Local for Locals or Go Global: Negotiating how to Represent UAE Identity in Television and Film

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

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Abstract

This dissertation in Middle East Studies explores the creation of national identity through visual media in the contemporary United Arab Emirates. Within a framework of cultural and media studies the thesis analyses how forms of representation are negotiated by Emirati media producers. The research tests the applicability of cultural theories developed by Appadurai and Eickelman in the context of the Gulf Region.

The UAE media industry is considered within a network of global media companies. The local industry's interaction with global media production companies illustrates a constructed divide between local and global identities. This creates specific patterns of media making and influences local audience perceptions of different narratives and representations.

The research uses qualitative methods, based on interviews and focus groups conducted between September 2009 and April 2010 in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The interviewees were Emirati media professional and Students of Media Communication. They discuss how media producers and television presenters try to reconcile their notions of what a national media should be with the restrictive structure of the industry. The interviews demonstrate the challenges of a government-controlled national media for the development of a public dialogue on national identity and confirm that the state-controlled television and film industry, does not account for the diversity of the Emirati community of nationals.

The criticism of Emirati representation in the media is accompanied by a feeling of stagnation and inability to change the existing patterns. It results in their turning away towards commercial media. Going beyond an analysis of restrictive media praxis, the research provides an inside perspective on the complex issue of contemporary Emirati identity.

Acknowledgements

Spelling conventions

In the United Arab Emirates many media companies, television brands, and other media use anglicised versions of Arabic terms for their brands. It is therefore difficult to apply a unified style of spelling which does not hinder the flow of reading and is truthful to the Arabic language. As a general rule names, titles, and headlines will be capitalised in both languages.

The English spelling of Arabic personal names follows the preferences of the individuals named such (i.e. the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid). Since in the UAE English spelling of names is common (i.e. for business cards, registrations, or online) the transcription of them neither seems necessary nor easier to read.

The same practice applies to the names of the emirates, cities, government institutions, or organisations: they will be dealt with as names/brands with the English spelling used in their English publications.

To distinguish the internationally used official institutions from media companies and brand names, the latter will be written in Italics. This practice aligns companies with customary English names (i.e. *Egyptian Radio*) to the cases which do not follow usual spelling conventions: the companies *TwoFour54* and *Imagenation* are examples for such cases of brand-names.

Titles and headlines of television shows and films will be written in inverted commas. Arabic terms will be distinguished through Italics.

Diacritical transcriptions will be used in this thesis for names and Arabic terms which are not usually written in English. In these cases the spelling of Arabic terms follows the guidelines of the International Journal of Middle East Studies with slight modifications for terms particular to the Gulf dialect. The transcription of i.e. the male attire customary in the Gulf will be transcribed the way it is pronounced, *kandōra*. Some of the dialect terms are consistently used throughout the UAE media in an anglicised way, such as the *abaya* and *sheela* (women's' garments). Rather than writing these terms in diacritics, they will be written in their customary spelling in Italic. Particularly challenging is the spelling of Arabic-anglicised terms which follow rules of grammar from both languages. The very specific term "*Boyah*" for example takes an English plural suffix (*Boyahs*) when written in Latin alphabet, but the Arabic plural ending *–āt* when written in Arabic. The main text of this thesis will align such terms to one spelling, but acknowledge the original language of secondary sources using the term.

Contents

Introduction

In November 2011, in anticipation of the United Arab Emirates' 40th anniversary celebration of its founding, the national flag was everywhere. It was on every television screen. It was displayed in shop windows. It appeared on every imaginable public space and on products ranging from gadgets to t-shirts. Even the streetlights gleamed green, white, and red. Operating under the official slogan "Spirit of the Union", merchandising efforts were thematically focused on evoking pride in this still young nation. The official narrative presented on TV was that of the transformation from a landscape of humble, nomadic (?) Bedouin people to a thriving, modern nation in which the Emiratis had enthusiastically embraced modern life but who had never forgotten where and what they had come from.

At present, with daily life back to normal, observing public life in the UAE's large malls presents a rather different picture. The space is dominated by international retailers and the customers are a mix of all nationalities. In the hot climate of the Emirates, the malls are like community centres: we find jogging groups in the mornings, shoppers, people meeting to chat, and in the evening "going out" often means heading to a mall to meet for a film, music, or to dine. At first sight the connection to and influence of the Bedouin culture is not obvious. The atmosphere is closer to that of an international airport where people from all over the world come together. They shop for popular global brands, from Valentino to Starbucks and although they speak Hindi, Tagalog, Chinese, French, or Arabic, English is the lingua franca for transactions. The overall impression is that of international diversity and of global consumer culture: everybody from everywhere is represented in this small Gulf country. In short, the Bedouin presence, distinguishable by the local attire, the white Bedouin dress for men and the black cloak for women, comprises only a tiny part of the actual makeup of the population in the UAE.

For several reasons the UAE offers an ideal case to study the notion and relevance of national identities in a contemporary global consumer culture. It is a young nation with a high level of government control over public life. The discourse of national identity is

constructed and protected by the government who also provides the framework and boundaries for the level of internationalisation. UAE nationals are not only consumers of international goods and culture, but rentiers of the state – and with it, the state ideology. The power-relations between state and citizens are top-down and yet the citizens have all means to choose various other communities to identify with. Through daily contact with global media, through travelling, and education, Emiratis can experience collective identities which are not specifically national; just like the proportion of Emiratis in the mall-scenario form a minority in a potpourri of ethnicities, national identity can become just one of a myriad of consumable identities.

In the context of Middle Eastern studies, the UAE is an exceptional case by which to study national identities because it is the last Arab state to become a nation. While most other Arab states gained independence during the 1940s, the UAE formulated a local national discourse relatively late during the 1960s and became independent in 1971. Since then the UAE has taken a rapid course towards the multi-national society it features today. Oil revenues have enabled the government to speed up the process of building a highly developed society and functioning government apparatus. Yet the government administration and infrastructure relies heavily on imported consultants and labourers. By the end of 2010 the population of the UAE was 8.2 million, only 11.5% of which were Emirati nationals.[1] These demographic specifics pose a challenge to the country's identity as a distinct Arab nation. Emirati nationals live as a minority among a multi-national mix of people. Among a highly diverse population, Emiratis have embraced a lifestyle which is dominated by global consumer goods and media. The high level of access to knowledge of and experience with multiple ways of living and forming collective identities challenges the relevance of a specifically local culture. A unique Emirati culture thus becomes tested on a daily basis.

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[1] According to the National Bureau of Statistics, in mid 2010 the majority of Emirati nationals (42%) lived in Abu Dhabi Emirate, followed by 33% in Dubai and Sharjah. Demographic statistics released by the government are irregular and disputed however; for some years the Bureau has not released demographic imbalances at all. (See: Staff-Reporter, 2012. UAE Population put at 7.2 Million.)

Research aim and questions

Strengthening national identity is a concern to the UAE government and Emirati nationals alike. At schools the raising of the flag and singing of the national anthem is an important ritual; pictures of the country's rulers are present in all public places ranging from oil portraits in offices to glossy billboards along the highways. The political structure of the UAE gives the government a monopoly over the production of the identity discourse, and a major tool to circulate the discourse is the national media. Television campaigns and advertisements praise the achievements of the rulers, the country's rapid modernisation, and the lasting link between old and new generation. TV commercials present images of Bedouins, camels, and traditional coffee ceremonies merged with high-rise buildings, expensive cars, and other phenomena of a modern urban life-style. The constant repetition of these images constructs an association between the symbols they use, and the identity of Emiratis today.

These brief advertisements condense national identity into a brand of the UAE. Yet, such representations aside, the TV programmes are dominated by imported content. Series, daily soaps, and talk shows are mainly Egyptian, Lebanese or Kuwaiti productions or copied versions of globally successful game shows. Flipping through the local TV channels enforces the impression gained by the aforementioned stroll through the mall: Local identity is present on a visual level through distinct attire and symbols, while imported influences prevail in terms of actual content. The series and daily soaps do not tell stories from within Emirati society. Even the news reporters and talk show presenters are mainly Levantine Arabs who interview expatriates living in the UAE. Inevitably the question arises whether this content is of social relevance to the Emirati nationals.

The producers of the local media seem to deem a isolated narrative enough to create an identity almost as if it were a kind of brand. Moreover, government censorship does not permit the media to act as a platform for different Emirati communities, social classes, or interest groups. The ruling elite determine what national identity is supposed to be. At the same time, the success of the government's national identity project relies on the willingness of individuals to be part of the national community. They have to be encouraged

to identify with the narrative and thus become part of a creative dialogue, the outcome of which the ruling elite can never totally control. The editors, film makers, reporters, and designers have two tasks. First, they are the implementers or presenters of the government's official narrative. Then, they are the creators of a narrative which represents and reflects on their own understanding of Emirati identity. These different narratives overlap somewhat but a gap between governmental narrative and variations of the ideal national identity will be apparent in the experiences of these media makers. Their observations and opinions on the national community will not necessarily be translated into the actual visual content that is distributed through the media. But the struggles of individual media producers with government censorship and guidelines will show which aspects of the government's national identity construct are contested.

The research presented in this dissertation explores how young Emirati media producers envision their contributions to visual representations of national identity. The Emiratis who work in the media industry grew up with international media as well as the ubiquitous government presentations of UAE history. In their professions they are challenged to negotiate their own concepts of identity with already established forms of representation and structures of media production. This research asks what impels Emirati media professionals to create a certain image of their national community on screen. Emirati media professionals are those UAE nationals who professionally work in media production. Behind the scenes or on screen, they contribute to the national media industry and thus to visualisations or derivations of the government's ideology.

National media is understood as more than a distributor and facilitator of ideologies but a potentially open interactive communication tool. National TV in particular is faced with the challenge of broadcasting an array of programmes which a diverse national community can experience as meaningful and relevant. Hence, TV has the potential to stage unity through diversity. By translating the national ideology into a media format, it becomes a product of consumption which has to be sold. Its success with audiences relies on its ability to provide entertainment and information. The power relationship between a prescribed ideology and the people is tested in the media. As a product of consumption, the ideology has to constantly justify its validity among other channels and media products.

The research presented in this dissertation will address two questions:

1. What does the UAE media elite (representing the government) do to make the fabricated national ideology a successful product of consumption?
2. How can media professionals (reporters, film makers or any people producing media as a profession) use the local media as a domain to experience, express, and negotiate, represent and reflect on their identities as Emiratis and also find a wide audience in order to fulfil their assignment from the government?

Relevance and contribution to the field

The main contribution of this dissertation lies in the perspective it takes on the representation of national identity through the perspective of Emirati media professionals, or media makers. In order to understand how Emirati media makers negotiate, represent and reflect on their national identity, it is necessary assume a grassroots perspective on the media landscape. This approach leads to a more differentiated view on UAE society and media. In the field of Gulf Studies most research on media is conducted on the transnational satellite channels in the region. Qatar's news channel *Al Jazeera* in particular has attracted major attention either as a platform for diverse Arab communities, or a tool for the Qatari government to profile itself as a modern media society. Al-Nawawy and Iskandar, examine how *Al Jazeera* has enabled people to oppose government ideologies.[2] Naomi Sakr's two books on Arab media, "Satellite Realms" and "Arab Television Today" approach Arab media from the perspective of changing power relations between businesses and governments.[3] Her interest in censorship and import of global media formats to the Arab media domain offers relevant considerations for this dissertation. Yet her focus on shifting power relations

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[2] See for example: Al-Nawawy, 2002. *Al-Jazeera: How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East*, p.11. See also the works by Dabbous-Sensenig (2006) and Hafez (2004) which use case studies of selected aspects or shows to test whether the channel really complies with its self proclaimed agenda to provide balanced news.
[3] See: Sakr, 2001. *Satellite Realms: Transnational Television, Globalization and the Middle East* and ibid., 2007. *Arab Television Today.*

from top-down government controlled media to a more business driven commercial media does not uncover the micro-dynamics of such changes.

Marwan Kraidy and Joe Khalil in their book "Arab Television Industries" go a step further and examine not only local media regulations in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Dubai but politics and programming in individual channels.[4] Here they draw attention to daily practices of media making, such as language, dress code, and programme order. In a second book, "Reality Television and Arab Politics", Kraidy explores the potentials of Arab reality shows to provoke public dialogue. He analyses the reactions and arguments shows like the transnational singing contest "Star Academy" have caused between religious scholars and broadcasters, ultimately Arab media consumers and conservative authorities.[5] Whilst a main part of Kraidy's research is dedicated to conflicts between Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, he also takes a closer look at how the UAE has incorporated reality shows into their television programmes. Using the example of the poetry competition shows "Prince of Poets" and "Poet of the Million" he highlights how more conservative societies have joined the popular trend of reality game shows in their own ways. Ultimately, as Kraidy demonstrates, the import of Western reality shows into the Arab media has led to an internal diversification, since religious and conservative interest groups are now in competition and debate with global formats. Ultimately the overall question is, "how can you be Arab and modern at the same time, without one of these identities usurping the other?"[6]

The main focus of visual content on Arab satellite channels is on socio-economic as well as political balances of power. Based on economic and political frameworks, local government channels have changed in the post satellite era. Jones for example explores how the government controlled media in Jordan has lost control over the community of nationals due to the wide choice of other media and sources of information.[7] Tracing and mapping counter-discourses to the dominant narratives of Arab governments delivers important insight into the diversity of Arab publics, government opposition, and grassroots channels of communication.

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[4] Khalil & Kraidy, 2009. *Arab Television Industries.*

[5] Kraidy, 2010. *Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life.*

[6] Ibid., p.193.

[7] See for example: Jones, 1999. *Jordan: Press, Regime, and Society since 1989*. Jones describes the Jordanian media sphere as retorting to oral information discourses, or to foreign media.

This dissertation focuses on those people who actually partake in the production of the dominant and oppressive discourse. It follows the example of scholars such as Lisa Wedeen who has analysed how people in Syria became part of the oppressive media against their own better judgement or personal opinions. Lisa Wedeen's research has analysed why "Syrians of all sorts, at one time or another, have been compelled to bend their talents to the service of state propaganda."[8] Her interviews with producers of the state ideology show how individuals can reject the legitimacy of a regime yet simultaneously partake in its established personality cults and state ideology. Wedeen thus shows how a "loyalty-producing regime and its anxiety-inducing simulacrum" manages to establish a structure of compliance.[9]

Understanding the perspective of the media producers adds valuable insight into the micro-dynamics of non-democratic regimes who rely on top-down promulgations of a national identity. Analysing what the individuals working within the regime structures think and how they justify their own compliances opens the field to find solutions to problems of oppressive media from within. Unlike the propaganda machinery of the Assad regime in Syria, the UAE case has different characteristics which enable specific forms of negotiation for Emiratis. This research will illustrate how UAE government is struggling to reconcile an image of modernity and an open media with the aim to strengthen its own legitimacy through control of the media. The sometimes conflicting policies of media control and the subsequent media productions are used by Emiratis as one way to partake in the definition of their collective identity.

For the field of regional studies of the Gulf this dissertation adds to the knowledge about socio-political dynamics in the contemporary UAE media landscape. Because most scholarly attention is on satellite channels in the Gulf, analysis of the national media industry have not been comprehensively reviewed. Several articles mention the national TV channels of the UAE to highlight significant developments but do not describe the industry as a whole. The development of the main national TV channel, Abu Dhabi TV and its role during the Gulf War in 2003, as mentioned by Kai Hafez, is a case in point.[10] Other research,

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[8] Wedeen. 1999. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*, p.2.
[9] Ibid., p.3.
[10] See: Hafez, 2004. *Arab Satellite Broadcasting: An Alternative to Political Parties?*

such as the aforementioned by Kraidy and Khalil highlight specific UAE media productions and companies, such as the establishment of Dubai Media City. Pritchert-Duthler and Yunis review the development of film festivals in the country.[11] Yet for the purpose of providing an overview of the UAE TV and film industry this research gathers a compilation of otherwise singular reviews. Without aiming to be an historical account, this dissertation delivers an account of the development and current state of the TV and film industry in the UAE. This research tracks developments, ideas and discarded media endeavours during 2009 which can be important for historians interested in the establishment of this newest part of the UAE media landscape.

This dissertation contributes to cultural studies of Gulf societies. Since the interaction of individuals with media is the main interest of this dissertation, contributions on social science in the Gulf become relevant to consider and draw from. John W. Fox, Nada Mourtada-Sabbah, and Mohammed al-Mutawa from the American University of Sharjah for example have co-published observations on media and material culture in the UAE.[12] Their work traces how the "media marketplace" has shaped a new "Emirati ideal" of individualism directed by global brands, and how this potentially affects the official singular narrative of identity of UAE society as promulgated by the government. The researchers draw their conclusion from triangulating different concepts of lifestyle and comparing them with trends in the contemporary UAE. However, their framework readily accepts notions which form the basis of 'ideal' communities. This approach manifests itself in statements, such as "the traditional culture of the Bedouin [is] codified in the Qur'an and *hadiths*."[13] It is vital to question such seemingly established 'beliefs' which are often reflected in research on social phenomena in the Gulf. This does not devalue the meanings such 'common' perceptions have for individuals, who may frame their positions in society, as well as their personal and collective identities on these ideas. But they have to be understood instead as consciously constructed narratives rather than 'truths'.

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[11] Se: Yunis & Picherit-Duthler, 2011. Lights, Camera, Education: An Overview of the Future of Film Education in the United Arab Emirates.

[12] Mourtada-Sabbah, Nada; Al-Mutawa, Mohammed; Fox, John W. & Walters, Tim. 2001. *Media as Social Matrix in the United Arab Emirates*.

[13] Ibid., p.123.

Works on other aspects of modernity and heritage in the UAE are Suleiman Khalaf's, "The Nationalisation of Culture" on (re-)invented traditions, Lubna Ahmed Al-Kazi's, "Gulf Societies: Coexistence of Tradition and Modernity"[14], or Sally Findlow's research, "The United Arab Emirates: Nationalism and Arab-Islamic identity".[15] Despite their different topics and theoretical approaches these works share an underlying distrust of the phenomena they identify as 'modern'. 'Tradition' becomes a value which needs to be protected. The Sharjah University team also edited "Globalisation in the Gulf", a compilation of essays examining different aspects of globalisation in Gulf societies. The preface of the mainly political and economical compilation of essays addresses, or rather defends how the Gulf States have merged tradition and 'postmodernism' in a way which enabled them to be global players yet preserve their identities.[16] As a conglomerate of research on Gulf societies these works provide insight into various aspects that play a role in a collective identity, such as mall culture, heritage, or sports. Their research tries to contribute to a better understanding of the region, for example: the eye-striking signs of materialism have raised the question whether the Emiratis lack authenticity or a unique identity. The works of the scholars from Sharjah University attempt to answer such questions and provide a more differentiated view on Gulf societies than just the stereotype of 'decadent oil-rich Arabs'. But the notion of 'tradition' as cherished core of a national community, for example, is not questioned, nor is the concept of 'identity' as a value challenged. By accepting the concepts out of which such prejudices have evolved, their validity is ultimately strengthened.

In this sense the research on Gulf societies will benefit from a framework which does not define 'global media' or 'global culture' as potentially threatening local identities; not because they are 'good' but because they part of a framework which reveals the dichotomy between local and global, or between authenticity and lack of identity. Rather than arguing from within such a framework it will be crucial to put the spotlight on individual nationals, who are both creators and reconcilers of dichotomies.

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[14] See: Khalaf, 2001. *The Nationalisation of Culture: Kuwait's Invention of a Pearl-Diving Heritage*; and Al-Kazi, 2001. *Gulf Societies: Coexistence of Tradition and Modernity*.
[15] See: Findlow, 2000. *The United Arab Emirates: Nationalism and Arab-Islamic Identity*.
[16] Mourtada-Sabbah, 2006. *The Arab Gulf Region:Traditionalism Globalized or Globalization Traditionalized?*,

Methodological considerations

To analyse the consolidation of identities around media images and narratives, the human perspective has to be the prism through which media is understood. The media consumers are the implementers and interpreters of said images, and it is the human effort of interpretation which creates notion of self. It is my belief that this process is not a planned or organised construction, but is ultimately a creative one. Therefore, while an outside observer may find similarities between media texts, the reasons why an individual chooses a certain way of expression cannot be answered by a mere text analysis. Attached to the interest in individual expressions of self is also a specific notion of media as a dialogical social tool. Media scholar Peter Dahlgren proposes a notion of media based on the observation that it has become such a broad force in culture that it now shapes civil society, the public sphere, and democracy itself.[17] Barbie Zelizer, furthermore, defines media as agent which models "real life", "setting in place a world with strategically fashioned categories that distinguish between here and there, now and then, and good and evil."[18] From this perspective media can be seen as a nexus of human interaction, which accordingly has to become the centre of observation. Media is simultaneously embedded in a macro-communication process as well as a micro-communication one. It becomes the prism through which people see themselves, experience notions of culture and identity, and equally express these notions. As such the significance of media messages, the "raw material for [the] individual's interpretative work"[19], lies in the moments of translation into meaning[20] which takes form in actual consumption of the media and actual performance. For the aim of this research there can be no 'objective' definition of media which is as situational and subjective as those who encounter and use it. The focus is he positions individuals see themselves in within their experience among an imagined global community of media consumers. Accordingly the research acknowledges multi-coded communication

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[17] See: Dahlgren, 1995. *Television and the Public Sphere: Citizenship, Democracy and the Media.*

[18] Zelizer, 1997. *Blurring Distinctions: Media, Culture, and Identity,* p.586.

[19] Cohen, 1994. *Self Conciousness. An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*, p.16.

[20] See: Hall, [1973] 1980. *Encoding/Decoding*, p.129.

tools as important means through which the experience of identity is re-enacted on an individual and a collective level.

The research requires examining the dominant state-controlled media discourse on identity. An epistemology and methodology has to be applied which aims to "unravel the social processes and relations that have constructed the social world in hierarchical ways."[21] Taking this approach, the methodology of this dissertation is inspired by what Michel Foucault calls the "insurrection of subjugated knowledge."[22] Knowledge has to be understood as by nature partial, situated, subjective, and relational.[23] Within this framework 'official' knowledge is questioned and the validity of an 'official narrative' of identity under scrutiny. The official media is viewed as an institution which aims to implement a pre-selective knowledge as seemingly comprehensive and unbiased. It executes this goal by fabricating and controlling a discourse of Emirati identity via legal frameworks and self-appointed agents. By pre-filtering which voices are admitted to the media sphere an empowered set of supposedly 'common' beliefs and truths is established.

The exclusion of groups, predefined according to categories such as age, gender, class, or ethnicity, nevertheless triggers alternative discourses and debates. Stuart Hall argues that the capacity of such interest groups to influence the outcome is limited, due to the nature of the social practices within the media apparatus. However, the "sign-vehicles" (codes and code systems) which circulate the media product cannot control a continuous flow of meanings – and thus public opinions.[24] The research of this dissertation aims to give voice to opinions which are subjected to an officially sanctioned reading and want to partake in the dominant 'flow of meanings', yet struggle with the boundaries procured by the discourse. At the same time they are free to 'imagine' their own self within a global media discourse and exchange of images. For Arjun Appadurai, "imagination" is a process

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[21] Sharlene N. Hesse-Biber, 2004. *Feminist Approaches to Research as a Process: Reconceptualizing Epistemology, Methodology, and Method*, p.19.

[22] See: Foucault, [1976] 1980. *Two Lectures*,

[23] Harding, 1987. *Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?*, p.3.

[24] See: Hall, [1973] 1980. *Encoding/Decoding*, p.128f. Cunningham argues that media is public communication and thus engaged in public debates. His observations on the relationship between media and public opinion are based on a definition of media, which aims to be a platform of opinions. This might be an ideal, but does not necessarily have to match with social reality, especially in the case of a highly restricted, censored media industry as established in the UAE. (See: Cunningham, 2004. *Popular Media as Public 'Sphericules' for Diasporic Communities*, p. 151.)

which creates fertile ground for creating notions of collective self within a globalised world of images. Globalised media imagination provides concrete images and narratives across cultural and national borders.[25] He points out that the global media-flow both generates local problems of social wellbeing and encourages emancipatory politics by providing input to the imagination of communities. He introduces the term "grassroots globalisation" as an attempt to bring together Western scholarship and public intellectuals and thus challenge the unequal existing power relations between academy and non-researchers.[26] The methodological approach of this dissertation follows Appadurai's focus on the exploration of human experiences.[27] In this framework media takes the position of a communication tool around which people gather, draw inspirations and into which they ideally translate their very individual narratives.

The subjects of analysis are the individual notions of self as a result of an interpretive process, which is triggered and informed by experiences evolving around media images of identity and otherness, of uniqueness and mutuality. In his book "Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization" Appadurai develops a cultural concept of group identity which is contextual, heuristic, and comparative. For him "situated and embodied difference" is a key characteristic of local communities.[28] Their local 'culture' is understood as a codified construction or official corpus. In the case of the UAE this must be what will be referred to as the 'official narrative', 'official identity' or 'dominant discourse.' 'Dominant' because it is linked to an elite who invents it and who has the power to give their 'culture' a dominant place in media.

It is important to acknowledge that the experience of individuals is the result of their personal history, social frameworks, as well as their imagined knowledge of their own historicity – as people using media, as members of a society, part of a gender, ethnicity etc. It effectively creates structures in which people might willingly or unwillingly make themselves agents of certain patterns of behaviour and which release the individual from the burden of reinterpreting and questioning their habits. Notions of collective memory or ethnicity can thus be understood by research participants as 'perfectly natural'

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[25] See: Appadurai, 2005. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p.5-11.

[26] See: Appadurai, 2001. *Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination*,

[27] See: ibid.p.50f.

[28] Appadurai, 2005. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p.13.

condensations of truth.[29] Without dominating the research participants from the outside position of a researcher such notions have to be questioned and identified as categories reproduced perhaps by media but enforced ultimately by social performance. The latter will be the yardstick to interpret their validity.

In practice these methodological considerations result in a fieldwork designed around personal interviews, completed by observations, as well as discussions with participants about such observations and impressions. At the same time, integrating media into the analysis means to have a look at how such notions are empowered by the affluent reproduction of legitimising narratives and images which become products of consumption, social knowledge, and entertainment.

Fieldwork: context and outline

The fieldwork conducted for this dissertation benefitted considerably from my formal status as a resident and employee in Abu Dhabi from 2006 to 2011. My role as editor for the Abu Dhabi e-government project should neither affect nor interfere with my research on UAE media. However, in practice both roles influenced each other. Prior to my research I had worked as an editor for the official internet portal of the Abu Dhabi government which was implemented by the Abu Dhabi Systems and Information Committee (ADSIC). The work provided me with firsthand experience of workflows within the local government departments, as well as valuable networking opportunities.[30] Under the management of Emirati the teams of the government entities mainly consisted of foreign employees often employed as contractors. Although I tried to keep a strict separation

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[29] Hall, 1997. *The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity*, p.174.

[30] Particularly insightful for my research were the e-government training sessions I co-conducted with employees from the Abu Dhabi Cultural and Heritage Foundation, the Abu Dhabi Sports Council, and the Office of the Abu Dhabi Brand. Between 2006 and 2008 The government of the emirate of Abu Dhabi was in a phase of restructuring. During that time a government restructuring committee was responsible for dissolving and merging government department and to redefine their responsibilities. This phase was an aiming to reform the efficiency of government departments. After the restructuring committee was dissolved some of the departments were re-opened and new entities established.

between my university research and my job, working closely with government institutions influenced my fieldwork in several ways. In some cases personal introductions to media makers were made through friends and work colleagues. On several occasions my long term residency and work in the UAE created a bond of understanding and trust between myself and research participants. Most importantly however, my affiliation to ADSIC provided unrestricted access to the management level of the emirate's media company and to the campus of the TV channel. Thus it was easier to conduct observations and unofficially establish contacts in Abu Dhabi, whereas in Dubai access to the campus of the local media was only possible with an appointment.

I conducted the main fieldwork for this dissertation between September 2009 and April 2010. During this eight month period I worked part-time in Abu Dhabi and took up a second residence in Dubai. In addition, I attended the two international UAE film festivals in Abu Dhabi (October 8-17) and Dubai (December 9 -16).Moreover, I was also able to observe the run-up to and re-launch of the Abu Dhabi Media Company, a company which produces TV and print media in the emirate. This was a major topic of discussion with research participants. Finally, I was there during the month of Ramadan during which television daily soaps are an integral part of daily culture. As such the fieldwork trip could incorporate observing and taking part in events first hand, and also experiencing how this most important event was presented and covered in various forms of media. In the following years 2010 and 2011 while evaluating and analysing the research I returned to the UAE for the annual film festivals and used the occasions to follow up with research participants.

The interviews and focus groups are quotable mainly as MP3 recorded material and quoted as such. The names of the participants are encrypted to protect their anonymity. A noteworthy feature of the interviews is the general mix of languages that were spoken by the participants. Due to the daily interaction with non-Arabs, especially in the film industry but also television, it is common for young Emiratis in the field to speak English or adjust their local dialect to a Levantine or Egyptian dialect, which are dialects of the main Arab TV producing countries. As a courtesy, research participants therefore often mixed Lebanese Arabic with English during the interviews, as did I. The interviewees were all fluent in English, accustomed to consuming English media and thus comfortable speaking about the topic in English. The language-mix usually occurred in the heat of a discussion or to

emphasise a crucial point. Out of consideration of consistency, the original quotes used in this dissertation are either in their original English or translated from Arabic.

