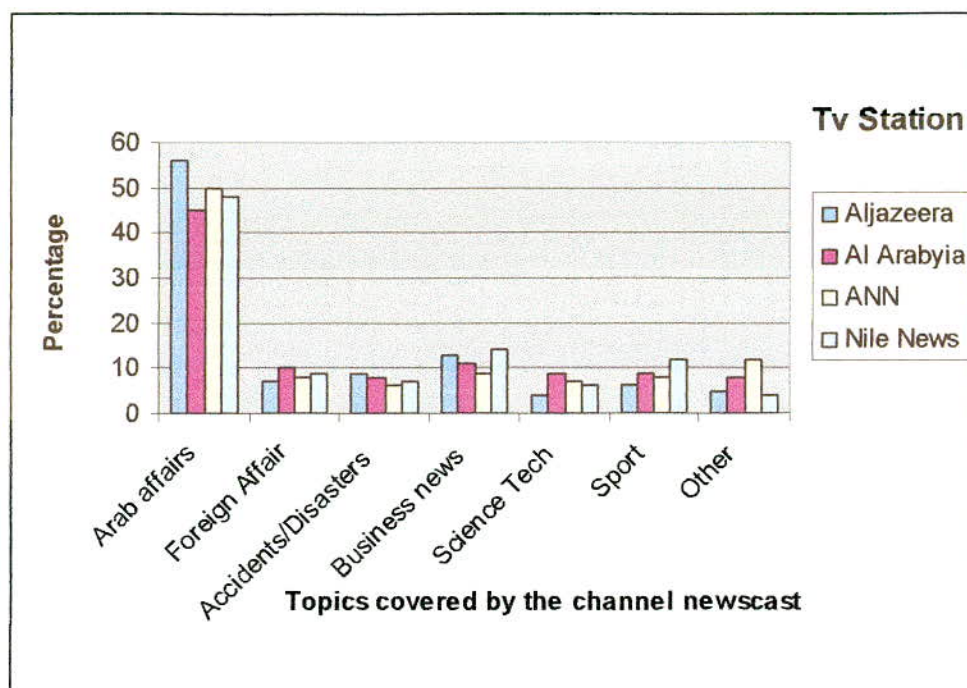
#### **7.2.5.4 Topics covered on satellite news**

The first question which needs to be asked when it comes to analysis is: what topics are covered on the satellite news channels? The answer to this question provides an indication of the news agenda of the satellite news channels. This study examined many hours of news over two weeks and the major finding is that the four channels are presenting a diversity of topics with repetition of a story during the day. Al Jazeera was the most comprehensive news channels among the three channels. It was the first channel to present programmes with titles like: 'For Women Alone', 'Under the Microscope', 'Hot Spot' and 'Top Secret'. These are the main programmes which are exclusive to the channel. There are programmes on politics, sport, and religion presented on Al Jazeera during the week, but the channel has a lack of health programmes. On the other hand, ANN, Al Arabyia and Nile News all present live programs about human health. 90% of Al Jazeera's programmes, whether live, recorded or documentary, are focused on political issues.



**Table 10: Topics covered on their newscasts by the satellite news channels**

One day average



It is clear enough from the above figures how different channels have a different news agenda. On Al Jazeera, Arab affairs occupied 56% of its main newscast, the same as ANN. The rest of newscast time was divided between other news stories. On Nile News domestic issues occupied 17%, because the channel is not a private channel. Its main target is Egyptian viewers around the world who want to hear more news about their country. Domestic affairs includes health, education, the environment, culture, art, etc. If the viewer of Al Jazeera watched the 2 main news bulletins of one hour each, the viewer would watch a total of:

- Twenty-one to twenty-five minutes of Palestinian news
- Twenty-one to twenty-three minutes of Iraqi news
- 3 minutes of the domestic news
- 5 minutes of healthcare and foreign affairs
- Four minutes accidents/disasters
- Two and a half minutes about science and technology
- Half a minute on lifestyle

- Just under four minutes on sport
- 2 minutes of short news items

If people watched Al Jazeera for 12 hours a day, in practical terms they would have seen:

- More than an hour of Palestinian news
- More than an hour of Iraqi news
- More than 12 minutes of the domestic news
- More than 20 minutes of foreign affairs
- More than 16 minutes about accidents and disasters
- More than 10 minutes about science and technology
- More than 4 minutes of lifestyle coverage
- More than 4 minutes of sports news
- More than 8 minutes short news items

#### **7.2.5.5 Differences between satellite news channels**

ANN, with its small staff, produces news by focusing on fewer topics, doing more edited stories with voice-over and airing fewer live reports. Beyond that, however, the similarities between the networks are bigger than the differences. The topics on the four networks, for instance, are remarkably similar. Moreover, the four networks are virtually indistinguishable in the level of repetition, the percentage of new stories through the course of the day and the level of substantive updates.

### **7.2.6 Coverage of Palestinian Issues on Al Jazeera: 1/6/2008 - 1/9/2008**

**Table 11: Coverage of Palestinian Issues on Al Jazeera: 1/6/2008 – 1/9/2008**

<b>Palestinian issues</b>	<b>The number of Palestinian news stories in the three month period</b>
Israeli occupation and Palestine	180
Democracy and internal issues such as corruption, reform, political conflict, civil war	120
The Palestinian economy and the siege; social problems, culture, sport, science, and the arts	90
Human rights in Palestine, such as the case of the border between Egypt and Gaza strip	30

The table above shows that the largest number of stories was devoted to the problems of the Israeli occupation (a democracy/human rights issue), and that democracy issues within Palestine were the second most prominent topic on the Al Jazeera's main evening newscast during the specified period. There were 180 and 120 stories respectively in the three month period. This shows how Al Jazeera's news agenda is still extensively focussed on Palestine, in the same way that it was in the earlier survey. (See 8.2.4.5 above, where Palestine news was the main topic.) Despite the economic crisis around the world, which has occupied the news headlines in other media, Al Jazeera has given most space in its newscasts to Palestinian affairs.

The Palestinian stories took different forms of presentation. Straight news reporting, accompanied by live interviews with guests or with the channel's own reporters in Palestine was the most frequently used format. Aljazeera depends heavily on its reporters in the field and rarely uses footage from other TV companies or news agencies when it comes to Palestinian issues.

## **7.3 Al Jazeera Audience Survey**

### **7.3.1 Sampling design**

The target population for the survey consisted of adults from Palestine and Jordan. The sample consisted of 358 people interviewed between March 2005 and September 2005, and 400 people interviewed in 2008. The purpose of the sampling method was to obtain adequate representation across the chosen sample locations by targeting:

(a) respondents in their homes as well as different locations, such as streets, parks, coffees shops, on buses, and in universities.

(b) different people with different backgrounds, such as different education, rich and poor. These characteristics were clear from the areas the author visited.

A random sample was chosen for this research in order for the result to be more representative of the whole society. It consisted of 26 households from both side of the streets chosen randomly by the author. In some cases the author followed specific random instructions e.g. take the first road right, including side streets, interview at the second house on your left, continue down the road, interview tenth household on your right etc., and interviewed individuals as they were encountered.

“Random sampling is the purest form of probability sampling. Each member of the population has an equal and known chance of being selected. When there are very large populations, it is often difficult or impossible to identify every member of the population, so the pool of available subjects becomes biased.” (13)

“Systematic sampling is often used instead of random sampling. It is also called an Nth name selection technique. After the required sample size has been calculated, every Nth record is selected from a list of population members. As long as the list does not contain any hidden order, this sampling method is as good as the random sampling method. Its only advantage over the random sampling technique is simplicity. Systematic sampling is frequently used to select a specified number of records from a computer file.” (ibid, 13)



To achieve fully random sampling is quite difficult. As Coolican (14) points out: 'Most psychological research does not use random sampling'. He goes on: 'What students can reasonably do is attempt to obtain as random a sample as possible...' The method of sampling used in this research is known as *quasi-random sampling* or *systematic sampling*. Street maps of the cities concerned were divided up with grids, and streets selected in different areas. Once the streets were chosen, the residents of the first 26 houses (by number) in each street were interviewed. In some cases houses were omitted because they looked unsafe, had a dog, were vacant, were a commercial property, etc. In these cases the author moved on to interview the residents of the next available house.

As well as interviewing the occupants of these selected houses, the interviewer took advantage of chance encounters while moving about the cities to interview households. This involved different locations such as the market, the bus station, university campus, restaurants, etc.

### **7.3.2 Survey design**

The first survey was carried out in 2005. It was made up of 42 questions with multiple choice answers. All the questions have a unique number except for those asking for the basic demographic information in Group A. The questions were designed to cover different areas, and this is indicated by a code letter following the number. Group B questions were intended to find out a little about underlying social attitudes. Group C questions were intended to show the amount and nature of TV viewing, and how the sample incorporated TV into their lives. Group D questions asked for comparisons between Al Jazeera and other channels. Group E was a long group of questions investigating the sample's perception of what they had learnt and how their opinions had been influenced in relation to social and political issues. The question groups in 2005 can be summarised as follows:

- A. Demographic information
- B. Levels of awareness and engagement in relation to the political and social environment
- C. Media exposure and information sources
- D. Al Jazeera and other channels compared
- E. Al Jazeera's impact on learning and opinions

The second survey was carried out in 2008. Three questions which had not worked very well or were repetitive were omitted (22, 27, 31), but the remaining questions were carried forward. A few new questions were added to Groups C, D, and E, to clarify what had emerged in the first survey. Zayani and Sahraoui suggest in their book *The Culture of Al Jazeera*, p173 (15), that there was a risk that the Al Jazeera audience was becoming jaded by a very negative output. To follow this up, Groups F, G, and H were added, to discover how the audience saw the channel's output, and how they felt about it. The second survey, after deductions and additions, contained 55 questions. The numbers of the new questions added to the 2008 survey are followed by a lower case 'n'. The new Groups were:

- F. Al Jazeera's approach to political and social issues
- G. The feelings created by Al Jazeera
- H. Has Al Jazeera changed?

A face-to-face survey was selected as a way of discovering the attitudes and opinions of the sample. As Coolican (ibid, 14) says: "Questionnaires used in surveys are usually constructed for the specific research topic and tend to test for a current opinion." To gain some idea of possible movements of opinion, the survey, with some additional questions, was repeated in 2008. The research aims to discover broadly how the sample felt that Al Jazeera and other TV sources of news impinged on their daily lives and the lives of those around them.

There were no open-ended questions, and in all cases the questions offered respondents a choice of answers. In some instances respondents were able to choose more than one option. This was intended to make the survey as helpful and user-friendly as possible to a

wide range of respondents from different educational backgrounds, and to ensure the maximum number of usable responses.

Roughly two thirds of the questions asked directly for facts or opinions, but about one third offered quotations and asked for varying levels of agreement or disagreement. The use of an outspoken quotation often engages the respondent more than a straightforward request for information, and this type of question also provides variety. Some questions covered ground already dealt with, coming at it from slightly different angles, with the aim of confirming opinions already expressed.

There was a deliberate attempt to avoid technical vocabulary, but perhaps some of the 'quotations' are rather wordy and use a very abstract vocabulary (such as 'lack of democracy', 'political systems', 'abuse of human rights')

"As a general rule, long questionnaires get less response than short questionnaires. However, some studies have shown that the length of a questionnaire does not necessarily affect response. More important than length is question content. A subject is more likely to respond if they are involved and interested in the research topic. Questions should be meaningful and interesting to the respondent." (16) The author has tried to follow this advice by keeping the survey to a moderate length and making sure the arrangement and variety of the questions is the most helpful.

The result was a fairly tightly structured survey, but one which it was felt would work in the field and produce usable results.

### **7.3.3 Survey pilot**

To ensure that the survey ran smoothly in the field it was piloted. The main objectives of pre-testing are:

- To make sure the questions are understandable
- To check how long the survey takes to complete
- To check if the questions are related usefully to the research problems

This survey pilot study took place in Jordan and Palestine between April 2004 and June 2004, and the method used was to distribute surveys by hand and carry out face-to-face interviews. In order to achieve a broad reaction to the material the author chose random samples. Feedback was provided by the interviewees both during and after the interview.

The pilot study enabled the author to discover some of the limitations in the survey. In particular, some of the survey participants asked what was meant by expressions such as 'current affairs programs', 'talk show', or 'democracy'. The author had to explain these terms to the participants before and during the actual data collection. There was also a limitation found in the education question. Instead of asking the participant about the education level reached, this question was replaced by a straightforward question in which the participant chose his/her education level from the list: never went to school; primary school; secondary school; college and university.

Another limitation was thrown up by participant viewing habits. As people have different habits and timing for watching TV (some of them before they go to bed or while they are in bed), such things make estimating the number of viewing hours difficult. Therefore the question was replaced in this research by asking the survey participants to estimate the number of times per week they watched Al Jazeera satellite news channels.

The pilot survey showed several questions to be irrelevant. They were eliminated, and several questions were added.

Another issue that emerged was the length of the survey. Originally the questions covered 10 pages and were printed on double-sided pages. Many of the pilot respondents complained that it seemed too long for them. The author reprinted the survey, changing

the font and printing the questions on single-sided pages. After that the feedback was good, and the response rate increased greatly. After adjusting the survey, the author again pre-tested it on fifty people in Palestine. It was found to be working well and the questions were found to be statistically valid.

#### **7.3.4 Survey administration**

The surveys were conducted in Palestine and Jordan. The author interviewed people in their homes, as well as making use of some random respondents in streets, parks, coffees shops, on buses, and in universities. As well as the printed survey, the author used a laptop and filled in the respondent's answers if the respondent not willing to fill in the survey.

Using face-to-face interviews enabled the interviewer to see the respondent's reactions and take note of them. Also it makes it easier for the respondent to ask questions and be given explanations about the research. This makes them feel that their answers to the questions are important, and that creates a relaxed atmosphere between the respondent and the interviewee. That in turn makes it easier for the interviewer to ask the questions.

Interview length was approximately 10 to 20 minutes, depending on the respondent's education and language. Some of the respondents were born and had grown up outside Arab countries, and Arabic was not their main language, so that their ability to understand it was less than for the native speakers.

#### **Introduction**

"Hello my name is Robin Kabha. I am calling from the London Thames Valley University as a part of my PhD (Doctorate Degree) about: *The impact of Al Jazeera satellite news channel on forming Palestinian public opinion and promoting democracy among Palestinians.*"

"I would like your opinion on number of issues related to Arab satellite television. The survey will take about ten minutes. If you have any questions about the content or your

right as research participant please feel free to contact me on 07932 667 951 or email me on [robinkabha@hotmail.com](mailto:robinkabha@hotmail.com). Thank you very much for participating.”

### **Consent**

“Before we begin I would like to assure you that this survey is completely voluntary and has been approved by the London Thames University. All the information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. “

“To help us describe participants in the study, please tell us...” (Here followed the questions from Group A on demographic profile.)

### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

The name, address of the respondents was not recorded. This was in order to make sure the respondents were comfortable while answering any questions. This is reinforced especially when the respondent knows that his/her personal data or identity are not known.

“An anonymous study is one in which nobody (not even the researcher) can identify who provided data. Some studies have shown that response rate is affected by the anonymity/confidentiality policy of a study. Others have reported that responses became more distorted when subjects felt threatened that their identities would become known. Others have found that anonymity and confidentiality issues do not affect response rates or responses”. (17)

### **Ethical issues**

Ethical issues taken into consideration by the author were as follows:

- 1 Informing that participant that the survey is voluntary and that they have a right not to answer any questions. At the same time the author emphasises how important their answer is to this research, in order to ensure the validity of the research.
2. Informing the participant that all the information he/she provides will be treated confidentially, and his/her answers will only be used for this piece of academic research. .
3. The author offers to send the survey results to any participant who asks for it and provides an email address.

Because of the above concerns, the author had to build confidence in the respondents by introducing himself and explaining why he is here, as well the purpose of doing the survey. The author made it clear to the respondent that the research had no connection with any commercial concern.

### 7.3.5 The 2008 Survey Data

#### Introductory note

This section contains the results of the 2008 survey of the Al Jazeera audiences in Palestine and Jordan. The commentary makes comparisons with the 2005 survey. For the full data of the 2005 survey, see the Appendix.

#### Group A: Demographic information

##### Gender and Age

What is your age group and gender?