Media Professionals

The core interviews of this research were conducted with people who I refer to as media professionals throughout this dissertation. The term encompasses people who are professionally involved in media production, either as employees, freelancers, or independent company owners. Media professionals can be script writers and designers, editors, reporters, directors, or film producers. As a community they constitute an interest group which, apart from consuming media professionally, partakes in the production process, not on a decision making level but as contributors. They have to reconcile different personal interests, ambitions and notions of self with the options their employers give them. Hence the narratives of media professionals can show how the media framework and industry in the UAE affect individuals.

The interviews with Emirati media professionals included 12 news reporters, six TV presenters, five script writers, as well as ten people working in film production. They were conducted as one-to-one interviews with the exception of one focus group of female employees of the Abu Dhabi TV channel. The topics discussed were how local media is perceived as representative of their own notions of UAE identity, how they would like to contribute to the local media, and which obstacles they encountered in the industry. The discussions were kept open, however, in order to allow participants to elaborate on topics not necessarily anticipated beforehand but of importance to their experiences with media. With the presenters we began the interviews with questions about their shows, what they wanted to convey, and which role models they tried to follow. In the case of two presenters from Abu Dhabi, I was able to monitor their talk shows from within the studio. The advantage was that more spontaneous discussions could be conducted on set between shooting and which also included editorial teams already present.

Because of this unrestricted access the field work in Abu Dhabi was more in-depth than in Dubai. Meetings during lunch or breaks, before or after work, led to informal meetings of a more social nature in, a mall or coffee shop. Whereas the first interviews were formally scheduled with the assistance of administrative staff, participants soon approached me individually. The informal approach to research participants and repeated meeting prior to recording interviews was valuable for the establishment of trust between the interviewees and me as a researcher.

Due to close contact with the employees of the Abu Dhabi media company a focus group with five Emirati female employees was organised. Soon one of the research participants suggested meeting her colleagues from different departments for a recorded group interview. They used this focus group to relate how they came to work in the media. The animated exchange of stories resulted in a second meeting with the same group. The meetings with freelance media professionals followed similar patterns of initial contact through my observations of their shows or film screenings, followed by more casual meetings, at media events or exhibitions, or merely running errands. Many contacts to film makers were established during the film festivals during which we would attend screenings together and discuss directly about local productions or developments in the media industry.

Students of Media and Communications

Although I had initially intended to focus on interviews with media professionals, I decided to widen the circle of research participants to Emirati students of media and communication. Many students were familiar with working in the local media through internships they had in the media companies, or attending film production institutes which contributed to the film festivals. The universities also organised trips for students to attend selected festival screenings together. Not yet fully fledged media professionals, the students added valuable perspectives on the media industry they considered a potential future

employer. The view of media students on currents trends is specific, since they are consumers but also deal with media and media making as a challenge which will influence their future lives more urgently than other professions. Hence their view on the media they consume is different from the mere consumer and they cannot be indifferent towards the image of media people throughout society.

To organise meetings with Emirati students I approached the national universities in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. These were the Higher College of Technology which have campuses for male and female students in both cities, as well as the Zayed University. The latter was at the time exclusively for female Emirati nationals and also had a campus in each city. The departments of media and communications organised focus groups to support my research. In total 18 focus groups were conducted, each with 8-15 participants. Since they took place during class times the meeting usually lasted one hour. In some cases the classes were split in half, with half an hour discussion time for each group. Since I relied on the permission of the university departments I had no influence on whether the students were the same age or had matriculated at the same time. Nonetheless, most students were in their last year of studies, aged between late teens and early twenties, and mainly single.

Zayed University in particular was anxious to protect the privacy of their students and asked me not to attempt arranging follow-up meetings outside the campus. There was a fear of receiving inquiries or complaints from parents who assumed that the students were strictly confined to the campus grounds and not interacting with persons other than university staff. The men's colleges did not insist on such precautions, nor did the female campuses of the Higher College of Technology. According to university staff, the reason was that Zayed University students were from the upper classes of Emirati society and those parents more concerned with who their daughters interacted with outside their families.

Initially I was apprehensive to conduct focus groups in the setting of classrooms, since it put me into the position of a semi-teacher or lecturer and I expected the discussions to be accordingly staged or generic. However, the focus groups provided useful insights into the perspective of the participating students. In order to establish a constructive conversation it was necessary to use considerable time explaining my position as a research student and to answer questions about my own heritage and personal background.

The discussions evolved around *PowerPoint* presentations as well as short video clips of local shows, channel advertisements and brands. The advantage of focus groups with students was the group dynamics which motivated the more tentative students to engage in the conversations. Usually we started by talking about their favourite channels and shows and the discussion quickly developed into discussions about their future plans with media and how they would make certain programmes. Since I had agreed not ask any students to meet outside the campus grounds, I provided my e-mail and *Facebook* contact information to the groups leaving it to them whether or not to seek further contact. Most of the male students and some females contacted me via *Facebook* and were extremely helpful in accessing discussions on current media events. I also met some of the students by chance at the film festivals and although those encounters were not recorded they helped form an impression of their interaction with media.

Chapter outline

The chapters of this dissertation are organised around central topics which were raised by both media professionals and students. Some issues (e.g. censorship) were more relevant to those working in the media than students, which explains the dominance of certain participant groups in some chapters. Following the two research questions, the first chapters will focus on introducing the subject and analysing the government's perspective on the local media, including the media set-up, legal framework and structures in the workplace. The second half of the dissertation will explore the grassroots perspective of individuals within the previously described structure.

I.   The first chapter provides the historical background necessary to understand the development of the contemporary national identity project and media industry. The review also sketches the theoretical framework of the dissertation, basic concepts, and re-occurring themes. The central topic is the construction of a UAE national

identity by the government and its normalisation via media. Foremost concepts are dimensions of imagined communities and the dialogical nature of identity formation. The chapter explains how the sense of belonging to a community is always imagined and in dialogue with an equally imagined 'other'.

II.   Chapter 2 shows how ideology and praxis contribute to the idea of national identity and explains the characteristics of the nationalist ideology in the UAE. The UAE ruling elite legitimises their own position as rulers through a nationalist ideology, which is circulated via a narrative of a shared ethnicity.

The conflict between foreign and local concepts of national identity draws attention to the role of media as facilitator and 'normaliser.' The official narrative as part of the dialogical process has to compete with other media messages to win the attention of the largest possible audiences and with it the public approval of their national ideology. Since the official narrative forms a defined corpus it also claims an unchanging validity, which is difficult to maintain in a constantly changing media sphere. This challenge is met by adapting modern branding strategies to assure that images of local identity permeate all spaces of public life. This national myth becomes the nexus of an ideologically constructed dichotomy between local identity and global distractions from the supposedly authentic Emirati nationhood. In order to maintain the intactness of the official narrative, control over the media industry will become essential for the ruling elite which it legitimises.

III.   Chapter 3 will outline how the government has established itself as sole owner of the media sector, despite progressive privatisation. Furthermore this chapter will explore how changes in media technologies have triggered shifting notions of what media should be in the eyes of the viewers. The initial approach to using media as an educator for the nationals was ultimately challenged by the availability of different media styles. The satellite era exhilarated the loss of influence the one-sided government media had enjoyed over its citizens in the start up phase of the nation. Accordingly, the government media in the UAE shifted from political information media to entertainment. The idea behind this is that entertainment is more easily digested that political information, and it is watched with a non-critical eye. Thus it is

easier to transport messages and ideas through entertainment. Joint ventures with international media producers further the image of the UAE as a global media player. Yet, despite all proclaimed openness the government remains in control of national media production through an established and complex structure of selection and censorship.

IV.   Chapter 4 will explore the structures of control from the perspective of Emirati media professionals. The observations start with restrictions on the general political freedom of speech through the government and continue to the structures of self censorship. But the restrictions imposed on self-expression go beyond avoiding politically sensitive topics, and include modelling TV presenters into representations of the nation. Both content and physical appearances are controlled by an established structure of anticipatory compliance towards the rulers. Their public images act as blueprints, but (with few exceptions) these physically visible examples are only set by male members of the ruling families. This gendered public visibility translates into different possibilities for male and female presenters to express individuality through their attire on screen.

        The interviews with Emirati women who work for the local TV channels will illustrate how they can experience the predefined roles imposed by their employers as a way to emancipate themselves from other social structures which restrict their radius of public action. They can thus become willing agents of the government's national identity discourse. Personal evaluations and experiences of the media industry will illustrate the effectiveness of the government's media strategy: It actively invents the role of 'Emirati national' to be consumed by media audiences and over time perceived as 'normal.' The chapter will conclude with reflections on how the consumption of these media images is interrelated with notions of national representation beyond the screens of TV.

V.   Chapter 5 will draw the focus of the research to contestations of the government's media strategy. The outlooks of Emirati students will be used to show why the local media cannot succeed with its attempt to mainstream representations of identity. As part of a global media landscape the UAE national media cannot compete with other

media spheres in terms of quality and diversity of content. Rather than uniting the community of nationals into one audience, it alienates Emiratis. The perception of the students even goes a step further to perceive the UAE media as a 'foreign' discourse, intrinsically connected to the expatriates working in the industry. They sum up the disconnection under the label of a 'Lebanese Media Mafia'. The examination of this notion will reveal their beliefs that only insiders of the community can make convincing media for the community. Despite their appreciation and consumption of international media, the students want the local media to provide stories related to their daily lives. They accept the brands of national identity as 'accurate'. Yet more complex visualisations such as talk shows are criticised as artificial and implausible constructions which do not reflect real life experiences in the emirates.

Not finding engaging local discourses in the official media, the public dialogue shifts to alternative media spheres, such as the internet. My dissertation will establish that Emirati communities indeed want to partake in the discourse on national identity. The chosen example in this context is the ongoing dispute about Emirati men marrying foreign women. The course of the argument in the media will show how the official media can be challenged. In this particular case Emiratis from mixed ethnic backgrounds rallied around a journalist who attacked the dominant opinion of the official media directly. The observations will be indicative for possibilities Emirati media professionals have to diversify the one-sided official media message from a grassroots level.

VI.   Chapter 6 will explore different examples of such micro-dynamics of change in the controlled media landscape of the UAE. It will show different ways media producers choose to bypass the structures of control and to introduce different topics and forms of representation. Different as the reviewed Emiratis approach this challenge, they use the demand and shortage of Emirati media personalities to their advantage. One way to gain permission to talk about controversial topics can be linked to an entitlement which functions as an entry permit to the media stage. This can be gained through personal achievements, such as educational awards or an earned reputation.

Other Emirati media producers found their own businesses, which gives more space to develop their particular media style independent from the established ways of the TV channels. They carefully create public profiles and fan bases before they collaborate with the official media. Having thus escaped the roles media professionals are usually fostered into, these media producers add diversity to the otherwise one-sided media.

VII. Chapter 7 rounds up the observations on representations of national identity by taking a look at the currently evolving UAE film industry. This new dimension of the UAE media is influenced by the same intents and restrictions from the government but its different outreach can highlight how the imagined 'non-local' influences the experience of national identity. The review of films shows that locals accept a stereotypical representation of their national community when it comes to films. The imagined other nations influence their perception of Emirati films, and the yardstick of success is how well the nation is represented. Whereas individual and personal stories are called for on TV, in film stereotypes reign supreme. The style and narrative of Hollywood films in other local film industries is pivotal in this context. Since the Emirati film industry wants to join the blockbuster movie industry, it tries to copy the Hollywood style. In practice, Emirati cinema audiences experience films through the eyes of 'other' national communities who they imagine have a negative idea about Emiratis and Arabs.

In the TV industry, the government has established a pattern of representation and consumption of national identity. In the case of cinema, Hollywood films have established a certain way of feeling scrutinised. The imagined 'gaze' of other national communities leads to a feeling of having to prove themselves as a national community. The chapter unravels similarities between the government and the Emirati nationals. Both want to control how media represents the community and both want to present themselves in the best possible light. To achieve this they want to control the media by making it one-sided. The government wants to present the nation they created as successful, authentic and thus legitimate to the people. The nationals want to present their community as equally coherent and valid to other national communities. In a way, the government and the nationals have more in common than one thinks at first. While the nationals are struggling

with government control and want more diversity, they are just as eager to act as censors and controllers when they face the imagined mass-audience of world cinema.

This last chapter reinforces what the other chapters have addressed: the media identity is a reconciliation of different concepts and trends. Branding and individual expressions are appreciated in different situations and can be used to feel part of an imagined community of nationals. The situational view on different media also includes the imagined 'other' who plays a pivotal role in determining how people want to be represented in which situation. The concern with representation towards an imagined scrutinising 'other' in many cases hinders Emirati media producers from pushing boundaries towards a more diverse and realistic visualisation of UAE society. At the same time the research shows that the government's insistence on the construct of an ethnical homogenous national community is challenged from a grassroots level. Due to the fact that most Emiratis are multi-ethnic, the pure lineage of the Bedouin myth is no longer maintainable. The brand of the nation is currently in a process of being re-interpreted to represent share moral ideals rather than biological heritage. The mere fact that this reinterpretation is possible demonstrates the success of a national brand which is so generic that it enables identification and reinterpretation from various communities without losing its social meaning.

This dissertation explores how Emirati media professionals navigate government restrictions and envision their national identities in midst a conglomerate of global media styles. The multi-national population of the UAE, the easy access to global media, and the urgency of determining a distinct identity, makes the UAE case significant. In an environment where media mainstreams and brands dominate the interpretive material available to individuals, national identity is transformed into a mainstream itself. The aim of the UAE government to create a unified and stable national community is therefore challenged and contested by diverse publics it seeks to control. This dissertation illustrates the dynamics of the rapidly growing UAE media landscape and its implications on the national identity discourse. In addition, the dissertation will analyse how the government developed a strategy to control the community of nationals it aspires to create. Through the

perspective of Emirati film makers, reporters, and TV presenters, the success and implications of this strategy will be discussed.

1 Imagining and visualising nationhood: the dialogical character of imagined community and the legitimisation of a ruling elite

Since the establishment of *Dubai Media City* in 2001 the United Arab Emirates has set out to be the centre of the media industry in the MENA (Middle East and North African) region. The country has enjoyed tremendous success in attracting global media makers and prides itself on being one of the leading countries worldwide in terms of media accessibility.[31] Yet while the UAE is busy making deals with foreign investors, the national media is restricted by government censorship. Any content has to be in accordance with the country's official religious and cultural values, which has resulted in websites being blocked, imported magazines having content blacked out, and legislation being passed that states that all locally produced media content has to be approved by the government. Every internet user in the UAE is familiar with the blocked screen message that states that a particular page cannot be accessed because it does not comply with the customs of the UAE. The contradiction between high media accessibility and the censorship of that media makes any study of it much more than a survey of contemporary technological developments: it inevitably becomes a study of the nation's social development. A working knowledge of the history of the Emirates is required in order to fully comprehend the magnitude of the achievement in creating a nation in a mere few decades. It also illustrates the importance of media in sustaining this newly-formed and full-fledged national community.

This chapter combines a historical overview of the UAE nation building processes within the theoretical framework on which the research is based. Recurring themes will be introduced, such as the juxtaposition between local and global interests, and different perceptions of communities. A key notion will be the concept of "imagined communities", which is enforced via media image. The challenges and modifications of the UAE national

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[31] CNN have already developed an Arabic-language channel in 2009, and the newly-established Arabic National Geographic channel became the ninth most-viewed Ramadan show in the Arab world after only one year of broadcasting. (See Hawkes, 2010. *Nat Geo Abu Dhabi Gears up for Oloum Al Qital.*)

ideology mirror similar dynamics on the media industry. In their attempt to create a national identity, the UAE media landscape is characterised by a dichotomy of interests within the ruling elite as well as between the government and the UAE population. In order to obtain legitimacy the government had to merge tribal politics into the ideology of a UAE nation.

Section 1.1 will ascertain how different concepts of nationhood have to be adjusted and reconciled according to the specific needs of the government's nation building project. The legitimacy of the political status quo strongly relies on the perception of the community of UAE nationals as 'naturally' evolved from a shared heritage. It will be argued that the ideological 'normalisation' of this notion is part of a dialogical process of constant negotiation.

This negotiation takes place on the level of circulated ideas and notions but also in direct visual encounters between members of the community. These face-to-face encounters with others of the imagined community are of specific relevance for the UAE case and suggest an extension of Anderson's and Appadurai's conceptualisations. As the section will show, in the UAE the community of nationals imagines itself to be *potentially* face-to-face. On an imaginary interpretive level this notion creates a community which is more personal than Anderson's imagined community. This particular aspect does not only frame a certain way of experiencing the 'other', but, as section 1.1 will show, is part of the discourse of legitimacy constructed around the ruling elite.

The historical evolution of this legitimising discourse will be reviewed in section 1.2. How it developed in response to other ideologies, which were circulated via mass-media will be shown. The competition between the Arabic language radio stations from the 1930s onwards demonstrated the propaganda potentials of audio (and visual) media for political means from which the rulers of the Gulf could profit. The experience with imported ideologies fuelled by the media during the Trucial States era showed a large gap in the rulers' control over political stability. It became vital for the success of the nation building project to defuse any alternative nationalist ideologies and consequently a local media infrastructure was set up as educator in nationhood for the citizens. The rapid development of the local media during the 1970s led to characteristics which would remain significant features of the UAE media until today.

1.1 Imagining the nation

The notions of nationhood which contributed to the UAE nationalist project have to be evaluated on the grounds of dialogical exchange. The process of negotiating overlapping or contradictory concepts which have contributed to an official narrative of Emirati nationhood ultimately forms the basic interpretive material for individual Emiratis. Since the process of identity formation as an interpretive notion develops into a recurring theme throughout the conducted research in the UAE, the following section will focus on conceptualisations of collective identities. The first two parts will evolve around the notion of a UAE national community and the historical development of the federation. The relevance of both ethnical and political concepts of nation will be discussed through the establishment of the political system.

In the case of the UAE the notion of a tribal heritage is a vital part of the national identity. Therefore the third part of the following section will explore the importance of a reconciliation of tribal and national community for the legitimisation of the ruling elite. This part will show how in the UAE fabricating an ethnic ideology of the nation established a class system. This system extends from the Emirati population to its relation to expatriate residents who form the majority of the population.

The discussion will proceed in part four to the concept of dialogism, which is crucial to the formation of collective identities. The relationship between different concepts of nationhood will be conceptualised as both distinguishing as well as symbiotic. Therefore notions of nations, as bound by a shared ethnicity or by a political aim, are only seemingly dichotomous. In the creation of a notion of nationhood each national ideology can create a characteristic reconciliation of such concepts. The complexity of notions of collective identity is expressed in the world views of individuals who contribute to the national media. Embedded in the nationalist discourse, the notion of a tribal community forms an imaginary bond between members of the UAE community of citizens, who do not know each other in real time.

Elaborating on the imaginary bond or sentiment between members of a community, the last part of the following section will highlight a characteristic of the UAE imagined community: the notion that in the UAE the community is at least potentially face-to-face. This concept will remain relevant for the development of individual and sub-communal selves throughout the research. It influences social public actions and displays of identity albeit an imagined watchful community who gains more power over individuals through the idea.

1.1.1 National identity as a negotiation between ideology and experience

To conceptualise the meaning of nationhood in the Emirati context it is necessary to provide a brief review on how the UAE was established. The nation-building process is a case for Ernest Gellner's concept of nations which are formed and controlled by political and intellectual elite. The ruling elite then impose a national ideology on the population.[32] In the case of the UAE borders of the state territory were not drawn along commonly accepted territorial claims landmarks, let alone the lines of ethnicity and religion.[33] In fact, the Ottoman Empire, British agencies and the Government of India had all influenced the territorial boundaries. What was proclaimed state territory of the UAE was a result of fervent diplomacy pushed by political pressure.

British interest in the region before the discovery of oil was primarily due to both their location (en route to India) and to pirate activity in their waters. Both had a serious impact on British trade interests. Prior to the foundation of the UAE the seven Emirates had entered, as other Sheikhdoms in the region, into mutually beneficial agreements with the British government, earning themselves the name of the 'Trucial States.' In 1897, the British were able to put the area under their Protectorate, thereby securing safe naval passage to India in return for stabilising the political position of the existing rulers. The exploitation of oil in the Arabian Peninsula, which started during the 1930s, shifted the balance of power in

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[32] Gellner, 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*, p.6f.
[33] Until now border conflicts exist between the UAE and Saudi Arabia and Iran.

favour of foreign companies and powers in the region, which were once again able to influence local politics. The emirate of Fujairah, for example, had been under the control of the Qawasim until 1952, when the American ARAMCO company tried to pay the local dominant tribe (the Al Sharqis) for oil exploration rights. To keep the Americans out of the region, the British upgraded Fujairah to a Trucial State, which set it under the 1835 agreement that granted British companies exclusive rights to their resources.[34]

When oil was found offshore in Abu Dhabi in 1958, it quickly became the most attractive Emirate to investors, exports started in 1962 and shortly thereafter, in 1966, the British supported a peaceful coup against the ruler, who it was deemed had not done enough to assist the British in building the infrastructure necessary for their business operations. The new ruler, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, would not only go on to develop the emirate in this crucial respect, but would eventually (together with the ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Rashid Al Maktoum) become the driving force behind the federation itself. With a British-friendly ruler as head of the most important oil producer among the emirates, the British were able to gradually start withdrawing from the region; they announced in 1968 that a complete withdrawal would be achieved by 1971.[35] It was then that Sheikh Zayed and Sheikh Rashid launched what the former reportedly called "our experiment in federation." [36]

The he territorial space of what is now the UAE shares ethnicity, religion, and even family ties with other neighbouring Gulf States. The initial plan of a union was not limited to the seven emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, Umm Al Quwain, and Ajman. Bahrain and Qatar were also involved in the negotiations. A realistic fear of local rulers in the region was that after the British withdrawal their sheikhdoms would be

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[34] See: Davidson, 2008. *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*, p. 27f. Ajman is an interesting example of a British intervention of a different sort: although no oil exploration was ever done in the emirate, the British put an army base there to deter American companies from attempting to win the favour of its sheikhs. The army base was, in essence, an excuse for the British to pay the local rulers and thus ensure their loyalty. (See: ibid. p.60).

[35] Immediately after his appointment Sheikh Zayed set about restoring Anglo-Emirati relations and investing the Emirate's oil profits in infrastructure and various social welfare projects. Although the British had begun to withdraw in 1966, they had first ensured that Sheikh Zayed understood and was willing to fulfil the needs of their oil contractors, so British consultants (including for the army) continued to work in the country.

[36] The quotation is reprinted in Staff-Reporter, 2008. *Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan: A Special Tribute.*p.17.

annexed by Saudi Arabia.[37] Several scenarios for a federation were therefore discussed, but many rulers were reluctant to join the federation for fear of having to relinquish their titles.[38] In addition to the pressures of attempting to negotiate a political union (which meant drafting a shared constitution, resolving old territorial disputes, and establishing a federal government), each emirate was also trying to keep up with necessary infrastructural developments. Incredibly, on the day of the unification itself on December 2nd 1971[39], the constitution was still a mere draft, developed under the assumption that Bahrain and Qatar would form part of the aspired federation.[40] Considering the circumstances under which the nation state was built, it becomes clear just how important it was for the rulers to legitimate their political status.

Michael Herb and Greg Gause analyse the means by which ruling elites throughout the Gulf region ensure their power and political stability.[41] Gause coins the term "tamed" tribalism to describe the relations to and control of tribes, which are core political challenges for the GCC-states.[42] In the process of founding the nations tribal support was crucial for the rulers who at the same time managed to naturalise the influence of tribes through government institutions.[43] In the UAE as in other GCC states urbanisation and sedentarisation politics were employed.[44] To maintain political stability it is vital that the

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[37] See: Gause, 1994. *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*, p.18.

[38] In the early stages of these negotiations it seemed that none of the region's rulers could agree with each other on any issue. Abu Dhabi was far from the first choice of capital, for example: previous plans had favoured Sharjah or even Manama, the capital of Bahrain. Another proposal to merge the smaller emirates (Ra's Al-Khaimah, Fujairah, Umm Al-Quwain, and Ajman) into one mini-union of Coastal Emirates in order to give them a stronger voice in the Council was rejected by Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Dubai.

[39] At this date, the federation consisted only of the six emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Fujairah, and Umm Al Quwain. Ras Al Khaimah joined a few months later, in early 1972. Bahrain and Qatar became independent states in August and September 1971, shortly before the formation of the UAE.

[40] The draft constitution of 1970 had been intended for a union which included Bahrain and Qatar, and was thus designed to preserve the autonomy of each member state: it therefore severely restricted the federal government as a central body by supporting established distributions of power. However, the provisory constitution that was eventually agreed upon by the Supreme Council was only moderately different from the original, which makes it a somewhat contradictory piece of legislation that still limits federal power. It has since been extended twice, so that it is still considered the basis of the UAE federal government to this day. Abdullah Omran Taryam discussed the pros and contras of the constitution in depth in his book Taryam, 1987. *The Establishment of the United Arab Emirates 1950 – 85*, chapter 6.

[41] See: Herb, 1999. *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies*, p.21ff. and Gause, 1994. *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*, p.10ff.

[42] Gause, 1994. *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*, p.18.

[43] Ibid. p.14.

[44] Ibid.p.24.

"rulers portray their systems as representing the best of religious and cultural obligation."[45] Gause's remark summarises the importance for a national ideology to appear 'natural' while depending on the political willingness and initiative of a political elite.

1.1.2 The political setup of the UAE: strengthening the ruling elite and defining its citizens

The 40-year slogan "Spirit of the Union" does more than merely accentuate the achievement of creating a nation-state: it signifies the attitude of the nation's ideological founding fathers, Sheikh Zayed and Sheikh Rashid and the relationship between the member emirates. Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed was first elected president of the federation with Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Rashid, as Vice President, in 1971. According to the provisional constitution, the federation would be governed by a president elected by a supreme council, which consists of representatives of the ruling families of each emirate. Thanks to his continued re-election, Sheikh Zayed held his post until his death in 2004 (as did Rashid, who died in 1990). He was succeeded by his son, Sheikh Khalifa and Rashid's son was also elected to his father's old position, keeping power in the family. The Supreme Council also elects a council of ministers as the fifth executive body (after the President, Vice President, and the Supreme Council). The Council of Ministers (or Cabinet) until now is responsible for raising and maintaining the living-standard of its citizens and enhancing the development of the country as a whole. The 22 seats were again divided proportionally according to the size of the emirates, which gave preference to Abu Dhabi and Dubai. With the sole exception of Abu Dhabi, the Sheikhs have always appointed ministers from their own families, and a change in the constitution was required in order to admit other citizens.[46]

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[45] Ibid. p.26.

[46] Federal Decree No. 2 (9/12/1971) (See: Taryam, 1987. *The Establishment of the United Arab Emirates 1950 – 85*, p.208). The settlement of basic laws and establishment of ministerial bodies required lots of negotiation, especially between the largest emirates, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Not only did these have different legal interests – mainly regarding business, of which Dubai was adamant by supportive – but also they could not easily agree on how best to merge their departments of justice, information, security, police, health, and communications

The relationship between the emirates was established, the process of granting citizenship employed by the rulers in the founding years of the UAE further supports Gause's definition of the Gulf States as monarchies who have "tamed" tribalism to ensure their political strength. Citizenship for versatile tribes could not simply be given on the basis of territorial belonging. Applicants were usually required to either approach the ruler personally or through an esteemed representative. Although the application process has predictably become increasingly stringent ever since, it is still at the discretion of the ruler. Nationality is now regarded as a privilege that may even be granted for special contributions to the state, which is perhaps the best testament to Ernest Gellner's notion that "nations are the artifacts of men's loyalties and solidarities".[47] From a governmental perspective, the process of granting citizenship symbolises a continuation of tribal social structures and practices of legitimate tribal leadership: because tribes enter into alliances with one another, it is the leader who has the power to decide which other tribes may be admitted into the confederation. In terms of government-citizen relations, this set up establishes a patronage-benefactor relationship in which the citizens do not have a say in the political process.

This initial setup changed gradually over time as illustrated in the transformation of the nation's legislative and consultative body, the Federal National Council (FNC) between 2006 and 2011. It consists of 40 members and is reformed every two years. Since 2006 half of the FNC members are elected by select citizens.[48] To widen the circle of citizens eligible for election, a new governmental body, the National Election Committee (NEC), was formed to oversee the elections in 2011.[49] Subsequent steps were taken to ensure the satisfaction of the UAE population, in accordance with policies the state has pursued since its foundation. The rulers, in keeping with the tradition of a rentier state, provide their citizens with considerable benefits, from free education and healthcare, and government-allocated land and housing to financial assistance for weddings (available to nationals marrying nationals only) and employee benefits.

(See: ibid. p.217). The Federal National Council was therefore formed by the Constitution in order to persuade and pressure all its members towards a quick establishment of federal ministerial system. (See: ibid.p.218f.)

[47] Gellner, 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*, p.7. Such a sense of solidarity may explain why those families who originally refused to adopt the nationality face complications when they try to apply for it many years later.

[48] See: Heard-Bey, 2007. *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates: A Society in Transition*, p.377.

[49] WAM, 2011. *About the Federal National Council.*

Following Gause, this relationship between rulers and citizens is part of the politics of diffusing tribal influences by making them part of and dependant on the government system.[50] The state permeates into all levels of the lives of the nationals, thus establishing a monopoly on all public institutions. But although the state could formerly have been described as a rentier state, recent rhetoric suggests that the country is trying to develop more of a social welfare system, "by transitioning from social care to social development, ensuring integrated social service policy-making, and upgrading the quality of social services."[51] The focus of the research conducted in this thesis is on how members of the national community sees itself, in particular the grassroots perspective on national identity rather than how the UAE as a nation originated.

1.1.3 The definition of tribes and a class-system based on ethnicity

Defining the term tribe forms the basis of a community which imagines itself as tribal or at least rooted in a tribal past. The naturalization process of the UAE implies a variation of the Gellner nationhood model as formed and controlled by political elites. The tribal element inherent in government structures is important to both the legitimacy of the ruling families and the majority of citizens. In fact, the conflict between "taming" and using tribal notions of nationhood reflects the difference between the characterisations of tribal relations. The anthropologist Evans-Pritchard argued that tribes are constituted by lineage segments.[52] . In other words, a tribe can be thought to have a dimension of shared descent. However, Dale Eickelman observed that the tribal system is determined not by blood relations, but by alliances, and that these alliances are subject to change. Attempts to classify and categorise tribal society are therefore shaped by the ideological position of the

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[50] Gause writes that rulers of the Gulf States "encourage their subjects to think of themselves as tribesmen in a political system whose chain of loyalties culminates in the king, amir, or sultan. They dispense patronage through tribal leaders, according them a place of influence in the political system and reinforcing tribal identification among those who eventually receive that patronage." (Gause, 1994. *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*, p.26.)

[51] UAE Cabinet, 2008. *Highlights of the UAE Government Strategy 2011-2012*, p.12.

[52] The notion of tribe as constituted by lineage segments is based on Evans Pritchard's structuralisation of Nuer tribes (see: Evans-Pritchard, 1940. *The Nuer of the Southern Sudan* . 272ff.)

theorist. [53] The ideological background of the observer is crucial to bear in mind: Eickelman criticises Western imperialist attempts to s define tribal societies from an outside perspective without considering the notions the tribes they were studying had of themselves. This criticism can also be applied to the Arab discourse. Descriptions of tribes were defined by outside observers and formed by the observers' notions of their own society as well as their political agenda. [54]

In the context of Gulf societies references to Bedouin tribes often becomes a framework by which create distinctions of class within society. Since the history of the states is imagined as tribal, those who come from a Bedouin family can feel closer to the ruling class. Anh Nga Longva, for example describes this form of constructing difference between sub-communities in Kuwait. She observes how in this particular national context the dichotomies linked to a Bedouin or urban heritage are not only linked to attributes of backwardness and development, but go further to describe loyalties to the nation state. The Bedouin Kuwaitis who have settled in the area since 1960 are considered to be less committed and obedient to the modern nation state than citizens from the pre-oil era. [55] In the UAE this relationship between different communities of citizens is reversed: since the founding fathers were Bedouins, their tribes are considered the authentic and original Emiratis.

It is a sign of a successful implementation of a national ideology that the ruling classes are imagined as legitimate due to their tribal Bedouin background. This includes a

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[53] Eickelman in fact argued that differing working definitions of 'the tribe' exist because they are dependent on the individual theorists' notion of cultural origins. (See: Eickelman, 1981. *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach*, p.87f.)

[54] The utilization of 'tribal culture' as contrast to 'urban society' has a longstanding tradition in Arab thought. An example is 14th century Arab scholar Ibn Khaldoun, often described as the "father of Arab sociology". He characterised tribal society on the background of defining civilisation and savagery, and with the aim to accuse urban society of decadence by contrasting it with a still pure and noble form of society, the tribal society. In his "History of the Arab Peoples" Albert Hourani highlights the importance of Ibn Khaldoun for Arab historians. His work strongly influenced Arab nationalist scholars such as Rashid Rida and Jurji Zaydan. (See: Hourani, 1991. *A History of the Arab Peoples*, *Preface* & Schaebler, 2004. *From Urban Notables to Noble Arabs*, p.178.)

[55] Longva, 2006. *Nationalism in Pre-Modern Guise: The Discourse on Hadhar and Badu in Kuwait,* p.172f. Problems between the two communities have, as Longva asserts, intensified since Kuwaitis with Bedouin heritage have become the majority in the National Assembly in 1990. They are suspected of double-loyalty to their tribes and the state.

genealogical purity, based on being part of the tribal notion.[56] The idea that the members of a tribal federation share patrilineal descent is what Eickelman would call an ideology which constitutes cultural meaning.[57] This is why, as Eickelman says, anthropological concepts have to acknowledge that there are several working definitions of what the cultural bases of a tribe are, depending on who is defining it.[58] From the perspective of ruling families in the Gulf a tribal lineage is an element of legitimisation, which is why a genealogical notion seems natural. Andrew Shryock points out that

> in "the postcolonial era, when 'modernity' and 'authenticity' have become twin fixations of political thought in the Middle East, it is quite ordinary for the culture-making classes to drape new identities in the legitimacy of older, genealogical traditions, and vice versa."[59]

Shryock's remark can be linked to Gause's characterisation of Gulf nationalism, which argued that the ruling families and inherently the tribes they belonged to initially used the tribal connections to justify their rule, and then made sure to neutralise the influences of tribes. Through the constitution and government institutions they ensured that the future of the Federation depended on their families.[60] The UAE rulers validated their claim by building up and providing infrastructure, education, healthcare and other welfare

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[56] Several researchers have analysed the importance of 'tribe' and 'Bedouin' as a framework to construct identity and otherness in the Gulf. Gause explores the real and constructed use of tribalism in government politics of legitimisation. Other researchers, such as R.W. Hawker approaches the framework from a socio-linguistic angle. He describes how in Dubai culture and heritage are intertwined with specific categories of identity. (See: Hawker, 2002. *Imagining a Bedouin Past: Stereotypes and Cultural Representation in the Contemporary United Arab Emirates*.) The success of the idea can be linked to the fact that it revisits a longstanding discourse in Arab thought. (See: Schaebler, 2004. *Civilizing Others: Global Modernity and the Local Boundaries (French/German, Ottoman and Arab) of Savagery*, p. 3-29.)

[57] Eickelman, 1981. *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach*, p.87.

[58] Eickelman, 1981, p.87f.

[59] Similar to Schaebler, Shryock observes that defining the tribal social structure has been a preoccupation of sociological studies since the so-called Arab Renaissance (the *naḥḍa*), during which it was incorporated into a rising Arab nationalism: once again, the notion very much depends on the social and political position of the definer. (Shryock, 1994. *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan*, p.6.)

[60] See: Gause, 1994. *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States*, p.23ff.

benefits which ensured the prosperity of the UAE nationals. The system of elitism based on ethnic background has grown increasingly convoluted over the years. Not only has this yielded a class system for the nationals, it has necessarily resulted in the development of a class of nationals. To achieve the country's ambitious goals with a working population of merely around 293,788 in 1975,[61] the emirates imported labourers to work on the numerous construction sites, as well as in the service industries and public sectors. Expatriate labourers were initially recruited from Egypt, Sudan, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon, but increasing numbers of Asians came during the 1980s.[62] According to government statistics, 219,580 working visas were issued in 1995 for a population which was already more than four times larger than it had been 20 years before (1,335,894).[63] The number of working visas steadily increased until 1997 (461,705) and levelled out during the following two years to around 300,000.[64] It is worth remembering that by that time the UAE had become one of the richest countries in the world with a per capita income of 19,270 US Dollars by 1985.[65]

The relationship between ethnicity and social class is not, however, as simple as "locals versus internationals". Immigrants play an important role in strengthening the ruling elite: Asian labourers are mainly in service and construction industries. The latter has brought the UAE and especially Dubai into disrepute for ignoring human rights' abuses suffered by unskilled labourers from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. Western (or Westernised Levantine) expatriates on the other hand were and are often employed in

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[61]UAE Ministry of Planning, 1999. *Economically Active Population by Industry and Sex: Census 1975-1995*, table 3/10. The category "working population" stated in this census does not state whether women were included in the number. The total population of the UAE is furthermore a topic which the government is eager to disguise in order to obscure the demographic balance between nationals and residents. Government statistics furthermore tend to change categories of evaluation, so that it is difficult to trace demographic developments over time.

[62] Zahlan, 1989. *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman*, p.129.

[63] UAE Ministry of Planning, 1999. *Economically Active Population by Industry and Sex: Census 1975-1995*, table 3/10. Later number of issued working visas could not be obtained. Even in the case of the quoted statistic it is important to remark that the number of residencies is not published. Since working visas are issued temporary labourers the ministry can thus avoid to provide information on how many of the labourers would in fact settle (even if not for life) in the UAE.

[64] After that date, the Ministry of Planning did not include the information in published statistics anymore.

[65] Zahlan, 1989. *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman*, p. vii.

administrative positions. These foreign workers have an established presence in other areas, and not just in the private sector. By 2001 the number of Emiratis employed by the federal government was 25,738, whilst the number of expatiates was 30,890.[66]

These expatriates form an elite of government administrators who do not challenge the regime. The allocation of jobs to specific ethnic groups already started with the need for professionals to work in the oil sector and infrastructure development.[67] Effectively, linking skill and social status to origin, though caused by political circumstances[68] repeats the structures of linking origin (of a tribe) to social status. Accordingly, parallel to different tribal classes of Emiratis, the expatriates are categorised among what is perceived as ethnic lines (these sometimes overlap with regional or national categories, such as Westerners, Pakistanis, Filipinos, Syrian Levantine, Lebanese etc.).[69] An analogous notion of ethnicity linked to social status can be observed among the UAE nationals, although conflicting definitions of tribal and national identity emerge depending on who is doing the defining and under which circumstances. The following example illustrates how different notions of collective self can be negotiated by individuals who affiliate themselves with different communities.

During the fieldwork with UAE media personalities, participants referred to their identity as "pure Emirati" (or as the phrase goes: "Emirati Emirati"). Those who identified with this as such saw this notion as equivalent to being a "true" UAE citizen, thus distinguishing themselves from citizens who have gained the status of nationals but who hail

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[66] UAE Ministry of Planning, 2001. *Economically Active Population by Industry and Sex: Census 1975-1995*, table 3/22.

[67] The difference between expatriates is striking in the work sector. Although not officially promoted the praxis in government institutions and even the private sector is to calculate salaries on the basis of the employees nationality. During my employment in the UAE I was able to observe that a consultant from Lebanon for example would receive a lower salary than a British national with the same qualifications. The private sector also employed this procedure which was hardly challenged. This categorisation sometimes lead to obscure work-interview situations: a German-Lebanese lawyer employed by a construction company in Abu Dhabi explained that due to his mixed origin his employer informed him he would receive the salary of a South African, as this was a compromise between the expenses for a European lawyer and the cheaper Lebanese.

[68] Historian Ali Mohammed Khalifa for example notes that Arab expatriates have been outnumbered since the British hindrance of Arab workers coming to the Trucial States out of fear of nationalist influences (see: Khalifa, 1978. *The United Arab Emirates : Unity in Fragmentation- a Study in Ministate Integration in a Complex Setting, 1968-1976*, p.224.)

[69] Remarkable is how the categories are not strictly divided by region or nationality but by the knowledge the local population assumes to possess about a certain expatriate community. The more these foreigners are perceived as a distinct community with specific characteristics, the more likely is a national label rather than a regional one. This explains why the common word for Levantine Arabs (*Shami*) is used parallel to Lebanese.

from Yemeni, Saudi or other Gulf tribes. While these participants also considered themselves Emiratis, they were able to associate themselves with or distance themselves from specific social phenomena by either utilising their local credentials or by citing their 'extra-Emirati' origins. A notable example of this was provided by a second-generation Emirati research participant of Bahraini origin, who remarked: "If something is positive [in the UAE] I'm so proud; if something is negative, I'm not local... I don't know. It [Emirati culture] is my culture and I love it – well, I've been living here the past seventeen years, how can I not love it. There are just these minor things that make me question... [So] I use this technique, if I don't like it here [I say] 'Well, I'm Bahraini'; if I don't like Bahrain: 'I'm Emirati'".[70]

The participant aptly demonstrated here how different approaches to nationhood and collective identity can be represented in (and negotiated by) one individual and exposes the fluctuating nature of collective identity, which is always subject to prioritisation by the individual. Personal identities are not so unified that people can afford to belong to one imagined community at a time, which gives citizens the freedom to choose their circles accordingly – and to belong to several at once.[71] Depending on the situation or topic under discussion, an individual may see social structure represented in different categories, imagined as triangle, mosaic, or merging colour-scale.[72] With regards to the different categories Paul Dresch remarks that "there are commonly reckoned three circles of identity in Gulf society beyond that of *muwāṭin* or fellow citizen: *khalījī* or Gulf, then Arab, then *ajnabī* or foreign."[73] Research participants who identified themselves as "true" Emiratis often believed themselves to be descended from the tribal federation of the Bani Yas. Both

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[70] Al Hind, 2009. *Becoming a Presenter*, [Recorded interview].

[71] One might say that such negotiations and flexible notions of identity in social reality function as a psychological defence mechanism against identity crisis and discomfort within social categories an individual or collective is subjected to by the imagined other.

[72] Layne for example criticises the 'mosaic' and segmentary models to describe tribal societies (Layne, 1994. *Home and Homeland: The Dialogics of Tribal and National Identities in Jordan*, p.6.) As much as I agree with her contempt towards such structuralist models attempting to categorise more complex and dynamic human relations and interactions, it can be observed that individuals in some instances themselves refer to such structures, comfortable with putting themselves into a category.

With the merging colour-scale I am referring to the colour selection tool one finds for example in Adobe Photoshop, which contrary to the mosaic does not have clearly cut boundaries. The complementary colours gradually evolve into each other thus describing better what the boundaries between mosaic pieces distorts.

[73] Dresch, 2005. *Monarchies and Nations: Globalisation and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf*, p.25.

the ruling families of Abu Dhabi (Al Nahyan) and Dubai are believed to be originated from the Bani Yas (or "the seven families").[74] Linking 'true' Emiratiness to the Bani Yas indirectly applies a genealogical notion to notions of both the hierarchy of the tribe and of the UAE society in turn.[75] It is significant that this hierarchical notion is important to some Emiratis, since it legitimises different classes of citizens. The Bani Yas tribal federation who initiated the UAE becomes not only the founding myth of the nation but the justification for a class distinction: those who can affiliate themselves to this elite can perceive themselves as legitimised as Emiratis by an inherited right older than the nation state itself – just like the ruling families.

Far from disproving Eickelman's theory of tribes as political alliances often set into a an ideological framework of segmentary lineage[76], the observation that some Emiratis do in fact perceive themselves as community mirrors the different notions of tribe, communal cultural meaning and nationhood. As such the different ways of imagining community by individual Emiratis may be seen as evidence of the difficulties the UAE state has in legitimising itself. In his discussion of different tribal concepts, Eickelman highlights that ethno-political conceptions, including those utilised by state authorities, overlap with other definitions of tribe held by tribespeople which are not therefore subject to abstract reflection.[77] How the tribal society is perceived by Emiratis is more a reflection of the individual than it is of the collective. What is more important to understand is how the community (or the ruling elite, as the case may be) reinforces perceptions of tribal structures in order to legitimise itself.

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[74] McCoy, 2008. *Iranians in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates: Migration, Minorities, and Identities in the Persian Gulf Arab States*, p.76.

[75] "Abdul", 2009. UAE Media, *[Recorded interview]*.

[76] Eickelman, 1981. *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach*, p. 102.

[77] Ibid. p.87f.

1.1.4 Identities and the dialogue between formal and practical ideologies

The situational affiliation to a collective identity described by the example of the Bahraini-Emirati draws the attention to the reconciliation of 'ideal' identities. The research presented in this thesis conceptualises this negotiation as a creative interpretive process performed by individuals to make different affiliations meaningful for their own sense of identity. This creative process can be translated into various forms of social expression from conversation or visual appearance to media texts such as films.

A scholar who has outlined the correlation between concepts of national identities is Linda Layne. Drawing from an analysis of tribal and national identities in Jordan, she reconciles the coexistence of seemingly dichotomous concepts of identities within a community, by referring back to Michael Bakhtin's concept of dialogue.[78] A dialogical approach can acknowledge not only the overlapping character of notions of collective identity, but their fluctuant nature. However, whilst the application of Bakhtin's textual concept of dialogism to social communities may well describe the flow of communication and information between these groups, one has to remember that Bakhtin's concept does not consider the "other" to be a necessary constituent of one's own identity. Although he sees "self" as evolved from a dialogic exchange (not self-sufficient or static),[79] Hirschkopp observes that Bakhtin's notion of dialogue takes place between two (or more) stable pre-existent entities.[80] Herein lies the major difference between Bakhtin's theory and Dale Eickelman: the latter considers the concept of cross-fertilisation essential to the development and expression of "cultural meaning." With 'cultural meaning', Eickelman does not mean a contrast to material artefacts, but a different level of meaning, which is "socially employed, produced and maintained in social action and interaction."[81] Hence cultural

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[78] In her analysis of Jordan's development as a nation, Layne outlines the problems of developing models to understand the correlation between tribal and national identities. (Layne, 1994. *Home and Homeland: The Dialogics of Tribal and National Identities in Jordan*, p. 9ff.)

[79] Holquist, 2002. *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*, p.19.

[80] Hirschkop, 2001. *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, p.149.

[81] Eickelman, 1989. *Ethnicity and Cultural Identity*,

meanings produce cultural conceptions which are adjustable, and although they result in as well as evolve around cultural artefacts, they are themselves under constant change as part of continuous reproduction processes.[82]

Eickelman made an important distinction between what he called 'formal' and 'practical' ideologies: whilst he thought of the former as mainly theoretical and often bureaucratic (what is referred to in this thesis as an 'official narrative'), he described the latter as evident and inherent in people's practices. There is, however, a danger of viewing these concepts as so dichotomous that they are completely independent of each other. To view national sentiments as an artificial political construction is to ignore its evident discursive strength in countries such as the UAE. For this reason, Eickelman suggested that formal and practical ideologies enjoy a bilateral relationship, suggesting not merely a Bakhtinian dialogic contrast but an influential exchange between them. He elaborated that such relationships are in fact "ways of making sense of the social world and of informing action within it",[83] implicating both its importance to a national population and the interpretative effort required on their behalf. It is therefore my belief that the creation of a national identity is a far more complex process of creating cultural meaning than that of constructing the nation. The latter is constructed by the political elite through legal and administrative frameworks; the former requires other citizens to accept and promote the concept. As an educative government-driven process, national identity as an ideology still relies on external agents (from outside the political elite) to promote it.

Though creating a nation is a largely bureaucratic process which requires the understanding and assent of the nationals, the process of creating cultural meaning (and therefore, a national *identity*) requires the nationals to comprehend this sentiment. In other words, understanding is a mainly intellectual effort while comprehension is achieved by experiencing the sentiment: Arjun Appadurai conceives of imagined communities as communities of sentiment.[84] Sentiments cannot however be simply constructed and indoctrinated as part of a top-down process, just as nationalism cannot exist statically but must be kept alive by the vigour and passion of the national community. In order to achieve

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Eickelman, 1981. *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach*, p.87.

[84] Appadurai, 1990. *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, p.7.

this, the nationals must both identify with the sentiment/ideology and live it in their everyday lives. Only through praxis and experience can the validity of a taught theory be internalised and accepted as common knowledge. Although an initial concept may be invented or fabricated, it requires a conglomerate of individuals to perform accordingly in order to become a social force: it is at this point (as was the case with collective memory) that assimilation must take place between intellect and experienced reality.

Elaborating on his notion of 'communities of sentiment', Appadurai defined a national identity as "the consciousness of the cultural attributes and their naturalization".[85] Though the political elite may construct what Eickelman calls a 'formal' ideology and educate their citizens accordingly, it must be subsequently 'naturalised' by the nationals if it is to become a 'practical' identity. Eickelman calls this practical ideology a 'world view', which indicates that the community share assumptions about social order which feel so 'natural' to them that they are taken for granted.[86] Michel Foucault discussed a similar notion, which he called 'normalisation': he noted that social norms which had actually been enforced are by now taken for granted as a result of what he called 'normalisation'.[87] The norms would only be negotiated by the community if they were subsequently 'problematised' by the "development of a domain of acts, practices, and thoughts that pose problems".[88] His theory implies that the process of creating a national identity requires a negotiation or at least an interpretation of normative notions.

Rather than incorporating Foucault's and Eickelman's definitions into one, it is useful to consider 'normalisation' and 'naturalisation' as distinct concepts which describe different processes. The former may be considered to mean the process by which an elite promotes or enforces a national identity along certain lines (ethnic, if Smith's theory is correct) in order to subjugate certain sectors of society. Naturalisation, on the other hand, may be considered an attempt to create a community united by a world view rather than to create a hierarchical social order. Though both are intertwined in social reality, one is consciously constructed and perceived as regulative and for an orderly formation of society; the other is

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[85] Appadurai, 2005. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p.13.

[86] Eickelman, 1981. *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach*, p.86.

[87] See: Bess, 1988. *Power, Moral Values, and the Intellectual. An Interview with Michel Foucault (1980),*.

[88] Foucault, 1984. *Polemic, Politics, and Problematizations*, p.385. 'Problematising' is used according Foucault's definition of highlighting certain aspects of an issue, phenomenon or topic, thus de-naturalising it.

considered a more grassroots creation of cultural meaning which transforms enforced ideologies and individual experiences into multiple ways of mutual understanding community. The process of creating a national identity may be thought of as an attempt to create both a social structure and a corresponding ideology or as an enforcement of the legitimacy of the entire nation by promoting a distinct (yet common) culture. Both interpretations nonetheless rely on the comprehension of the resulting ideology by the community, which requires its successful negotiation by the citizens themselves.[89]

I therefore regard the creation of national identity as a cyclical and infinite process based upon the negotiation of the formal ideology by the citizens; the subsequent naturalisation or problematisation of the ideas therein; and the resulting sentiment of collectiveness (practical ideology) which in turn informs the formal ideology. The process therefore requires both immense pedagogical finesse on the part of its promoters and much negotiation on the part of the citizens in order to succeed. Once successful, however, the resulting ideology provides a way "of making sense of the social world and of informing action within it"[90].

1.1.5 The extent of imagination: subsidiary imagined communities

Both Eickelman's and Appadurai's concepts are linked to what Benedict Anderson has labelled as 'imagined communities' which, as a description of community formation, will be used as a central concept in this dissertation. Anderson argues that any sense of "comradeship" beyond what he calls the "face-to-face" (i.e. with people the individual has not personally met) is obviously imagined, regardless of whether it resulted as part of a top-down imposition[91] or was derived from "pre-modern ethnic identities and communities".[92] In addition, his approach suggests that no matter what the citizens of a nation base their

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[89] Forming a group identity therefore requires much more than an official narrative: the individuals must firstly be made aware of a common culture and then accept it as their own (which I have called comprehension).

[90] Eickelman, 1981. *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach*, p.87.

[91] Gellner, 1995. *Do Nations Have Navels?*, [online].

[92] Smith, ibid. *Nations and Their Pasts*, [online].

imagined connection on, be it ethnicity, kinship, or tribal unions, they will all think of themselves as sharing a political identity, even if they all differ on what that identity is.[93]

The dialogical and creative notion of identity formation means that the members of Anderson's 'imagined communities' give meaning to the narratives and experiences they encounter to 'imagine' a national identity. According to Anderson, the basis of national communities is that its individual members "will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[94] With regard to Emirati society, however, Anderson's notion has to be expanded to incorporate the role of second-hand information and subsidiary contact with other members of the community. Anderson claimed that imagined communities are formed when they become too large to rely solely on face-to-face communication and so come to depend on a mediator: media images and narratives thus become an empowering element for imagined communities. For the UAE community of nationals this important role of media correlates with another important source of interpretive material for the sense of communion, the second-hand knowledge (or *imagined* knowledge) of members of the imagined community of nationals. The size of the national population of the UAE was estimated by the National Bureau of Statistics to be 851,164 in 2006, as size which allows nationals to *imagine* themselves as a face-to-face community even though they are not.[95]

The idea is that nationals may have an 'imagined knowledge' of people who they have never met in person, but who are either socially pre-defined by their tribe's names or characterised through the narratives of somebody who has met them. Such an indirect knowledge of others and their actions, which can in many cases be characterised as the social phenomenon of gossip, is nevertheless an indisputably important part of membership of an imagined community. It creates the idea that 'everyone knows everyone' and

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[93] Anderson gives the example of the members of the French aristocracy as a 'class' who would not define themselves as such, but by family- kinship- and cliental-communities (see: Anderson, 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, p.6f.). In his example the definition of 'class' was imposed on the described community in retrospective (only in the late 18th century) as a homogenising category; however, at the time, just as in the case of the UAE, it has to be remembered that different perspectives and definitions or labels for the existing national community existed in coexistence and different variations.

[94] Ibid. p.5-7.

[95] UAE Government, 2010. *United Arab Emirates Population Statistics*. See also an estimation quoted by local media: Staff-Reporter. 2011. UAE Population at 8.26m in 2010 H1. *Emirate 24/7*, May 19.

therefore contributes to its legitimacy in the eyes of its members. One research participant informed me: "everything goes [round] quickly [here] and people know about it, so this is what we hear every day before leaving the house: 'be careful and remember that Dubai is small'".[96] Another provided me with a less gossip-related example of imagined knowledge by saying of her future husband: "I don't have to see him, I know everything about him from my brothers".[97]

Such statements highlight the importance of mediators or informers of knowledge of others. Anderson is certainly right to see media as the key informer for an imagined community; after all it uses multiple codes (images, sound) which can provoke strong emotions to a mass audience in one simultaneous action of transmission. However, the media as informer cannot be isolated from or its role marginalised albeit personal informers. Both have to complement each other if what Eickelman calls 'world view' shall be enforced. A shared world view or notion of collective identity is therefore based on individual interpretive efforts and communication with others. Where the individual understands the own notions to be shared by others, the notion of a community evolves. However this communal notion is always imagined, even between two individuals in direct encounter. What links people together as an interpretive community is always subjective since it is based on individual interpretations and understandings.[98] If the notion of connection and shared world views is an imagined interpretive notion on a micro-level between individuals, we must correct Anderson's definition of imagined communities: even face-to-face communities are imagined since they are based on individual de-coding and interpretation. Mutual understanding and shared ways of interpreting signs are imagined,

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[96] Al Samt, 2010. *Social Media in the UAE*, *[Recorded interview]*.

[97] "Hamda", 2008. *UAE Media*, *[Recorded interview]*.

[98] Going back to the Saussureian definition of the relationship between words and things, meaning is marked by exclusion: by not naming or signifying, the possibility of creating meaning is reduced by the sign (see: Saussure, 1974). Embedded in his theory of language as a social institution Saussure has not only marked the way for intertextuality theory but to a cultural theory in which signs are structured yet open for interpretation. Expanding Saussure's classic concept of signs marking meaning by exclusion to the level of media texts (and further mediated "stories"), the "shared perceptions" which link members of interpretive community are not based on agreement on certain meanings of signs and narratives, but rather on the (imagined) notion of excluding meaning from signs and narratives. Not only does Barthes's theory of the "Death of the Author" disconnect the author (and his personal intentions) from the text and makes the reader the focus point of giving significance/meaning to the text, the basic acceptance of the arbitrariness of signs opens the possibility of seeing an image as a "message without a code". (See: Barthes, 1977. *The Death of the Author,* and Barthes, 1977. *The Photographic Message*,)

which does not mean that there can be no notion of mutual understanding, but it is important to bear in mind that it is, after all a notion, an interpretation. Following Anderson we have to accept that every community is imagined, consisting of individuals linked by interpretations which are perceived as mutual and reassured through communication. Since the community is created via communication on a micro-level, media, as a form of mass communication, translates this interpretive process to a macro level, yet remains dependent on individual receptions.

1.1.6 Imagined communities and imagined face-to-face communities

Focussing on interpretive processes as key to the creation of an imagined community means that media cannot be analysed isolated from the individuals engaged with it. Media allows the translation of narratives into specific and complex forms (texts, images, sounds), but remains embedded in an even more complex system of communication and action. Notions of self within an imagined community therefore cannot be investigated by a strict analysis of the media text but only through the prism of what media is perceived as by those interacting with it. The role media plays as an enforcer of an imagined community depends on the intentions of those producing media, the consumers, but also on the size of the community within which it is circulated. I would go as far as to say that if an individual identifies herself or himself as a member of an imagined community, the importance of media for said person increases with the size of the community.