Male

Age	Palestine	Jordan
18- 25	37	29
26-32	29	32
33-49	22	31
Over 50	12	8

Female

Age	Palestine	Jordan
18- 25	22	26
26-32	31	30
33-49	33	34
Over 50	14	10

At first sight these samples look as if they are overemphasising the populations of both Palestine and Jordan below the age of 50, but in fact the proportions of both populations over the age of 65 are 3.6% in the West Bank, 2.7% in Gaza and 4.1% in Jordan. Both populations are surprisingly young, with 38% in the West Bank, 44.7% in Gaza and 32.2% in Jordan under the age of 15. (18)



## Education

What final level of education did you reach?

Education	Palestine	Jordan
Never went to school	1	2
Primary School	3	17
Secondary school	47	39
College & University	49	42

These figures reflect the national statistics for Palestine, where 91.9% of males and 96.3% of females over the age of 15 can read and write (West Bank), and 96.7% of males and 88% of females can read and write (Gaza). In Jordan the figure is similar: 91.3%. The average school life expectancy is similar in both countries, around 14 years (primary to tertiary). This indicates that around half the population stays on into some further education, and that the sample is therefore representative. (18)

## Occupation

Which of the following occupational groups best describes your present situation?

<i>Occupation</i>	Formal and high skills	Labourer, domestic/unskilled worker	Housewife	Retired	Student	Unemployed	Disabled
<b>Palestine</b>	11	7	20	1	29	27	5
<b>Jordan</b>	18	22	27	2	10	18	3

At first sight it looks as though the unemployed have been over-represented (because they are more readily available for interview). But the unemployment rate in Gaza was running at 41.3% in June 2008, and in the West Bank it was 16.3%, producing an overall figure of around 28% for Palestine. In Jordan the official unemployment rate in June 2008 was 12.9%, but the real rate was thought to be a good deal higher. These figures tally with the sample and suggest that it is broadly representative. (18)

## **Group B: Levels of awareness and engagement in relation to the political and social environment**

### **1B. What does it mean to you to live in a democratic country?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Freedom in general, individual freedom, respect the people's rights, rule of law</b>	91%	87%
<b>Peace/ no oppression</b>	8%	10%
<b>Don't understand the word of democracy</b>	1%	3%

The table shows that the vast majority of the audience understand some of the basic principles of democracy. These figures show an increase since 2005, from 88% to 91% in Palestine, and from 86% to 87% in Jordan.

### **2B. Do people in your country feel free to express their political opinions over the TV screen?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Yes</b>	87%	78%
<b>No</b>	10%	17%
<b>Don't know</b>	3%	5%

The table shows that a very high proportion of the audience feel confident to express their opinions on television. These figures show an increase since 2005, from 81% to 87% in Palestine, and from 76% to 78% in Jordan.

### **3B: Would you describe yourself as having...**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Very strong religious beliefs</b>	88	90
<b>Not strong religious beliefs</b>	3	7
<b>No comment</b>	9	3

This table shows the very high levels of strong religious belief in the respondents in both Palestine and Jordan. The results are so different from the 2005 survey that there may be something unrepresentative about the first or the second sample of respondents. The figures for Palestinians with very strong religious belief were 56% in 2005 and are now 88%. The figures for Jordanians were 53% and are now 90%.

#### **4B. How would you describe your political orientation?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Liberal</b>	45	39
<b>Right</b>	8	37
<b>Religious Party</b>	40%	18
<b>No political orientations</b>	7%	6

This table shows that politically the respondents see themselves principally as liberals or supporters of a religious party. This shows little change from the 2005 survey. The proportion of Palestinians seeing themselves as liberals was 45% in 2005, and has remained unchanged. The proportion of Jordanians seeing themselves as liberals was 37% and has grown slightly to 39%. The proportion of Palestinians seeing themselves as supporters of a religious party was 31% in 2005, and has grown to 40% in the present survey. The proportion of Jordanians seeing themselves as supporters of a religious party was 28% and this has dropped to 18% in the 2008 survey.

### **Group C: Media exposure and information sources**

#### **5C. How many days a week do you watch Aljazeera TV?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Almost every day</b>	84%	73%
<b>3 or 4 days a week</b>	11%	16%
<b>At least once a week</b>	3%	6%
<b>Less than once a week</b>	2%	5%

The table shows the continuing high level of viewing of Al Jazeera, with very large proportions watching the channel 'almost every day'. These figures show an increase since 2005: from 79% to 84% in Palestine, and from 62% to 73% in Jordan. When 'almost every day' and '3 or 4 days a week' are combined, the proportions are 95% for Palestine and 89% for Jordan.

**6C. Which TV station do you watch most often over half an hour at a time?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	89%	81%
<b>Alarabiya</b>	5%	8%
<b>ANN</b>	2%	5%
<b>Nile news</b>	1%	2%
<b>Other Arab news tv</b>	3%	4%

The table shows the continuing popularity of Al Jazeera in relation to the other channels. These figures show an increase since 2005: from 73% to 89% in Palestine, and from 66% to 81% in Jordan. The figures here for the other channels do not reflect actual viewing time spent on them; they simply show that Al Jazeera is the first choice for extended viewing.

**7C. Where do you receive Aljazeera satellite news channels: at home, at the office, other?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Home</b>	79%	69%
<b>Office</b>	10%	16%
<b>Other, e.g. internet</b>	11%	15%

The table shows that most of the audience watch Al Jazeera at home. These figures show an increase since 2005, from 75% to 79% in Palestine, and from 59% to 69% in Jordan. In 2008 some additional questions were asked about viewing patterns. See below, questions 9Cn, 10Cn and 11Cn.

**8C. Which channel would you say that you rely on most for news and current affairs programmes?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	91%	80%
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	4%	7%
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	4%	8%
<b>Nile news</b>	1%	5%

The table shows that a very large majority of the audience regard Al Jazeera as the channel they rely on most for news and current affairs. These figures show that in this area, audience opinion has remained constant since 2005, at 91% in Palestine and 80% in Jordan.

**9Cn. Is most of your viewing of Arab satellite news channels...**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
viewing by yourself	21	16
viewing with your family	43	38
viewing with your friends	26	26
viewing with work-mates	10	20

This table shows that the most common form of satellite tv viewing is with the family (around 40% of the respondents in both Palestine and Jordan). The second most frequent form of viewing is with friends (around a quarter of the respondents in both Palestine and Jordan).

**10Cn. Does Al Jazeera give you topics you are interested in talking about?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
many topics	63	56
some topics	22	22
very few topics	11	15
None	4	7

The majority of the audience in both Palestine and Jordan find Al Jazeera a source of interesting topics for conversation – 63% of Palestinian respondents and rather less, 56%, of Jordanian respondents.

**11Cn. Have you ever sent your views to an Al Jazeera programme... (You can choose more than one answer.)**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
by phone	22	16
by video clip	12	8
by email	36	47
by fax	10	14
by text	17	11
never responded	3	4

Almost all the respondents in Palestine (97%) and Jordan (96%) had responded to an Al Jazeera programme in some way. The preferred way of responding in both Palestine and Jordan was by email (36% and 47% respectively), followed by phone (22% and 16% respectively).

### **Group D: Al Jazeera and other channels compared**

**12D. Which of these channels has most effect on your opinion about an event or news story?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	92%	88%
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	4%	6%
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	1%	2%
<b>Nile news</b>	0%	1%
<b>Other Arab news tv</b>	3%	3%

The table shows that the audience regard Al Jazeera as significantly more influential on their opinions about current issues than the other channels. These figures show an increase since 2005, from 85% to 92% in Palestine, and from 75% to 88% in Jordan.

**13D. “Aljazeera channel is the best Arab channel in dealing with political reform in Palestine.” How far do you agree?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	94%	88%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	5%	10%
<b>Don't know</b>	1%	2%

The table shows that a very large majority of the audience regard Al Jazeera as the best channel in dealing with political reform in Palestine. These figures show only a marginal increase since 2005, from 93% to 94% in Palestine, and from 87% to 88% in Jordan.

**14D. Do you think the credibility of Aljazeera programme content, such as talk shows, current affairs programmes and news, compared with other Arab channels, is...**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Getting better</b>	90	83
<b>Getting worse</b>	2	4
<b>Staying about the same</b>	5	8
<b>Don't know</b>	1	3
<b>Other Arab tv news more credible</b>	2%	2

The table shows that a very large majority of the audience regard Al Jazeera as increasing its credibility. These figures show an increase since 2005, from 89% to 90% in Palestine, and from 79% to 83% in Jordan.

**15D. Which of the following Arab satellite news channels is most actively promoting USA policy in Palestine or among Palestinians?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	9	6
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	32	28
<b>ANN</b>	6	7
<b>Nile News</b>	40	44
<b>Other Arab tv news</b>	13%	15

The table shows that only a very small proportion of the audience see Al Jazeera as pro-US. These figures have fallen since 2005, from 18% to 9% in Palestine, and from 23% to 6% in Jordan – a substantial shift in both countries. The proportion which sees Al Arabiya as pro-US has fallen in Palestine from 37% to 32%, but remained constant in Jordan. The figures for ANN are much the same as in 2005. Nile News is seen as somewhat less pro-US in Palestine, down from 48% to 40%, but up marginally from 40% to 44% in Jordan. Al Jazeera and ANN are seen as significantly less supportive of the US than Al Arabiya and Nile News.

**16D. Do you think any of these satellite TV stations are biased towards the Palestinian cause?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	15	13
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	20	25
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	39	29
<b>Nile News</b>	14	22
<b>Othe Arab news tv</b>	12%	11

This table shows that the proportion of the audience believing Al Jazeera to be biased in favour of the Palestinian cause has fallen from between a quarter and a fifth in 2005 (25% for Palestine and 19% for Jordan) to 15% for Palestine and 13% for Jordan. This is quite a significant drop. The channel perceived as most biased in favour of Palestine is still ANN, with slight changes in scores since 2005: from 37% to 39% for Palestine, and from 31% to 29% for Jordan.



**17D. Which satellite TV stations are addressing politically taboo subjects, such as the legitimacy of some of the Arab leaders, human rights, and corruption in relation to Palestine?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	52	47
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	20	27
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	17	12
<b>Nile News</b>	1	5
<b>Other Arab tv news</b>	10%	19

This table shows not only that Al Jazeera is perceived as the station most likely to be addressing hot topics, but also that the perception has been strengthened since 2005. The response from the Palestinian sample has increased from 42% to 52%, and from the Jordanian sample from 39% to 47%. These are significant increases.

**18D. Which satellite news channel makes most use of its talk show programmes to promote democracy in Palestine?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	69	62
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	17	20
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	9	10
<b>Nile News</b>	1	2
<b>Othe Arab news tv</b>	5%	6

This table shows that Al Jazeera talk shows are seen as way ahead of the shows of the other channels in terms of promoting democracy. Moreover, this opinion has increased significantly since 2005: from 49% to 69% in Palestine, and from 42% to 62% in Jordan.

**19D. In your opinion, which TV station has the most power to change public opinion in Palestine?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Have no opinion</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	93%	11%	2%
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	7%	36%	7%
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	2%	49%	22%
<b>Nile News</b>	0%	51%	17%

This table shows that Al Jazeera is seen by a very large majority of the audience as having the most power to change public opinion of the four networks. Compared with the 2005 survey, Al Jazeera has increased its score from 87% to 93%.

**20D. "Aljazeera provided best coverage of the 2006 elections in Palestine." How far do you agree?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	90%	86%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	8%	11%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	2%	3%

This table shows that the audiences in Palestine and Jordan were very satisfied indeed with the election coverage of the 2006 elections in Palestine. This compares with a similar question in 2005 about the coverage of elections in Iraq, Palestine and Egypt. Then 91% of Palestinian respondents and 82% of Jordanian respondents 'Strongly agreed' that Al Jazeera's election coverage was best.

**22D. Where would you expect to get uncensored programmes among these satellite TV channels?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	79%	64
<b>Al Arabyia</b>	11%	21
<b>ANN</b>	3%	12
<b>Nile News</b>	0%	0%
<b>Other channel</b>	7%	1%

This table shows that the respondents feel considerably more confidence in getting uncensored programmes from Al Jazeera than from other channels. This confidence has grown to some extent in Palestine since the 2005 survey. The figures for Palestine have increased from 71% to 79%, but the figures for Jordan have decreased slightly from 66% to 64%.

**23D. In your opinion, which of these channels is most likely to exaggerate in telling the news story about Palestine?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	4	6
<b>Al Arabyia</b>	11	17
<b>ANN</b>	51	49
<b>Nile News</b>	30	25
<b>Other channel</b>	4	3

This table shows that of the four named channels, Al Jazeera is perceived as the least likely to exaggerate news stories about Palestine. The survey response from Palestine relating to Al Jazeera has remained much the same (5% in 2005, 4% in 2008). The response from Jordan has fallen more noticeably (17% in 2005, 6% in 2008).

**25D. Which of the following Arab satellite newschannels do you think is educating you most about democracy and human rights?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	96	93
<b>Al Arabyia</b>	3	5
<b>ANN</b>	1	2
<b>Nile News</b>	0	0

This table shows an increase in the support for Al Jazeera since 2005, when the figures were 88% in Palestine and 83% in Jordan.

**26Dn. Compared with Al Arabiya, do you think Al Jazeera is... (You can choose more than one answer.)**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
more confrontational (e.g. concentrating on extreme views to create conflict)	12	16
more sensational (e.g. shocking pictures)	22	8
more constructive (e.g. offering solutions to problems)	26	17
less confrontational	12	15
less sensational	18	24
less constructive	13	12
much the same	3	8

There were interesting differences here between Palestinian and Jordanian respondents. Over a quarter (26%) of Palestinian respondents – the largest Palestinian response – saw Al Jazeera as more constructive than Al Arabiya, but at the same time 22% - the next largest Palestinian response - saw it as more sensational. The largest response from the Jordanian respondents (24%) saw Al Jazeera as less sensational, and the next largest Jordanian group (17%) believed Al Jazeera was more constructive. The respondents are more in agreement about Al Jazeera as constructive than about whether it is sensational in comparison with Al Arabiya.

## **Group E: Al Jazeera's impact on learning and opinions**

**27E. How far does Aljazeera make you interested in politics?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Very interested</b>	96%	85%
<b>Not very interested</b>	3%	9%
<b>Not interested at all</b>	1%	6%

The table shows that the vast majority of the audience regard Al Jazeera as stimulating their interest in politics. These figures show an increase since 2005, from 95% to 96% in Palestine, and from 79% to 85% in Jordan.

**28E. "Aljazeera addresses political issues which are of little concern to the Palestinian audience." How far do you agree?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	7	14
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	88	83
<b>Don't know</b>	5	3

The table shows that the audience regard Al Jazeera as particularly relevant to Palestinian concerns. These figures have remained static since 2005, when the percentages were also 88% for Palestine, and 83% for Jordan.

**29E. "Aljazeera talk shows and its news coverage encourage people to use violence against their governments." How far do you agree?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Agree</b>	90%	89%
<b>Disagree</b>	9%	9%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	1%	2%

This table shows that a very high proportion of respondents believe that Al Jazeera encourages violent action. The responses have not changed significantly since 2005: from 93% to 90% for Palestine, and from 87% to 89% for Jordan. Note the follow-up question 45En below.

**30E. “The Aljazeera talk show presenters should stop viewers from revealing any information if they feel it threatens Palestinian national security, or from swearing at Arab leaders.” How far do you agree?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Agree</b>	87	79
<b>Disagree</b>	7	29
<b>Have no opinion</b>	6	14

This table shows increasing concern about the behaviour accepted on Al Jazeera talk shows. The proportion of those agreeing has increased greatly since 2005, from 60% to 87% for Palestine and from 57% to 79% for Jordan. These are significant increases.

**31E. “Aljazeera should not be allowed to cover certain Israeli affairs such as elections, or interview Israelis, as long as Israel is occupying Palestinian land.” How far do you agree?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Agree</b>	74	77
<b>Disagree</b>	17	12
<b>Have no opinion</b>	9	11

This table shows that around three quarters of the sample felt that the Israeli point of view should not be given a platform on Al Jazeera. This still leaves a quarter of the respondents who did not believe in exclusion. The scores here have increased from the 2005 survey, slightly in the case of Palestine (from 72% to 74%), but more noticeably in the case of Jordan (from 59% to 77%).

**32E. How well do Aljazeera talk shows cover political reform in Palestine?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Very well</b>	79	69
<b>Not very well</b>	16	19
<b>Have no opinion</b>	5	12

This table shows that there is still a very large majority who believe that Al Jazeera talk shows cover political reform in Palestine very well. However, the scores have fallen slightly from the 2005 survey: from 84% to 79% for Palestine, and from 72% to 69% for Jordan.