Without getting into the dispute of whether gossip is an informal individual form of communication or a tool to enforce community norms, for the understanding of the Emirati imagined community it is important to acknowledge the limited number of Emirati citizens comprising it, and the notion of being connected to, having knowledge of, or having met any member of the community via a subsidiary. This notion goes beyond Anderson's notion that the image of the connection is present in the mind of each of its members. Interestingly the notion of knowing everybody at least via subsidiaries extends to the relationship between citizens and rulers. Due to the nation being so young and the nationals' imaginings of tribal

life, citizens imagine that the nation was a "face-to-face" community until very recently. As aforementioned, the notion seems to be derived from the limited number of UAE nationals embedded in the collective memory as one characterised by possible face-to-face interaction between the ruler and his people in the *majlis*. One research participant observed the imagined proximity between modern Emiratis and their nation's origins in the figure of Sheikh Zayed: "for the young people Sheikh Zayed is a myth, but they all have family members who all met him and have stories about him".[99]

The underlying notion of this statement is that until now the essence of the Emirati community is a face-to-face close-knit tribe. The participant has readily adopted the idea that the rulers hold the community together as their representatives. The success of this conception is mainly thanks to a naturalisation of the official narrative of the Emirati nation state, on the basis of which the ruler's *majlis* (plur. *majālis*) is interpreted as a continuation of a tribal social structure. It symbolises a communal space, where all the members can come together and be imagined as connected by the ruler, who thus assumes a symbolic role as the nexus of the community. Of course, the notion is for most members of the community a narrative reality only: it is never personally experienced by them, but rather communicated through narratives of experiences in the *majlis*. It is nevertheless a reassurance of the imagined intactness of the community and more importantly, of the continued intactness of the community since its origins, long before the foundation of the UAE.

The interesting phenomenon of such a notion is that it is not limited to male citizens. Despite the fact that women would attend *majālis* for women and only in exceptional cases attend the ruler's *majlis*, women can also envision themselves physically close to the ruling class. Stories about women going to the Sheikh asking for something support the notion that all Emiratis are politically close to the Sheikhs. Women may believe they could go to an audience with him should the occasion arise, though they would in reality hardly go themselves. The government ideology has an interest in fostering such beliefs since they constitute to their image of tribal leadership. Accordingly, stories of exceptional occasions in which women really approach the rulers in person always end with the woman being granted support and sponsorship by the government. In turn, film producers, for example,

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[99] "Abdul", 2009. UAE Media, *[Recorded Interview].*

who depend on funding to profile themselves, can count on a career boost if they adhere to the national myth. An example is a short documentary, screened during a film festival, which tells the story of a Bedouin widow in dire circumstances who went to seek help from Sheikh Zayed. The film shows how she thankfully made the most of the farmland Sheikh Zayed granted her. The film director thus neatly combines several government conform messages in the thirteen-minute documentary: a traditional Bedouin woman who personifies how conservative ideas of women's role in society and emancipated self-determination do not contradict each other and are in fact validated by the highest patron, Sheikh Zayed, as virtuous. The main protagonist, who is repeatedly called a pioneer, is shown as an obedient wife (though now a widow), caring matron to her children and employees, and a hardened farmer who lives in harmony with the land and animals she owns. Since the film brings together so many aspects of a governmental syllabus it is not astonishing that the director could garner the Authority of Culture and Heritage as the financial and executive producer.[100] The example fits directly into the cultural politics of other Arab regimes, such as the aforementioned research of Lisa Wedeen in Syria.[101] Admittedly, the oppression of intellectuals and artists under the Syrian Assad regime is an extreme case, but the government strategy is ultimately the same as in the UAE: the oppression of freedom of speech through censorship institutions is complimented by government support of those intellectuals who support the ideology of the respective regime. It becomes common knowledge among intellectuals that compliance to the government ideology is beneficial for advancing individual careers. Therefore, if you want to gain experience and public recognition as a film director, why not choose a fairy tale from the imagined days of Sheikh Zayed.

Governmental support of individuals who sport the notion of a close ruler-citizen relationship is one way to encourage the notions of closeness. Another way is the prevailing praxis of individuals from the ruling families to appear unexpectedly in public places. One might see for example a member of the Al Maktoum family strolling through the Dubai Mall on a weekend. Such phenomena are important to maintain the imagined community: while

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[100] Zain, 2010. *Father Grant (Menhat Al-Waled)*, Abu Dhabi Film Festival.

[101] As mentioned in the Introduction, Lisa Wedeen explores how intellectuals and artists under the Syrian Assad regime modify their personal opinions to suit the required state ideology. (See: Wedeen, 1999. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*.)

it is of course a myth that pre-UAE tribal society was face-to-face, it is the notion of "their" history as such that endows otherwise meaningless acts with significance and requires symbolic figures, such as the rulers, to perform these politically loaded rituals in order to maintain the national's connection with the imagined community.

Though there are certainly more symbolic and ritualised actions of reassurance for members of an imagined community, the example of the *majlis* is still important to mention since it shows that not only is the state aware of its function as the nexus of the community, but because the ruler himself is the perceived link to an imagined tribal past. We are therefore presented with a government which, on the one hand, defines itself as a modern nation state buton the other hand consciously retains features of a tribal society – even if these are only symbolic. For the analysis of media such symbolic references to a close-knit community will be crucial. As media representations of national identity they stand as the result of a reconciliation process between concepts of nation, just as they become part of an ongoing media dialogue. How national media stands as a result of a multisided dialogical process between nationalisms will be explored in the following section.

1.2 Dialogue with, and control of, media

In the case of the UAE's concept of nationhood, tribal notions of community had to be incorporated into an ideology of nationhood. This does not mean, however, that tribal ideas of society were the only ones known and promoted by members of the society. Although constructed with a narrative presenting the UAE as an untouched Bedouin society catapulted into modernity with the discovery of oil, the society in the Gulf was far from isolated from other nationalist discourses. It will therefore be necessary to evaluate the cultural notions of identity on which the state was built (and on which the rulers arguably capitalised) in order to identify the origins of what one might call a 'national consciousness' in the country.

The dominant social discourse certainly cannot be analysed without the political and economic context which gave rise to it, especially as these are so necessary for communication with those outside of the face-to-face community. However, the problematisation of the social structure was strongly dependent on contesting ideologies which had reached the emirates long before the discovery of oil in 1962 via media and cultural agents. The first part of the following section will illustrate how nationalism in the UAE developed as a dialogical process, in response to and in interaction with ideological discourses present in the Trucial States during the 1950s and onwards. The role of media in this process strengthens the argument of a dialogue between different notions of self and community, and shows that the notion of tribal society had already been contested both under the influence of British policies in the region and with the rise of pan-Arabism

It is difficult to determine whether the conflict over access to the media is a struggle to gain a public sphere or merely a conflict of supremacy between governments and interest groups. For Habermas the public sphere is the social domain ultimately accessible to all citizens, in which 'private' people come together to form a 'public' and subsequently, through conversation, form a public opinion.[102] According to his original definition, developed from within a Western society, a public sphere develops from a bourgeois society: specifically, from the interest of a given society to take an active part in politics.[103] It is certainly problematic to try to adapt or discard Habermas' notion *vis-à-vis* either contemporary or historical Arab societies. The main difficulty lies in his definition of 'public', which Habermas does not simply define as society, but as those who have access to information on state related activities and, as a consequence, are able to form a public opinion. The basic question that emerges with regard to media is: what role does media play as a communicator/transmitter of opinions, and how far can they be said to constitute the 'public opinion' of the imagined community?[104]

'Public opinion' is as superficially theoretical as assuming *one* public. Fraser conceptualises multiple overlapping publics, but with regards to media it suffices to speak of

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[102] Habermas, 1999. *The Public Sphere*, p.92.
[103] Ibid. p.93.
[104] Since its development during the late 19th century Arab media was used as a tool to promote ideologies to the largest possible target group in order to induce them to join the imagined community of followers (of pan-Arabism or local nationalism, religious activism, certain lifestyles etc.).

audiences, fan communities, or consumers.[105] Although connected by a shared consumption of a media product these communities are not homogenous: their perceptions are different and their assembly situational. Nevertheless, nationalist media aims to create a dominant discourse which it labels as 'public opinion'. Because during the Nasserist era the Trucial States did not have a local media to enforce a mainstream ideology, media was imported – often from Egypt. Through newspapers and especially radio transmission, Nasserism thus became a dominant discourse.

The second part of the section will describe the response of the different political powers (the British agents and the local rulers) to this discourse. The events illustrate different strategies of political power, which are also relevant for contemporary UAE media politics. Ultimately, the rulers would secure their legitimacy by a mixed approach of securing local loyalty and deflecting foreign influence. But in order to provide the nourishing ground for a national identity the construction of one's own media infrastructure was necessary. The last part will provide an overview of its development, as a tool to legitimise the rulers, educate the nation's citizens and strengthen an imagined community.

1.2.1 Imported mass-media challenging local legitimacy

As a 'protected state' of British India, Eastern Arabia enjoyed more independence than those areas that were under direct British administration and also benefited powerful families in the region.[106] Whereas the tribal structure of the Gulf societies was characterised by shifting alliances and changes in leadership, the British ensured that power over certain

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[105] Fraser coins the concept of counterpublics "in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs." (Fraser, 1992. *Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy*, p.67.) Fraser's counterpublics are intertwined with a dominant public. The focus of this research is on the shifting and situational nature of belonging to different publics, therefore the dichotomisation of publics vs counterpublics will not be used.

[106] The Gulf region described as "Eastern Arabia" is Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quawain, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, and Muscat/Oman. (See: Onley, 2005. *Britain's Informal Empire in the Gulf, 1820–1971,* p. 30.)

regions stayed in the hands of one family, thus indirectly establishing the modern structure of sheikhs as hereditary monarchs of a defined area.[107] As a result, the ruling families, merchants and other civilians all had different attitudes toward the imperial power depending on whether or not they had personally profited from the British intervention.

The Maritime Truce of 1835 between the British government, the Qasimi Empire, and the rulers of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Ajman (which was repeatedly renewed), secured the rulers' power and provided them with rentier payments from the British India Office in exchange for keeping piracy under control and for giving British agents exclusive contracts.[108] The fact that the rule and legislation of the region were indirectly under the control of the British (by keeping their sympathisers in power) created a fertile ground for nationalist ideas well before the formation of the UAE. An additional cause for discontent, especially among the merchants, was that the rulers were not obliged to share the received oil revenues with the rest of the population. The discontent turned against both the British and the ruling families who were perceived as the puppets of the British agents.[109] This discontent with the political situation was displayed both directly and indirectly and mass media became a turning point around which such ideologies evolved.

In the case of the future UAE, this meant imported media, given that the first locally produced newspaper, *Al-ʾIttiḥād (The Union)*, was first published in 1969, in the midst of the process of forming a nation state. In neighbouring Bahrain the situation was slightly different. The Bahraini rulers had initially supported the development of a local media industry; Sheikh Salman ibn Hamad Al Khalifa, for example, published a supportive statement for the first issue of *Ṣawt al-Baḥrayn (Voice of Bahrain)* in 1952. But when the paper shifted from publishing literary content to spreading anti-British and nationalist ideas,

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[107] See: Peterson, 1977. *Tribes and Politics in Eastern Arabia,* p.302.

[108] It would be hasty to assume that the ruling and powerful families (let alone the rest of the population) were consequently pro-British, given that Britain had forced the emirates (as well as Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait) into treaties which had enabled the India Office to interfere in local politics. James Onley discusses the double-sided relationship between rulers and British agents in his essay: "The Politics of Protection in the Gulf", *New Arabian Studies*, vol. 6 (2004), p.30-92.

[109] Davidson writes how Egyptian papers such as *Al-Hilāl (Crescent)* and *Ar-Risāla (Message)* contributed by publishing caricatures, displaying the crown prince of Dubai, Sheikh Rashid, as the puppet of the British Agent. (See: Davidson, 2008. *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*, p.58.)

it was shut down three years later.[110] While the struggle here was between the government and Bahraini press owners, the struggle over media control and supremacy in the Trucial States was fought on a transnational level. The threat to the rulers' legitimacy was intensified by the media's potential to create imagined communities beyond territorial boundaries. Radio added a persuasive power to this potential: not only did it skip time consuming circulation via export, but offered an experience of media consumption able to stir emotions on a different level from that of print media. With radio broadcast mass media was first able to incorporate complex code systems into its message which were accessible to everybody. Although radio stations were not set up in the Gulf until 1949 (with the *Saudi Broadcasting Station*), the population could receive Arabic language radio from the late 1930s onwards, during which time Egypt was the predominant provider. During the 1920s several privately run broadcasting stations were established in Cairo, culminating in the 1934 foundation of the *Egyptian Radio*.[111] Radio sets were already being sold in Palestine around the year 1930, but they could only receive either short wave signals from Europe or the medium wave from Cairo, which is why the latter proved so influential in the Middle East.[112].

What role the media can play in stirring and channelling the emotions of the imagined community of media consumers can be illustrated through the rise and popularity of Nasserist Pan-Arabism in the 1950s, for which radio became an important political weapon. The socialist ideology did not only endanger the political stability but mass media played a crucial role in its influence in the Trucial States. Nasser had become the leading figure and symbol of Arab nationalism, even by those who did not support his socialist

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[110] E.g.: *Al Qafila* (The Caravan) was launched in Bahrain in 1953 with openly nationalist tendencies and prohibited in 1955; it re-opened in 1956 under the name *Al-Waṭan (Homeland)*, but was finally shut down by the government by the end of the year. The Bahraini weekly *Al-Mizān (Balance)*, which was launched in 1954 and covered political topics as well, was shut down after two years. Several other private print-media were forced to stop their production, and after a major strike in 1965, during which the labourers among other topic demanded right to gather and freedom of expression, the government released a publications law, which forthwith controlled the media. Other weekly or daily papers in Bahrain were shut down during the 1960s for political reasons soon after they were launched. (See: Mühlböck, 1988. *Die Entwicklung Der Massenmedien Am Arabischen Golf*, p.149f.)

[111] Danielson, 1997. *The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century*, p. 85.

[112] In 1932 there were already 675 licensed sets for local radio in Palestine. (See: Staff-Reporter, 2006. *From the Archives - a Brief History of Radio in the Country*.

agenda. For many Nasser was, as Barnett put it, a leader who "stirred the imaginations and the desires of the masses because of his vision of an Arab nation that was restored to greatness".[113] Nasser's interpretation of Arabism developed rapidly during the late 1950s from the notion of needing to stand up to the West to establishing himself as the leader of the Arab resistance against Israel (which was perceived as the latest hostile Western presence in the Middle East) by 1964. In Cairo, the centre of this transnational ideology, radio broadcasts were used to its fullest as a mass medium to enforce an imagined community of Arab speaking peoples, and the programme *Sawt al-ᶜArab (Voice of the Arabs)* was the symbolic focus point around which members of this imagined community would gather. Wireless broadcast had opened a new era of instant communication on a global level through the capacity to stir emotions on a level never achievable by print media. The emotional experience of media consumption in coffee shops, by illiterate and literate people alike, opened up completely new possibilities of getting entertainment in addition to information. One only has to think of the addition of music by singers such as Umm Kulthum, to the political discourse of pan-Arabism, in order to appreciate the possibilities of a widened code system.

But for the ideological message to unfold agents were needed to transform it into a concrete threat of the political status quo.[114] In the Trucial States schools became rallying centres of political action or, in Hall's words, 'transformations' of the media message into praxis. Due to a lack of local staff, teachers from Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen were frequently employed: these staff quickly assumed responsibility for the propagation of the Nasserist thinking they had imbibed in their own countries. The contemporary Easa Saleh Al-Gurg even claimed in his autobiography that the Egyptian Educational Mission purposefully supplied teachers who were going abroad with nationalist propaganda to distribute.[115] These subversive voices were supported by political parties in the Trucial States, such as the Front for the Liberation of Occupied Eastern Arabia (FLOEA) and the Dubai National Front (DNF).[116] They organised parades and distributed propaganda calling for political change and

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[113] Barnett, 1998. *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order*, p.107.

[114] Following Hall's observation that the basis of social practices lies in the translation and transformation of the media message.

[115] See: Al-Gurg, 1988. *The Wells of Memory : An Autobiography*,

[116] See: Davidson, 2008. *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*, p.44-45.

organised sabotage actions against British installations.[117] The DNF even went further than to simply oppose the British: their leaflets called for a new state structure with political parties and used cultural clubs and schools as political platforms to personally promote their ideas.[118]

From the perspective of Gellner's and Anderson's theories of nationalism it is significant how the DNF shifted its notion of nationhood according to political events. According to Christopher Davidson, their initial ideal was an ethnically Arab state which led them to oppose the Persian and Indian residents in Dubai.[119] However, under the influence of the Suez Crisis, which gave new hope to nationalist movements all over the Arab world, the DNF changed its attitude. It hoped to create a state which could stand alone against Iran and Saudi Arabia, by integrating the Persian families into their cause. The development shows how nationalist ideologies cannot only create but modify and reverse their narratives of comradeship. This flexibility of narratives makes it even more important for ruling elite to 'protect' and 'preserve' the narrative which legitimises them.

The different interest groups trying to gain influence over public opinion in the Trucial States also illustrate an argument made by Stuart Hall as well as Appadurai. Both emphasise that that globalisation as an exchange of ideas circulated among communities from different locations is not a modern phenomenon at all; merely the means of exchange have qualitatively developed.[120] As such the notion of global and local discourses being in dialogical interaction is not connected to 'modernity' but a phenomenon inherent in all

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[117] The DNF was also supported by some of Dubai's most influential families, such as the Futtaim and Ghurair, who had been former beneficiaries of the Sheikh until British trade politics had cost them their advisory positions. In their political aim, the parties were connected to a network of Nasserist parties from other Arab countries. The Ghurair family in particular had close links with Saudi Arabia and the British Resident even suspected one prominent member of their family to be a Saudi agent, who donated money to Nasser. (See: ibid. p.44-45)

[118] For occasions such as sporting events some even hung pictures of Nasser himself on the walls. Since 1956 the DNF produced professional propaganda material, probably being printed in Saudi or Pakistan, calling for change. Davidson remarks how sabotage actions against the British became more violent during the late 1950s, even suspecting a DNF involvement in an assassination attempt on the ruler of Sharjah in 1958. (See: ibid. p.42.) He mentions however that some scholars have argued that the 'DNF' may have not been an organised party at all, but an umbrella term for anyone who opposed the British and the ruling families. (See: ibid.p. 49.)

[119] See: ibid. p.44.

[120] See: Hall, 1997. *The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity*, p.173ff.

societies.[121] Nasserism as a socialist ideology opposed tribal hierarchical structures of political power. Translated into a local discourse, it was modified according to the needs of those who 'translated' it into social action.[122] In a dialogical sense, the radio broadcasts made people question the status quo and thus differentiate themselves as a community from the ruling elite. The significance of radio is its potential to reaffirm the individual self and opinion by imagining it as part of a stronger political interest group than face-to-face parties or clubs.

The interaction between the parties and the mediated imagined community of pan-Arabists showed the ruling elite that it had to control both to ensure its claim for legitimacy. But while the parties could be directly persecuted, the agitator of the unrest (Egypt) had to be targeted via its media. As the following sections will show, the direct threat by local opponents would be pacified by extraction and bribe. Controlling the media would require a long term strategy that the British were not willing to invest in. The nationalisation of the Suez Canal, if used as a blueprint for the nationalisation of oil revenues, could potentially deprive them of their source of income. As a result the British government assumed the same position it did with regards to political rule: it 'froze' the balance of power towards ruling families leaving it to the local rulers to develop an additional long-term strategy.

1.2.2 Securing local loyalties and deflecting foreign interference

To secure their interests in the Trucial states during the 1950s and 1960s, the British agents stabilised their relationship with the rulers through purposeful demonstrations of military power and by strengthening administrative bodies established to secure the

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[121] See: Appadurai, 2001. *Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination*, p.9.

[122] Davidson mentions political pamphlets distributed in the Trucial States, in which the rhetoric of Nasserism is clear in the demand to create a nation for all citizen and the need to bring the Persian descended families onside. Exactly how the political DNF and FLOEA adapted Nasserism for their own political interests exceeds the purposes of this thesis, but it is still important to emphasise that different tendencies found representation in different societal circles. (See: Davidson, 2008. *Dubai: The Vulnerability of Success*, p.49f.)

position of the rulers.[123] Dissidents were removed from their administration and replaced with loyal supporters. The judicial body was reorganised by assigning the post of Chief Justice to a pro-English Syrian magistrate and by appointing lawyers from Bahrain. Since the schools had played a major role in triggering nationalist sentiments (and as there was no local media to suppress), a new Sudanese Minister of Education was appointed, who promptly began firing selected (mainly Egyptian) teachers. The campaign was predominately targeted against Egyptians: Sudanese and Zanzibari candidates replaced Egyptian administrators in order to weaken the Egyptian presence in the administrative sector. In addition, the Egyptian airline EgyptAir was banned from the Gulf; and Egyptian delegations were not permitted into the country.

The British also recognised that it was important to deter the locals from thinking that the Sheikhs were under their control: they accordingly diminished their presence at the Trucial Council, allowing the rulers to chair their own meetings in turn.[124] The rulers were thus able to seemingly comply with anti-British demands by appearing to distance themselves from the British agents when it came to local politics. While such a strategy of replacement sufficiently secured the interests of the British, the rulers were posed with the need to find a long-term solution to stabilise their role as ruling elite. The British attack on potential agents of political unrest did not mean that nationalism automatically disappeared from the public discourse.

Even though, as previously mentioned, the theoretical dichotomy between local and global is artificial, it becomes an important notion when trying to consolidate a local identity: imported ideas which are identified as 'foreign' or 'alien' have to be localised in order to strengthen the aspired 'local identity'. Following the reactionary strategy of the British agents a major task for the rulers was to secure local loyalties and deflect foreign influence. This was supported by the drastically transformed economic situation when Abu Dhabi struck oil offshore in 1959: they began exporting it in 1962 and soon found more

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[123] The British for example set up the police force, which was recruited from Pakistan and trained by British officers. (See: ibid. p.49.)

[124] The Trucial Council was established by the British in 1952. Chaired by the British agent the meetings of the council were also attended by representatives of the British oil companies. (See: ibid. p.56.)

reserves inland (in the Bu Hasa field in 1963).[125] The emirate swiftly became one of the largest oil producers in the Middle East, with 102.8 million barrels exported in 1965, which had increased to 253.7 million barrels per year by 1970 (which was one quarter of the oil produced by Kuwait).[126] Their newfound wealth enabled the rulers to neutralise the discontent of influential families who had been adversely affected by their loss of monopoly over the international pearl trade.[127] The Futtaim and Ghurair families, who had supported the DNF, were granted exclusive import rights for certain goods and thus had no longer any financial reason to challenge the rulers.

But the mitigation of internal discontent was only one aspect of securing 'locality': approaching independence from the British agents, the most pressing threats to an inspired national community were neighbouring states. Just days before the emirates officially united, Iran annexed three islands belonging to the Al Qawasim Empire (Abu Musa and Tunb), threatening that it would not recognise the United Arab Emirates unless the disputed islands were declared Iranian territory.[128] Saudi Arabia was also waiting for an opportunity to annex territory from Abu Dhabi, which it claimed as its own.[129] Accordingly, no sooner had the UAE declared their federation they began to push for admittance into the Arab League and the United Nations Organisation. While they were accepted into the latter on December 9th, their acceptance by the Arab League on the 6th was met with opposition from both the South Yemeni Democratic People's Republic and (of course) Saudi Arabia.

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[125] Although a well in the Bab field of Murban had already given evidence of oil-reserves, these had not been explored further until 1960 due to mechanical difficulties.

[126]Staff-Reporter, 2006. *Abu Dhabi National Oil Company: Company History*.

[127] Although Abu Dhabi became far richer than Dubai, the latter benefited from the stream of investors and companies who came to the Trucial States, keen on exploring more possible oil reservoirs and business opportunities.

[128] Taryam describes that even though the British had recognised the islands in 1820 as Qasimi territory, they refused to respond to a complaint by the ruler of Ra's Al Khaimah to stand up for the Trucial agreement and force the Iranian troops to hand over the islands. Even pressure from other Arab countries (Libya for example nationalised British Petroleum to exercise pressure on the British government) could not change the British attitude. The relations between Sharjah and the British government had already been overshadowed by their interference into the Al Qawasim's authority and ruling matters, which explains the strong support of nationalism in Sharjah and Ra's Al Khaimah (both ruled by the Al Qasimi family) which was far more expressed than in Dubai, where the British acted as securer of the Al Maktoum family's authority, or in Abu Dhabi who had only since the 1960 become a target of British interference. (See: Taryam, 1987. *The Establishment of the United Arab Emirates 1950 – 85*, p.178 and p.185f.)

[129] Ibid. p.170.

The Arab League took a more active role in the UAE's troubles, but to the detriment of the Emirates: the Secretary General of the League negotiated between them and Iran only to decide that Abu Musa and the Tunb islands would remain with Iran.[130] Both Saudi Arabia and Iran (and to a lesser extent, Oman too) continued their attempts to undermine the new federal government's authority by dealing with each of the member emirates individually, hoping that this would make them reluctant to accept a federal authority.[131] While Iran had recognised the UAE as a state and Sheikh Zayed as its president, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia refused to recognise the federation until Abu Dhabi relinquished a number of oil fields and renounced their claim to the Buraimi Oasis.[132] It was not until 1974 that Saudi Arabia finally acquiesced and acknowledged the UAE, which was an important step for both the consolidation of the federal government and for the elimination of unilateral foreign politics by the member states.[133]

Creating a strong political stand of the UAE in its regional context was an important step. Internally a notion of nationhood was procured mainly via education and the urbanisation projects, developed with the assistance of foreign experts.[134] Whether this set-up established a negative dependency on expatriates is questionable: Khalifa highlights their heterogeneity, political passiveness, and thus potentially negative effect on economic life, but in the beginning of the UAE it can be argued that the foreign experts strengthened the power of the ruling elite who employed them. A state that educates its citizens to take ownership over their country and state administration would not only make the immigrants redundant but destabilise the balance of power. As the Gellnerist Paul Brass points out, "Nationalism is most likely to develop when new elites arise to challenge […] an existing pattern of distribution of economic resources and political power".[135] Both the growing population of nationals and expatriates create a need for the government to tip the balance of economic participation towards the nationals, and thus appease possible discontent. The

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[130] Ibid. p.188f.

[131] Taryam mentions how Iran assisted the local health authorities for example. (See: ibid. p.219.)

[132] The Buraimi conflict, in which Saudi Arabia had occupied the oasis but had been expelled by the British troops in 1955, had been a military humiliation for Saudi Arabia and a main reason for its reluctance to acknowledge the UAE within its defined state borders. (See: ibid. p.219f.)

[133] See: ibid. p.221.

[134] See: Khalifa, 1978. *The United Arab Emirates : Unity in Fragmentation- a Study in Ministate Integration in a Complex Setting, 1968-1976*, p.223 ff.

[135] Brass, 1991. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, p.43f.

education politics laid the foundations of breaking the distribution of government participation towards the tribal elite by enabling more and more citizens to enter higher job positions.

From a Gellnerist perspective, a new elite of educated nationals, which does not fit into the structure of elite defined by tribe, would be important for a sense of collective identity based on nationality. Competing against foreigners but being privileged by the state could be an additional strengthening factor for the notion of national community. However, this would threaten the legitimacy of an elite group that considers themselves entitled privileged by ethnicity or tribal identity. Khalifa describes that tribal families were consciously positioned into the government administration, which supports the 'tribal' character of UAE nationalism discussed in section 1.1.[136] As seen in the ideological shift of the DNF, nationalisms are modifiable, which underlines the need for the ruling elite to establish a strong narrative of national identity in their favour. This has to be designed as seemingly 'timeless', mainstream, and naturalised in the notions of the 'community of sentiment.' The spaces of social interaction as well as mass-communication would play a vital role in this process, and hence it is no surprise that Sheikh Zayed launched a comprehensive nation building project, already before the official unification.

1.2.3 Establishing a media infrastructure for the nation building project

While negotiations for the federation of the UAE were still going on, Sheikh Zayed laid the basis for the future UAE media network with the base in Abu Dhabi. In 1969, the first local newspaper (*Al-ʾIttiḥād)* and the Abu Dhabi Radio were founded, which developed into the National Federal Service with branches in each emirate.[137] Seeing how it was possible to create support for unification using mass media, the first television station in the Trucial States went on air from Abu Dhabi in August 1969. This made the future UAE the

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[136] See: Khalifa, 1978. *The United Arab Emirates : Unity in Fragmentation- a Study in Ministate Integration in a Complex Setting, 1968-1976*, p. 192.

[137] Mühlböck, 1988. *Die Entwicklung Der Massenmedien Am Arabischen Golf*, p.109.

fourth Gulf country with local TV.[138] The media sector developed rapidly and by 1980 the UAE not only had around twenty official government magazines, but also six daily newspapers, five women's magazines, broadcasting stations in every emirate, and the second biggest sound studio in the world.[139]

Promoting the nation in the media was an obvious goal, reflected especially in the names of the print media, with titles such as *Al-ʾIttiḥād (The Union)*, *Al-Waḥda (The Unity)*, *Al-ʿAhd al-Jadīd (the New Truce)*, or *Al-Fajr* (The Dawn). The government media wanted to attract all people in the state to get their information on political developments from the local media. Accordingly, the two oldest Arabic daily newspapers *Al-ʾIttiḥād* (est. 1969) and *Al-Ḫalīj (The Gulf,* est. 1970) in their early years published the government's legal declarations. *Al-ʾIttiḥād* (until 1972 published on a weekly basis) had replaced the former *Abu Dhabi News* (a bulletin run by the Abu Dhabi government) which published all protocols in connection with the establishment of the federation and additional political reports. With this step, detailed accounts of political developments were re-categorised from an English sounding headline to a specifically 'local' publication. When the paper was changed to a daily basis covering more general political topics, news from the Abu Dhabi local government were transferred to the monthly *Al-Jarīdat ar-Rasmīyya li-l-ʾImārāt (The Official Magazine of the Emirates).*[140] Furthermore, it shows that by 1972 the distinction was necessary between the UAE federal government and the local government of Abu Dhabi, both based in the emirate. Also significant is the range of target audiences catered to by the newly established media. A shift in coverage from specialised topics to general topics developed and indicates mainstream interests at the time. An example is the business paper

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[138] Kuwait had been the first Gulf country with a local television service, which was established in 1957, followed by Bahrain in 1964. And despite the strong protests from the conservatives in Saudi Arabia, King Faisal's conviction that television was an important tool to connect the isolated provinces of Saudi Arabia via media led to the joint American-Saudi establishment of a Saudi television service in 1965. Qatar's first TV station was founded in 1970, and Oman followed in 1974. (See: Kazan, 1993. *Mass Media, Modernity, and Development: Arab States of the Gulf*, p.288f.) The first TV was established in Dubai, with Abu Dhabi following in 1971 with the *United Arab Emirates TV.(* See: Mühlböck, 1988. *Die Entwicklung Der Massenmedien Am Arabischen Golf*, p.112.)