**33E. How appropriate is Aljazeera's handling of democracy issues in Palestine?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Very serious</b>	78%	52%
<b>Not at all serious</b>	20%	43%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	2%	5%

This table shows a response consistent with 2005.

**35E. "Aljazeera TV gives the information I need about the progress of Palestinian issues." How far do you agree?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	93%	89%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	5%	10%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	2%	1%

This table shows that a very large majority of respondents feel that Al Jazeera is giving them the information they need on Palestinian issues. The scores are very similar to the 2005 survey: Palestine has increased slightly from 90% to 93%. Jordan has increased somewhat more, from 82% to 89%.

**36E. "I think that Aljazeera has managed to influence me and Palestinian public opinion about the need to be ruled by a democratic political system." How far do you agree?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	85	90
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	12	6
<b>Have no opinion</b>	3	4

This table shows that a very large majority feel that they and other Palestinians have been influenced by Al Jazeera to believe in the need for a democratic system. Although still very high, the scores have fallen from 2005: the Palestinian score has fallen from 95% to 85%; the Jordanian score has fallen from 92% to 90%.

**37E. “I think that Aljazeera has managed to influence Palestinian viewers about democracy and human rights in their country.” How far do you agree?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	83	78
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	12%	10
<b>Have no opinion</b>	5%	12

This table shows that a very large majority of the audience believes that Al Jazeera has made a convincing case for democracy and won over Palestinian viewers. Although very high, the scores have fallen from 2005: the Palestinian score has fallen from 90% to 83%; the Jordanian score from 88% to 78%.

**38E. Do you agree with this statement: “I think that Aljazeera should continue producing more programmes about Palestinian society in terms of lack of democracy and mismanagement of the existing political system which has divided the country.”**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	83%	76%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	14%	22%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	3%	2%

This table shows strong support in both Palestine and Jordan for television programming on Al Jazeera which exposes political mismanagement and a lack of democracy in Palestine. In a similar question in the 2005 survey, the Palestinian score was 86% (falling slightly to 83% in 2008) and the Jordanian score was 66% (rising more significantly to 76% in 2008).

**39E. Do you think Aljazeera news and its current affairs programmes are...**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Trustworthy</b>	89%	84%
<b>Not Trustworthy</b>	8%	14%
<b>No opinion</b>	3%	2%



This table shows that a substantial majority of the respondents in both Palestine and Jordan believe that Al Jazeera is trustworthy in its news and current affairs programmes. The level of confidence has grown slightly since the 2005 survey. The Palestinian score was 87% and it has grown to 89%. The Jordanian score was 79% and it has grown to 84%.

**40E. Do the guests on Aljazeera talk shows and current affairs programmes affect your views or develop your opinions about your government?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Sometimes</b>	79	77
<b>Rarely/ Never</b>	10	16%
<b>Don't Know</b>	11%	7%

This table shows that in both Palestine and Jordan, the respondents' perception of being influenced by guests on Al Jazeera talk shows and current affairs programmes remains at a high level. Nearly four fifths of the respondents admitted some influence. The figures are very similar to the earlier survey of 2005. The proportion of Palestinian respondents has remained the same at 79%. The proportion of Jordanian respondents has fallen slightly from 81% to 77%.

**41E. Do you ever talk about anything you've seen on Aljazeera?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Sometimes</b>	92	90%
<b>Rarely/ Never</b>	5	3%
<b>Don't Know</b>	3%	7%

This table shows that the proportion of respondents in Palestine and Jordan who discuss Al Jazeera programmes has remained very high, at around nine tenths. This is very similar to the earlier survey in 2005. The proportion of Palestinian respondents admitting to spending time talking about programmes was 89%, which has risen to 92% in the present survey. The proportion of Jordanian respondents in the same category was 92%, which has fallen slightly to 90% in the present survey. In 2008 a related question, 10Cn, was introduced.

**42E. Do Aljazeera programmes motivate you to participate in any politically orientated activities? (e.g. vote; sign a petition; join a political discussion; demonstrating, protesting.)**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Sometimes</b>	91	89
<b>Rarely/ Never</b>	7	8
<b>Don't Know</b>	2	3

This table shows that a very high proportion of the respondents in both Palestine and Jordan have felt motivated to participate in some political activity as a result of Al Jazeera programmes. The figures are very similar to those for 2004. The figures for Palestine were 87% in 2005, and are now 91%. The figures for Jordan were 93% in 2005 and are now 89%.

**43E. Overall, do you feel that you have learnt from Aljazeera programmes about democracy issues such as human rights, civil society, and democratisation?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>Yes</b>	91	88
<b>No</b>	6	8
<b>Don't know</b>	3	4

This table shows that around nine tenths of the respondents in both Palestine and Jordan feel that they have learnt from Al Jazeera about democracy issues. The results are very similar to the earlier survey of 2005. The proportion of Palestinian respondents who believed that they had learnt from Al Jazeera was 91% in 2005, which has remained unchanged. The proportion of Jordanians was 86% in 2005 and has increased slightly to 88%.

**44En. Has Al Jazeera changed your views about the role of women in society?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
<b>not at all</b>	42	36
<b>very little</b>	32	45
<b>some change</b>	16	19

Al Jazeera is not perceived by 74% of Palestinians and 81% of Jordanians as having changed their views about the role of women. Less than 20% across Palestine and Jordan feel that their views have changed to some extent.

**45En. What sort of violence might be encouraged by Al Jazeera?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
violent street protest about specific issues	74	66
suicide bombings	12	28
other	14	8

This is a follow-up question to 29E on whether Al Jazeera encourages people to use violence. In their answers to that question, respondents showed that they felt strongly that Al Jazeera encourages violence (around 90% for both Palestine and Jordan). In answer to this question, 74% of Palestinians and 66% of Jordanians saw the violence in terms of street protest. Only 12% of Palestinian respondents saw it in terms of suicide bombings, but a surprisingly high figure of 28% of Jordanian respondents saw the violence encouraged by Al Jazeera in terms of suicide bombings.

**Group F: Al Jazeera's approach to political and social issues**

**46Fn. Do Al Jazeera's programmes suggest answers to the problems faced by Palestinian people?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
They provide clear answers	58	49
They indicate possible ways forward	29	36
They concentrate on the problems rather than any answers	13	15

The bulk of the respondents in both Palestine and Jordan felt that Al Jazeera contributes something positive to the debate about the future of Palestine (87% in Palestine and 85% in Jordan), but less than half in Jordan and only 58% in Palestine felt that the channel offered 'clear answers'.

**47Fn. Do you think the confrontational style (i.e. presenting extreme views in conflict) of some of Al Jazeera's debates is helpful in finding answers to social and political problems in Palestine?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
is very helpful	18	9
is slightly helpful	12	15
is not helpful	68	72
no opinion	2	4

Around 70% across the whole sample was critical of the confrontational style of Al Jazeera - 68% in Palestine and 72% in Jordan - though a surprisingly high 18% in Palestine saw it as 'very helpful'. This was not matched in Jordan.

**48Fn. Does Al Jazeera give the impression that the situation of Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza is getting better or getting worse?**

	<b>Palestine</b>	<b>Jordan</b>
Getting a lot better	8	9
Getting slightly better	12	8
Much the same	36	27
Getting slightly worse	12	18
Getting a lot worse	32	38
No opinion	32	38

This question produced a spread of responses. There is obviously disagreement and uncertainty on this topic, but the weight of opinion was clearly towards the negative. 44% of Palestinian respondents and 56% of Jordanian respondents felt that Al Jazeera gave the impression that things were getting 'slightly worse' or 'a lot worse'. 36% of Palestinian respondents and 27% of Jordanian respondents felt that the impression created by the channel was that things were much the same. 32% and 38% respectively had no clear opinion.

**49Fn. Does Al Jazeera put across a viewpoint of its own?**

	Palestine	Jordan
Yes	75	66
No	23	28
Not sure	2	6

75% of Palestinian respondents and 66% of Jordanian respondents felt that Al Jazeera puts across a viewpoint of its own (as opposed to simply giving a platform to a variety of views).

**50Fn. What do you think is Al Jazeera's viewpoint?**

	Palestine	Jordan
Pro-American Pro-Israel	5	8
Pro-Islamist	34	38
Pro-Palestine	59	49
Pro-existing Arab rulers	2	5

59% of Palestinian respondents and 49% of Jordanian respondents felt that Al Jazeera's own viewpoint was basically pro-Palestine. 34% and 38% respectively felt that it was pro-Islamist.

**51Fn. Do the issues you believe are important get enough coverage on Al Jazeera?**

	Palestine	Jordan
Good coverage	49	46
Some coverage	43	47
Little or no coverage	8	7

There seems to be very general satisfaction that Al Jazeera covers what the audience believes to be the important issues. 92% of the Palestinian respondents and 93% of the Jordanian respondents reckon that the issues of importance to them get 'good' or 'some' coverage on Al Jazeera.

**52Fn. Does Al Jazeera give a fair picture of what life is like in Palestine?**

	Palestine	Jordan
a fair picture	77	66
a slightly exaggerated picture of hardship	13	18
an exaggerated picture of hardship	6	9
not sure	4	7

These figures show that between two thirds and three quarters of the target audience believe that Al Jazeera gives a reasonably fair picture of life in Palestine. 90% in Palestine and 94% in Jordan believe that the picture is either 'fair' or 'a slightly exaggerated picture of hardship'. This is a considerable vote of confidence in the general reliability of the channel over matters which the sample know about.

**Group G: The feelings created by Al Jazeera**

**53Gn. How does Al Jazeera leave you feeling about the future of Palestine?**

	Palestine	Jordan
Feeling angry	26	19
Feeling discouraged	13	32
Feeling a strong sense of belonging to the Arab people	46	29
Some other feeling	10	8
No particular feeling	5	2

These responses show that even though it reinforces a strong sense of Arab identity, Al Jazeera leaves around two fifths of Palestinians and a half of Jordanians with negative feelings about the future of Palestine.

**54Gn. If Al Jazeera gives you negative feelings, why do you watch the channel?**

	Palestine	Jordan
It gives better coverage of Palestine than other channels.	21	16
Even if the news is bad, it still makes me feel I belong to the Palestinian community.	43	38
I hear people on Al Jazeera expressing views I strongly agree with.	26	26
I enjoy talking about Al Jazeera programmes with family and friends.	10	20
I feel the channel is on our side.	10	20
Some other reason.	10	20

The reinforcement of a strong sense of belongingness (expressed in options 2 and 3) clearly acts as a powerful motivation for watching the channel, and this seems far more important than the quality of news coverage (option 1).

**Group H: Has Al Jazeera changed?**

**55Hn. Do you think Al Jazeera's approach to political debate has changed in the last few years?**

	Palestine	Jordan
changed a lot	21	19
changed slightly	44	42
remained the same	26	29
don't know	9	10

These figures show that around two thirds of respondents in both countries feel that Al Jazeera has changed either 'slightly' or 'a lot' over the last few years.

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## **Chapter 8: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

This discussion firstly considers the data in relation to the research questions, and integrates it with ideas of other researchers. Secondly the data is considered in relation to the most relevant effects theories.

### **8.1 Discussion of the Research Questions**

**1. What is the amount of time Palestinians spend watching Al Jazeera; what form does their viewing take; and how does it compare with their viewing of other Arab satellite TV channels?**

The popularity of Al Jazeera with the Arab audience is generally accepted in a range of studies. Jeffrey Tayler (1) refers to Al Jazeera as “The world’s most widely watched Arab TV station”. Lawn and Carey (2) state that “the majority of Arab viewers watch Al Jazeera for hours on end – or at least keep the network on in the background while doing other things for nearly half their waking hours. It is estimated that Al Jazeera has an audience of over 45 million individuals or 70% of Arabs with access to satellite TV”. Zayani and Sahraoui (3), in their recent study *The Culture of Al Jazeera* (p44), refer to a 2002 Gallup poll of nine countries in the Arab world which concluded that “Al Jazeera is widely watched and is in fact perceived positively in the Arab world”. They also refer to a poll carried out by the University of Maryland and Zogby International in six Arab countries in 2004, which showed that “Al Jazeera was found by far the most watched satellite channel for international news”.

However, the shortage of detailed information about the Al Jazeera audience is highlighted in the same work by Zayani and Sahraoui (ibid, p134). They write: “There is certainly a receptive audience for Al Jazeera, but determining how much audience share

Al Jazeera has is a tricky issue". The present research attempts to provide some more precise information about viewing in Palestine and Jordan.

A question about the frequency of watching Al Jazeera showed that large numbers in Palestine and Jordan watched 'almost every day' (5C). The 2008 figures showed an increase since 2005 from 79% to 84% in Palestine and from 62% to 73% in Jordan. The survey sample watched Al Jazeera 'most often for over half an hour at a time' by a substantial margin over the other channels (6C). The 2008 figures showed an increase since 2005 from 73% to 89% in Palestine and from 66% to 81% in Jordan. These findings provide some more detail about the popularity of the channel.

The question on where people watch Al Jazeera (7C) showed that 'Home' was where most respondents watched satellite TV, and there was some increase between 2005 and 2008. An additional question in 2008 showed that the most common form of satellite viewing is with the family (around 40% of respondents in both Palestine and Jordan) and the second most frequent form of viewing is with friends (around a quarter of the respondents in both Palestine and Jordan). (9Cn) Most of the sample audience is stimulated to talk about what they have seen on Al Jazeera (around 90% across Palestine and Jordan, with no substantial change between 2005 and 2008) (41E); and a new question in 2008 showed that the channel provides topics that the respondents are interested in talking about (around 80% across Palestine and Jordan) (10Cn).

These findings show how Al Jazeera forms a significant part of the social structure of viewers' lives. This links with the point made by Nouredine Miladi (4), where he argues that the oral tradition – discussion of current issues in houses, cafes and streets – is still a vital strand in Arab opinion-making.

Various writers refer to the success of Al Jazeera's programmes offering participation. For example, Ali Alarabi (5) comments on the way in which *The Opposite Direction* has provided "an outlet to various opinions and views to be debated and contested freely without censorship". In the process it has become "perhaps the most popular Arab TV

show on television today, viewed weekly by millions of Arabic speakers around the world". To follow up this area of participation, a new question in 2008 asked about how viewers might have contacted the channel. Almost all the respondents in Palestine (97%) and Jordan (96%) had responded to an Al Jazeera programme in some way. The preferred way of responding in both Palestine and Jordan was by email (36% and 47% respectively), followed by phone (22% and 16% respectively). Only 3% in Palestine and 4% in Jordan had never responded. This shows a impressive level of active engagement with the channel. (11Cn)

## **2. Which channels provide Palestinian viewers with more political news and current affairs programmes, in particular dealing with the development of democracy in Palestine?**

As far back as 2003 Hussain Amin (6) reported a national survey in Jordan which showed that Al Jazeera was rated the best channel for news and current affairs. Al Arabiya was rated second and Abu Dhabi TV third. Mark Lynch (7), p45, reports a 2004 survey in Jordan which found 72% watching Al Jazeera and 54% watching Al Arabiya. "Al Jazeera remained the standard-setter – and was the one station every Arab could assume that other Arabs had seen that day – but other stations offered a serious challenge." The present research confirms this situation and provides further detail.

The content analysis showed that Al Jazeera news provides more live interviews and live events than other channels (7.2.5.1) often with satellite links (7.2.5.2); updates its news stories more than other channels (7.2.5.3); has the highest proportion of 'Arab Affairs' news (7.2.5.4); and shares with Al Arabiya a concentration on correspondents in the field and live events (7.2.5.2). Al Jazeera's newscasts provide more extensive information about stories than its rivals, and a higher proportion of stories have an identifiable source. The channel's extensive resources create the capacity to have correspondents 'on the spot' when news breaks, and its reliance on unedited live material is combined with well-trained reporters who have greater freedom in presenting news stories than those in the

state-run TV channels (7.2.5.1). There is a good deal of editorial freedom for producers, and interviewers are allowed to ask searching questions (7.2.5).

When asked in 2005 which of the channels was educating them most about democracy, Al Jazeera was seen as a significantly better source, and this remained constant in 2008 (25D). However, when asked in 2005 how often the Arab satellite news channels dealt with democracy issues, the respondents to the survey put Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya in joint leading positions (24D). There was a hint here that Al Jazeera might not have quite the leading edge it had had, and that other channels were catching up. However, in 2008, Al Jazeera was perceived as having a clear lead over the other channels in its handling of politically sensitive subjects, such as the legitimacy of some Arab leaders, human rights and corruption in Palestine (17D).

However, there was very strong agreement with the idea that the audiences had learnt from Al Jazeera about democracy issues (with similar results in 2005 and 2008) (43E); that Al Jazeera 'gives the information I need about the progress of Palestinian democracy' (with similar results in 2005 and 2008) (35E); and that Al Jazeera is 'the best Arab channel in dealing with political reform in Palestine' (with a marginal increase between 2005 and 2008) (13D). Other questions (8C, 20D, 32E) coming at this issue from different angles also produced responses in favour of Al Jazeera.

### **3. In what ways does Al Jazeera serve as a medium for public awareness and information among Palestinian satellite TV viewers?**

Many writers discuss the way in which the new satellite channels have increased the general level of political understanding. Khalid Hroub (8) maintains that: "The satellite media in the Arab world have, of course, raised awareness". He is echoed by Hisham Sharabi writing in 2003 (9), who admits that conclusive evaluation is not possible at this point, but still insists that a raising of political consciousness among large segments of the population has definitely taken place. Zayani's (10) work on Al Jazeera's role in

shaping ideas is making the same point. Lawn and Carey (ibid) take a similar view, maintaining that people are sharing a growing interest in civil societal issues. This research attempts to show in more detail how this is happening.

Firstly there is the sheer volume of material about the Arab world appearing on Al Jazeera. The content analysis studies showed (unsurprisingly) the channel's concentration on the situation in the Arab world, in both its news and talk shows. Talk shows were dominated by Iraq, Palestine and democracy issues (7.1.3 Table 1). Viewers' feedback by phone, email, etc., shows how they have become engaged with the ongoing debate about Arab society, in a way that is clearly educational.

Secondly there is the range of opinion and attitudes presented by the channel. Lynch (11) defends Al Jazeera against its critics by saying that "it is manifestly untrue that the Arab media are dominated by a single perspective". The Al Jazeera mission statement is quite specific about the way the channel is committed to act "as a forum for plurality" (cited in Zayani and Sahraoui, ibid, p57-58), and Al Umari, Al Jazeera's chief correspondent in Israel and the Occupied Territories, maintains that Al Jazeera offers the audience a choice of views: ... "we respect the viewer's intelligence. Let him be the judge. We don't dictate anything to anyone". (Cited in an article by Asaf Carmel (12).)

The findings of the present research back this up. Nearly a third of talk show guests were not from the political or religious establishment, and presumably voiced some alternative views (7.1.3 Table 2). The talk shows have created a media space for a wide range of topics, many of them previously taboo, and for a wide range of opinions (7.1.1, 7.1.3). The content analysis showed that the news on Al Jazeera includes different points of view, and uses multiple sources for stories, encouraging audiences to make up their own minds (7.2.5.2). It presents critical views of Arab regimes as frequently as views critical of US action in the Arab world. All this tallies with Al Jazeera's claim to be presenting a plurality of views.

Thirdly there is the general level of satisfaction among the survey sample with what Al Jazeera is providing. A group of questions in the survey identified that in general the sample felt very positively about the quality of material provided by Al Jazeera in terms of raising public awareness and providing information. Al Jazeera programming was seen as relevant to the Arab audience (28E) by a substantial majority, remaining constant between 2005 and 2008. An even higher level of support was given to the idea that Al Jazeera dealt more effectively with the topic of political reform than other channels (with marginal increases between 2005 and 2008) (13D).

A question on which TV stations were addressing political subjects previously taboo (17D) produced more of a spread in response. Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya scored very similar results in 2005, but there was solid preference for Al Jazeera in 2008 (69% in Palestine and 62% in Jordan). A question on uncensored channels (22D) produced a very clear pecking order in 2005, with Al Jazeera comfortably in the lead, followed in order by Al Arabiya, ANN and Nile News. This was repeated in 2008, with some changes in the Al Jazeera figures.

A question on the trustworthiness of Al Jazeera (39E) showed an increase in the number of the respondents who had confidence in Al Jazeera from 2005 to 2008 (87% to 89% in Palestine and 79% to 84% in Jordan). A question (14D) on whether the credibility of Al Jazeera programming in relation to other channels was improving produced consistently high levels of support for the perception of improving credibility, increasing from 2005 to 2008 from 89% to 90% in Palestine and from 79% to 83% in Jordan. This was considerably higher than the figures obtained in a public opinion poll conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (19-21 March 2007) (13), which showed that Al Jazeera is regarded very positively by about half of the Palestinian population. 48.4% of Palestinians who watch TV “trust Al Jazeera as the most reliable source of news.”

A question on exaggeration (23D) showed Al Jazeera as the channel perceived as least likely to exaggerate compared with Al Arabiya, ANN and Nile News. The 2008 response

from Palestine has remained constant. The response from Jordan has fallen from 17% to 6% (showing that *fewer* people think that Al Jazeera is likely to exaggerate).

Overall, respondents were in no doubt that the channel had an educational mission, and this would tally with the Emir of Qatar's belief that the channel is a way of preparing his state for free parliamentary elections.

Fourthly there is the particular issue of the use of graphic images of war and violence. Al Jazeera news has provided graphic images of war and violence in the region (7.2.2, 7.2.3, 7.2.4). On the one hand it has created what one critic has called the 'grisly' quality of Al Jazeera, but on the other it can also be seen as getting away from previous sanitised presentations of war and violence. It is not clear how far this is a commitment by the channel to the 'truth' and how far it is sensationalism intended to increase audience share. Whatever the cause, the use of this material, especially when it relates to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is what makes some commentators regard the channel very critically.

For example, in an article in the New York Times Magazine (Nov 18<sup>th</sup> 2001), Fouad Ajami (14) (director of the program in Middle East Studies at the School of Advanced International Studies at John Hopkins University) referred to Al Jazeera's handling of the al-Dura episode as "incendiary". "The station played and replayed the heart-rending footage of 12-year-old Muhammed al-Dura, who was shot in Gaza and died in his father's arms. The images' ceaseless repetition signalled the arrival of a new, sensational breed of Arab journalism. Even some Palestinians questioned the opportunistic way Al Jazeera handled the tragic incident. But the channel savored the publicity and the controversy all the same."

Scott MacLeod (15) writing in October 2006 comments specifically on Al Jazeera: "Al-Jazeera won loyal viewers with its on-the-spot coverage of the Palestinian *intifadeh* in 2000, the Afghanistan and Iraq wars waged in 2001 and 2003, and the conflict in Lebanon this past summer. But the tone of the output was often partisan, and some

thought its grisly footage of death and destruction accompanied by angry commentaries took al-Jazeera's journalism toward the realm of incitement to hatred.” But he goes on: “In their defense, the channel's executives say that al-Jazeera is just the bearer of bad news. And there is evidence that the channel has consciously moderated its line over the years, scaling back the Arab flag-waving in its news bulletins and talk shows.”

By way of comment on all this, the survey sample for this research believed by a very substantial majority that Al Jazeera gives either a ‘fair’ or only a ‘slightly exaggerated picture of hardship’ in its portrayal of life in Palestine. (Question 52Fn) This is a considerable vote of confidence in the general reliability of the channel in matters which the sample know at first hand.

#### **4. Have Al Jazeera viewers in Palestine and Jordan gained a better understanding of democracy from the channel’s programmes?**

The Al Jazeera mission statement (cited in Zayani and Sahraoui, *ibid*, pp57-58) states that the channel is committed “to support the right of the individual to acquire information and strengthen the values of tolerance, democracy and respect for liberties and human rights.” It is not surprising therefore to find that democracy issues in various forms dominate the channel’s content.

The content analysis of the talk shows demonstrated that they give democracy issues a high profile. The word count showed the emphasis on key concepts of democracy, with ‘right of self-determination’ being the most frequently used of the selected phrases (7.1.3 Table 3). Some 80% of shows surveyed dealt with topics that touched on democracy in some form (7.1.3 Table 1).

The concern for democracy appears in the way programmes can be as critical of the failure of Arab regimes to adopt progressive reforms as of US involvement in the Middle East (7.1.1). (In the survey, question 38E showed the audience’s reaction to this issue: a



substantial majority of respondents felt that Al Jazeera should expose governments pursuing reactionary policies, and this response remained much the same between 2005 and 2008.)

One of the main planks of democracy is that it requires participation by the people for it to work. Al Jazeera's programmes set out to encourage feedback from the ordinary viewer, and have been very successful in this. The high level of response through phone, email, etc., was shown in the answer to a new question in the 2008 survey (11Cn). Almost all the respondents in Palestine (97%) and Jordan (96%) had responded to a programme in some way. The preferred way of responding in both Palestine and Jordan was by email (36% and 47% respectively), followed by phone (22% and 16% respectively). This shows the extent to which the channel has engaged the viewers.

The content analysis of the talk shows also provided examples of the level of viewer engagement in the phone-in discussions, and this also suggested that viewers were gaining a good deal in understanding democracy (7.1.4). The viewer quoted showed an understanding of the complexity of the democracy issue in the Arab world, where sweeping away an oppressive regime may produce something worse, and where 'democracy' as proposed by the West may be tainted by Western interests, illustrated by the way that at times the West does not accept democratically elected leaders that it does not approve of.

However, whether this high level of participation by viewers represents the first step towards real democracy, or whether it is just a kind of television game, is hotly debated by the critics. One group of commentators insists that political change requires political institutions, and that TV debate, however free, is no substitute, but others argue that simply by opening up free debate the channel has given an impetus to democratic development. This research cannot resolve this dispute, but it does show the considerable degree of participation the channel has stimulated, not only in terms of phone-ins and emails to shows, but also in terms of real political action. Question 42E asked whether respondents had been motivated by the channel to take part in some political activity such

as voting, signing a petition and so on. A very high proportion claimed to have taken part in some form. This confirms in a modest way what several commentators believe. Mohamed Zayani (16) has made the point that "Arab satellite broadcasting has helped the Arab street mobilize its efforts to support the intifada." Sharabi (ibid) maintains that political "commitment and action have become possible on a mass scale never known before".

The viewers' growing understanding of democracy has certainly included an awareness of the possibilities of taking to the streets and of their own power to influence things. Several examples suggested links between television coverage and street protest (7.2.4), and question 45En in the survey showed that between two thirds and three quarters felt that if Al Jazeera encouraged violence, it would be in the form of street protest. Marc Lynch (ibid, p5) is in no doubt about the link between news coverage and street protest, and identifies specific instances where TV material seems to have led to action on the streets. He argues that "the impact of the news coverage has similarly revolutionized political behaviour. News coverage has inspired contentious politics on the so-called Arab street, from the fierce demonstrations sparked by al-Jazeera's coverage of the American-British bombing of Iraq in December 1998, to the intense waves of sustained popular protests over the bloody fighting between Palestinians and Israel in 2000 and 2002, to the demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq in 2003, to the wave of protests demanding political reform that swept from Lebanon through Egypt into the Gulf in the first months of 2005."

The transcripts of *The Opposite Direction* (7.1.2) showed how that programme puts people into conflict with each other rather than attempting to find compromise or to negotiate positions. This backs up what other commentators have noticed, and raises the question of whether this kind of approach, although providing exciting television, is really a preparation for democracy, where the way forward frequently involves compromise.

Zayani and Sahraoui (ibid, p172-3) feel that the audience may be tiring of this form of debate. They comment that: "So far, Al Jazeera does not seem to be providing much beyond engaging in what Fatema Mernissi calls 'the art of polemics', which used to strike a chord with its viewers in the past but is unlikely to do so in the future... What can be asserted, though, is that reality is such that viewers are already being saturated with *déjà vu* Arab politics and will end up expecting more or will tune out of news channels altogether."

There was one indication in the survey that audiences felt that the uproarious conduct of some talk shows had a downside. One question raised concerns about Aljazeera's talk shows getting out of hand and even creating security risks (30E). This was the only anxiety among responses expressing a very high level of approval of the channel.

However, the audience survey showed interestingly discriminating responses. A new question in 2008 asking whether the respondents found the confrontational style helpful produced a negative reaction from around two thirds of the sample (47Fn). But when asked whether Al Jazeera programmes concentrated on solutions or problems, 87% in Palestine and 85% in Jordan believed AL Jazeera provided 'clear answers' or 'possible ways forward' – seeing the channel in a positive light (46Fn). This suggest that audiences can filter out what they see as helpful, and it links with Miladi's comment (ibid) that "viewers have come to construct their opinion through the ability to choose between various sources of information."

Around twelve questions in the survey came at the issue of understanding democracy better from different angles. Respondents felt strongly that Al Jazeera had made them interested in politics (27E), with some slight increase from 2005 to 2008. Respondents felt that the channel gave them the information they needed about the progress of Palestinian democracy, with little change from 2005 to 2008 (35E); and that they had learnt from Al Jazeera programmes about democracy issues, again with little change from 2005 to 2008 (43E). By far the majority of respondents had a good understanding of the concept of democracy, with a slight increase from 2005 to 2008 (1B), but it would

have been worth refining this question to find out if possible how far TV had been responsible for this. Most respondents admitted that they talked about what they had seen on Al Jazeera: around 90% in 2005 and 2008 (41E). A new question in 2008 (10Cn) found that a high proportion (85% in Palestine and 78% in Jordan) found 'many topics' or 'some topics' on AL Jazeera interesting to talk about.

In 2005 a large proportion of respondents 'strongly agreed' that Aljazeera provided the best coverage of elections in Iraq, Palestine and Egypt: 91% in Palestine and 82% in Jordan. A similar question in 2008 about coverage of the 2006 elections in Palestine produced a similar vote of confidence: 90% in Palestine and 86% in Jordan. (20D).

In 2005 49% in Palestine and 42% in Jordan strongly agreed that the talk show programmes on Aljazeera promoted democracy in Palestine. Aljazeera's scores were closely followed by Al Arabiya. (18D). By 2008 the scores for Al Jazeera had increased to 69% in Palestine and 62% in Jordan, and the channel had moved well ahead of Al Arabiya. Al Jazeera was seen as a significantly better educational source about democracy issues (25D).

Other related questions dealt with: Al Jazeera's treatment of political reform (13D), and the Al Jazeera talk shows and their treatment of political reform (32E). These reinforced the findings above.

Overall this research shows how Al Jazeera has managed to raise the profile of democracy in the minds of many Palestinians.

##### **5. In what ways has Al Jazeera influenced Palestinian public opinion, with particular reference to democracy?**

A number of commentators make the point that Arab governments feel that, as a result of cross-border satellite TV, their power to influence public opinion is slipping away. Simon

Henderson (17) believes that Arab governments are worried that they have lost control of public opinion. Shibley Telhami (18) elaborates this idea, arguing that because increasing numbers of citizens are getting their news from outside their own countries, governments are less certain that they can manipulate public opinion or head-off opposition. Telhami believes government spin will become less effective. Alterman (19) echoes this view, that governments will lose control of public opinion. Najib Ghadbian (20) also believes that satellite TV has undermined government control of what people watch and what people think. This research confirms the role of Al Jazeera in particular in shaping public opinion.

Firstly the respondents to the survey had no doubt that Al Jazeera operated as an opinion-forming influence. In 2005 Aljazeera was perceived as the channel having most effect on opinion about public affairs by 85% in Palestine and 75% in Jordan. These figures had increased by 2008 to 92% and 88% respectively (12D). In 2005 87% of respondents agreed that Aljazeera was the channel most likely to change public opinion in Palestine, and in 2008 this had increased to 93% (19D). Aljazeera gained the strongest support (in relation to the three other channels) in response to the question 'Which channels in your opinion have the ability to shape public opinion in Palestine?' (21D). In 2005 a high proportion also admitted to being 'sometimes' affected in their views and political opinions by the guests on Al Jazeera talk shows. This had remained much the same by 2008 (40E). The respondents do not appear to have abandoned their critical faculties as only 'sometimes' were they influenced.

Secondly, the respondents felt that Al Jazeera was successfully building support for democracy in the Palestine. In 2005 a very high proportion of survey respondents thought that Al Jazeera had managed to influence them and Palestinian public opinion about the need to be ruled by a democratic political system. Although showing a slight fall, the 2008 figures were still very high: 85% for Palestine and 90% for Jordan (36E). A similarly high proportion felt that Al Jazeera had managed to influence Palestinians about democracy and human rights in their country. The 2008 figures showed a drop, but were still substantial (37E). In 2005 a substantial majority of respondents felt that Al Jazeera

should expose Palestinian governmental abuse and mismanagement, and this was much the same in 2008 (38E). Moreover, a high proportion said that ‘sometimes’ they had been motivated by Al Jazeera programmes to participate in some political action, with strong responses of 91% in Palestine and 89% in Jordan for 2008 (42E).