[139] At the end of 1978 the Dubai television station opened "Studio C", which was bigger than the BBC studio in London and the second largest in the world, after the studio of the *Egyptian Radio & TV Cooperation*. (See: Mühlböck, 1988. *Die Entwicklung Der Massenmedien Am Arabischen Golf*, p.115.)

[140] *Al-ʾIttiḥād (The Union)* had initially been published as a weekly newspaper in Beirut due to the lack of local printing facilities. It changed to a daily basis in 1972. (See: ibid. p.130.)

Al-Fajr, which had initially printed news about oil-industry conferences, to later address economics and financial issues in general.[141] Apart from the political economic target, a sports magazine (*Ahli),* was established in 1972 and the daily *Al-Waḥda* included an extra column for women's issues since August 1973. The local radio programmes tell their own story of target audiences the government wanted to address. Especially the foreign language programmes indicate the amount and origins of foreigners in the country - or at least how prominent the governments judged different expatriates to be. The Abu Dhabi-based *Voice of the Emirates* had English, French, and Urdu programmes, the *Sharjah Broadcasting Station* offered French and Urdu, Ras AlKhaimah English and Urdu, and Dubai English. Dubai and Abu Dhabi would eventually even expand their programmes to an extra frequency and in 1980 Abu Dhabi established an additional English pop-music channel (*Capital Radio*).[142]

The development of television was just as well thought out as that of radio, even if television was not a normal household article in the beginning. But by 1974 when the *United Arab Emirates TV* (established in 1971) switched from monochrome to colour television it could already be received in the whole country.[143] As with print media and radio, Abu Dhabi's focus was on national issues about the union, reporting on activities of the president, culture and events within the region.[144] Since media promoting the political ideology had to be produced locally (rather than relying on imported content), it was important for the national television service to have departments for different topics, and the necessary production facilities.[145] During the late 1970s Abu Dhabi took the lead in

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[141] The offices were in Abu Dhabi und Dubai, and in 1978 it additionally published an English part. The magazine however was only issued from 1975 to 1978.

[142] See: Mühlböck, 1988. *Die Entwicklung Der Massenmedien Am Arabischen Golf*, p.111f.

[143] See: Taryam, 1987. *The Establishment of the United Arab Emirates 1950 – 85*, p.207.

[144] By 1977 the percentage of TV programmes in UAE showed a focus on radio drama, followed by special and mixed programmes and news. 6.7% of the programmes were religious, with approximately 4.5% Koran recitation. Dubai had more music and folklore programmes than Abu Dhabi (9.1 % and 12.1%, while Abu Dhabi only had 1.7 % music programme and 2.8% folklore. (See: Mühlböck, 1988. *Die Entwicklung Der Massenmedien Am Arabischen Golf*, p.112. & p.118.)

[145] Ajman established an own production studio in 1981 and a TV channel (*Ajman TV*) in 1996' Sharjah TV was launched in 1989 with two TV channels; Umm Al Quwain has no own TV broadcast facilities yet. (See: Staff-Reporter, 2012. *Ajman Tv: About Us*. and Staff-Reporter, 2012. *Sharjah Tv*.

training staff from all the national television stations.[146] With a more commercial agenda, Dubai also expanded their local production facilities, and bought additional foreign content.[147] Their *Programme One*, which was especially targeting local audiences, bought Arabic movies from Egypt and offered English movies with Arabic subtitles. English language channel *Programme Two* for expatriates occasionally aired French programmes as well.[148]

Whilst on a local level the two emirates thus developed their images as city-states, the media profile of the nation as a whole was also pushed ahead as early as the 1970s. In 1974, the Ministry of Information and Culture established a news agency, which distributed news from the emirates to *Reuters*, UAE embassies abroad, and newspapers in Beirut.[149] Supported by *Reuters*, the ministry founded the *Emirates News Agency (Wakālat Anbāʾ Al-ʾImārāt)* two years later with several branches all over the country, in order to distribute more UAE news not only to local but international print media.[150] In the later 1970s and 1980s the agency signed contracts for news exchange and cooperation with ten international news agencies, a number which was constantly increased to 48 by 2002.[151] The activities also included sending staff for journalism trainings to different international media institutions in Arabic countries, as well as to the BBC in the UK.[152] . The employees were mainly Arab expatriates from Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and Sudan.[153] The ultimate goal was to change this reliance on imported know-how towards local staff.

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[146] In 1979/80 the Ministry of Information and Culture organised extra working shifts for broadcast employees from the other emirates, so they could be brought to Abu Dhabi several times a week for training. (See: Mühlböck, 1988. *Die Entwicklung Der Massenmedien Am Arabischen Golf*, p.116.)

[147] Dubai was the first TV service to purchase an outside broadcast van for started live-broadcasts in 1982 (See: ibid. p.118.)

[148] *Programme Two* (1982, as quoted by ibid. p.118.)

[149] The Ministry of Information and Culture was established in 1974 out of the former Ministry of Information and Tourism. (See: ibid. p.127.)

[150] An English desk was added in 1978. The focus of its news is on UAE local events, government developments and activities of the rulers (85-90% according to self-statement in 2009). (See: WAM, 2012. *Emirates News Agency: About Us*.)

[151] Co-operations were formed with *Tunis Afrique Presse* (1977) which assisted in training WAM's staff, further with *Maghreb Arabe Presse* (1977), *Reuters, Agence France Presse, Middle East News Agency, UPI, Kuwait News Agency* (all in 1978), as well as with the Italian *Agenzia Nazionale Stampa*, BBC Summary of *World Broadcasts*, and the *Third World News Agency Inter Press Service* (all in 1980). By 2009 the agency had offices in 29 countries. (See: ibid.)

[152] Ibid.

[153] See: Mühlböck, 1988. *Die Entwicklung Der Massenmedien Am Arabischen Golf*, p.116.

Establishing a national media with a majority of foreign employees could pose a problem for the authenticity of the media, since the educational and ideological backgrounds of the people building the media would influence its content. To ensure loyalty to the nation's leaders, the government followed a strategy similar to the appeasement policies during the Nasser era, by granting privileges to influential families. In Dubai, the major daily newspaper *Gulf News* was and is still in the hands of the Al-Tayyer family, who also have lots of relatives on the Dubai Municipality Council.[154] In addition, the Sharjah daily news *ᵓAḫbār Al-ᶜArab (News of the Arabs)*, is owned by the Al-Taryam family.[155] In Abu Dhabi the government changed its media policy, from supporting privately-owned media in the Trucial States era, over nationalisation of the media, to companies owned or chaired by individual members of the ruling Al Nahyan family. They initially supported the private newspapers *Al-ᵓIttiḥād*, *Al Bayān (The Statement)*, and *Al-Waḥda* (established 1973) but incorporated them into the government owned *Emirates News Inc.* (EMI) in 1989.[156] Founded as a (supposedly) ministry independent entity the EMI took over all newspapers, television, and radio stations.[157] In 2006 the EMI was reorganized into a shareholding company.[158]

Whether nationalised or seemingly privatised, the government remained in control of the media. In so doing, the potential development of a public sphere in the Habermasian sense was reduced. The government would channel diversification of the media range in order to attract different communities within the population, but not allow them to establish their own community media. The idea of controlling the mass media was to educate the population to become citizens with *one* 'public opinion'. The initial purpose of

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[154] The Al-Tayyer Kaladari family, originally from Qatar, owns several prominent businesses and has members in the Federal National Council. Other families with cultural as well as political interests are for example the originally Persian Al Rostamani family, and the Al Majid family, which runs a cultural centre in Dubai. (See for example: Staff-Reporter, 2008. *Obaid Humaid Al Tayer, Minister of State for Financial Affairs.*

[155] The head of the Al-Taryam was not only UAE ambassador in Egypt, but also speaker of the Federal National Council.

[156] Rugh, 2004. *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics*, p.64f.

[157] According to Rugh and Möhlbock the EMI as well as the news agency were independent as for the editorial management and only relied financially on the government. Rugh interprets this as an attempt to give the media more autonomy, but I do not agree with his view, since financial control inevitably controls editors and their staff. Chapter 2 will elaborate more on the subtle means of controlling seemingly private or independent media companies. (See: ibid. p.64f. and Mühlböck, 1988. *Die Entwicklung Der Massenmedien Am Arabischen Golf*, p. 123.)

[158] A discussion of the set-up and evolution of the Abu Dhabi media will follow in section 3.1.

the media, to convince people of the merits of the UAE nation state, would include another ideological aim. This one, convincing the Emirati nationals of one shared Bedouin heritage, will be addressed in the next chapter.

2 Enforcing a narrative of reconciliation between past and present

The creation of an ideological link between an imagined past and present lifestyle requires more than a continuation of Bedouin traditions on an administrative level (i.e. through *barza* and *majālis* rhetoric and practices). Drawing on Eickelman's concept of formal and practical ideologies, both have to harmonise in order to become comprehensible. This means that a mere top-down proclamation of a collective identity is not enough; it has to strike a chord with the target group, and this group have to actively embrace the idea. Eickelman even goes so far as to suggest that in "the late twentieth century, the major impetus for change in religious and political values is coming from 'below.'"[159] Based on his observation one can envision a reactionary relationship between ruling elite/intellectuals and the grassroots of society, in which the official narrative has to be adjusted according to changing cultural practices and perceptions of the target audience. As Eickelman points out, "practices and the resulting social spaces involve both emotional and intellectual engagement among participants in overlapping circles of communication, solidarity, and the building of bonds of identity and trust."[160]

As described in the previous chapter, the UAE the government developed and set up a media infrastructure which was part of a plan to secure the nationals' loyalty. Another part of the plan was to establish a welfare system, which was easy in terms of funding because of the income stemming from the country's natural resources of gas and oil. Since the 1980s the UAE's Human Development Index (HDI) has consistently risen. By 2011 the UAE would be ranked 30th worldwide, putting it in the UN's "very high" category.[161] By providing for health care, education, infrastructure, and housing, the government could create a positive image of the rulers in the eyes of the population. Simultaneously, the

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[159] Eickelman, 2000. *The Coming Transformation in the Muslim World,* p.16.

[160] Eickelman, 2004. *Preface*, p.xiii.

[161] With a high nominal per capita GDP (almost 48,500 US dollars in 2011), the UAE economy is heavily reliant on its oil revenues; it is estimated that around 2,794.690 barrels were extracted per day in 2009. (See: UNDP, 2011. *National Human Development Reports for the United Arab Emirates*. and Staff-Reporter, 2010. *United Arab Emirates Statistics*.

rentier system and media infrastructure function as a framework for the distribution of a discourse on national identity. The latter had to be convincing and establish a distinction between the UAE and other nations. Differentiation and dialogue with other identities is still, after decades, an ongoing and vital priority of the UAE government and will be described in this chapter. Part 2.1 focuses on how the government circulated narrative to create an official and common collective notion of nationhood which in turn legitimised the ruling elite.

In order to understand what national identity means from a grassroots perspective, it is necessary to first illustrate the dynamics and potentials of media as a facilitator of narratives of national identity. The first part will exemplify how the UAE media is used to create a one-sided image of national identity. In order to gain momentum, this constructed narrative is constructed around the UAE's first president, Sheikh Zayed. He is presented and perceived as the personalised ideal of heritage and nationhood. To enforce a strong link between the invented heritage of the UAE and contemporary society, the UAE media is forced to adjust to changing public expectations towards media. This topic will be pivotal in further chapters yet has to be contextualised. The technological possibilities and media trends are constantly changing so that the same message can still be conveyed, no matter what form of communication is used to relay that message.

Section 2.2 will illustrate the network of transnational media which the local UAE media is part of. By referring to the interrelation of local media landscape and transnational trendsetters, this part will discuss how regional media perceptions have changed through historical events and technological developments. The process of negotiating what media *is* transforms the relationship between government and citizens into one social discourse: media. In this context the question of local and transnational media communities is a recurring topic. Global media gives individuals a wider repertoire of images with which to identify and creates rituals, such as consumer consumption. Such rituals almost always take place in real-time public spaces which create a sense of belonging to not just the group present at the time, but of the unseen, imagined worldwide community of consumers. Such communities are represented for the individuals in real life spaces, i.e. of consumption, which can be visited in a ritualised act of affirming belonging, as well as in media spheres (TV, internet etc.). The nation state as a facilitator of local identities also engages in

interaction with global patterns of identity formation, by for example drawing from techniques of marketing and branding.

2.1 The naturalisation of an invented identity through an official discourse

The first part of the following section will sketch the general concern with preserving an Emirati local identity within the society that also includes a large number of expatriates. Foreign expertise was considered necessary from the early stages of the country's development in order to establish a state apparatus and to develop the education system. The strong reliance on expatriates in all economic sectors has led to the peculiar demographic imbalance, which makes UAE nationals a minority in their own country. This shift has led not only to demographic but significant cultural changes, which is especially evident in the importance of English as the lingua franca for conducting business. In fact, everything from high-level consultancy jobs to everyday exchanges in shops and taxis can be and is sometimes only possible in English. Throughout this thesis the necessity of having a strong local media will become a major topic around which interviews with media professionals evolve. Although not the centre of this dissertation itself, the official heritage discourse of the nation is therefore an important source for Emiratis to create their own notions of identity.

Based on the general overview, the establishment of a dominant narrative of identity is explored in more detail from the perspective of creating an official history. In effect, the publication and distribution of the official narrative has to become a marketing project. As a result, producers of such narratives are professionals employed by the government, but also individual members of the political elite, who have a personal interest in stabilising the identity project. The second part of the section will show how marketing a collective identity in the contemporary UAE can be seen as a type of national branding project. The second part will discuss how the official narrative reconciles an imagined Bedouin past with an ambitious urban present to legitimise the socio-political status quo. The third part of the section will show how the official ideology is focussed around Sheikh

Zayed as the role model of their national identity. By idealising Sheikh Zayed into the 'father of the nation', the government has managed to replace formerly imported role models, such as Nasser, with a local figurehead. The values represented by Sheikh Zayed's constructed image appeal to young Emiratis, although the historical figure is obscured by the myth.

2.1.1 The official narrative of the UAE's cultural journey

In all public spaces the multi-national character of UAE society is visible. As a result, there are many ways that the government attempts to combat a perceived threat of foreign influence, from government-initiated identity conferences to official proclamations. The UAE government is eager to emphasise the significance and distinct identity of the community of nationals. The identity issue is constantly brought to the attention of people living in the Emirates, from every day interactions, where Emiratis work with, get served by, or go to school with expatriates, to advertisement boards and campaigns addressing the topic. Such advertisements convey a one-sided statement: the Emirati nationals are a Bedouin people lead by their genuine authentic rulers. Gause points out that the "issues of dress and public affirmation of tribal structures are part of a larger intellectual agenda pursued by the Gulf monarchies in the name of *turath* (heritage)."[162] An example for such an affirmation was an advertisement board on the road from Abu Dhabi to Dubai in 2009. It showed the portrait of the president, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, captioned "Our heritage, our identity" (*turāthna hawīyatna*).[163] In this example, the portrait of the current UAE president wearing the Emirati Bedouin attire is sufficient to enforce the Arabic statement. The rulers become representations of national identity and their dress, mannerisms, and language is a norm all Emiratis should follow.[164]

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[162] Gause, 1994. *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States,* p.27.
[163] See: Image 2. 2, p.94.
[164] By constantly reinforcing and finding new ways to present a national identity, the government stays on its strategic marketing course. Yet, this non-stop inundation also shows vulnerability, that perhaps there is a latent or very real fear of foreign influence reshaping national identity.

This local heritage is visibly enforced in the local attire obligatory for Emiratis working in government jobs, and in tourism paraphernalia.[165] In addition, conferences and symposiums on heritage (or 'the topic' or 'national identity') are organised by the government, and 2008 was even proclaimed "the year of identity", making the topic omnipresent in the media coverage of the various events related to it.[166] Long-term government politics to preserve and nourish the local identity are outlined in the 'Government Strategy 2011-2013', which reaffirms the government's ambition to foster the Emirati citizens in all sectors of public life and at the same time counteract multiculturalism.[167] These policies also include the preservation of the Arabic language and of marriages between Emirati citizens. The policies are backed by the development of an official narrative of the country's identity. As is the case in other Gulf States, this national identity is constructed as a story of the constancy of deep rooted Bedouin values.[168] The official narrative of the country's rapid achievements showcases the positive sides of what some Emiratis rather see as a development craze. In the words of Emirati researcher Saoud Sultan Al Qasimi, in a commentary article for the Dubai School of Governance:

> "There may come a time soon when Emiratis realize that they have exchanged too much, too soon, for too little. By then the old generation would have passed on, and it will be a case of salvaging what is left of Emirati culture in a way like walking into a burned house to salvage what the fire has spared."[169]

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[165] A scholar who discusses the artefacts of the national identity is Sulayman Khalaf who working for the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage stresses their importance for the integrity of the imagined community of Emiratis. (See for example: Khalaf, 2005. *National Dress and the Consruction of Emirati Cultural Identity*.)

[166] See: UAE-Government, 2011. *National Identity*.

[167] The strategy's section on identity remarks that "social cohesion, family stability, and national identity constitute the priorities of the UAE Government. Therefore, the Government will promote community cohesion, preserve the UAE National Identity, and encourage an inclusive environment that integrates all segments of society while upholding the unique culture, heritage and traditions of the UAE." Among other aims, the paper outlines that marriages between UAE national shall be promoted and specific living spaces for Emiratis constructed. This particular aspect labelled "integrated neighbourhoods" is also planned in Abu Dhabi's urban framework plan and ultimately describes specific living spaces exclusively for Emiratis. (See: UAE Cabinet, 2008. *Highlights of the Uae Government Strategy 2011-2012*, p.9.)

[168] Gause, 1994. *Oil Monarchies: Domestic and Security Challenges in the Arab Gulf States,* p.26.

[169] Al Qassemi, 2011. *How Urbanisation Is Changing Emirati Identity.*

Meanwhile the official discourse is built upon the rapidity of the development and success the UAE has achieved on all socio-economic and political levels, supported by government-endorsed historians and the official media.[170] Book stores and government websites are full of "before and after" pictures of the nation and institutions have been established to collect and preserve historical artefacts and narratives. The historical consciousness enforced by this discourse is constructed around contrasts. It emphasises the country's economic obscurity in the early 20th century, when the local pearl industry declined. Considering this, the rise to global recognition and prosperity with the discovery of oil in 1968 appears even more amazing. What is conveniently obscured by this simplified image[171] is the interaction between the Trucial States and other nations (particularly Great Britain) before the discovery of oil, which resulted in the creation of the autocratic regime in place today. The outcome of this is the semblance of continuity and connection between the old Bedouin way of life and the modern Emirati society, which is enforced by a romanticised notion of the 'purity' of their ancestors' lifestyles and the corresponding 'need' to retain such values even in

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[170] The historian Frauke Heard-Bey for example wrote a comprehensive history of the UAE, which has been translated into several languages and is almost the only one of its kind available in UAE book stores. She herself contributed to the discourse of contrasts and achievements, commenting in a retrospective foreword that "it may seem [to the reader] as though one is comparing two entirely different worlds". (p.2) Heard-Bey's history of the UAE is supportive of the government to be point of defensiveness: on the National Assembly's questionable structure, which excludes citizens from less influential families from the election process, she states: " ... the constitution is appropriate to the requirements of the new federation, because the nature of tribal societies in each of the seven Emirates and the earlier absence of formal education limited the choice of suitable representatives to the small number of leading families." (p. 377). Her uncritical approach reads more as narration than analysis, whereas Taryam is scathing in his description of the contradictions and inefficiencies of government policy. Heard-Bey's book is widely distributed in the UAE and is treated as the official history of the Emirates, but interestingly, Taryam was himself a member of the Federal National Council in 1971 and has connections with the rulers of Sharjah. Despite his uniquely privileged insight into events in the country's history and knowledge of the people who brought them about, his work remains hidden in university libraries, whereas an outsider's relation of the Emirates' story is treated as definitive: yet another example of the government's willingness to shift their stance if it serves their overall aims.

[171] The focus on a romanticised pearl-industry does not only obscure the harsh conditions of the pearl-fishers; the narrative of the economic depression between the 1920s and 1968 also obscures less image-boosting trading activities that sustained the region in the interim. One illustration concerns the weapons and slave trades. Heard-Bey for example only briefly mentions the trade of weapons through the ports of Ajman, Sharjah and Dubai, which was proclaimed illegal by the rulers in 1902, but does not elaborate on the probable continuation of the trade on the black market, given that, as she states, a rifle was "the most treasured possession of every tribal Arab." What the reader may find more abhorrent is her assertion that "the deprivations of a 19th-century factory worker, or the distress of the unemployed in Europe after the First World War could cause more individual suffering than when people were taken and forced to work at what they would almost certainly have chosen to do anyway." (Heard-Bey, 2007. *From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates: A Society in Transition*,p. 193 and p.233.)

metropolitan conditions. In other words, the view that the importance of heritage has been heavily emphasised by the Emirati government in order to serve its ideological interests, and Emiratis' conceptions of this heritage will have to be accordingly analysed in order to understand the official interests behind nationalist sentiment.

The policy of filtering, censoring and simplifying the historical narrative is enforced by the lack of published historical accounts from insiders. As the records and archives of the British Foreign Office are not sufficient to form an authentic national canon, the UAE government has repeatedly launched historical research initiatives. In 2010, for example, the National Library bought the private research collection of an Emirati historian to add to its historical archive. A few years previously, the Centre for Documentation and Research collaborated with Zayed University to train researchers as oral historians. The Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage launched a comprehensive initiative to preserve local poetry, which strongly relies on oral tradition. The latter initiative combines the documentation of oral poetry with courses in the art of this specific genre, in order to preserve the understanding and appreciation of its language and style. The support of historical documentation simultaneously enables government entities to control publication and accessibility to historical records. This makes it easy for the UAE government to establish an almost *Oceania*-like institutionalised discourse on the UAE history, with a distinct identity supported by an array of pioneers and builders of the union. How the creation of the official history is established will be demonstrated in a more detailed discussion of one prominent element, the *topos* of the Bedouin heritage. Its reconciliation with the present-day urban character of the country and its focus on the figure of Sheikh Zayed are at the centre of visualisations of identity, as coming chapters will show.

2.1.2 The myth of the urban Bedouin: a narrative of legitimisation

During the founding phase of the UAE, spaces of communication had to be constructed to distribute the national ideology among the community. Abu Dhabi and Dubai faced different challenges in planning their urban developments. Abu Dhabi, the new capital of the nation, was confronted with a demographic challenge: if they were to circulate narratives which would consolidate the new national identity with any degree of success, they would have to provide adequate urban areas in order to consolidate the population

into a space so as to ensure access to media outlets. Dubai had enjoyed more international attention than Abu Dhabi, and had already amply demonstrated its potential as a trading hub between East and West. Abu Dhabi on the other hand lacked any such tradition and as a result was in dire need of both a historic centre and an urban character. The government was therefore forced to intervene and, in so doing, created what Elsheshtawy called a "sudden" city.[172] He characterises the urban development of Abu Dhabi until now as "a conflict between a desire to modernize while still harking back to the old ways of the Bedouin."[173] To create an urban identity, basic places for interaction, such as parks and other urban landmarks had to be built. During the 1970s, Dubai expanded the existing Port Rashid, whilst Abu Dhabi invested in the central area project (from 1969-1981), which included four markets and the Hosn Palace (with a Cultural Foundation) all of which were to represent "traditional Islamic" architecture.[174] As part of the second urban planning phase of 1969-1988 (as it was categorised by the Abu Dhabi Municipality from) Sheikh Zayed hired an Egyptian Director General of Town Planning[175] to design houses for the newly nationalised Bedouins. He specified that the architecture should be in accordance with the lifestyle the Bedouins had led and should resemble their original homes to create an emotional link to the new city-life.[176]The task of redefining an imagined tribal community as a national urban community was further complicated by a lack of basic infrastructure to provide easy access to cities from rural areas. A contemporary of this building phase is Abdullah Omran Taryam, who describes how every aspect of urbanisation was meticulously planned. He recalls that the population was generally supportive of the union, claiming that people enthusiastically celebrated each successfully-formed federal governmental body, and were eager to embrace the stability of a "sovereign state with a distinct identity".[177] One must, however, consider that Taryam, who was in 1971 a Federal National Council

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[172] Elsheshtawy, 2008. *Cities of Sand and Fog: Abu Dhabi's Global Ambitions*

[173] Ibid. Al Fahim also describes the difficulties the government faced when granting land to citizens of the emirate to encourage them to construct houses on them and settle, but they merely sold the land to expatriates for a very low price, being more interested in cash than land ownership. From such experiences the government took the consequence to prohibit selling local-owned land to expatriates, but only leasing it to. (See:Al Fahim, 1996. *From Rags to Riches: A Story of Abu Dhabi*, p.156.)

[174] In Sharjah the new ruler, Sheikh Sultan also invested further into infrastructure and urban development. (See: Elsheshtawy, 2008. *Cities of Sand and Fog: Abu Dhabi's Global Ambitions*)

[175] Abdel Rahman Makhlouf, who had planned the city of Jeddah in 1968.

[176] Elsheshtawy, 2008. *Cities of Sand and Fog: Abu Dhabi's Global Ambitions*

[177] Taryam, 1987. *The Establishment of the United Arab Emirates 1950 – 85*, p.207.

member, was obviously part of the political elite himself, and could therefore have had a notion of the people through their representatives. He may not therefore have had any knowledge of others' sentiments towards the union, shaped as his perception was by his own social circle.

Mohammed Al Fahim, another auto-biographer from a similar circle described how difficult it was for the rulers to induce people to comprehend the new notion of a national community.[178] According to him, the tribal identity of the people was so strong that their sense of collective identity, belonging, and allegiance did not extend beyond their tribal group (and even inter-tribal alliances shifting). Speaking as a supporter of the 'new' form of tribal sentiments, it is significant how this particular characteristic of a tribal imagined community is discussed: Fahim remembers how tribe members would not easily accept a bureaucratic government apparatus over a personal leader. Worse still, although inter-emirate travel had always been problematic due to the lack of proper roads, the new requirement of 1959 to carry a passport on such journeys meant that each emirate was destined to develop distinctly, constituting what he called "cultural barriers" between the emirates.[179] By highlighting these difficulties he indirectly acknowledges the necessity of the tribal sentiment to change in order to suit a nation-state identity. This does not diminish the tribal element per se. On the contrary, the difficulties of connection and solidarity between tribes indicate a 'difficult lifestyle' connected to this micro-form of tribal sentiment. This can be dissolved by expanding the solidarity to a macro-level and connect all people to one big community.

Nation building thus becomes a mission of enlightenment and transformation of tribal identities to an improved level. According to Al Fahim Sheikh Zayed personally visited the tribal chiefs of his emirate, with whom he already had good relations from his time as ruler of Al Ain, to convince them of the benefits a unified nation had in store for them: "His long-term objective was for them to become useful citizens who made significant

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[178] Mohammed Al Fahim is member of an influential Abu Dhabi family (originally from Iran) and has been raised in Sheikh Zayed's palace in Al Ain, studied in London, and later took over influential positions in the newly founded UAE. In his memoirs he narrates his childhood during the 1950s and outlines the following decades from a very personal point of view as a contribution to writing the history of the UAE. His close relationship to the ruling family, and especially Sheikh Zayed, gave him access to insider information, whilst at the same time gives his narrative the air of a laudation on the late ruler.
[179] Al Fahim, 1996. *From Rags to Riches: A Story of Abu Dhabi*, p.153.

contributions to the economy either by getting an education, farming, or working in the oil industry. In keeping with this goal tribe members were often recruited by the military or the police."[180] Fahim's description is notable for understanding the difficulties the rulers faced in communicating their idea of a national identity, as well as the obstacles posed by a lack of mass-education and infrastructure.

His focus on these deficient aspects also adds another legitimising discourse constructed around Sheikh Zayed: his speedy solution to all difficulties indirectly justifies his coup against his brother Shakhbout, who was ruler during that time of deprivation. Under Sheikh Shakhbout, Abu Dhabi's infrastructure had developed much more slowly than that of Dubai's, even after the former had become a major oil exporter (and was consequently the wealthiest of the emirates). The resulting lack of roads, supplies and services caused many oil companies to move to Dubai, and some even went to Bahrain and Qatar to procure supplies and to recruit technical experts.[181] Although Sheikh Zayed had taken advantage of his brother's absence in 1961 to build Abu Dhabi's first mud road,[182] there was still no electricity until 1963 except in the ruler's palace.[183] Although Shakhbout did invest in social development, by recruiting teachers from Jordan, and looking for new water sources[184], for example, he also imposed a ban on new constructions in Abu Dhabi, arguing that proper planning was necessary.[185] His relationship with the British government and their oil contractors was marred by his mistrust of their procedures and of the contracts they offered him, mainly because the British exclusivity law forbade him from comparing British policies to French or American alternatives.