The content analysis of the talk shows showed how the channel continually highlighted the democracy issue. The lack of democracy has been criticised and the need for political reform promoted (7.1.1). Al Kasim’s presentational style challenged viewers to get engaged and ask questions about what they themselves really thought (7.1.2). Iraq, Palestine and democracy have dominated the shows’ discussions (7.1.3 Table 1). One third of show guests represented interests other than those of the political and religious establishment (7.1.3 Table 2). The word count showed the enormous emphasis on democracy issues (7.1.3 Table 3). Further content analysis reinforced these findings, with more evidence of the emphasis on democracy in the talk shows (7.1.3 Table 4).

All these findings back up the survey results just considered. With this degree of exposure to democracy issues through programme content, it is not surprising that respondents felt the channel had convinced them of the need for democratic developments. The data from the content analysis therefore gives us a picture of a television channel with a commitment to keeping democracy issues in front of its audience, and also challenging them to engage and do something about it. The audience survey shows a body of viewers who trust Al Jazeera, and who readily admit to the way the channel has encouraged them to adopt a particular vision of political development.

As a result the great majority of survey respondents saw themselves and Palestinian viewers being influenced by Al Jazeera about the need to move towards greater democracy. Some of them felt that Al Jazeera had actually persuaded them to take some political action, such as vote, sign a petition, join a political discussion, demonstrate or protest.

When asked to compare the influence of Al Jazeera on public opinion with that of other channels, Al Jazeera was perceived as more influential than other channels by a considerable margin. (19D).

Paradoxically, among all this emphasis on democracy, a question in 2005 about whether Al Jazeera encouraged violence against governments produced a high level of agreement which was maintained in 2008 (29E). A new question in 2008 about the sort of violence which might be encouraged by Al Jazeera suggested predominantly street protests about specific issues: 75% in Palestine and 66% in Jordan. (45En). This certainly chimes with the correlation noticed in the content analysis between Al Jazeera programmes and street protest, but without being conclusive. (See 7.2.4.) It could also be another side to anxieties expressed in the response to question 30E, about talk shows getting out of hand and some programmes being a security risk.

But the study also showed up a further element in the relationship between Al Jazeera and the Palestinian audience, connected to the democracy issue, but going deeper. Two thirds of the respondents felt that Al Jazeera gives a pretty accurate picture of what life is like in Palestine (52Fn), and when asked whether Al Jazeera gives the impression that things are getting better or worse for Palestinians, there was a good deal of negativity (48Fn). A further question, coming from a slightly different angle, showed that even though it reinforces a strong sense of Arab identity, Al Jazeera leaves around two fifths of Palestinians and half of Jordanians with negative feelings about the future of Palestine (53Gn). Why then do Palestinians watch the channel? This was asked in question 54Gn, which showed that the reinforcement of a strong sense of belongingness clearly acts as a powerful motivation for watching the channel, and this seems far more important to many than the quality of news coverage (54Gn).

There is the implication here that Al Jazeera is important to Palestinians because it meets some emotional or psychological need as much as dealing with the practicalities of politics and democracy. This would confirm what Zayani and Sahraoui (ibid, p66-67) (and others) maintain: "People relate to Al Jazeera because it both shares and stages the

malaise and sorrow of Arabs. Al Jazeera emerged in an environment marked by a succession of wars and crises and during a time marked by the spirit of defeat and disappointment. As such, Al Jazeera is the channel of Arab disenchantment, articulating what people want to say but cannot say with a rare sense of audacity. Over the years, it has come to give an outlet to people's fears and anxieties and to allay much of the anger and frustration many Arabs feel." The significance of Al Jazeera for Palestinians goes deeper than simply issues of democracy and political reform, and it has shown up in the present research.

## **8.2 Setting the data in a theoretical context**

### **8.2.1 Agenda Setting**

Over the period January 2003 to December 2004, just over 20% of the talk shows on Al Jazeera dealt with democracy issues (7.1.3 Table 1). The sorts of topics included were: the role of political parties in Arab countries, human rights in Arab countries, women's rights, Arab public opinion, elections in Egypt and Lebanon, the Syrian opposition, the Algerian elections, and so on.

A further 25% of the programmes dealt with Palestinian issues, and while these involved topical events such as the conflict with Israel, they tended to come back in the end to the Palestinian right of self-determination in a state of their own. Another third of the programmes were about Iraq, and although elections appeared as a topic, this was part of a large range of topics relating to things such as Saddam's regime, the war and the consequences.

Therefore, some 45% of programmes dealt either directly with democracy or with Palestinian issues, and so from a Palestinian viewpoint, issues of self-determination and having a political voice were given a high profile.



The word count applied to the talk shows during the same period (7.1.3 Table 3) showed that the most frequently used words or phrases were: *right of self-determination, election, political opposition, dictator, multi-political parties, civil rights* and *press freedom*. Although not in the top group, *media freedom, democracy* and *human rights* increased substantially in usage between 2003 and 2004, by 162%, 125%, and 100% respectively. *Women's rights* and *minority rights* also increased in usage, by 54% and 50% respectively.

The data collected in 2008 from the principal talk shows showed that over a nine month period 36% of programmes dealt with democracy issues within Palestine, and a further 24% dealt with human rights issues, such as the Gaza Strip situation. (7.1.3 Table 5)

Parallel with this, data collected in the three month period from 1.6.08 to 1.9.08 (7.2.6) from Al Jazeera news output, specifically on Palestine, showed that 36% of stories dealt with internal democracy and human rights. Most of the stories (43%) dealt with the relationship with Israel (which also has a democracy/human rights dimension).

This material shows the extent to which democracy issues have been highlighted by Al Jazeera, and continue to be given a high profile.

The survey showed how the audience has been reacting to this programming.

Firstly, the audience indicated that they wanted to know about democracy issues, and that Al Jazeera was meeting this need. In 2005 a large proportion of respondents strongly agreed that 'Aljazeera TV gives the information I need about the progress of Arab democracy': 90% in Palestine and 82% in Jordan. By 2008 these had increased to 93% and 89% respectively (35E). In 2005 respondents 'strongly agreed' that 'Aljazeera provided the best coverage of Arab elections in Iraq, Palestine and Egypt' (91% of Palestinian respondents and 82% of Jordanian respondents). In 2008 there was a very similar response to Al Jazeera's handling of the 2006 elections in Palestine (90% in Palestine and 86% in Jordan) (20D).

Secondly the audience indicated that the programming had stimulated their interest in politics. In 2005 Aljazeera was perceived as making the respondents more interested in politics by 95% in Palestine and 79% in Jordan. By 2008 these figures had remained much the same in Palestine (96%) but increased in Jordan (85%) (27E). In 2005 large numbers admitted to being motivated 'sometimes' to take some sort of political action by Aljazeera, with similar responses from Palestine (87%) and Jordan (93%). By 2008 these figures had remained constant at 91% and 89% respectively (42E).

Thirdly the audience was aware that Al Jazeera talk shows actually promote democracy. In 2005, 49% of respondents in Palestine and 42% of respondents in Jordan strongly agreed that the talk show programmes on Aljazeera promoted democracy in the Arab world. In 2008 Al Jazeera had increased its scores to 69% and 62% respectively (18D).

Fourthly, the audience felt the programming had convinced them of the importance of building democracies for themselves. In 2005 a large proportion of respondents strongly agreed that 'Aljazeera has managed to influence Palestinian viewers about democracy and human rights in their country': 90% in Palestine and 88% in Jordan. By 2008 these scores had fallen slightly to 83% in Palestine and 78% in Jordan (37E). In 2005 a large proportion of respondents strongly agreed that 'Aljazeera has managed to influence me and Arab public opinion about the need to be ruled by a democratic political system': 95% in Palestine and 92% in Jordan. Although still high, the scores have fallen in 2008 to 85% and 90% respectively (36E).

The data from the content analysis therefore gives us a picture of a television channel with a commitment to keeping democracy issues in front of its audience, and also challenging them to engage and do something about it. As a result, viewers today are significantly more likely to see programmes about democracy, as Al Jazeera is increasing its coverage of the topic in most of its talk shows, especially *The Opposite Direction*, which is the most popular. It introduces more complex political material for discussion and debate by specialists. Increased exposure to messages regarding their civil rights and

the role of civil organisations, together with other topics such as violence, fake elections and referendums – all this can play a meaningful role in sensitising viewers to the importance of democracy issues and current concerns about them.

Expressions such as *democracy*, *human rights*, *public opinion*, *reform* etc. are not just part of an educational process. They also pass on underlying messages to viewers, implying criticism of undemocratic, corrupt Arab leaders and their governments, which still control their countries by what they call ‘emergency law’. Moreover, democracy is presented in such a way as to suggest that the lives of Arab people would improve and democracy would create a better future in every respect. The underlying assumption is that this is the way forward. The audience survey shows a body of viewers who respond to this by trusting Al Jazeera, and who readily admit to the way the channel has encouraged them to adopt a particular vision of political development.

But the major problem with agenda-setting theory is not in establishing correlation but in establishing causality. This survey goes some way towards addressing this problem by drawing on the perceptions of the audience about how they felt the channel had influenced them. This is not conclusive, but it is significant that the audience feel that this is how things have been working. However, it is interesting that there is a slight drop between 2005 and 2008 in the number believing the programming had convinced them of the need to build democracies for themselves. This could be because the problems on the ground between Hamas and Fateh have created a degree of disillusionment with democracy in Palestine. This would show the limits of Al Jazeera’s influence: that the audience’s beliefs about democracy are not dependent on Al Jazeera, but that their response to the programming is tested against their experience of the world around them. This is considered further in the next section.

### **8.2.2 Cultivation Theory or an Active Audience?**

As explained in Chapter 6 on Media Theory, Cultivation Theory cannot be applied to the current study in the way that Gerbner used it. It is not possible to devise measures of ‘democracy’ on television and in the real world in the way that Gerbner devised measures

of violence. Nevertheless, the underlying idea that television creates a version of the world which over time people come to accept as 'real' is an approach which is relevant to the current research. The use of a survey in 2005 and again in 2008 allows for comparisons over time. Has the channel created an assumption that democracy is the natural way forward, or are the audience's reactions in fact more complicated?

In 2005 a large proportion of respondents strongly agreed that 'Aljazeera has managed to influence me and Arab public opinion about the need to be ruled by a democratic political system': 95% in Palestine and 92% in Jordan. But although still high, the scores have fallen in 2008 to 85% and 90% respectively (36E). In 2005 a large proportion of respondents strongly agreed that 'Aljazeera has managed to influence Palestinian viewers about democracy and human rights in their country': 90% in Palestine and 88% in Jordan. By 2008 these scores had fallen slightly to 83% in Palestine and 78% in Jordan (37E).

These responses suggest that over a three year period the audience has become slightly *less* convinced by Al Jazeera that democracy is the answer to Palestinian needs. This could be for various reasons, one of which could be the current conflict between Hamas and Fateh, which shows up democracy in a bad light.

Another area where attitude change has occurred is in Palestinian attitudes to Israel. The concerns about the channel offering a platform to Israel have increased between 2005 and 2008, slightly in the case of Palestine (from 72% to 74%), but more noticeably in the case of Jordan (from 59% to 77%) (31E). In 2005 Aljazeera was perceived as being biased towards the Palestinian cause by 25% of Palestinian respondents and 19% of Jordanian respondents. In 2008 this had fallen to 15% and 13% respectively, quite a significant drop. This could be because there was less bias, or because the audience was less aware of it (16D).

These responses could be taken as suggesting a hardening of the Palestinian stance towards Israel, and a strengthening of a sense of the Palestinian cause (so that pro-

Palestine material on Al Jazeera no longer appears as biased). This would be natural in the light of the current situation in Gaza and the continuing disruption caused by the Wall and its checkpoints.

In both these examples it is possible to explain attitude change in relation to current events as much as to the influence of Al Jazeera, and this suggests that the audience is weighing up what they see on Al Jazeera in the light of what they see around them.

Further to this, the question on whether Israeli views should be given a platform on Al Jazeera also showed that in 2008 there were 26% in Palestine and 22% in Jordan who *were* happy for Israel to be given a platform on Al Jazeera (31E). This is a sizeable minority, who were able to come to a different conclusion, and another indication that the audience consists of individuals who are able to make up their own minds.

Moreover, the content analysis showed up a wide range of opinion leaders in the guests on talk shows – well known figures from the elites of society, and coming from a spread of different interests (7.1.3 Table 2). In 2005, almost 80% of respondents admitted to being influenced in some way in their views and opinions by the guests on Aljazeera talk shows and current affairs programmes, and by 2008 these figures had remained largely unchanged (40E). But once again, this implies that the audience is having to make its own judgements between the widely differing views of the programme guests.

A group of new questions in 2008 considered the helpfulness of Al Jazeera in relation to the future of Palestine. In response to one question the bulk of the respondents in both Palestine and Jordan felt that Al Jazeera contributes something positive to the debate about the future of Palestine (87% in Palestine and 85% in Jordan), but less than half in Jordan and only 58% in Palestine felt that the channel offered ‘clear answers’ (46Fn). Another question showed that around 70% across the whole sample was critical of the confrontational style of Al Jazeera – 68% in Palestine and 72% in Jordan – though 18% in Palestine saw it as ‘very helpful’. This was not matched in Jordan (47Fn). These

answers showed no single or simple response to Al Jazeera's programming in relation to Palestine.

A further question about whether Al Jazeera gives the impression that the situation of Palestinians is getting better or worse also produced a spread of responses. There is obviously disagreement and uncertainty on this topic, but the weight of opinion is towards the negative. 44% of Palestinian respondents and 56% of Jordanian respondents felt that Al Jazeera gave the impression that things were getting 'slightly worse' or 'a lot worse'. 36% of Palestinian respondents and 27% of Jordanian respondents felt that the impression created by the channel was that things were much the same. 32% and 38% respectively had no clear opinion (48Fn).

This group of three new questions shows a good deal of uncertainty. It appears that Al Jazeera does not produce a simple, unified response to its treatment of Palestine.

A specific example of someone refusing to accept a black and white picture was the phone-in caller quoted in 7.1.4, who was able to see that 'democracy' is a term that means rather different things depending on who is using the word.

The various responses considered in this section suggest a thinking audience who relate what they see on television to what they see happening around them, and are able to negotiate their own understandings. This moves us right away from Cultivation Theory and the idea of that media are capable of forming consistent assumptions about society, towards the approach developed by Morley and others, which sees the audience as able to construct a range of meanings of its own.

### **8.2.3 Public opinion**

The survey used in this research has provided insights into the opinions of the sample on a range of topics.

Audience trust in the channel; its perceived reliability and relevance; comparison with other channels

In 2005 high proportions felt that Aljazeera news and current affairs programmes were trustworthy, and these had increased slightly by 2008 (39E; see also 22D, 23D, 32E).

In 2005 Aljazeera was relied on most for news and current affairs by high proportions of respondents, and these figures remained constant in 2008 (8C). In 2005 Aljazeera was seen as increasing in credibility by a substantial majority, and by 2008 there had been a marginal increase (14D).

In 2005 there was strong disagreement with the idea that Aljazeera addresses issues of little concern to Arabs, and this has remained constant in 2008 (28E). In 2008 there was a very high level of satisfaction that Al Jazeera covers what the audience believes to be the important issues (51Fn).

In 2005 there was very strong agreement with the idea that Aljazeera is the best Arab channel dealing with political reform in Arab countries, and by 2008 these responses had shown a marginal increase (13D). In 2008, over a quarter (26%) of Palestinian respondents – the largest Palestinian response – saw Al Jazeera as more constructive than Al Arabiya, but at the same time 22% - the next largest Palestinian response – saw it as more sensational. The largest response from the Jordanian respondents (24%) saw Al Jazeera as less sensational, and the next largest Jordanian group (17%) believed Al Jazeera was more constructive. The respondents are more in agreement about Al Jazeera as constructive than about whether it is sensational in comparison with Al Arabiya (26Dn).

The channel's capacity to influence

In 2005 Aljazeera was perceived as the channel having most effect on opinion about public affairs by a substantial majority. By 2008 these figures had increased appreciably (12D). In 2005 a large proportion agreed that Aljazeera was the channel most likely to change public opinion in Palestine. By 2008 that had increased (19D).