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[180] Ibid. p.154.

[181] See:ibid. p.94f.

[182] See:ibid. p.85.

[183] See:ibid. p.116.

[184] During the 1950s successful explorations, conducted with the assistance of the British agency, were strongly encouraged by Sheikh Zayed, who was, until 1966, ruler of Al Ain. (See Walker, 1999. *Tyro on the Trucial Coast*, p.137ff.) However, Mohammed Al Fahim recollects this attempt to dig news wells as having occurred ten years later and not being successful. (See: Al Fahim, 1996. *From Rags to Riches: A Story of Abu Dhabi*,p.95f.).

[185] This is the explanation Al Fahim offers in his memoirs. (See: Al Fahim, 1996. *From Rags to Riches: A Story of Abu Dhabi*, p.85f.) Elsheshtawy however suggests that the ruler did not allow the city to be built in stone in order to have better control over his subjects, mentioning also that according to other interpretations Shakhbout simply lived in nostalgia for traditional Arab way of life, and was therefore reluctant to change the lifestyle. (See Elsheshtawy, 2008. *Cities of Sand and Fog: Abu Dhabi's Global Ambitions*)

According to Al Fahim, Shakhbout's politics ultimately alienated the Emirati population and the British government, who both demanded that he be removed.[186] One has to remember that Al Fahim's autobiography is part of an approved historical narrative. The account therefore provides an insight into how the UAE government wants its history to be remembered. Whether it was really a majority of the population or merely influential families who backed the bloodless coup of Sheikh Zayed against his brother, remains unanswered it is not politically opportune to ask: what if his approach of slow modernisation had prevailed; would Abu Dhabi's society rely less on foreign labourers and Emiratis work in all sectors and not only white collar jobs? Presenting Shakhbout as alienated from the Emirati population does serve to indirectly legitimise these developments.[187]

The autobiographies of Fahim and Taryam demonstrate the importance of selective historical accounts in the media to establish a set view of history. Both recollections are also indicative of a different retrospective interpretation of the country's situation during the 1960s and 1970s. Both auto-biographers were from influential families, but whilst Taryam wrote enthusiastically about the imminent unification and its positive resonance among the people during the 1980s, Fahim's history, written ten years later, highlighted the difficulties. The achievements, especially of Sheikh Zayed, seem even greater. The perspectives show how new ideologies are promoted and justified with different emphasis at different times. When the federation and the national identity were both still relatively new, and an infrastructure was still in the making, Al Taryam's duty was to give the union validity by highlighting the support it had among the people. Fahim's narrative was published once the country was more established and thus the idea of a union and nation can be seen as naturalised. His focus on Sheikh Zayed's achievement, which was a recurring theme throughout his book, is part of a different phase of the UAE's identity discourse: the retrospective glorification of Sheikh Zayed as the nation's father. The narrative is written to highlight the achievement of creating a modern nation-state within a short amount of time

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[186] See: Al Fahim, 1996. *From Rags to Riches: A Story of Abu Dhabi*, p.95f.

[187] At the same time the official narrative makes it difficult to determine how influential the British really were in supporting the coup. Similar to the narrative reality of an authentic Bedouin society led into the age of modernity by the visionary Sheikh Zayed, opinions on historical developments are presented as unitarily approving, whilst this is as unlikely as the infamous 99% votes for a dictator holding pseudo-democratic elections.

and thus gains significance and legitimisation from highlighting how many obstacles had been overcome. The title of Fahim's book "From Rags to Riches" outlines this agenda. It has been translated into at least five languages and is available in every UAE bookstore, thus also sending the message of the UAE's achievements to a global audience. Such a support can only be given from a notion of cultural achievement and strength.

2.1.3 The acceptance of Sheikh Zayed as figurehead of Emirati identity

Fahim's autobiography gives ample evidence of patterns of justification, *topoi,* and symbols. These include not only collective memory but clothes, mannerisms, language, and other symbols of identity which can be enacted by individuals: in short, a cultural narrative. As a public figure Sheikh Zayed was an ideal local replacement for imported role models and leaders such as Nasser. A local identification figure was politically important for the fledging nation in order to inspire people to think on a local instead of a pan-Arab level. Culturally speaking, Emiratis sorely needed a representative figurehead which can be understood in modern terms as a 'celebrity'. The political elite therefore required citizens who identified with the 'nation building' project on all levels, and not those who sought external inspiration for their collective identities. As Hall points out, culture is a momentarily produced interpretive act which is not necessarily constituted of the raw material (such as symbols, rituals etc.). The meanings of cultural actions are created in moments of re-enactment (by wearing a certain dress for example) and will change over time[188]

Performed by a popular figure, such cultural re-enactments gain momentum and strength. Just as the pan-Arab ideology was strengthened for having Nasser as its figurehead, Sheikh Zayed and Sheikh Rashid both represented the national ideology, but Sheikh Zayed has proved a particularly successful cultural icon. This can be attributed partly to his prominent political role, which has made him the representative of the nation also on a global scale. It is important to remember that Sheikh Zayed was not only of local

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[188] See: Hall, [1973] 1980. *Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems*, p.29.

importance but his political performance on a global stage served to legitimise him to both other Arab nations and the international community at large. His charity to Muslims around the world for example was just as important to the image of the country as the camel races he held for state visitors. In short, what he gave to the others was done and legitimised as in the name of the nation and contributed to the country's profile. Thus Sheikh Zayed was not merely local, but in his performance on a global stage pathed the way for a pan-Arab and global image of the UAE.

In addition to his political and representative achievements, the celebrity industry established around Sheikh Zayed as local hero has been operating at full capacity since his death in 2004. Portraits and posters of him are prevalent in every public space. There is even an online obituary where people can pay their written respects and comment on him. . By creating a public image of Sheikh Zayed which includes timeless and generally human values, such as foresight, vision, kindness etc. he becomes significant for any time and any generation. How successful the public image of Sheikh Zayed has been as a conceptualised nexus of Emirati culture can be seen not only from reinforcing narratives (such as Fahim's), but of the way young Emiratis perceive him as a key personality for their national identity.

In 2009 I was offered the opportunity to circulate an anonymous online survey among students at the Dubai Women's college. The administration of the college used opportunity to launch small pilot project to collect a selected sample of impressions on how naturalised the constructed image of Sheikh Zayed as father of the nation was. In particular, I was interested in learning about the variations of his constructed image as ideal Bedouin considering the historical profile of Dubai. Although ruled by tribal leaders, (the Al Maktoum family) the population of Dubai during the pre-oil era had been mainly merchants. Sheikh Zayed's image relies on the image of his Bedouin character, which could be difficult for members of urban merchant families to identify with.

Since the online survey would be distributed within an official context (by the university to students of the college) I could not expect statements or opinions which contradicted the official narrative of Sheikh Zayed's greatness and character.[189] Therefore I formulated six questions about different aspects of the official image of Sheikh Zayed and

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[189] Questions leading in that direction would have most likely not gained me the universitiy's permission to conduct the survey in the first place.

asked the participants to comment on them. The selection of keywords provided in the first three was designed to fit into the image of nation's founder and president as an authentic Bedouin, a poet and philanthropist; and the father of all Emiratis. Two questions asked for concrete knowledge of important dates and sayings of Sheikh Zayed. The aim was to find out whether the image participants had of Sheikh Zayed was based on his concrete achievements (expected to be taught in UAE schools) or rather a more intuitive, or mythical idea about his greatness. For the last question, the participants were required to choose their favourite of a selection of six different pictures of Sheikh Zayed's : one picture showed him in official robes next to the UAE flag; one was a portrait of him smiling at an unseen person to his right side; another was a black and white close-up of Sheikh Zayed with a kind but solemn gaze. The remaining three pictures were oriented towards the traditional image of the Bedouin. One black and white photo showed a young Zayed on a camel with a falcon on his arm,[190] the other portrayed him dressed in a dove-blue *kandōra* with matching jacket and a falcon, the third sitting in a tent at night reading a paper by torchlight, with a hooded falcon on each side (see image on following page). This exercise or the survey as a whole was intended to determine which version or what kind of composite version the students had internalised; the official mythical version, the factual history, or aspects of both.[191]

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[190] The source of this picture is unknown but it seems to be from pre-UAE times or the early days of the UAE.

[191] In order not to distract from the image of Sheikh Zayed himself no picture of him with children was chosen, though this fact was remarked by a participant as missing ("I would prefer if you put an picture where a child was sitting with him ^_^").

Image No. 2. 1: The selection of pictures provided in the online questionnaire[192]
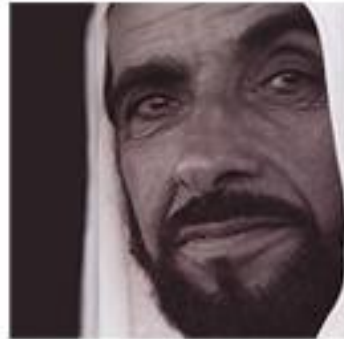
A total of 97 female students submitted their answers between 26th November and 31st December 2009. From these participants 52 skipped the question asking for historical dates, while all 97 students participated in choosing a picture. Although such a limited

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[192] Gleissner, 2010. *Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan in the Collective Memory of UAE Youth: A Pilot Project Survey, [Unpublished report].*

questionnaire cannot be considered conclusive evidence, it does indicate the successful establishment of Sheikh Zayed as a mythological figure in the collective memory of Emiratis. It can also confirm the naturalisation of a state-induced terminology describing the former president. An interesting result of the questionnaire was that the young Emirati women from Dubai did not choose characteristics and values related to the *topos* of the "noble Bedouin" as the most important aspects of Sheikh Zayed. These same women did not see themselves as originally Bedouin either (only 19% identified themselves as such), but as 'city people' (64%).[193] The most important aspect of Sheikh Zayed for the participants was his 'vision' (chosen by 74.2%).

The most popular picture, chosen by 42% of the participants echoed the image of a visionary personality. It was also the most recent picture, a black and white close-up, which thus shows him as a figure from the past looking into the future. The students were asked to give an explanation for their selection: 12 of the 29 who picked the photo justified their preference by citing his visionary expression, one student writing that "his strong gaze shows his vision and wisdom". The second most popular picture was the portrait of a smiling Sheikh Zayed, chosen by 24.6% of the participants, who agreed that his smile represented him as kind, loving and caring. As one participant summarised, "he [was] always smiling, people feel comfortable to see him and they feel happy to chat and be close to him. This smile makes people always [want to be] around him, he was always encouraging people to talk and ask what they want and need."

The statements thus repeated exactly what the current mainstream media established, the image of a man who stands for general human values and the spirit of progress, although not specified. Considering the context in which the answers were given (distributed through the university, possible filled out on campus), the answers could be expected to repeat an official discourse. Accordingly, most of the students chose the latest trend, which obscures aspects of Sheikh Zayeds image such as a Bedouin patriarch, or patron of fine arts and architecture. The questionnaire answers indicate that there is a process of assimilation for role models which takes place whenever that figure is said to be

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[193] From the selection of city people, Bedouin, seafarer, or tradesmen 64.0% choose the city, followed by 19.0% identifying themselves as Bedouin, 14.0% as seafarer, and only 3% as tradesmen. Since of the participants were from Dubai, the result itself is not astonishing, and the answers from students of Al Ain or Abu Dhabi could have been different.

the archetype of a certain attitude. Since the participants do not mainly identify themselves as Bedouins, this aspect of Sheikh Zayed loses relevance for them. Although Sheikh Zayed himself was keen to express his Bedouin identity, his image in the media has been modified to more generic attributes, such as the kind-hearted leader with family values. Even for a generation which does *not* identify with the Bedouin image he can thus be part of the national identity discourse, as a mythological father of the nation behind which the complexity of the real person disappears. Historical events linked to political achievements have become secondary in this scenario. The question about milestones in Sheikh Zayed's and therefore the UAE's history was least popular. From the 48 students who answered the question, only 12 provided three historical events as asked for in the question. All participants listed the UAE National Day as first and thus most significant event associated with Sheikh Zayed. The few who provided more than one mentioned the urban development of Dubai (a project actually executed under the local ruler, Sheikh Rashid).

2.2 Ways of experiencing reality and forming new imagined communities

Stuart Hall remarked that national cultural identities are no longer exclusively facilitated and distributed by the state apparatus.[194] Globalisation has resulted in the nation-state's loss of control over both its local scene and its global cultural output. Modern technology has made it possible for the people of all or most social classes and walks of life to interact with each other and to the outside world, independent of governmental influence. Due to the immense possibilities offered by individual experiences and identities Appadurai believes that "standard cultural reproduction (like standard English) is now an endangered activity that succeeds only by conscious design and political will."[195]

The independent communication that technology provides people in the UAE creates a particular challenge for the those responsible for marketing and selling the official version of identity. As the first part of the section will show, Arab government media has created

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[194] See: Hall, 1997. *The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity*,

[195] Appadurai, 2005. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p.54.

'image worlds' for citizens to educate them towards an ideological national identity. In so doing, it has tried to determine and direct people's experience in their Emirati identity. Personalities such as Sheikh Zayed have been constructed as prototypes of the national identity. Their performances represent an 'ideal Emirati' to the community of nationals. However, as media technologies constantly change, this mediated experience has to be constantly adjusted, as the example of the satellite era will show. The second part of the section will discuss the influence of corporate brands and their role in creating imagined communities which evolve around de-territorialised practices constituting identities.

Global consumer products use marketing and branding to enforce rituals and experiences which challenge the supposedly local identities the state constructed. The nation state ideology risks losing relevance if it does not manage to incorporate the real life experiences of Emiratis into the national narrative. Since daily routines are framed by branded consumer products, the producers of the national narrative apply similar techniques – and brand itself. As a dominant commercially driven discourse they challenge supposedly 'local' identities in a new way and raise the question of authentic local identities – a question which challenges government ideology and imagined sub-communities alike.

2.2.1 Trans-national TV reshuffling imagined communities

The producers of the national narrative have recognized that media is n "a cultural agent, particularly as a provoker and circulator of meanings […] that serve dominant interests in society."[196] The dominant interest thus represented by the ruling elite, media is used by the rulers to inculcate the nation-building project and the idea of national identity "into" the viewers, as well as to prohibit anything potentially harmful to the state to be communicated through the media. Lila Abu Lughod describes a similar media-viewer relationship for Egyptian TV. She remarks that "the addressee was the citizen, not the

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[196] Fiske, 1987. *Television Culture*, p.1.

consumer. Audiences were to be brought into national and international political consciousness, mobilized, modernized, and culturally uplifted."[197]

Abu Lughod's observation is equally true for the UAE media in its build-up phase.[198] The national media was on a mission – a mission to secure loyalties on a local level; to identify with the UAE and its official identity while simultaneously presenting the country within a transnational community of nations. In a review of Arab TV broadcasts during the 1980s and 1990s, Al-Nawawy describes common characteristics of national Arab television, saying that they were "non-controversial and do little else but serve as a public relations outlet for governments."[199] This top-down nationalistic input was contested by interest groups who felt that the media content was detached from their social reality. Unable to gain access to the media arena, oral discourses would become the focus of the national communities rather than the media.[200] In this scenario the government media lost more and more credibility, especially in times of political crises when communities turned to media for reliable information but had to resort to rumours.[201] This development highlights the difficulty in using media as a mere top-down tool for mass-education and the importance of the perspectives and intentions of those using it, as producers, consumers, or both.

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[197] Abu-Lughod, 2005. *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt*, p.11.

[198] Following chapters will explore in more detail how the different notions of audiences as consumers of citizens are navigated in the contemporary UAE media landscape.

[199] Al-Nawawy & Iskander, 2002. *Al-Jazeera: How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East*, p.11. For the UAE this characteristic would be captured in 2009 in the Human Rights Watch description of the local media's motto: "Just the Good News, please". (Staff-Reporter, 2009. *Just the Good News, Please: New Uae Media Law Continues to Stifle Press.*)

[200] For authoritarian regimes of Arab states, certainly these notions played a role in the governments' attempts to control the media and use it as a tool to educate citizens and keep information from them. Until the 1980s there was a large gap between information circulated mouth-to-mouth and in the media. Jones observed for the establishment of the Jordanian media how it was set up as mouthpiece of the nation, educator of citizens and communication tool of local identity. (See: Jones, 1999. *Jordan: Press, Regime, and Society since 1989*. P.2.)

[201] The famous *Sawt al-Arab* radio for example lost the trust of its audience with the defeat of the Syrian-Egyptian army by Israel in 1967. As a mouthpiece of the Egyptian government's ideology the channel's credibility was connected to the success of propagated ideal and achievements. The channel had not only raised expectations for an Arab victory over Israel, but even continued to announce Arab victory, when the battle was already lost. When the Egyptian population realised that the radio had hidden the facts of the defeat, and the trans-national audience had to face the fact that the dream of Arab greatness had not survived a "reality check", the government propaganda lost its credibility. (See: Boyd, 1999. *Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of the Electronic Media in the Middle East*,)

Just as the new technology of radio broadcasting had changed the way media was experienced, the satellite era redefined the formation of imagined communities and their depth. A globally tradable repertoire of images, ideas, and opportunities that enable individuals to identify with others led to "a singular new power in social life."[202] This development transferred the challenge for governments to justify their politics and remain in charge of citizen-manipulation to a new level. The capacity to connect imagined communities not with privileged government officials but people from their social class was a major attraction satellite channels could offer.[203] When the Qatari channel *Al Jazeera* was launched in November 1996, it successfully managed to use this asset. The channel provided diaspora people with a link to their communities in their homelands. But *Al Jazeera*'s news broadcast for an Arabic speaking audience also created new imagined communities of sentiment.[204]

With a mixture of sensationalism, subjugated voices becoming a space, and its pan-Arab outreach, *Al Jazeera* thus confirms the role of media as facilitating meanings and at the same time setting new "strategically fashioned categories."[205] The credibility and strength of these categories are achieved by the instantaneous communication of events from within a national community into the homes of the nation. The possibility of manipulating such seemingly 'real' events discredits satellite channels just as their ideological agendas. In the case of *Al Jazeera* the self-proclaimed agenda of unbiased news and accessibility of subjugated voices to the media has been undermined by its connection to the Qatari government. Nevertheless, *Al Jazeera* set a standard, which other satellite channels strived

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[202] Appadurai points out: "the imagination has now acquired a singular new power in social life." (Appadurai, 2005. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p.53.)

[203] Al Jazeera is an excellent example for Anderson's notion of media simulating face-to-face meetings and thus inducing a sense of community. (Anderson, 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, p.12.) Or, to highlight the community-building potential of media images even more (as opposed to information value), the media's projective quality, as Appadurai calls it, provides the members of a community with an image that creates sentiments and notions of belonging over borders. (Appadurai, 2005. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p.7.)

[204] El Nawawny's interviews with Arab expatriates in Canada also have validity for Arabs in the Middle East. His sources describe how the channels daily broadcast of the second intifada made people feel personally and emotionally aroused. The live broadcast of personal fates or ordinary people, such as the murder of Mohammed Al Durra (during the second intifada), was shocking and "real" for the viewers. It made the daily routine of normal people come alive. (Al-Nawawy, 2002. *Al-Jazeera: How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East*, p.8.)

[205] Zelizer, 1997. *Blurring Distinctions: Media, Culture, and Identity,* p.586.

to follow and governments tried to control. Due to the complex relationship between media and communities assembling around it, the nation state risks losing its role of dominance over the national community it constructs. To remain the "modelling agent"[206] for the imagination of one national community it has to make the constructed narrative of a past relevant and meaningful in a constantly changing present.

2.2.2 Global media practices to preserve locality: the power of brands and master narratives

Appadurai describes the general features of globalisation as movement of money and people which transforms and deterritorialises culture.[207] He remarks that in our globalised age, imagination and improvisation are stronger than ever before.[208] One has to bear in mind that consumer culture carries its own social power allowing for the development of a mainstream, which follows best selling practices and master narratives.[209] In his enthusiasm for the power of imagination and improvisation, Appadurai does not reflect on the hegemonic relationship between the producers and the consumers of such new cultural practices. Dominant media discourses establish codes, styles, *topoi*, and symbolisms which nobody can surpass. Amidst countless narratives, characters and collected identities constructed by 'dream factories' such as Hollywood, the individual can merely produce an 'intertext' which reshuffles ingredients in a new way. Anthony Paul Cohen stipulates that media is simultaneously embedded in a macro- and micro communication process and as such delivers "raw material for individuals' interpretative work."[210] Considering the global corporations fabricating persuasive master narratives one might put a more pessimistic slant on Appadurai's outlook and say that global media has created a nourishing ground for global communities, constructed around brands.

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[207] See: Appadurai, 2005. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p.50.
[208] See: ibid. p.56.
[209] See: Lury, 2011. *Consumer Culture*, p.30 & p.134f.
[210] Cohen, 1994. *Self Conciousness. An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*, p.16.

As a tool to market a product, idea or person, branding relies on condensed images and narratives to convey human experiences. Pine and Gilmore pointed out that for marketing purposes the focus should not be on the quality of a product but the process of using it: "The focus would then shift to the user: how the individual performs while using the good."[211] Daryl Travis accordingly defines brand as "an artefact that points the way to an experience."[212] These two aspects of branding, experience and performance, are essential to enforce a community of loyal consumers. Brand expert Steve Davies described the relationship between brand and emotional experiences as follows:

"We remember experiences more readily than facts, because experiences are more likely to be related to other experiences through one or more sensory triggers – the smell of a classic car reminds us of our childhood, the winding road in Jaguar's F-TYPE video triggers memories of a favourite drive."[213]

Branding, as a form of encoding reminiscences of experiences into a reproducible media text, tries to establish an associational link between the visual representations (logo, advertisements) and emotional stories. As part of a community which shares the supposed positive pleasures evoked by the experience of consumption, the branded product becomes a cultural agent.[214] The idea is to cultivate the feeling in a consumer that if s/he buys something or buys into an idea, then the payback is one of the following: immediate pleasure, a feeling of pride, a feeling of belonging or identification with and embracing of an idea. Celebrities have always been used in marketing campaigns, to cultivate loyalty in consumers. The use of Sheik Zayed for marketing of national identity marks the same kind of strategy and success. During Sheikh Zayed's lifetime, his public performances, which were

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[211] Pine & Gilmore, 1999. *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*, p. 15.

[212] Travis, 2000. *Emotional Branding: How Successful Brands Gain the Irrational Edge*, p.80.

[213] Davies, 2012. "Which Automotive Brands Are Winning the Content Marketing Race?"

[214] Luxury retailers, for example, focus more and more on the shopping experience and face-to-face attendance of customers (in VIP sections, personal shopping facilities, and through the services of fashion consultants). To distinguish their products from qualitatively similar but cheaper high-street products designer brands try to evoke the notion of exclusivity among their customers – similar to a tailor-made haute couture experience. (See for example: Thomas, Charlie. 2012. "Luxury Brands Must Develop Their Customer Experience to Survive".)

meticulously documented and reported on, enforced the image of a romantic Bedouin identity performed around camel-races, falcon hunting, and desert campsites.[215] The circulation of images and film-material featuring Sheikh Zayed performing these symbolic actions established him as the ideal embodiment of the authentic Emirati. Since his death in 2004 his image has remained present and effectively developed into a brand for the UAE's heritage. His public image has been carefully constructed into a conglomerate of media codes (images, symbols, narratives) which link a consistent message of identity with his distinguishable characteristics and features. Thus the Gulf-wide narrative of a tribal heritage has become localised for the UAE.[216]

Image No. 2. 2: The Sheikh Zayed brand, "Our Father Zayed" and Billboard in Abu Dhabi featuring the President of the UAE under the caption "Our Heritage, Our Identity"[217]

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[215] How these staged rituals of identity have been and are still performed by the UAE leaders has been analysed by Khalaf. See: Khalaf, 2000. *Poetics and Politics of Newly Invented Traditions in the Gulf: Camel Racing in the United Arab Emirates*.

[216] A frequently quoted basic definition of the term brand was presented by the American Marketing Association (AMA) as early as 1960, describing a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors." In practice, the meaning of brand evolves from the social impact or meaning of a branded item. The branding attributes gather all available marketing techniques to establish a distinction which goes beyond the attributes of a product. Complex associations and emotions are supposed to be conveyed through condensed logos, advertisements and narratives and linked in the mind of the consumer with the thus branded item. (See: American Marketing Association, 1960. *Marketing Definitions.* Also for discussions on the definition of brands: Keller, Apéria & Georgson, 2008. *Strategic Brand Management: A European Perspective*, p.2. & Jain, 2009. *Principles of Marketing*, p.231.)

[217] UAE-Government, 2009. *Screenshot of the Sheikh Zayed Brand, Billboard at Marina Corniche in Abu Dhabi, Billboard in Wahda – Abu Dhabi. [image compilation].*

If a "brand is a collection of perceptions in the mind of the consumer"[218], the branding of a national identity has to provide both a stable point of reference and contemporary relevance in the minds and experiences of nationals. Since the nationals simultaneously belong to local and deterritorialised communities, the national narrative has to enter into a creative dialogue with other image worlds. How the national media implements such dialogue can be exemplified through the following story from a popular Emirati cartoon.

The episode from the animation series *"Freej" ("Neighbourhood")* presents the holiday adventure of the Emirati teenager Jameela. She visits her old-fashioned aunt in Dubai and is stunned by her lifestyle. [219] Bursting into her aunt's the traditional *majlis* she immediately takes pictures of the place with her mobile phone and calls friends to share her "vintage" and exotic experience with them. Her aunt is as equally surprised and dismayed by her niece's attire (the fashionable *sheela* and *abaya* of young Dubai women), her designer handbag, flashy mobile phone, and by the mixture of Arabic and English she speaks. The character of Jameela mocks a stereotypical Emirati youth, whose identity is mostly based on material things. But true to the plot of a coming of age story, Jameela's old aunt transforms her niece into a traditional Bedouin girl. By the end of the episode, a now soft-spoken Jameela elegantly waits upon her astonished mother. Although it is implied that after her visit at the grandmother's house she will return to her cosmopolitan Dubai lifestyle, it is clear that the experience has improved her character. Jameela now understands 'the old ways', thus where she comes from and who she really is.

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[218] Bates, 2007. *What is a Brand?*
[219] Harib, 2008. *Jameela, [TV broadcast].*

The example illustrates how corporate symbols and brands are presented as potential threat to local identities. Stories of reconciliation between global and local, modern lifestyle and tradition are recurring topics not only in the UAE media but across the region. Constantly on the lookout for suitable topics to present the discourse, two Gulf talkshows (from Saudi Arabia and the UAE) each produced elaborate episodes on Japanese society in 2009. [221] Both shows followed the same pattern: the presenter of each show interviewed various Japanese families and presented their habits or ways of life, their homes, and their places of work. An example of this is one episode, in which the Emirati presenter, talks to a couple who gives say how most women, though highly successful and powerful in their career, will nonetheless still be responsible for all of the household duties, not expecting their husbands to take a share in cooking or cleaning. Although most women have embraced a modern style of life in terms of having a career, they revert to traditional ways when it comes to household and parenting duties. In some way it can be said that these women are upholding the inherited role models. This presentation of Japanese society is constructed to show parallels to urban societies in the Gulf. Especially the hectic business-life in Dubai comes to mind when looking at the skyscrapers of central Tokyo. The shows focus on the consumerist aspects of life and present Japanese youth as equally technology-driven as i.e. Emirati youngsters. The overall message to Emirati audience is a story of reassurance that a life performed around malls and international brands does not have to lead to a loss of local authenticity. On the contrary, the presenters show how modern

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[220] Lamaterra, 2008. "Jameela" [screen-shots], *Freej, Season 3.*
[221] Al Suweidi, 2009. Japan. *Khutwa*, [TV broadcast] October 19 & Shukairy, 2009. Japan. *Khawatir Khamsa*, [TV broadcast]. August 13. The latter dedicated several episodes to life and society in Japan, trying to find points of reference to Gulf societies.

utilities can be used to support a traditional way of living.[222] These examples are neither singular media occurrences nor temporary trends. One only has to switch on UAE television to see the same message repeatedly enforced through the advertisements of the local TV channels: young men in Bedouin attire race cars through the desert, interact with business executives in suits while wearing *kandōra* themselves or, to use an even more urban image, groups of Bedouins on horseback weaving through the skyscrapers of Dubai. All of these narratives depict old values and inherited customs as harmonious with modern developments and merging local culture with global trends.

To enforce the message even further, the rituals and performances of the rulers permeate all spaces in UAE society (from TV viewing in the privacy of a home, to the aforementioned billboard at the highway). A recent example is the new crown prince of Dubai, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, whose début both as a cultural icon and a political figure was achieved through branding strategies: these include a designed public image condensed in a logo and consistent visual image of the identity he represents. His political image combines aspects of the traditional authentic Bedouin *topos* with the profile of a modern youthful sports fan and car enthusiast,[223] thus targeting different age groups. In addition, he is often referred to as "Fazza", his nickname or brand logo name, if you will. Whereas his father earned his nickname, "Sheikh Mo", over time, Sheikh Hamdan is introduced to the public as a developed brand.

His image as the future ruler of Dubai markets him as a celebrity, following the definition presented by Matthews, that "Celebrities can also be considered brands because they can be professionally managed and because they have additional associations and features of a brand."[224] They have a constructed public image which concentrates the complexity of their human characteristics into a one sided and consistent representation.[225]

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[222] The Emirati presenter, for example, visits a kindergarten which is located in a Metro station. Working women can conveniently drop their children on the way to work and pick them up later. The presenter comments that through clever organisation people can easily adapt to women working outside their homes. (Al Suweidi, 2009. Japan. *Khutwa*, [TV broadcast] October 19.)

[223] See: Sheikh Hamdan's official website at: http://www.fazza3.com/.

[224] Keller, Apéria & Georgson, 2008. *Strategic Brand Management: A European Perspective*, p.2.

[225] Yin Fan states that "branding requires simplicity and clarity", which is basically the opposite of a personality of character, hence the difference between public image and brand of a person and the more complex personality thus condensed in a brand or public image. (Fan, 2006. *Branding the Nation: What Is Being Branded?* p.11.)

Whereas Zayed effectively ended the search for a national icon, Hamdan can still promote himself as a brand. Whilst his image (like those of other Sheikhs before him) incorporates continuity of his Bedouin heritage (represented through his poetry in *nabati*-dialect), he is far more modern in his image of the Emirati patron of sports and motors.[226]

Image No. 2. 4: Sheikh Hamdan's official image as presented on his website, "Fazaa"[227]

The circulations of stories about authenticity, together with the promotion of ruler-celebrities, are attempts by the government to create "stable points of reference" for a national community.[228] To maintain the relevance of the national narrative alternative non-national communities are presented as threats to the authenticity of the Emirati identity. Local and global are constructed as dichotomies in this discourse. The protection of the local

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[226] Certainly his image follows a path already laid out by his father Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who has profiled himself on an international stage as patron of horse riding and sports, as do many of his children (i.e. Sheikha Maytha, who is a martial arts champion).

[227] Headers from Sheikh Hamdan's Personal Website. *[screen-shots].*

228 The challenge for authentic local identities is to come to terms with what Halls sums up in the crucial question: "What is the point of an identity if it isn't one thing?" The discomfort expressed in this rhetorical question shows the challenge of balancing constancy and change "because the rest of the world is so confusing; everything else is turning [...] Identities ought to be some stable points of reference that were like that in the past, are now and shall ever be, still points in a turning world." (Hall, 1997. *The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity*, p.174and p.175.)

authenticity is ensured through the performances of those who are presented as the authentic thus entitles representatives of the nation: the rulers.

Appadurai promotes a different notion of locality. He stipulates that instead of looking for a local essence under the mesh of localities, practice itself dissolves this dichotomy.[229] Accordingly, the "impact of de-territorialisation on the imaginative resources of lived local experiences"[230] does not have to be interpreted as leading to a loss of local authenticity. On the contrary, being a local who imagines him or herself embedded in a global context can be just as authentically local. In the case of the UAE with its ethnically, economically global urbanity, a global frame of reference has to be acknowledged as part of local identity, and vice versa. The fact that the local media repeatedly addresses the concern of maintaining an ideal cultural identity shows the urgency of the topic in the eyes of the government's media producers. Throughout the following chapters the actual daily experiences which challenge the heritage ideal will repeatedly be addressed by research participants. Attempts to either extract or reconcile these seemingly dichotomous constructions are relevant for TV, but even more cinema films. They become platforms of contest, just as daily life experiences are framed by both commercial brands and a fabricated national identity, thus posing a challenge of reconciliation for the individuals.

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[229] See: Appadurai, 2005. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p.49.
[230] Ibid. p.52.

3. Controlling and securing the media: the balance between global outreach and local interests

The UAE media's relationship with global media has gone a long way from the 1970s when Emirati media professionals were sent abroad to be trained, and local channels reversely employed foreign media professionals. The exchange of personnel was extended by the set up of media free zones in the country. In section 3.1, the topic of whether the import of foreign media companies is intended to create more overall diversity in the media landscape and to encourage interaction will be discussed. It will show how media zones benefit the country's profile as a media nation, and how local television broadcasting tries to express global outreach in their brands. Both emirates, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, compete to establish TV industries which attract local audiences and comply with latest media trends (in terms of style, content, and programming). However, what is promoted as an ideal cooperation of global media companies remains under government control. In fact the government concentrates all media development under its companies. The result is a mainstream media sphere which is closed to alternative voices and eyed suspiciously by Emiratis, as examples will show.

The government's outreach to global media companies and import of expatriate staff potentially change the nationalist character of the local media. With more access to international satellite media, new audiences can evolve whose expectations will reflect back on the local media. How the UAE government navigates change and control over media is the topic of section 3.2. Direct and indirect censorship are the immediate mechanisms of control. Both can, however, jeopardise the media's aim to become an internationally recognised media hub. *Al Jazeera* and other satellite broadcasts (such as the *Middle East Broadcasting Center Group*, mbc) had demonstrated just how relevant and informative media could be. At the same time *Al Jazeera* demonstrated to the governments that it was possible to remain in control of the media yet make it more attractive and even commercially profitable.

Although the UAE media did not go as far as giving media control to the population via public broadcast, the structure of the industry moved more towards the ideal of commercialised media. The focus of this section will be on Abu Dhabi TV where the media transformation was more turbulent than in Dubai. While Dubai, had always followed a more commercial line, the media in Abu Dhabi had been was focused on the nation-building project. In the phase of problematising the role of media, government, and audiences, the Abu Dhabi media initially followed the example of *Al Jazeera* as a news channel for Arabic-speaking audiences. Soon, the policy was changed towards entertainment which entailed a less obvious political agenda and fewer diplomatic pitfalls. But the dilemma of entertainment as a main pillar of the national media lies with the reconciliation of a mainstream entertainment or the catering of diverse audiences. The national media has to position itself, negotiate priorities, and reconcile aims in a dialogue with global media, audiences, producers in order to attract, sell, and control. The final remarks of this chapter will discuss the difficulties of such endeavour.

3.1 Negotiating global and local media as host or co-operator

The review of the first UAE media zone in Dubai, the *Dubai Media City*, will show how commercial interest can be of mutual benefit to foreign media companies and the government. While it contributes to Dubai's international profile, the foreign companies are provided with ideal facilities. Over time the media city brought companies closer together, but whether this was intended by the government is disputed and will be discussed in this context.

Abu Dhabi's newly established media zone focuses on the latest addition to the UAE media landscape: film production. The second part of this section will show that Abu Dhabi is determined to be more than a mere host to foreign media producers. The Media Zone Authority tries to use foreign film productions to market its own version of Emirati culture around the globe. If successful this step could reinforce the official national identity narrative on a trans-national level. Yet, proclaiming to boost the national identity and

support Emirati media talents does not convince the local media professionals, as the third part of this section will show. Their reactions to the new film production boom shows that they not only reject being held to an official narrative, but mistrust the business integrity of the whole project.

In order to understand how the media in Dubai and Abu Dhabi implement their global ambitions the last part of the following section will review the main characteristics of television in both emirates. The range of channels reflects how they try to follow the example of satellite channels yet represent a specific local culture at the same time. The review will show that especially the media in Abu Dhabi faces difficulties to establish a strong TV identity.

3.1.1 *Dubai Media City*: an attempt for global cooperation or branding tool?

With the establishment of *Dubai Media City* (DMC) in 2001, the emirate has attempted since 2001 to create an image of an open Arab country: it has certainly communicated its eagerness to be at the centre of modern media developments. According to its marketing description *Dubai Media City* is not only host to over 1,400 companies,[231] but "has evolved as a thriving media community catering to businesses in segments such as Publishing and Printing, Music, New Media, Leisure and Entertainment, Broadcasting, Film, Information Agencies and Media and Marketing Services."[232] By concentrating media outlets and production companies in one media free-zone, *Dubai Media City*, the emirate has attempted since 2001 to create an image of an open Arab country: it has certainly communicated its eagerness to be at the centre of modern media developments. The idea of a free zone for global media within a campus-like space can facilitate both international business collaborations and the exchange of ideas. *Dubai Media City* therefore stands for a space of media diversification, a nucleus of global trends. In the past the UAE government has striven to develop its own media industry by importing foreign experts as well as

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[231] Staff-Reporter, 2011. *Key Players in Your Industry Are Here*.
[232] Staff-Reporter, 2011. *History and Milestones of Dubai Media City*.

sending local personnel abroad for training: but how helpful have these experts been in developing a local media? The aim of *Dubai Media City* is to reach beyond the regional market by attracting global media production companies such as *Reuters*, CNN, mbc and the BBC to set up office within it premises.[233] Qatar-based media analyst Joseph Khalil takes the view that despite its international outreach DMC was not initially intended to facilitate interaction between global and local media.[234] In fact, Khalil argues that it was conceived as an incubated space in which foreign media outlets would be segregated from local ones and could, therefore, be contained.

Khalil claims the establishment of DMC is directly linked to the overall aim of distinguishing a local identity in view of Arab states with already established images. According to Khalil, one strong motivation was the chance to position the UAE as knowledge and based society. Furthermore, the offer of advantageous business conditions led to a "repatriation of media operations"[235], such as the London-based mbc which moved to DMC in 2002.[236] Another consideration was to strengthen the image of Dubai itself, as a distinct city-state rather than just one of the emirates of the UAE. Although the "Brand Dubai" was not officially established before 2009, the project of profiling the emirate internationally had already become a priority after the inauguration of the *Burj Al Arab* Hotel in 1999.[237]

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[233] DMC certainly outgrows its predecessors in the Arab world, by its comprehensive approach to include all media genres in its trade zone. The *Egyptian Media Production City* (EMPC) was established in 1997 with the intention to develop the Egyptian cinema industry. With several production facilities the EMPC wants to "bring Egypt's genius out" and to provide cheap local media production with high quality. (Staff-Reporter, 2009. *The Genius of Time, Place and People*.) According to its aim to boost Egypt as a media production centre for the Middle East, the International Academy for Media Sciences [IAMS] was incorporated into the project, thus creating a nexus of media development, production, and enhancement for the country. Jordan was next to build a media city, shortly before Dubai in 2001. *Jordan Media City* (JMC) is a privately owned venture run by the local *Dallah Production Company* and established initially to boost the *Arab Radio and Television* (ART) Network. (Staff-Reporter, 2012. *Jordan Media City*.) The latter distributes and produces different media genre for the Arab language market and maintains a leading position among Arab pay TV services. (Staff-Reporter, 2012. *Arab Radio and Television Network Demographics and Distribution*.) Although the Egyptian and Jordanian media industries (and the Qatari *Al-Jazeera*, of course) may once have served as role-models, *Dubai Media City* is the most cosmopolitan in character.

[234] See: Khalil. 2011. *Un-Settled Media and Nomadic Labour: The Next Decade of Media Cities*, [Conference proceeding].

[235] Ibid.

[236] See: Schleifer, 2001. *Interview with mbc News Director Steve Clark*.

[237] See: Gangal, 2009. *Sheikh Mohammed Creates 'Brand Dubai' Office.* Various article have explored different aspects of the Dubai brand. A analysis of the Dubai Brand in the context of global city-scapes in Asia can be

Khalil even asserts that with DMC Dubai wanted to distance itself from the more powerful Abu Dhabi.[238] Competition between the richer and more influential emirate and Dubai is indeed a feature of local politics which dates back to the Trucial States era.

Thus set up as a showcase project of a media-friendly and globally open Dubai, DMC remained loyal to the main characteristics of media in the UAE: DMC is government-owned and remains under government surveillance despite its 'free zone' label. The foreign producers needed and therefore invited to set up a base in the Emirates must still conform to local rules. The UAE media is presently regulated by Federal Law No 15 (1980) "concerning publications and publishing" executed by *The National Media Council* (NMC). The latter promotes itself as regulator of all UAE media activities in terms of licensing, content monitoring, and journalist accreditation.[239] Far from being specific, the media law prohibits any publications which could damage the reputation of the country or its allies.[240] Its vague wording leaves the NMC to decide which content is to be banned from publication and it can impose penalties which may range from fines and impounding of the publications, to closure of the publication or imprisonment.[241]

According to NMC consultant Muhammad Ayish, the media zones are considered self-regulatory and therefore free to report on any UAE-related subject.[242] He elaborates that the NMC acknowledges the media zones as an economic asset for the country, which is why the NMC would not generally interfere with them.[243] Although major global players such as *Reuters* and CNN have not yet clashed with the law (at least not publicly), DMC is still no stranger to international scandal. Although the foreign channels and news agencies are supposed to be free from government intervention, the independent Pakistani channels *Geo News TV* and *ARY One World* were shut down in 2007 at Pervez Musharraf's demand. Ayish commented on the incident by pointing out that channels aiming to harm UAE relations with their

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found in Haines, 2011. *Cracks in the Façade: Landscapes of Hope and Desire in Dubai*, as well as Bagaeen, 2007. *Brand Dubai: The Instant City or the Instantly Recognizable City*.

[238] See: Khalil. 2011. *Un-Settled Media and Nomadic Labour: The Next Decade of Media Cities*, [Conference proceeding].

[239] Ayish, 2011. *Media Investment and the Search for Regulatory Models in the UAE, [Conference proceeding]*.

[240] See: UAE-Government, 1980. *Publications and Publishing Law*, Chapter 7, Articles, 80, 73, 79, 83, and 84.

[241] See: ibid. Chapters 7, Articles 86 ff. A more detailed discussion of the media law will follow in chapter 4.1 on censorship practices.

[242] Ayish, 2011. *Media Investment and the Search for Regulatory Models in the UAE, [Conference proceeding]*.

[243] Ibid.

countries of origin were not wanted in the UAE. The channels in question, however, were exceptions and usually the NMC would "regulate" content rather than companies.[244] Generally, the foreign media branches seem to adopt the *Al Jazeera* policy and avoid challenging the government that provides their Middle East location.

In view of the spatial and legal conditions under which DMC was set up, it seems that the import of international media companies has not been laid out to promote cooperation but to enhance the assets of the country. What appears to be a diverse and vibrant media landscape is actually a parallel existence of media zones and local media. However, five years into the establishment of DMC developments could be recognised which nourish interaction between international and local media. One notable example of these is the News and Training Centres of *Dubai TV*, which both relocated there in 2005. [245] Does this development prove Khalil's theory of separated media space wrong, and was DMC intended to function as a meeting space between local and international media? He explains the development as a reaction by the government to developments which took place on a grassroots level. According to Khalil the original plan to keep the media outlets separate was destined to fail in the long run: moving the most famous global media companies into a central location merely incited local media companies to follow them there.[246] Employees from the local media were eager to find employment with the more renowned and professional media companies in DMC, which ultimately led to a brain drain to the disadvantage of the local media. Khalil's argument is essentially that the Dubai authorities made a massive miscalculation with deeply ironic ramifications: in trying to prevent the local media professionals from becoming too close to the foreign ones, they unwittingly pushed the two together. If he is correct, the City's autonomous development into an intercultural centre demonstrates that spheres of interaction simply cannot be divided, even by keeping them physically separate.

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[244] Ayish, 2011. *Media Investment and the Search for Regulatory Models in the UAE, [Conference proceeding].*
[245] See: Staff-Reporter, 2009. *Media Training Center*. There are also plans to move the remaining offices of the local TV Broadcast, Dubai Media Incorporated, to the City in their wake. See: Al-Abed, 2005. *United Arab Emirates Yearbook 2005*, p.25.
[246] See: Khalil. 2011. *Un-Settled Media and Nomadic Labour: The Next Decade of Media Cities*, [Conference proceeding].

While Khalil's conclusion is based on his inside knowledge of the Arab media industry, it is difficult to prove and other aspects may just as well have contributed to the development. The theory that DMC was built far away from the local media location in order to separate both is not convincing. The premises of the Dubai broadcast channels are in the heart of the old centre of the city, close to the creek in Bur Dubai. But by 2001 the centre had already shifted North-West along the coast towards Jebel Ali. DMC was not erected away from the urban centre but in close proximity to a new vibrant centre for businesses, hotels, and residential district. Whereas the old centre of Dubai would have been too crowded, DMC seems ideally located opposite the famous *Palm Jumeirah*, the *Emirates Golf Course*, *Dubai Marina* and other prime developments. While it is possible that the intent was to create a spatial separation does not withstand closer observation, it might have nevertheless served the government to neglect any interaction until necessary. While it is difficult to ascertain why a closer cooperation was delayed, another consideration should be mentioned: in order to remain the first choice for foreign media companies DMC had to constantly enhance its incentives. Accordingly the *International Production Zone* was announced in 2003, followed by *Dubai Studio City* in 2005.

But DMC could not merely rely on offering convenient and cheap facilities. Following the role model of EMPC by adding training services and platforms for exchange seems a likely step to make the location even more attractive. Accordingly DMC is host and co-organiser of workshops, networking communities, and event around media production, such as the Dubai International Film Festival (launched in 2004), and the Dubai version of *TED conferences* (TEDxDubai, in 2009).[247] It is possible that the Dubai government did not anticipate which direction the DMC project would take, but it seems exaggerated to suggest a plan from the upstart to separate media cooperation. It is more likely that the government will tolerate unforeseen developments under the condition that they do not challenge the government's overall control over media. But while Dubai seems to be open for unforeseen business opportunities the media zone in Abu Dhabi followed a different approach with more direct government involvement.

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[247] See: TEDx-Dubai, 2011. *About Tedx*.

3.1.2 Imagine an image-nation, but within limits

An international media presence both creates more jobs for locals and increases media production, and Abu Dhabi certainly seem to have recognised the Media City's potential in this respect. The establishment of the Abu Dhabi Media Zone Authority in 2007 (better known by its brand name of *TwoFour54*) had presented foreign media producers with an unprecedented opportunity: to open offices in the Emirate in their own names.[248] In 2008, the governmental media conglomerate *Abu Dhabi Media Company* (ADMC) founded a media production subsidiary, *Imagenation*.[249] Its aim is to develop the Emirate's media industry in two ways: by training and funding local ingénues and through co-productions with international media producers.[250] *Imagenation* has already collaborated with Bollywood[251] on feature films, and has formed corporations with international film production companies such as *Participant Media*, *National Geographic Films*, *Warner Bros.,* and others. The aim of these efforts is not simply to develop their own local media culture, but to market the UAE on an international scale by producing, in their own words, "commercial films and content that opens a unique window to the Middle East, Africa and Asia".[252]

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[248] See: TwoFour54, 2011. *MZA Licensing.*

[249] The set-up of Abu Dhabi Media Company will be discussed in more detail in 3.1.5

[250] On its website *Imagenation* describes its aim to develop, finance and produce "Arabic and international features which offer fresh perspectives, have universal appeal and tell compelling stories that inspire, enlighten and entertain. Locally, *Imagenation* has set up an Arabic content division to develop stories from the rich tradition of Middle Eastern tales. We aim to strengthen Emirati film production by supporting local film-makers in bringing their stories to a global stage." (ADMC, 2011. *Imagenation Abu Dhabi: Our Story*.)

[251] The Bollywood feature film "My Name is Khan" (by K. Johar, 2010), "The Crazies" (by B. Eisner, 2010), "Shorts" (by R. Rodriguez, 2009), "Furry Vengeance" (by R. Kumble, 2010) and Jodie Foster's "The Beaver" (2011). Other films are upcoming; it is worth mentioning that the rapid development of such a large scale filming industry had been tested in American productions such as "The Kingdom" (by P. Berg, 2007) and "Syriana" (by S. Gaghan, 2005) before the new entities were established in September 2008.

[252] Other partners of *Imagenation* are *Participant Media*, *National Geographic Films*, *Hyde Park Entertainment, Parkes/Macdonald Productions*, and Singapore's *Media Development Authority* (MDA). In addition, *Imagenation* partnered with *Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment* - co-financing video games such as: "SpeedRacer: The Videogame", "Fear 2: Project Origin", "Looney Tunes Acme Arsenal and Watchmen: The End is Nigh". (See: ADMC, 2011. *Imagenation Abu Dhabi: Our Story*.)

This ideological aim sets the Abu Dhabi media zone apart from its predecessor in Dubai, which at least initially focused on the economic advantages of a media zone. Surely DMC was also a means to enhance the global image of Dubai, but even this aim was in line with an economic focus. Dubai as a media hub contributed to the overall image of Dubai as an economic centre of the Middle East. Abu Dhabi, on the other hand, had historically assumed the role of capital of the UAE as a nation. Less dependent on foreign investors, the oil-rich emirate could focus on the mission Sheikh Zayed had initiated, and act as the promoter of a UAE national identity. Abu Dhabi was in no hurry to establish a centre for international media production but could observe the benefits and challenges of such an institution through the experiences of Dubai.[253]

The Abu Dhabi media zone was launched as part of a comprehensive project to boost local talents via media and promote the nation on an international scale. From the start think tanks and conferences were part of this project, prominent amongst which was the annual "Circle Conference",[254] where current media trends and challenges were discussed. Since its inauguration in 2007, a recurring topic has been the potential of the emerging Emirati media infrastructure and how best to develop the local film industry. Speakers representing Arab and Western media often suggest directions for the UAE to pursue using other nations' industries as examples, and discuss which country could serve as a role-model.[255]

In 2010, for example, several European film producers were invited to discuss the development of local film culture in their native countries. Various possibilities for co-production were discussed, most notably with the French-German channel *Arte*, which is often viewed as a pioneer of intercultural production.[256] In 2010, the conference's keynote

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[253] By focusing on film production TwoFour54 did not enter into direct competition with DMC which follows a more general policy of service provider to all genres of media.

[254] The "Circle Conference" is annually organised as a prelude to the *Abu Dhabi Film Festival* (until 2009 called Middle Eastern International Film Festival). The organiser is the *Abu Dhabi Film Commission* (ADFC), a subsidiary of the *Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage* (ADACH). The conference aims to function as a think-tank for film makers around the globe and features a grant for the best film project in a pitching competition during the conference. (See: Ammari, 2009 *Abu Dhabi Film Commission Announces the Circle Conference in Association with Imagenation Abu Dhabi.*)

[255] See: Al-Sabah. 2010. *Funding Independent Features in a Global Market*, [Conference proceeding].

[256] Their Arabic films have proven particularly successful, such as the Cannes award-winning "The Syrian Bride" (by E. Riklis, 2004) and "Caramel" (by N. Labaki, 2007).

speech was delivered by the French-Tunisian movie producer and distributor Tarak Ben Ammar, who has played a significant role in Tunisia's metamorphosis into a global media production centre.[257] During this event, he mused that the goal of a fledgling film industry must be to provide a cultivating environment, both officially and logistically[258], and to create jobs for the local population. Its development enables a country's 'media intelligentsia' to recruit and train their own local professionals and, in the long run, to offer them an infrastructure for local production. Ben Ammar reflected on what the establishment of an infrastructure for international film producers in Tunisia had achieved, more than merely importing Hollywood vehicles. By creating work in various fields of production, it has created a community of media professionals.[259] With his speech Ben Ammar made himself a role model for *TwoFour54*, which follows precisely this aim. Even more in line with the cultural policies of the emirate was his claim that once the infrastructure is in place, nations will inevitably begin to capitalise on their culture as a brand.[260]

Since 2007, Abu Dhabi has been implementing a cultural brand for the emirate which aims to go beyond mere tourism marketing for the emirate. *The Office of the Brand of Abu Dhabi* (OBAD) developed a visual brand (including logo, images and editorial guidelines) which all local government entities have to integrate into their public activities.[261] The main component is the logo with the slogan "Travellers Welcome", as well as an image database with various attractive photos of Abu Dhabi. These visualisations are "built on the legacy of His Highness the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan" and accordingly utilise the romanticising symbols around which his official image is constructed: desert landscapes, falcon-hunting Bedouins etc.[262] Important to note is that the Office of the Brand does not clearly distinguish between 'Abu Dhabi' and 'the nation' but states that the brand was created to "protect our national identity and to develop our global reputation."[263]

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[257]Tarak Ben Ammar is the founder of *Quinta Communications*. He is co-producer of major Hollywood productions, distributor for the Arab world and considered a pioneer in building up Tunisian's film industry starting with co-operations with George Lucas and Steven Spielberg in the 1970s.

[258] See: Ben Ammar, 2010. *Creating a Successful International Media Business from Tunesia*, [Recorded conference proceeding].

[259] See: ibid.

[260] See: ibid.

[261] See: e-Government, 2007. *Abu Dhabi Brand*.

[262] See: ibid.

[263] See: ibid.

Compared to Dubai the emirate of Abu Dhabi thus still follows its established strategy to act on behalf of the whole nation.[264]

As part of the branding project the Abu Dhabi media zone is clearly intended to go beyond the idea of hosting media spaces. Instead, it aims to promote the emirate's brand as part of a creative collaboration with global media producers. Noura Al Kaabi, board member of *TwoFour54* and ADMC, expressed this aim clearly in an interview, saying that the incentives the UAE could offer foreign film makers are: "stories! You want something different, we have it."[265] Her statement sums up the plan to capitalise on culture rather than business opportunities and include foreign media producers into the Abu Dhabi brand strategy.

3.1.3 "Collective dialogue" orchestrated by the government

Trying to utilise media producers to act as public relations agents of the country seems problematic due to its ideological mission which foreign media producers might not be willing to comply with. The brand tries to protect "the authentic sense of place and national identity which is so important to Emiratis"[266] but media producers looking for shooting locations are not likely to take an interest in this. Hence the framework pre-selects the range of foreign movies featuring the UAE. The Hollywood production "The Kingdom", for example, merely used the UAE as a mock-up Saudi Arabia, thus leaving the country's image untarnished from the storyline of Islamist terrorists being hunted down by US Special Forces. The only Hollywood production which actually features Emirati culture (to date) faced so many restrictions from the National Media Council that the location had to be changed. "Sex and the City 2", which sees the famous New York girls on a trip to Abu Dhabi,

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[264] Yin Fan discusses the paradoxes and complications of nation branding in general. He highlights that the brand of a nation is legally owned by an organisation which developed it. This causes complications, given that ownership of a nation cannot simply be attributed to i.e. a government. In the UAE case the local rulers establish bureaus or other government institutions responsible for developing brands, thus acting analogue to company-owners on a national level. (See: Fan, 2006. *Branding the Nation: What Is Being Branded?* p.5f.)

[265] See: Al Kaabi, 2011. *Twofour54 and Film Production in Abu Dhabi, [Interview].*

[266] See: e-Government, 2007. *Abu Dhabi Brand*.

had to be shot in Morocco and was banned in UAE cinemas for inappropriate content.[267] The next Hollywood Blockbuster featuring Dubai as a city adhered to local rules and was therefore enthusiastically welcomed to the UAE. With Tom Cruise visibly shooting scenes in the city for "Mission: Impossible- Ghost Protocol" in 2010, Dubai made an ideal marketing deal with a producer who agreed to feature Dubai as full of action and high buildings, fast cars and sand storms as well as being able to attract the Hollywood 'A list' In December 2011, "Mission: Impossible- Ghost Protocol" showed the world that post-recession Dubai is just as "hot" as ever.

[This image has been removed by the author of this thesis/dissertation for copyright reasons.] [268]

But while Tom Cruise was a willing agent, all the legal restrictions mean the UAE is unlikely to be able to compete with Tunisia or Morocco, both of which are currently considered role models for fledgling Arab film industries. Their governments do not, attempt to restrict or manipulate foreign producers' material, which in turn makes them more attractive than the UAE. The politics of using film-makers to market the UAE and a positive image of Arab culture also poses difficulties on a local scale. In Dubai, which has private production companies (also providing filming equipment), film-makers can limit government involvement in their films to script approval and shooting permission. In Abu

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[267] Films like Sex and the City 2 (by Michael P. King, 2010) could in the end not obtain shooting permission in the UAE due to the film's title (see: chapter 6).

[268] Cruise, Tom. 2011. *Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol [hero-shot].*

Dhabi, on the other hand, while the media zone has become increasingly well-equipped, the studios and technology are almost always owned by *TwoFour54*.

These regulations make film-makers' processes even more complicated than film production already is. The Emirati film maker Ali F. Mostafa recalled that he had difficulties obtaining script approval for his feature film "City of Life", but had he received government funding, the entire film would have been radically changed. As it was, the feature was financed by private sponsors and the council's refusal to grant approval was overturned by the ruler of Dubai (to whom Ali was connected).[269] Another film maker, Nayla Al Khaja, also had problems with the Media Council and so she now produces her films in collaboration with private production companies.[270] This way, she bypasses government appointed editors who could try to dictate the content of her film scripts. But while several private production companies are operating in Dubai, Abu Dhabi has capitalized on the government's version of culture: they have initiated an infrastructure which ensures that the media is at least partly government owned and develops in the government's favour. This development adds a new aspect to the monopolization of the media industry discussed in chapter 2. While the Dubai government holds the monopoly over the local media industry it has encouraged private media companies to use the location in DMC and ultimately interact with the government media. Even Emirati media companies can produce in DMC and sell them to the local media, as long as they comply with the demands of the NMC.