### The channel's promotion of democracy

In 2005 a large proportion of respondents strongly agreed that 'Aljazeera has managed to influence me and Arab public opinion about the need to be ruled by a democratic political system'. Although still high, the scores have fallen in 2008 (36E).

On the face of it, these findings suggest that large numbers see Al Jazeera as influential, and as a force which is promoting democracy in Palestine. But two points follow. One is that, as the previous section has shown, the sample holds a range of negotiated views about current issues. It looks as if, although they acknowledge Al Jazeera as an important player in the political development of the area, and although they see Al Jazeera's promotion of democracy as something they largely agree with, underneath the blanket term 'democracy' lie a variety of more subtle opinions. This would tally with existing knowledge about Palestinian attitudes to democracy already examined in Chapter 3.

Secondly, as discussed in Chapter 6, 'public opinion' has been seen not just as 'what many people think', but as a body of thinking that is able to bring pressure to bear on the powers-that-be. This is a complex area that lies beyond the scope of this research. It is possible to identify a correlation between street action and Al Jazeera programmes, but exactly how governments have been influenced is not clear.

Commentators have made the point that in the past Arab governments used the media to tell people about government actions. Their only interest in what people were thinking was from a security angle. The new media has changed all that by telling the rulers what the people are thinking. Other commentators have stressed that the new media may provide a talking shop for political opinions, but the institutional structures for taking those opinions forward do not fully exist.

There seems to be a need for a satisfactory model of how public opinion is working in the Arab world in the light of the new media. Lynch is grappling with this in his latest book, *Voices of the New Arab Public* (ibid), but it probably requires another ten or fifteen years



of political development (in whatever form that takes) before it will be possible to take stock of change in the Arab world and assess how the media has worked and what it can be credited with achieving.

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## **Chapter 9: Conclusions**

### **Summing up**

This research shows from detailed content analysis how Al Jazeera continually draws attention to democracy issues in Palestine, while at the same time offering a range of viewpoints. It can, however, present political issues in a rather confrontational fashion. The research surveys show in some detail how the audience reacts to the channel, watches it more than other channels, feels confidence in it, has learnt from it and engages with its agenda, at times with practical action. In many ways Al Jazeera is felt to be superior to alternative channels. At the same time, the two surveys showed changes in audience opinion and a spread of opinion on some issues. All this indicates that a good many people in the audience are in fact negotiating meanings in the light of their own experiences. In this way Al Jazeera, with its policy of 'the opinion – and the other opinion', could be said to be reflecting opinion as much as creating it.

Some would argue that Palestinians are not ready for real democracy, or that they have become used to being ruled by a system that falls short in various ways. Al Jazeera challenges this assumption by the popularity of its programmes, which try to make the audience aware and encourage them to feel that democracy issues should become part of their culture. They approve of the way Al Jazeera exposes non-democratic practices by Palestinian ruling parties. They are encouraged to be active politically, to join civil organisations and use their vote. The channel maintains that by doing so they will change their lives and eventually their country's political system.

Others have argued that although Al Jazeera is undoubtedly promoting the concept of democracy as an ideal to aim for, this is rather different from building democracy in practice – whether in terms of the reforms needed to make it happen or the practical capacity of the people to make it work. In this respect, the way in which Al Jazeera can polarise debate into black and white views could be seen as unhelpful in preparing people for democracy, but the sample did not feel this.

Democracy in the Arab world has been advancing in the last decade, partly because of external pressures (from the US and the European Union), and partly because of pressures from within. These have included the development of education, the growth of new communication technology (over and above satellite TV), and increasing signs of economic instability. Western countries with developed democratic structures are seen to enjoy not only the rule of law but also a high level of economic prosperity. The pressure for change has found expression through civil society organisations as well as the media, such as Al Jazeera. All these factors (as well as the ongoing conflict with Israel) have contributed to making Palestinians more interested in seeking real change in their society. This could explain why the survey respondents seem so ready to take on board Al Jazeera's attitude to democracy and human rights: Al Jazeera is pushing at an open door.

It could also be that Al Jazeera's success is due to the fact that it offers people for the first time a chance to see high-status figures - and also ordinary individuals - talking about change, as well as providing a way of expressing publicly their own ideas and feelings about change. This could be Al Jazeera's primary role - rather than instigating change itself. However, it was not possible within the scope of this research to evaluate Al Jazeera's role in relation to other factors. Obviously no social influence works in isolation, but the author believes this research has shown ways in which Al Jazeera makes a significant contribution to public opinion and to the movement towards democracy in Palestine, even though there are other players in the game. There is also, as the research has shown, an audience which acknowledges its debt to Al Jazeera, and is ready to take on board Al Jazeera's attitudes to democracy and human rights, but which can also relate what it sees on Al Jazeera to its own experience and draw its own conclusions.

Therefore this research confirms that the channel continually brings democracy issues to the audience's attention and engages them in the debate. The audience is convinced by its agenda and identifies with the channel. Moreover, Al Jazeera meets not just a desire for

political ideas and information but also a more emotional need, at a time when many in the audience feel very uncertain about the future of Palestine.

### **Further work**

One area worth investigating more fully is how viewers actually watch the channel, to discover in more detail where they watch and in what context they watch. Although the questionnaire indicated that respondents talked about what they had seen on TV, it would be helpful to know more about what aspects of TV they were talking about, and how it fitted into their social lives. Were there any male/female differences about this kind of talk? Did it tend to be same-gender talking or cross-gender talking? What exactly was talked about – the serious issues themselves, or the excitement of the clashes of personality? The channel probably has an impact on lifestyle, an area not covered in this research. More research covering the impact of satellite technology on Palestinian viewers in terms of the social and cultural aspects would be useful, particularly finding out how far women have been encouraged to re-evaluate their social role.

It would be worth finding out more about how respondents had gained their understanding of democracy, and whether they felt that TV had been particularly important in that. The survey indicated that respondents had become motivated to take a more active part in politics, and provided a suggested list of activities. It would be worth getting respondents to specify which activities they had taken part in. A large majority of respondents thought that Al Jazeera encouraged violence against governments, but what did they think about this situation? Did they feel it was right for the channel to be doing this, and what sorts of situations might justify violence?

It would be particularly interesting (though probably difficult in practical terms) to find people who had actually taken part in some sort of street action, in order to find out what they thought had motivated them, and how far television in general and Al Jazeera in particular were responsible for this. This would have provided some much-needed evidence to go with the correlations between particular programmes and street action which are identified in the content analysis section.

## **10. Appendix**

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## **10.1 Transcripts**

### **10.1.1 An extract from *The Opposite Direction* (2<sup>nd</sup> January 2007)**

The following transcript is of a show which was discussing the execution of Saddam Hussain.

**Faisal Al Kasim:** Can you deny that this man [Saddam Hussain] entered history through its broadest gate? This assassination also is called in the first day of Eid, Al-Adha feast. What do you say about these allegations?

**Mashaan al-Jabouri:** [interrupting]: Please....

**Faisal Al Kasim:** Just a minute, the voting. Do you support the execution of Saddam Hussein? 88.6% no, 11.4% Yes, what do you say to them?

**Mashaan al-Jabouri:** But if I may.....

**Faisal Al Kasim:** Just a minute.

**Mashaan al-Jabouri:** I want to invite the viewers to read a verse from the Quran on the soul of the martyr President Saddam Hussein.

**Sadeq al-Musawi:** In the name of God, the Merciful, we are not here to read a verse from the Quran.

**Mashaan al-Jabouri:** (In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful)

**Sadeq al-Musawi:** Here we condemn the man.



**Mashaan al-Jabouri:** (Praise be to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.....).

**Sadeq al-Musawi:** condemn the man who killed thousands and millions of Iraqis. I am not here to read Quran verses. He killed his nephew in Ramadan. The man did not know only violence and killings. I am here to talk to those who have sent you messages. I am here to clarify the picture to the Arab people and the Islamic nation - they should understand who is Saddam Hussein. We want to say that Iraqi people today impelled me millions of messages from millions of mothers and fathers who were sitting and waiting for their sons that they would return from prisons and fronts of battlefield set up by Saddam Hussein

**Faisal Al Kasim:** OK.

**Sadiq Al-Mosawi:** Allow me .... Saddam Hussein is not the leader and not an Arab leader. Saddam Hussein climbed to power surreptitiously in the dark night, killing his contemporaries to gain access to power. Saddam Hussein went to the dustbin of history. Saddam Hussein does not deserve to be described as leader of the Arabs. Who wants to describe Saddam Hussein as Arab leader hurts the feelings of the Iraqi people as a whole: Sunni, Shiite and Turks and Christians, all scarred by Saddam Hussein. Today this man is dead - as a shoplifter or the like.

**Faisal Al Kasim:** OK.

[Quarrel and angry dispute starts between the two guests, Sadeq al-Musawi leaves the place angry after Mashaan Al-Jaburi calls him an "Iranian dog".]

**Faisal Al Kasim:** sit, sit, please sit

Source: Transcript of Aljazeera talk show: <http://www.aljazeera.net>, 2/1/2007  
<http://www.aliraqi.org/forums/archive/index.php/t-68607.html> access date 6-3-2007

### 10.1.2 An extract from *The Opposite Direction* (26<sup>th</sup> July 2005)

**Wafa Sultan:** "Why does a young Muslim man, in the prime of life, with a full life ahead, go and blow himself up? How and why does he blow himself up in a bus full of innocent passengers? In our countries, religion is the sole source of education, and is the only spring from which that terrorist drank until his thirst was quenched. He was not born a terrorist, and did not become a terrorist overnight. Islamic teachings played a role in weaving his ideological fabric, thread by thread, and did not allow other sources - I am referring to scientific sources - to play a role. It was these teachings that distorted this terrorist and killed his humanity. It was not [the terrorist] who distorted the religious teachings and misunderstood them, as some ignorant people claim. When you recite to a child still in his early years the verse 'They will be killed or crucified, or have their hands and feet on alternate sides cut off,' - regardless of this verse's interpretation, and regardless of the reasons it was conveyed or its time - you have made the first step towards creating a great terrorist..."

[...]

**Bin Muhammad:** "The guest from America asked how a young man could blow up a bus. If only she had asked how a president could blow up a peaceful nation in Iraq. How does a president help the arch-killer of occupied Palestine? Why doesn't she ask where Hitler was brought up - Hitler, who murdered 50 million innocent people? Why doesn't she ask where the people who dropped two atom bombs on Japan were educated? Who killed three million innocent Vietnamese? Who annihilated the Indians? Who has maintained imperialism to this day? Who waged the Spanish civil war, which exacted a toll of 600,000 in 36 months? Why don't we ask these questions? Who has over 15,000 nuclear warheads - Muslims or the non-Muslims? The Muslims or the Americans? The Muslims or the Europeans? We want an answer. Where was Bush educated - if education is really what makes a person a criminal?..."

[...]

**Wafa Sultan:** "Murder is terrorism regardless of time or place, but when it is committed as a decree from Allah, this is another matter..."

[...]

"The Crusader wars about which the professor is talking - these wars came after the Islamic religious teachings, and as a response to these teachings. This is the law of action and reaction. The Islamic religious teachings have incited to the rejection of the other, to the denial of the other, and to the killing of the other. Have they not incited to the killing of Jews and Christians? If we had heard that a tribe in a distant corner of China has a holy book and religious teachings calling to kill Muslims - would the Muslims stand idly by in the face of such teachings? The Crusader wars came after these Islamic religious teachings. When these Islamic teachings were delivered, America did not exist on the face of the earth, nor was Israel in Palestine... Why doesn't he talk about the Muslim conquests that preceded all the wars he is talking about? Why doesn't he mention that when Tariq bin Ziyad entered Andalusia with his armies, he said to his people: 'The sea is behind you, and the enemy is in front?' How can you storm a peaceful country, and consider all its peaceful inhabitants to be your enemies, merely because you have the right to spread your religion? Should the religion be spread by the sword and through fighting?..."

[...]

**Bin Muhammad:** "Who invented slavery in recent centuries? Who colonized the other - us or them? Did Algeria colonize France, or vice versa? Did Egypt colonize England, or vice versa? We are the victims..."

[...]

"I am not saying that killing innocent people is nice. I say that all innocent people should be protected. But at the same time, we must start with the innocent among the Muslims. There are millions of innocent people among us, while the innocent among you - and innocent they are - number only dozens, hundreds, or thousands, at the most..."

[...]

**Wafa Sultan:** "Can you explain to me the killing of 100,000 children, women, and men in Algeria, using the most abominable killing methods? Can you explain to me the killing of 15,000 Syrian civilians? Can you explain to me the abominable crime in the military artillery school in Aleppo? Can you explain the crime in Al-Asbaqiya neighborhood of Damascus, Syria? Can you explain the attack of the terrorists on the peaceful village of Al-Kisheh in Upper Egypt, and the massacre of 21 Coptic peasants? Can you explain to me what is going on in Indonesia, Turkey, and Egypt, even though these are Islamic countries which opposed the American intervention in Iraq, and which don't have armies in Iraq, yet were not spared by the terrorists? Can you explain these phenomena, which took place in Arab countries? Was all this revenge on America or Israel? Or were they merely to satisfy bestial wild instincts aroused in them by religious teachings, which incite to rejection of the other, to the killing of the other, and to the denial of the other. When Saddam Hussein buried 300,000 Shi'ites and Kurds alive, we did not hear a single Muslim protesting. Your silence served to acknowledge the legitimacy of these killings, didn't it?..."

[...]

"What do you want from me? To speak evil of American society? I've never said that America is the eternal city of Plato, but I did say it was the eternal city of Wafa Sultan. The idealism of American society was enough to allow me to realize my humanity. I came to this country with fear."

**Bin Muhammad:** "Along with the Indians? Along with the Indians? What was left of the Indians? What do you have to say about the Indians?"

**Wafa Sultan:** "Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492. America was founded in 1776, approximately 300 years later. You cannot blame America - as a constitution, a regime, and a state - for killing the Indians."

Source: Transcript of Al Jazeera talk show:

<http://www.memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&P1=783> access date 5-1-2007

## 10.2 Data from the Survey: August 2005

(See section 7.3 for 2008 data)

### Group A: Demographic Information on Respondents

#### Gender and Age

What is your age group and gender?

Male

Age	Jordan	Palestine
18- 25	28	27
26-32	32	39
33-49	31	28
Over 50	9	6

Female

Age	Jordan	Palestine
18- 25	28	13
26-32	33	41
33-49	34	43
Over 50	5	3

#### Education

What final level of education did you reach?

Education	Jordan	Palestine
Never went to school	3	1
Primary School	37	3
Secondary school	29	49
College & University	31	47

## Occupation

Which if the following occupational groups best describes your present situation?

<i>Occupation</i>	Formal and high skills	Labourer/ domestic/ unskilled worker	Housewife	Retired	Student	Unemployed	Disabled
<b>Jordan</b>	13	17	27	3	20	18	2
<b>Palestine</b>	16	9	23	2	23	25	2

## **Group B: Levels of awareness and engagement in relation to the political and social environment**

**1B. What does it mean to you to live in a democratic country?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Freedom in general, individual freedom, respect the people's rights, rule of law</b>	86%	89%
<b>Peace/ no oppression</b>	11%	9%
<b>Don't understand the word of democracy</b>	3%	2%

**2B. Do people in your country feel free to express their political opinions over the TV screen?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Yes</b>	76%	81%
<b>No</b>	19%	18%
<b>Don't know</b>	5%	1%

**3B: Would you describe yourself as having...**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Very strong religious beliefs</b>	53%	56%
<b>Not strong religious beliefs</b>	46%	33%
<b>No comment</b>	1%	1%



**4B. How would you describe your political orientation?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Liberal</b>	37%	45%
<b>Right</b>	32%	22%
<b>Religious Party</b>	28%	31%
<b>No political orientations</b>	3%	2%

**Group C: Media exposure and information sources**

**5C. How many days a week do you watch Aljazeera TV?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Almost every day</b>	63%	79%
<b>3 or 4 days a week</b>	21%	13%
<b>At least once a week</b>	9%	4%
<b>Less than once a week</b>	7%	4%

**6C. Which TV station do you watch most often over half an hour at a time?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	66%	73%
<b>Alarabiya</b>	18%	17%
<b>ANN</b>	9%	6%
<b>Nile news</b>	7%	4%

**7C. Where do you receive Arab satellite news channels: at home, at the office, other?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Home</b>	59%	75%
<b>Office</b>	9%	12%
<b>Other</b>	6%	5%

**8C. Which channel would you say that you rely on most for news and current affairs programmes?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	80%	91%
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	7%	4%
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	8%	4%
<b>Nile news</b>	5%	1%

#### **Group D: Al Jazeera and other channels compared**

**12D. Which of these channels has most effect on your opinion about an event or news story?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	75%	85%
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	13%	9%
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	10%	5%
<b>Nile news</b>	2%	1%

**13D. "Aljazeera channel is the best Arab channel in dealing with political reform in Palestine." How far do you agree?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	87%	93%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	11%	6%
<b>Don't know</b>	2%	1%

**14D. Do you think the credibility of Aljazeera programme content, such as talk shows, current affairs programmes and news, compared with other Arab channels, is...**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Getting better</b>	79	89
<b>Getting worse</b>	12	6
<b>Staying about the same</b>	7	4
<b>Don't know</b>	2	1

**15D. Which of the following Arab satellite news channels is most actively promoting USA policy in Palestine or among Palestinians?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	23	18
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	28	37
<b>ANN</b>	9	7
<b>Nile News</b>	40	48

**16D. Do you think any of these satellite TV stations are biased towards the Palestinian cause?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>ANN(Arab news network)</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Nile News</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>11</b>

**17D. Which satellite TV stations are addressing politically taboo subjects, such as the legitimacy of some of the Arab leaders, human rights, and corruption in relation to Palestine?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Nile News</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>

**18D. Which satellite news channel makes most use of its talk show programmes to promote democracy in Palestine?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Nile News</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>

**19D. In your opinion, which TV station has the most power to change public opinion in Palestine?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Have no opinion</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	87%	11%	2%
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	67%	36%	7%
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	29%	49%	22%
<b>Nile News</b>	32%	51%	17%

**20D. "Aljazeera provided best coverage of the Arab elections in Iraq, Palestine and Egypt." How far do you agree?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	82%	91%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	16%	7%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	2%	3%

**21D. Which channels in your opinion have the ability to shape public opinion in your country?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	89%	95%
<b>ANN</b>	55%	65%
<b>Al Arabyia</b>	71%	76%
<b>Nile News</b>	43%	23%

**22D. Where would you expect to get uncensored programmes among these satellite TV channels?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	66%	71%
<b>Al Arabyia</b>	22%	21%
<b>ANN</b>	11%	6%
<b>Nile News</b>	1%	2%

**23D. In your opinion, which of these channels is most likely to exaggerate in telling the news story?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	17%	5%
<b>Al Arabyia</b>	19%	13%
<b>ANN</b>	34%	37%
<b>Nile News</b>	30%	45%

**24D. How often do Arab satellite news channels produce news and current affairs stories that deal with democracy and political issues in the Arab world?**

	<b>Always</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Seldom</b>	<b>Unsure</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	77%	12%	5%	6%
<b>Al Arabyia</b>	47%	46%	6%	1%
<b>ANN</b>	42%	36%	15%	7%
<b>Nile News</b>	28%	48%	16%	8%

**25D. Which of the following Arab satellite news channels do you think is educating you most about democracy and human rights?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	83	88
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	8	6
<b>ANN</b>	5	4
<b>Nile News</b>	4	2

### **Group E: Al Jazeera's impact on learning and opinions**

**27E. How far does Aljazeera make you interested in politics?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Very interested</b>	79%	95%
<b>Not very interested</b>	14%	4%
<b>Not interested at all</b>	7%	1%

**28E. “Aljazeera addresses political issues which are of little concern to the Arab audience.” How far do you agree?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	14	7
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	83	88
<b>Don't know</b>	3	5

**29E. “Aljazeera talk shows and its news coverage encourage people to use violence against their governments.” How far do you agree?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Agree</b>	87%	93%
<b>Disagree</b>	11%	6%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	2%	1%

**30E. “The Aljazeera talk show presenters should stop viewers from revealing any information if they feel it threatens Palestinian national security, or from swearing at Arab leaders.” How far do you agree?**

<b>The channel</b>	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Agree</b>	57	60
<b>Disagree</b>	29	34
<b>Have no opinion</b>	14	6

**31E. “Aljazeera should not be allowed to cover certain Israeli affairs such as elections, or interview Israelis, as long as it is occupying Arab land, especially Palestine.” How far do you agree?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Agree</b>	59%	72%
<b>Disagree</b>	39%	25%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	2%	3%

**32E. How well do Aljazeera talk shows cover political reform in Palestine?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Very well</b>	72%	84%
<b>Not very well</b>	26%	15%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	2%	1%

**33E. How appropriate is Aljazeera's handling of democracy issues in Palestine?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Very serious</b>	52%	78%
<b>Not at all serious</b>	43%	20%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	5%	2%

**34E. How influential was the information presented by the Arab news channels about the intifada and Iraq in affecting Arab governments in terms of reform of their political system and development of human rights?**

	<b>Very influential</b>	<b>Not at all influential</b>	<b>Have no opinion</b>
<b>Aljazeera</b>	75%	21%	4%
<b>Al Arabiya</b>	64%	34%	2%
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	55%	33%	12%
<b>Nile News</b>	46%	45%	9%



**35E. “Aljazeera TV gives the information I need about the progress of Palestinian issues.” How far do you agree?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	82%	90%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	11%	8%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	7%	2%

**36E. “I think that Aljazeera has managed to influence me and Palestinian public opinion about the need to be ruled by a democratic political system.” How far do you agree?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	92%	95%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	6%	2%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	2%	3%

**37E. “I think that Aljazeera has managed to influence Palestinian viewers about democracy and human right in their country.” How far do you agree?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	88%	90%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	10%	6%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	2%	4%

**38E. Do you agree with this statement: “I think that Aljazeera should continue producing more programmes about Palestinian society in terms of lack of democracy and mismanagement of the existing political system which has divided the country.”**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	66%	86%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	32%	11%
<b>Have no opinion</b>	2%	3%

**39E. Do you think Aljazeera news and its current affairs programmes are...**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Trustworthy</b>	79%	87%
<b>Not Trustworthy</b>	18%	11%
<b>No opinion</b>	3%	2%

**40E. Do the guests on Aljazeera talk shows and current affairs programmes affect your views or develop your opinions about your government?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Sometimes</b>	81%	79%
<b>Rarely/ Never</b>	13%	10%
<b>Don't Know</b>	6%	11%

**41E. Do you ever talk about anything you've seen on Aljazeera?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Sometimes</b>	92%	89%
<b>Rarely/ Never</b>	2%	7%
<b>Don't Know</b>	6%	4%

**42E. Do Aljazeera programmes motivate you to participate in any politically orientated activities? (e.g. vote; sign a petition; join a political discussion; demonstrating, protesting.)**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Sometimes</b>	93%	87%
<b>Rarely/ Never</b>	4%	5%
<b>Don't Know</b>	3%	8%

**43E. Overall, do you feel that you have learnt from Aljazeera programmes about democracy issues such as human rights, civil society, and democratisation?**

	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>Palestine</b>
<b>Yes</b>	86%	91%
<b>No</b>	9%	6%
<b>Don't know</b>	5%	3%

## 10.3 Content Analysis

### 10.3.1 Aljazeera Programme Schedule

<http://www.allied-media.com/aljazeera/schedule.html> (cited on 11-9-2004)

GMT		SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
20:00	Today's Harvest						
		Including:-	Economic,	Sport,	segments		61
21:05	Al-Jazzier	Witness	A Book is	Foreign	Interview	Al jazzier	Private
	Correspon-	To the	the best	Correspon-	of the day	Platform	Visit
	dents	Century	companion	27min.	27 min.	LIVE	
21:30	45 min.	50 min.	45 min.	Date In Exile	Arabic Sport	45 min	45 min.
	1 <sup>st</sup> .run	1st.run	1st.run	3rd Run	3rd Run 26min.	1 <sup>st</sup> .run	1st.run
22:00	News Bulletin						
							10min.
22:10	Second		Bulletin		Economic		
	Recorded					Re-run	14min.
22:30	Live		Sports	News			15 min.
22:45	Recorded		Weather	Bulletin			5 min.
22:50				Filler			8min.
23:00			News	Bulletin			15 min.
23:15	2nd run		Pictures	Talk			8 min.
23:25				Filler			
23:30	Between		Sport	Minute			
23:35	The	More than	Dialogue in Sport	Al-Sharia	For	Opposite	Without
	lines	one	Dialogue in Sport	&	women	Direction	Bounds
		Opinion	Question	Life	alone		
	27 min.	22 min.	In Sport	22 min.	22 min.	22 min.	22 min.
	3 <sup>rd</sup> run	3rd run	Open Dialogue	3rd run	3rd run	3rd run	3rd run
0:00			News	Summary			3 min.
00:05	Top secret	More than	Dialogue in Sport	Al-Sharia	For	Opposite	Without
	Something	to	Dialogue in Sport	&	women	Direction	Bounds
	tell	one	Question	Life	alone		
	In Focus	Opinion	In Sport	52 min.	52 min.	52 min.	52 min.
	Hot spot	52 min.	Open Dialogue	3rd run	3rd run	3rd run	3rd run
	3 <sup>rd</sup> run	3rd run	Cont. 3rd Run	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	50 min.	Cont.					

01:00	Today's News <span>Live</span>						
	including: Economic.		sports.	temperature	degrees	61	
2:05	promotions + filler	Eye	The History	Lost treasure of Atahulpa	Nature's treasures	On The wings of the	Trail
2:10	From Washing- Ton	witness 22 min. 2nd run	Of water Red Chapters 2nd run	The Fall of the British Empire 45 min. 1st run	Secret China 45 min. 1st run	wind (45 min.) Sport files 45 min. On The wings of the	& Error 2nd run Current issues
2:25	45 Min 2nd run	Weekly file 2nd run	Current issues 2nd run	45 min. 1st run	45 min. 1st run	On The wings of the	Current issues
3:00	News			Bulletin		15 min.	
3:15	Recorded	Weather		Bulletin		5 min.	
3:20	Filler						

### 10.3.2 Talk Shows: numerical data

**Table 1: Talk shows in general: Topics/Issues for Discussion**

**January 2003 - December 2004** (Four talk shows each month over two years.)

<b>The Show Topic</b>	<b>The number of shows</b>
<b>Iraq issues dealt with: the sanctions on Iraq, Iraqi opposition, the weapons inspectors, the war on Iraq, the torture in Iraq, Saddam's trial, elections in Iraq, Iraq resistance, the civil war in Iraq, corruption in Iraq, etc...</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Palestinian issues: the Road Map, Palestinian government, Palestinian elections, Palestinian resistance, Jenin camp massacre, Palestinian corruption, the Arafat siege, etc.</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Democracy issues: the role of political parties in Arab countries, human rights in Arab countries, women's rights, Arab public opinion, elections in Egypt and Lebanon, the Syrian opposition, Algerian elections, etc..</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Other issues, such as globalisation, Islamic politics, civilization conflict, Islam and terrorism; Social issues: sex, education, religion, fanatics, etc.</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>The show totals</b>	<b>96</b>

### 10.3.3 News: numerical data

#### 7.2.5.1 The news story frame: Prime time news

The table below shows Al Jazeera's newscast frame compared with other channels.  
Sample: 2 hours per channel per day over 2 weeks (=112 hours)

Story frames in minutes	Al Jazeera	Al Arabyia	ANN(Arab News Network)	Nile News
Live interview	34	28	18	20
Live event	12	8	4	6
Recorded report	10	14	24	21
Business news	4	10	14	13

#### 7.2.5.2 Story Length

Average Story Length on Arab satellite news channels (average per hour)

Story frame length in minutes	Guest Interview in studio	interview via satellite	interview through telephone	correspondent Field	Live Event
Al Jazeera	8	12	6	15	19
Al Arabyia	10	7	4	23	16
ANN(Arab News Network)	30	2	11	8	9
Nile News	25	5	8	10	12

#### 7.2.5.3 Updating the news story

Updating the news story: 2 week average

Sample: 2 hours per channel per day over 2 weeks (= 112 hours)

Percent/stories updated

Al Jazeera	60
Al Arabyia	40
ANN(Arab News Network)	10
Nile News	20

### **Updating the news story: one day average**

Sample: one day's newscasts with the total of 8 hours

#### **Percent/stories updated**

<b>Al Jazeera</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Al Arabyia</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>ANN(Arab News Network)</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Nile News</b>	<b>40</b>

### **7.2.5.4 Topics covered on their newscasts by the satellite news channels**

One day average

#### **Numbers of stories on given topics**

<b>Tv stations</b>	<b>Al Jazeera</b>	<b>Al Arabyia</b>	<b>ANN</b>	<b>Nile News</b>
<b>Arab affairs</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Foreign Affair</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Accidents/Disasters</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Business news</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Science Tech</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Sport</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>



## 10.4 Summary of findings

### Talk Shows

#### **Content: opening up of taboo areas**

- The talk shows have created a media space for a wide range of topics, including those previously taboo, and for a wide range of opinions. The feedback shows how viewers' perceptions have been affected. This is definitely educational.

#### **Content: the democracy issue**

- The issue of democracy in the region has been given a high profile. *The Opposite Direction* can be as critical of Arab regimes as of the US involvement in the area.
- 60% of shows in the first sample dealt with the crises in Palestine and Iraq. A further 20% dealt specifically with democracy and civil issues. Therefore some 80% of programmes touched on democracy in some form. The word count backed this up, with 'right of self-determination' being the most frequently used of the selected phrases. The second sample in 2008 showed that Palestine has roughly doubled its frequency as a topic on Al Jazeera talk shows.
- Nearly a third of guests are from public interest groups or NGOs, which means that alternative voices and interests are given a sizeable platform by Al Jazeera.
- Expressions such as *democracy, human rights, public opinion, reform* etc. are not just part of an educational process. They also pass on underlying messages to viewers, implying criticism of undemocratic, corrupt Arab leaders and their governments, which still control their countries by what they call 'emergency law'. Moreover, democracy is presented in such a way as to suggest that the lives of Arab people would improve and democracy would create a better future in every respect. The underlying assumption is that this is the way forward.

#### **Treatment**

- Al Jazeera's *The Opposite Direction* has its own rather abrasive tone. This is not necessarily shared by talk shows from other broadcasters.
- One particularly uncertain area is whether Al Jazeera talk shows, especially *The Opposite Direction*, simply create exciting television by putting people in conflict with one another. Is this helping to create real political engagement as a prelude to democracy? Question 47Fn in the survey raised the issue of whether the confrontational style of some of Al Jazeera's debates is helpful in the search for answers to social and political problems in Palestine. Around 70% across the whole sample was critical of the confrontational style – 68% in Palestine and 72% in Jordan – though a surprisingly high 18% in Palestine saw it as 'very helpful'.

#### **Effects**

- The talk shows have not just provided viewers with a range of opinions but have also created space for viewers to express their own opinions and experience a sense of engagement. Viewer contributions can show a considerable degree of political awareness and sophistication.

- Measuring media effects is notoriously difficult, but the media coverage of political crises in the Middle East appears to be at least one of the factors leading to public protest and action on the streets.
- The nervous reactions of governments and the government controlled press shows that they feel Al Jazeera to be a threat to their power. They have no doubts about its capacity to challenge their regimes.

## **News Broadcasts**

### **Content**

- Al Jazeera news concentrates heavily on Arab stories, appreciably more than other Arab satellite channels. The second survey in 2008 confirms that Palestinian issues are still a major source of news stories.
- Al Jazeera is able to cover a wide range of events as they happen because of extensive staffing (especially in Iraq and Palestine) and resources.

### **Treatment**

- Al Jazeera reporters are well trained and have greater freedom in presenting stories than those in the state-run TV channels. There is a good deal of editorial freedom for producers, and interviewers are allowed to ask tough questions.
- Al Jazeera is prepared to show very graphic images of war situations, but it is not clear how far this is a commitment to 'realism' or how far it is sensationalism aimed at increasing audience share. Certainly audiences have grown during the Iraq war.
- It uses more and longer satellite interviews and live events than its rivals, and fewer studio interviews. The split between unscripted material (interviews and live events) and written and edited material is roughly 75% to 25%.
- Al Jazeera newscasts present more extensive information about stories than its rivals, with a high level of stories having an identifiable source (such as interviews or stand-ups).
- Al Jazeera updates (rather than just repeats) a higher proportion of its stories than its rivals.
- Al Jazeera presents different points of view, using multiple sources for stories, encouraging audiences to make up their own minds.
- Al Jazeera is not a propaganda machine for any government. It presents views critical of Arab regimes just as frequently as views critical of US involvement in the Middle East.

### **Effects**

- There seems to be some correlation between street protests and Al Jazeera programmes.
- Western criticism of Al Jazeera has generated positive publicity for the channel in Arab states. The channel has also been heavily criticised by Arab states themselves.

## **The Survey**

### **Popularity, viewing and comparison with other channels**

- Aljazeera is maintaining its popularity. In 2008 it is watched 'almost every day' by 84% of respondents in Palestine and 73% of respondents in Jordan, an increase on the 2005 figures of 79% for Palestine and 62% for Jordan. (5C).
- In 2008 Aljazeera is the station watched 'most often over half an hour at a time' in comparison with three other Arab channels by 89% of respondents in Palestine and 81% in Jordan, an increase on the 2005 figures of 73% for Palestine and 66% for Jordan. Q2.
- In 2008 around two fifths of the respondents in both Palestine and Jordan watched television primarily with their families. (9Cn)
- In 2008 Al Jazeera provided 65% of the respondents in Palestine and 56% in Jordan with topics they are interested in talking about. (10Cn)
- In 2008 almost all the respondents in Palestine (97%) and Jordan (96%) had responded to an Al Jazeera programme in some way. The preferred way of responding in both Palestine and Jordan was by email (36% and 47% respectively), followed by phone (22% and 16% respectively). (11Cn)
- In 2008, over a quarter (26%) of Palestinian respondents – the largest Palestinian response – saw Al Jazeera as more constructive than Al Arabiya, but at the same time 22% - the next largest Palestinian response – saw it as more sensational. The largest response from the Jordanian respondents (24%) saw Al Jazeera as less sensational, and the next largest Jordanian group (17%) believed Al Jazeera was more constructive. The respondents are more in agreement about Al Jazeera as constructive than about whether it is sensational in comparison with Al Arabiya. (26Dn)
- In 2008 almost two thirds of the respondents thought that Al Jazeera has changed 'slightly' or 'a lot' over the last few years. (55Hn)

### **The political stance of Aljazeera**

- In 2005 Aljazeera was not generally regarded as the least pro-American station, but occupied a middle position with Al Arabiya. In 2008 Al Jazeera and ANN share very similar scores as the least pro-US stations. 9% in Palestine and 6% in Jordan believe that Al Jazeera is 'actively promoting US policy in Palestine'. In contrast Al Arabiya and Niles News show up as noticeably more pro-US, with between a quarter and two fifths of respondents seeing them as pro-US. (15D)
- In 2005 Aljazeera was perceived as being biased towards the Palestinian cause by 25% of Palestinian respondents and 19% of Jordanian respondents. In 2008 this had fallen to 15% and 13% respectively, quite a significant drop. This could be because there was less bias, or because the audience was less aware of it. (16D)
- Yet in a way that seems rather contradictory with the previous findings, in 2008 75% of Palestinian respondents and 66% of Jordanian respondents felt that Al Jazeera put across a viewpoint of its own (as opposed to simply giving a platform to a variety of views). (49Fn) In 2008 59% of Palestinian respondents and 49% of Jordanian respondents felt that Al Jazeera's own viewpoint was basically pro-Palestine. 34% and 38% respectively felt that it was pro-Islamist. (50Fn)

- In 2005 there were concerns about Aljazeera's talk shows getting out of hand and even creating security risks, and the proportion of those sharing these concerns has increased by 2008, from 60% to 87% for Palestine and from 57% to 79% for Jordan. (30E)
- The concerns about the channel offering a platform to Israel have also increased, slightly in the case of Palestine (from 72% to 74%), but more noticeably in the case of Jordan (from 59% to 77%). (31E)

## **Trust**

- In 2005 there was very strong agreement with the idea that Aljazeera is the best Arab channel dealing with political reform in Arab countries, and by 2008 these responses had shown a marginal increase, from 93% to 94% in Palestine, and from 87% to 88% in Jordan. (13D)
- In 2005 Aljazeera was relied on most for news and current affairs by 91% in Palestine and 80% in Jordan. These figures have remained constant in 2008. (8C)
- In 2005 Aljazeera was seen as increasing in credibility by a substantial majority. In 2008 there has been a marginal increase, from 89% to 90% in Palestine, and from 79% to 83% in Jordan. (14D)
- In 2005 a substantial majority felt that Al Jazeera talk shows covered political reform in Palestine very well. However, the scores have fallen slightly in 2008, from 84% to 79% for Palestine, and from 72% to 69% for Jordan. (32E)
- In 2005 the number of respondents thinking that Aljazeera was the channel most likely to exaggerate was 5% in Palestine and 17% in Jordan. By 2008 the responses were much the same in Palestine (4%), but had fallen more substantially in Jordan to 6%. (23D)
- In 2005 high proportions felt that Aljazeera news and current affairs programmes were trustworthy: 87% in Palestine and 79% in Jordan. By 2008 these had increased to 89% in Palestine and 84% in Jordan. (39E)
- In 2005 respondents clearly had considerable confidence in Aljazeera's ability to present the uncensored truth about situations: 71% in Palestine and 66% in Jordan. By 2008, the Palestinian score had increased to 79%, but the Jordanian score had decreased marginally to 64%. (22D)
- In 2008 between two thirds and three quarters of the target audience believed that Al Jazeera gives a reasonably fair picture of life in Palestine. 90% in Palestine and 94% in Jordan believe that the picture is either 'fair' or 'a slightly exaggerated picture of hardship'. This is a considerable vote of confidence in the general reliability of the channel over matters which the sample know about from their own experience. (52Fn)

## **Taboo subjects**

- In 2005 Aljazeera and Al Arabiya were both seen to be addressing politically taboo subjects, with close scores in Palestine and Jordan. In 2008 Al Jazeera had increased its scores (in Palestine from 42% to 52% and in Jordan from 39% to 47%), and moved well ahead of Al Arabiya. (17D)

## **Providing relevant political information**

- In 2005 there was strong disagreement with the idea that Aljazeera addresses issues of little concern to Arabs, and this has remained constant in 2008: 88% for Palestine and 83% for Jordan. (28E)

- In 2005 respondents 'strongly agreed' that 'Aljazeera provided the best coverage of Arab elections in Iraq, Palestine and Egypt' (91% of Palestinian respondents and 82% of Jordanian respondents). In 2008 there was a very similar response to Al Jazeera's handling of the 2006 elections in Palestine (90% in Palestine and 86% in Jordan). (20D)
- In 2008 the bulk of the respondents in both Palestine and Jordan felt that Al Jazeera contributes something positive to the debate about the future of Palestine (87% in Palestine and 85% in Jordan), but less than half in Jordan and only 58% in Palestine felt that the channel offered 'clear answers'. (46Fn)
- In 2008 around 70% across the whole sample were aware of the confrontational style of Al Jazeera – 68% in Palestine and 72% in Jordan – though a surprisingly high 18% in Palestine saw it as 'very helpful'. This was not matched in Jordan. (47Fn)
- In 2008 there seemed to be very general satisfaction that Al Jazeera covers what the audience believes to be the important issues. 92% of the Palestinian respondents and 93% of the Jordanian respondents reckon that the issues of importance to them get 'good' or 'some' coverage on Al Jazeera. (51Fn)

### **Promoting democracy**

- In 2005 between 2% and 3% of the sample did not understand the word 'democracy'. In 2008 the result was much the same. (1B)
- In 2005 49% of respondents in Palestine and 42% of respondents in Jordan strongly agreed that the talk show programmes on Aljazeera promoted democracy in the Arab world. Aljazeera's scores were closely followed by Al Arabiya. In 2008 Al Jazeera had increased its scores to 69% and 62% respectively, pulling well ahead of Al Arabiya. (18D)
- In 2005 respondents 'strongly agreed' that 'Aljazeera provided the best coverage of Arab elections in Iraq, Palestine and Egypt' (91% of Palestinian respondents and 82% of Jordanian respondents). In 2008 there was a very similar response to Al Jazeera's handling of the 2006 elections in Palestine (90% in Palestine and 86% in Jordan). (20D)
- In 2005 a large proportion of respondents strongly agreed that 'Aljazeera TV gives the information I need about the progress of Arab democracy': 90% in Palestine and 82% in Jordan. In 2008 these had increased to 93% and 89% respectively. (35E)
- In 2005 a large proportion of respondents strongly agreed that 'Aljazeera has managed to influence me and Arab public opinion about the need to be ruled by a democratic political system': 95% in Palestine and 92% in Jordan. Although still high, the scores have fallen in 2008 to 85% and 90% respectively. (36E)
- In 2005 a large proportion of respondents strongly agreed that 'Aljazeera has managed to influence Palestinian viewers about democracy and human rights in their country': 90% in Palestine and 88% in Jordan. By 2008 these scores had fallen slightly to 83% in Palestine and 78% in Jordan. (37E)

### **Influence**

- In 2005 Aljazeera was perceived as making the respondents more interested in politics by 95% in Palestine and 79% in Jordan. By 2008 these figures had remained much the same in Palestine (96%) but increased in Jordan (85%). (27E)

- In 2005 Aljazeera was perceived as the channel having most effect on opinion about public affairs by 85% in Palestine and 75% in Jordan. By 2008 these figures had increased to 92% and 88% respectively. (12D)
- In 2005 87% agreed that Aljazeera was the channel most likely to change public opinion in Palestine. By 2008 that had increased to 93%. (19D)
- In 2005 there was strong agreement with the statement that 'Aljazeera has managed to influence me and Palestinian public opinion about the need to be ruled by a democratic political system' by 95% in Palestine and 92% in Jordan. By 2008 the score in Palestine had fallen to 85%, while the score in Jordan remained much the same at 90%. (36E)
- In 2005, respondents admitted to being influenced in their views and opinions 'sometimes' by the guests on Aljazeera talk shows and current affairs programmes, with very similar responses from Palestine (79%) and Jordan (81%). By 2008 these figures had remained largely unchanged at 79% and 77% respectively. (40E)
- In 2005 large numbers of respondents admitted to talking 'sometimes' about what they had seen on Aljazeera, with very similar responses from Palestine (89%) and Jordan (92%). In 2008 these figures had remained constant at 92% and 90% respectively. (41E)
- In 2005 large numbers admitted to being motivated 'sometimes' to take some sort of political action by Aljazeera, with similar responses from Palestine (87%) and Jordan (93%). By 2008 these figures had remained constant at 91% and 89% respectively. (42E)
- In 2005 81% of Palestinian respondents and 76% of Jordanian respondents felt confident about expressing their political opinions on television. By 2008 this had slightly increased to 87% and 78% respectively. (2B)
- In 2008 almost all the respondents in Palestine (97%) and Jordan (96%) had responded to an Al Jazeera programme in some way. The preferred way of responding in both Palestine and Jordan was by email (36% and 47% respectively), followed by phone (22% and 16% respectively). (11Cn)
- In 2008 Al Jazeera is not perceived by 74% of Palestinians and 81% of Jordanians as having changed their views about the role of women. Less than 20% across Palestine and Jordan feel that their views have changed to some extent. (44En)

### **Encouraging violence**

- In 2005 large numbers believed that 'Aljazeera talk show programmes and its news coverage encourage people to use violence against their governments': 93% in Palestine and 87% in Jordan. By 2008 these figures had only marginally changed to 90% and 89% respectively. (29E)
- In 2008 74% of Palestinians and 66% of Jordanians saw the violence encouraged by Al Jazeera in terms of street protest. Only 12% of Palestinian respondents saw it in terms of suicide bombings, but a surprisingly high figure of 28% of Jordanian respondents saw the violence encouraged by Al Jazeera in terms of suicide bombings. (45En)

### **Al Jazeera and the Palestinian situation**

- In 2008 a question about whether Al Jazeera gives the impression that the situation of Palestinians is getting better or worse produced a spread of responses. There is obviously disagreement and uncertainty on this topic, but the weight of opinion is towards the negative. 44% of Palestinian respondents and 56% of Jordanian respondents felt that Al Jazeera gave the impression that things were getting 'slightly worse' or 'a lot worse'.

36% of Palestinian respondents and 27% of Jordanian respondents felt that the impression created by the channel was that things were much the same. 32% and 38% respectively had no clear opinion. (48Fn)

- At the same time, in 2008, when the respondents were asked whether Al Jazeera gives a fair picture of what life is like in Palestine, between two thirds and three quarters of the target audience believed that Al Jazeera gives a reasonably fair picture of life in Palestine. 90% in Palestine and 94% in Jordan believe that the picture is either 'fair' or 'a slightly exaggerated picture of hardship'. This is a considerable vote of confidence in the general reliability of the channel over matters which the sample know about. (52Fn)

- When asked in 2008 how Al Jazeera leaves them feeling about the future of Palestine, the response showed that even though the channel reinforces a strong sense of Arab identity, Al Jazeera leaves around two fifths of Palestinians and a half of Jordanians with negative feelings about the future of their country. (53Gn)

- When asked, in 2008, why they go on watching the channel if it creates negative feelings, the response showed that the reinforcement of a strong sense of belongingness clearly acts as a powerful motivation for watching the channel, and this seems far more important than the quality of news coverage. (54Gn)

### **Some other findings**

#### **What people claim to do in response to the channel.**

##### **Discussion**

- In 2008 Al Jazeera provided 65% of the respondents in Palestine and 56% in Jordan with topics they are interested in talking about. (10Cn)

- In 2005 large numbers of respondents admitted to talking 'sometimes' about what they had seen on Aljazeera, with very similar responses from Palestine (89%) and Jordan (92%). In 2008 these figures had remained constant at 92% and 90% respectively. (41E)

##### **Communicating with the channel**

- In 2008 almost all the respondents in Palestine (97%) and Jordan (96%) had responded to an Al Jazeera programme in some way. The preferred way of responding in both Palestine and Jordan was by email (36% and 47% respectively), followed by phone (22% and 16% respectively). (11Cn)

##### **Engaging in political activity**

- In 2005 large numbers admitted to being motivated 'sometimes' to take some sort of political action by Aljazeera, with similar responses from Palestine (87%) and Jordan (93%). By 2008 these figures had remained constant at 91% and 89% respectively. (42E)

- In 2005 large numbers believed that 'Aljazeera talk show programmes and its news coverage encourage people to use violence against their governments'. By 2008 these figures had only marginally changed. (29E)
- In 2008 74% of Palestinians and 66% of Jordanians saw the violence encouraged by Al Jazeera in terms of street protest. Only 12% of Palestinian respondents saw it in terms of suicide bombings, but 28% of Jordanian respondents saw the violence encouraged by Al Jazeera in terms of suicide bombings. (45En)
- The examples of correlation between television programmes and street protest (7.2.4) do not prove but do suggest the possibility of links between Al Jazeera talk shows and action on the streets.

### **Al Arabiya as a potential rival**

The content analysis showed that Al Jazeera shares with Al Arabiya a concentration on correspondents in the field and live events (7.2.5.2). There appears to be strong competition between Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya to broadcast the strongest images of violence (7.2.2). The 2005 survey showed Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya level pegging in frequency of programmes dealing with democracy in the Arab world (24D), and in being less likely to exaggerate in telling a news story (23D). Al Arabiya was showing signs of rivalling Al Jazeera in making use of talk shows to promote democracy (27E), and in being perceived as able to change public opinion (19D, 21D). In 2005 Aljazeera and Al Arabiya were both seen to be addressing politically taboo subjects, with close scores in Palestine and Jordan. However, in 2008 Al Jazeera had increased its scores (in Palestine from 42% to 52% and in Jordan from 39% to 47%), and moved well ahead of Al Arabiya. (17D)

A question in 2008 comparing the two channels produced interesting differences between Palestinian and Jordanian respondents. Over a quarter (26%) of Palestinian respondents – the largest Palestinian response – saw Al Jazeera as more constructive than Al Arabiya, but at the same time 22% - the next largest Palestinian response - saw it as more sensational. The largest response from the Jordanian respondents (24%) saw Al Jazeera as less sensational, and the next largest Jordanian group (17%) believed Al Jazeera was more constructive. The respondents are more in agreement about Al Jazeera as constructive than about whether it is sensational in comparison with Al Arabiya (26Dn).

### **Whether the channel has changed**

In 2008 almost two thirds of the respondents thought that Al Jazeera has changed 'slightly' or 'a lot' over the last few years (55Hn).



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