In Abu Dhabi private media producers, foreign or local, are forced into a co-production with *TwoFour54* that will try to influence content towards the official narrative of Emirati culture and identity. This set up institutionalises Fraser's point about the possibility of a diversified public sphere. She remarks that a majority ideology has preferential access to the public sphere and accordingly becomes strengthened. Her concept of counterpublics highlights the imbalance of power to access the public sphere and

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[269] See: Mostafa, 2010. *"City of Life" and Film Making in the UAE, [Recorded interview].*
[270] Nayla's films are for example produced with financial support of the Dubai based film production company Xpanse CGI. The latter is specialised on commercial services and digital animation. By co-producing entertainment films, such as produced by Nayla Al Khaja, such mainly commercial companies raise their own profiles and develop blueprints to showcase their technical/digital capacities towards customers. (See: Al-Khaja, 2010. *Being a Film Producer in the UAE, [Recorded interview].*)

express identity, otherness and diversity (counter-publics).[271] Even in a media landscape which is not monopolised by the government the problem of access to the public domain poses a dilemma. Curran observes that it can only be solved via public institutions, which ensure a fair share of accessibility to all. In his opinion public service broadcasting is the ideal form of community-controlled media, which can stage a "collective dialogue."[272]

In practice, the ideal of a community-controlled media is always difficult to implement fairly. In addition, various aspects, such as airing time, programme format etc. can marginalise some interest groups. To implement equal accessibility of the public media sphere is further complicated, because of different definitions of what accessibility should mean. Curran points out for example that the BBC statutes define accessibility as a form of delivery. Rather than understanding it as framework which enables any member of a community to enter the public dialogue, the media producers focus on the necessity to cater for all interest groups with their media.[273] If audiences and producers of media disagree on such vital definitions as accessibility and diversification in cases such as the public broadcast BBC, the UAE case seems even more frustrating.

Attempts to cater different audiences, such as Western and Arab expatriates, and Emiratis, may be made within the local media but it lies with the sole media institution to identify existing interest groups and determine their media demands. Under these conditions the "unity through diversity" ideal remains a top-down policy from a government regulated body and, as a result the endeavour can hardly produce attractive media which acts as a platform for diverse and perhaps controversial communities. In the case of Abu Dhabi the government considers itself as the mouthpiece of the interest group of Emiratis and since its aim is to strengthen the Emirati community various attempts are made to give Emiratis privileged access to the media discourse. Emirati media students and professionals are favoured with scholarships and training opportunities. But as self-appointed representative of the Emirati's interests the government only supports one version of Emiratiness, as the following example shows.

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[271] Fraser, 2007. *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World*.

[272] Curran, 1998. *Crisis of Public Communication: A Reappraisal*, p.191.

[273] Ibid. p.191.

During a discussion with a group of five scholarship students from the Abu Dhabi Film Commission in March and May 2010,[274] several pointed out that the school had demanded content that portrayed Abu Dhabi in a positive light. The conversation took place after they had just submitted their final video projects for the course. Reflecting on what had been two intense weeks of shooting and editing their short film projects, two students from Dubai complained that they had been discouraged by the course leaders from pursuing local stories. Instead the demand had been to choose topics specifically related to Abu Dhabi and perhaps be recruited by one of the local TV channels. One student in particular had faced restrictions in her choice for the film project. She had intended to present a short documentary about a female Emirati rapper from Al Ain city (in Abu Dhabi Emirate). After having interviewed the artist and having shot the short documentary, the school told her to cut out the soundtrack for the film, arguing that it showed an Emirati woman in a problematic light. Rola protested that: "the film was about a rapper, there has to be some of her music". As a result, the film was produced without a soundtrack, leaving the young film-maker frustrated about what she considered a grave implication to her creative work. As the discussion evolved, some of Rola's students mused that this was an isolated incident. However, the example of the following section will illustrate on a larger scope that the example of Rola is not an isolated case but symptomatic for the mainstreaming practices of the government.

3.1.4 The *Baynounah* failure

In 2007 Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, Abu Dhabi's crown prince, initiated a new TV channel called *Baynounah*, independent from the main government-owned media company. Owned by a leading member of the government this independence from the established ADMC promised innovation and the channel was feted as the first to be entirely produced by Emiratis. For this reason, many hoped that it would provide original content and receive strong local support. Since the project's inception in 2007, *Baynounah*'s

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[274] Al Jaberi, 2010. *Short Films for the Abu Dhabi Film Commission*, *[Recorded interview]*.

employees eagerly set about producing everything from documentaries to short films in anticipation of the launch. In 2009, the Abu Dhabi Film Commission (ADFC) even invited their students to contribute content to the new channel.[275]

The appearance of *Baynounah* personnel at the 2010 Abu Dhabi Film Festival, conducting interviews with the cast alongside both local and international journalists, suggested to Emiratis that its launch was imminent: rumours began circulating that *Baynounah* would be on air by the end of the year.[276] A mere month later, in November 2010, the channel was incorporated into the *Abu Dhabi Media Company*, which made the chance of any future diversification of the local industry seem far more remote. Four months later, in March 2011, the channel was dissolved and its employees were advised to seek work with the ADMC.[277] The production facilities were, of course, taken over by the Abu Dhabi media zone (*TwoFour54*),[278] and the ADMC (with its 1800 employees) relocated to the media zone shortly thereafter.[279]

Baynounah is a strong example of how local events have solidified the reputation of Abu Dhabi's media landscape. It was the emirate's first attempt to launch a channel specifically for Emiratis, produced by Emiratis. As such it was envisioned as a direct competitor to Dubai's most 'local' channel *Sama Dubai (Dubai Sky)*, which specifically targets Emiratis. It seems astonishing that Sheikh Mohammed initiated the channel as a separate venture given that he owns the ADMC. After all, the English daily newspaper *The National*, a direct competitor to Dubai's *Gulf News*, was launched under the roof of the ADMC. Perhaps he did not trust the ADMC to be innovative enough to develop a new media style; or he intended to establish his public profile as a leading media tycoon of the UAE. In his role as crown prince of Abu Dhabi and leader of the armed forces, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed has established a reputation of being more visible in the public sphere than his brother, the president of the UAE. He initiated various programmes and business ventures throughout the emirate of Abu Dhabi, thus enjoying a reputation of being particularly

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[275] Students from a Master Class in 2009/10 were encouraged to produce short documentations about Abu Dhabi for the new local channel *Baynounah*. (See: ibid.)

[276] Several film producers in contact with *Baynounah* had heard statements to this effect. Both a potential employee, as well as a former employee stated as much in 2011.

[277] See: Staff-Writer, 2010. *Baynounah TV Placed under Abu Dhabi Media Company*.

[278] See: Ibid.

[279] See: TwoFour54, 2011. *Media Business Partners*.

active.[280] Establishing a new TV channel could be seen as more than a statement of entrepreneurship and public image. A channel exclusively for Emiratis could become the fostering ground for a new elite of Emirati media professionals who, thankful to have been made part of a pioneer project, be particularly willing to translate Sheikh Mohammed's version of 'good media'. Whatever the motives, the announcement of a new media company was perceived by Emiratis as a sign of Abu Dhabi's media landscape gaining dynamism.

By establishing a specifically Emirati channel, Sheikh Mohammed demonstrated that he is not only aware of the need for a media catering the country's minority of UAE citizens, but that he also sees himself as a figurehead for this community. Even the name of the channel suggests Emirati identity: the name *Baynounah* can be associated with a poem by Sheikh Zayed praising an area in the Western Region of the emirate for its beautiful landscape.[281] Overall *Baynounah* can be understood as the attempt to launch a channel which represented the government's version of Emirati identity, but what it represented was *TwoFour54*'s true purpose: to centralise media production. The reactions of research participants to the latest developments of the Abu Dhabi media landscape and the case of *Baynounah* demonstrate the problems associated with government's monopolisation of media.

Aliya, a young film maker from Dubai, has founded her own media production company in Dubai and taken advantage of the new opportunities for media professionals in Abu Dhabi. In 2009, she applied for one of the scholarships at the ADFC and was recruited during her course to join *Baynounah* until its closure. Over time she became more and more frustrated with working for government institutions. She reported that when the channel was prematurely closed in spring 2011, the staff was told that financial reasons had led to the closure. However, none of the ex-employees believed that money had been the

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[280] Due to health problems, the UAE president and ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed appears almost as a remote figure of authority, while his brother, the crown prince is constantly in the public eye. Before the succession of Sheikh Khalifa in 2004, Sheikh Mohammed was even rumoured to become next in line of succession in the possible event of Khalifa's abdication. In 2001 J.E. Peterson described the family relations which make such a scenario possible, mainly due to Mohammed's mother, who was the most influential wife of Mohammed's father, Sheikh Zayed. It is telling for Sheikh Mohammeds profile and ambition that even though Sheikh Zayed's third son, he was considered a possible ruler at the time. (See: Peterson, 2001. *The Nature of Succession in the Gulf,* p.14f.)

[281] "Ali", 2010. *On the Meaning of Baynounah and Living Here Past Retirement.*

problem. Aliya was incredulous about this obviously false pretence, saying that "we saw the director every day, not working and having so much money… This is Abu Dhabi, how come there is no money?"[282] Aliya viewed the closure was the failure of a political project. She explained: "I thought they wanted to make something different, but now it's same-old same-old."[283] She did not directly criticize the channel owner, Sheikh Mohammed, as the one ultimately responsible, although 'they' can only mean the decision makers behind the project. For Aliya, the main source of frustration was the channel management she dealt with directly and who had deprived her of an opportunity to develop her skills.[284]

In the following weeks the ex-employees from *Baynounah* had interviews with different sections of the government media company, but no further information was given, nor was the closure reported in any of the local newspapers. In a personal interview Noura Al Kaabi, a member of the board of *TwoFour54*, evaded the question of the channel's closure by merely referring to higher powers.[285] The lack of media transparency nourishes rumours amongst the communities affected by such changes. *Baynounah* exemplifies how unofficial sources of information quickly become the only ones available. It also demonstrates how mistrust of government entities characterises the media landscape, as this was not an isolated incident. Since the bureaucratic decisions are never officially explained (in the news for example), those on the lower levels revert to their own conclusions. In 2010, the news reported that the chairman of ADMC, Mohamed Khalaf Al Mazrouei, had resigned from his post to become a cultural consultant for the Abu Dhabi Authority of Culture and Heritage (which he is also a chairman of).[286] Though he was replaced by another member of his extended family, ADMC staff and freelancers wondered as to the reason behind such a decision.

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[282] Aliya, 2011. *About Baynounah*, [Interview].

[283] Ibid.

[284] When I met Aliya six months later, in October 2011, she had found new employment with ADMC. She stated however that she considered this employment merely a means to support her own company and acquire the necessary financial means to shoot her own film projects. She said she had lost interest in contributing her ideas to a media company which would dictate content and produce unattractive media. I wondered at the time whether the government had not given away the chance to use the young film producers they had recruited from the Film Academy o promote their own agenda. As it turned out, Aliya was certainly not the only media professional who became disillusionised with the government's media industry and rather focussed on her independent career.

[285] Al Kaabi, 2011. *Twofour54 and Film Production in Abu Dhabi*, [Interview].

[286] See: Flanagan, 2010. *New Chairman for Admc as Company Reshuffles Board*.

While some staff members declared that "he didn't care about the channel", and that "it was his decision", other media professionals saw the act as a clear downsizing combined with a political move to appease the influential Mazrouei family.[287] In lieu of any explanations, employees tend to see a management reorganization as a political move by a member of an influential Emirati family. A similar change involving expatriate managers however is most likely to be attributed to corruption. In a discussion with two film producers from Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the two women (who had just met) quickly came to talk about the board reshuffles underway in Abu Dhabi media companies. Both accused the film festivals and *TwoFour54* of having corrupt directors. "They are just here for their pensions", one stated, "They just want to show-off."[288] Another local film producer stated during a different meeting that she was not at all confident that films could be freely produced with *Imagenation*, saying that "no filmmaker would want to work with them, they are so corrupt."[289]

Shortly afterwards an article was published that exposed the corruption of *Imagenation*, the subsidiary film production company of ADMC. The writer, a Dubai-based British journalist, verbalised what many film-makers had already feared and suspected was the case with the company's latest production: "Djinn". The film is the second Emirati feature film and was hailed as a milestone on the road towards a local film infrastructure. *Imagenation* had already recruited the Emirati director Nawaf Janahi for their first local production "Sheashadow" (released 2011) in 2010. The film was promoted as a show case of *Imagenation*'s vision to promote and nourish young local talents. Nawaf Janahi had won the "Emirates Short Film Competition" at the Abu Dhabi Film Festival in 2009 and *Imagenation* consequently offered to produce his first feature film.[290] The film "Djinn" followed shortly after, showing the determination and swiftness with which *Imagenation* was implementing its goals. While the film was advertised as a local production with local staff and a local story, the journalist claimed that this was a farce. The crew had only limited

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[287] Makki, 2011. *The UAE Media Landscape, [Telephone interview].*

[288] Ibid.

[289] In the beginning of 2011 rumours circulated about a series of corruption, not only in *Imagenation*, but also in *TwoFour54*, and of course ADMC. (Makki, 2011. *The UAE Media Landscape*, and Aliya, 2011. *About Baynounah*, *[Interview].*)

[290] *Imagenation* presents Nawaf Janahi as an example for their support of Emirati young talents, as featured on their homepage: ADMC, 2011. *Imagenation Abu Dhabi: Director's Interview*.

local staff and actors;[291] speaking parts had been unfairly given to relatives of staff members. Instead of opening doors for local talent, *Imagenation* created jobs for its own staff.[292] While the mere existence of such an article was a novelty, the content did not surprise media professionals but instead confirmed what they had already believed, known, or suspected. The case shows how the atmosphere of rumours cannot be broken by singular attempts to publicly discuss what is going on behind the self-marketing and dispel the rumours. On the contrary, singular scandals only make unconfirmed rumours the more trustworthy.[293]

As a result the one-stop-shop plan of the Abu Dhabi media zone is already suspect. The outlined corporation with global media producers and training programmes of local talents can lead to unintended consequences in the long run. The company may foster young talents from UAE universities who will have a different perspective on the company's politics and eventually push for change. As for the present what seems like a big step towards the development of local media production is struggling to reconcile its interests in opening but at the same time controlling media production. While in Dubai the exclusiveness of the media zones over time influenced the local media towards more exchange with the global media, the pre-conditions in Abu Dhabi already have the image of de-diversifying the media landscape and going backwards from pseudo-privatisation to government monopolisation of the media. How this monopoly creates its image as globally up-to-date local TV is illustrated by a review of the channels in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

3.1.5 Local TV with global profile: a comparison between Abu Dhabi's and Dubai's channels

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[291] Makki, 2011. *The UAE Media Landscape*, and Newbould, 2011. *Djinn Beset by Djinn?*

[292] A Dubai-based journalist unraveled the behind-the-scene story of "Djinn" after talking to several crew members, uncovering corruption and false claims largely differing from the promoted image. (See: ibid.)

[293] Shortly after, the Film Commission was announced to be re-shuffled. Since the reshuffling of directors boards are never justified, neither to press nor staff, involved staff and observers cannot but come to the conclusion that corruption is the reason.

The difficulty of being both globally significant and locally relevant is exemplified by the development of the *Abu Dhabi TV* Channel (ADTV). After the Iraq invasion of 2003, the channel changed direction and transformed into an entertainment channel. It was no longer in the role of cutting edge news-provider, but focused on national news while steering clear of any politically sensitive issues. After its brief but spectacular career as a global news channel in 2003, *Abu Dhabi TV* abandoned its name and political character and became *Abu Dhabi Al Oula* ("Abu Dhabi 1", although still referred to as *Abu Dhabi TV* or ADTV by many). If the aim was to simply focus on a national media identity, the near-constant reinvention of ADTV ever since is a testament of the challenges Abu Dhabi has faced in creating one.

Once again Dubai's different strategy has been the more successful of the two: all seven channels of Dubai's broadcasting company, *Dubai Media Incorporated* (DMI),[294] are broadcast to the wider Gulf Region and cater to a multilingual and multiethnic audience. The Arabic news and programme channel *Dubai TV* targeting a transnational Arab audience, is complemented by the entertainment channel *Sama Dubai*, focussing especially the Gulf Region. It features the heritage programmes sponsored by the crown prince of Dubai, dramas in the local dialect, as well as new media content featuring Emiratis. The English language channel *Dubai One* combines both programmes and news for English speaking expatriates in the UAE, while the other four channels cater specific interests such as sport (*Dubai Sports*, *Dubai Racing*, *Dubai Sports 2*) and religion (*Nour Dubai*).[295] While this array of specialised channels, on the one hand, pushed DMI's more local aspect into a niche (*Sama Dubai*), it has also allowed them to promote the city across all its channels. DMI is itself outspoken about this intention: the website's homepage proclaims that the corporation's mission is to promote "the UAE and Dubai in particular, reflecting its success on all levels to the world." [296]

DMI have also utilised what are perhaps the most obvious promotion tools: channel-specific advertisements often called 'stings'. Compressed into maximal thirty seconds, such

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[294] *Dubai Media Incorporated* (DMI) also publishes popular daily newspapers: *Al-ᶜImārāt al-Yawm (The Emirates today),* which launched in 2005 and known for its outspokenness; and *Al Bayān*, one of the oldest newspapers in the UAE.

[295] *Dubai Sports* (launched in 1998) and *Dubai Sports 2* (launched in February 2010) cover all forms of sport. *Dubai Racing* focuses on horse, camel, car racing and falconry; *Nour Dubai* (Dubai's Light) was formerly a radio broadcast on religious topics and went on air as a satellite channel in 2008..

[296] Staff-Reporter, 2010. *Dubai TV – About Us.*

'stings' gain their power from their briefness and rapidity.[297] In the case of DMI channels, the 'stings' often present Dubai as a modern urban society completely reconciled with its Arab Bedouin culture. But although the narrative presented in the 'stings' corresponds to that of the narrative presented in other forms of media, the 'stings' have not all been received well by management – or viewers.

The revamped version of *Dubai TV* (premiered in 2004) featured a high-tech urban metropolis peopled by pearl fishers and horse-mounted Bedouins. In one such sting, a Bedouin and his steed are shown jumping over some of the city's tallest buildings. According to the head of design, audiences' reactions were mixed, and those who complained often did not offer any specific reasons for their dissatisfaction. Yet their omissions are important in themselves: the fact that viewers complained at all demonstrates how representative they deemed such advertisements to be of their culture and people. Their complaints against this new style show a sense of protectiveness towards the official identity ideology, which should remain unaltered as a cherished heritage. Despite this, DMI decided to go ahead with the sting because they were less preoccupied with their responsibility of representation than with remaining commercially in vogue. The designer recalled that executives had approved the project with the words "Yes, this is TV, it's fine to do this."[298]

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[297] (See: Allen, 2004. *Modes of Television: Introduction to Part Three*, p.163.)

[298] Sidani, 2010. *UAE Media: Design and Content Development, [Recorded interview].*

While the Dubai media was more focused on the commercial aspect from the very start, leading to a more diversified range of programmes, *Abu Dhabi TV*, as the channel of the capital, has struggled to find its media identity as the mouthpiece of the nation. Shortly after the *Emirati Media Incorporated* (EMI) became the pseudo-private *Abu Dhabi Media Company* (ADMC) in 2007, the company revamped its existing channels and introduced new ones in an effort to emerge from their neighbour's shadow. The family-oriented channel *Abu Dhabi Al Oula*, re-launched in 2008,[300] features locally-produced American style talk and game shows. Its sister channel, *Abu Dhabi Al Emarat* (launched in 2000), was re-launched in 2009 with new programmes targeted at younger audiences.[301] The youngest of Abu Dhabi's channels is *Abu Dhabi Drama* (launched in 2010), a 24/7 broadcasting service for Arabic series, as well as dubbed dramas without commercial breaks.[302] Yet ADMC's biggest

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[299] Sama Dubai, 2009. *"Channel Stings" [screen-shots].*

[300] *Abu Dhabi Al Oula*, 2008.

[301] The channel aims to "capture the imagination and ambition of UAE nationals and Arab viewers across the region through its diverse and rich program offering" with local heritage shows and documentaries, as well as talk shows and series.

[302] Its content is not original but consists of repetitions of popular series thus specially targeting fans of the genre. Since it is free to air (globally receivable via NileSat), it has potential of becoming popular as a niche-channel.

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successes are both one of the oldest Abu Dhabi channels and a latest addition. The sports channel *Abu Dhabi Al Riyadiya* (launched in 1996) has established itself on a regional basis by acquiring exclusive rights for sporting events from the Gulf and detailed coverage of the Saudi football Professional League.[303] The latest asset for ADMC was the company's joint venture with the *National Geographic Society* (launched in 2009), which has finally given Middle Eastern viewers an Arabic language version of an incredibly popular and much-loved channel.[304] These developments are telling for Abu Dhabi's attempt to join the arena of popular media. Especially the newly found assets in sports and entertainment are procedures to attract mass audiences in a transnational level. In this context, the heritage TV channel acts as a reminiscence of the original local ideology of the channel.

Securing business with such major global players established Abu Dhabi as a worthy competitor to Dubai, but while the former built an impressive infrastructure, the latter was busy building a global image. On the level of urban identity, Dubai was especially eager to develop its global image as a modern metropolis, distinguishable from others by having everything they had, but bigger, quicker, and with more modern versions: the largest racetracks, tallest buildings, largest shopping malls all can be found in this emirate and are all collectively part of this aim to distinguish its self. Abu Dhabi has often been described retrospectively as more conservative and cautious of globalising itself than Dubai.[305] Whereas the capital had frequently betrayed concern that locals would 'misrepresent' their culture to the outside world, Dubai had (despite a number of complaints) no qualms about marketing their own character. Abu Dhabi on the other hand is still in the process of finding its media image. The constant changes and re-launches have jeopardised its branding potential, recognisability.

The problem has never been more apparent than when ADTV changed its logo in 2009 as part of yet another re-launch of the ADMC. Whereas every DMI channel has its own

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[303] *Abu Dhabi Al Riyadiya* was originally launched in 1996. Its sister channel *Abu Dhabi Al Riyadiya* 2 airs repetitions of live broadcasts. (See: Staff-Reporter, 2012. *Abu Dhabi Al Riyadiya*.)

[304] While most programmes are still dubbed, future plans are to produce programmes for National Geographic in Arabic using production facilities in Abu Dhabi. This step is in line with the establishment of Abu Dhabi Media Zone which also hosts an office for CNN (established in 2009.) Co-producions with these two global media players signify a huge step on the way to establish the emirate as a centre for international media in competition to Dubai. (See: Staff-Reporter, 2008. *Cnn to Broadcast from Abu Dhabi.*)

[305] See i.e. Elsheshtawy, 2008. *Cities of Sand and Fog: Abu Dhabi's Global Ambitions*.

logo in order to demonstrate the distinctiveness of each, the ADMC decided that theirs would all share a common symbol, but each in its own colour. Not long before the re-launch, ADTV had updated its falcon logo, but when the new version of the channel made its debut in 2009, the falcon had completely disappeared: ADTV's utterly unique emblem (a falcon) had been replaced by a uniform diamond. The unification of design across the channels aptly reflects the politics of the Abu Dhabi media landscape, which is developing a centralised media under the umbrella of *TwoFour54*. Feedback however confirms that brands draw their strength from established stereotypes as interpretive material, such as the symbols of a Bedouin heritage. While even a pearl would have symbolised the official national ideology and thus the local industry, a diamond is just a generic icon in the Emirates. The new logo is as disconnected to the region as its predecessor was deemed characteristic of it.[306] The abandonment of such an Emirate-specific symbol is significant for the experimental and unstable policies of Abu Dhabi's TV industry. With several re-launches the channel tries to be neutral, but loses in character.

It is inadvisable for a brand's logo to be tampered with too much since doing that often leads it not to be instantly recognisable.[307] This applies even more to a logo under which a company (or in this case the TV channel) has gained a reputation. Accordingly both students and media professionals disapproved of the new logo, stating that the falcon had been more representative of their culture. Their reactions show how naturalised symbols of the official identity are among Emiratis. Deducing, however, that Emiratis are hence in tune with everything the government ideology wishes Emirati identity to be would be hasty. DMI has maintained a stronger brand by avoiding alterations of their existing brands throughout their re-launch in 2008. This is evidenced by their retention of *Sama Dubai* logo: despite modernising the channel in various other ways, the corporation did not want to dispose of so distinctive an image.[308] Its calligraphic typography and stylised desert horizon make it the

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[306] The falcon is an instantly recognisable symbol of local culture, thanks mainly to the Bedouin sport of falcon hunting. Sheikh Zayed himself is frequently pictured participating in said sport, often with the falcon on his forearm (see chapter 1 on Sheikh Zayed). Tellingly, it appears that *Dubai Racing* recycled this concept, as the channel's 2008 insignia does not feature a car or a motorbike, but a horse.

[307] See Fan, 2006. *Branding the Nation: What Is Being Branded?* p.8 and chapter 2.2.2 on branding.

[308] See: Staff-Reporter, 2012. *Sama Dubai*.

most picturesque amongst all the Emirati channels. It also serves to visually connect the channel to the region.[309]

On the whole Abu Dhabi television channels are still struggling to compete with Dubai. Both DMI and ADMC promote their media productions as distinguishably Emirati yet globally compatible and competitive. They deliver "the national story"[310] while at the same time being "committed to create a new Emirati media generation."[311] But while DMI has always been focussed on the emirate of Dubai, ADMC currently struggles to be both: the voice of the unified UAE and the promoter of the new brand of Abu Dhabi. *Dubai Sports* for example aims to be "a monument media in line with the title of the city of Dubai, the capital of the sport in the Middle East, [...] always working to promote the good reputation of Dubai and the United Arab Emirates as a country which can host perfect international sporting events due to its sophisticated equipment and qualified administrative staff and stable security."[312] Since its re-launch in 2008 Abu Dhabi sports channel (*Abu Dhabi Al Riyadiya*) goes one step further, proclaiming its aim to position "Abu Dhabi as the world capital of sports",[313] which is in line with recent endeavours of the Abu Dhabi government to profile the emirate as a stage for international sporting events such as the Formula One. Similar to

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[309] Similarly the brand of DMI itself, simply "*Dubai Media Incorporated*" written in Arab calligraphy, has not changed over the last decade. Not so ADMC, which had introduced itself as a new brand when transformed into a shareholding company in 2007: three overlapping three-dimensional squares, representing empty television screens. Whilst this certainly seems suitable for a television channel, the company's title was written in English: once again, although there may be valid reasons for choosing such a neutral image, not using the nation's own language on a national media advertisement seems an oversight. ADMC's most recent reinvention seems to provide striking visual evidence that the company had swiftly realised their previous mistake. In 2011 ADMC was changed to *Abu Dhabi Media* (ADM). (See: WAM, 2011. *Abu Dhabi Media Reveals New Brand Identity.*) Their new logo features the company's name in Arabic calligraphy, startlingly similar to DMI's own calligraphic logo. For the remainder of this thesis events and interviews before the re-branding in 2011 will refer to ADMC rather than ADM.

[310] *The National* used this phrase in its self description in 2009. Interestingly the phrase has been changed by the end of 2011 into "the story of the Middle East as seen through the region's eyes." (See: Staff-Reporter, 2011. *The National: About Us.*)

[311] Sama Dubai shows its specific concern for Emirati nationals in the published description of DMI, in which it says: "DMI is committed to create a new Emirati media generation able to depict, portray and demonstrate the image of Dubai and the UAE, thereby contributing to the formulation of a new media concept." (Staff-Reporter, 2012. *Dubai Media Incorporated - a Lasting Commitment to Excellence.*)

[312] Staff-Reporter, 2010. *Dubai Sports: Agenda of the Channel*. The agenda has since been by the end of 2011: the detailed descriptions of the mission of each DMI channel has been replaced by a shorter generic mission statement and links to the channels' homepages with new, no longer governmental, URLs. (See: Staff-Reporter, 2012. *Dubai Sports*.)

[313] Staff-Reporter, 2009. *Abu Dhabi Media Company: About Us*.

the establishment of the media zones in both emirates the pattern in media development seems to be that Dubai is more on the cutting edge of developments with Abu Dhabi trying to benefit and learn from its experiences. Overall, creating new channels and re-launching their brands does not suffice to establish a media identity. The production of convincing content however poses a problem due to restrictions imposed by the UAE media law. The dimensions of its influence will be discussed in the following section.

3.2 Modifying forms of censorship

The last valid version of the law on publications and publishing goes back to 1980.[314] After an expansion in 1982, another proposed amendment was made in 2009, but has not been ratified as to date. How the media law practically controls the UAE media is the subject of the first part of this section. As per the law, the government does not allow any criticism of the ruling elite, including grievances of people living in the Emirates, which might lead to a public dialogue which could question or criticise the government. The National Media Council (NMC), as the government institution which enforces the media law, induces journalists and media producers to exercise self censorship, a practice strongly relying on individual agents and their understandings of what should be in the media. But with internet access and international satellite TV, banning imported media and censoring local content cannot prevent unpleasant topics from emerging in public discussion. Furthermore, a restrictive media does not support the country's image as a modern media hub. How the local media tries to avoid losing credibility as a provider of information is discussed in the second part of the current section.

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[314] The Publications and Publishing Law No. 5 for 1972 regulating printing and circulation of media which was at that time supervised by the *Ministry of Information and Tourism*.[314] Two years later however the supervising ministry was renamed to Ministry of Information & Culture and the publishing law amended in 1976. (See: Mühlböck, 1988. *Die Entwicklung Der Massenmedien Am Arabischen Golf*, p.126.) The latest proposal for amendment attracted a lot of attention in 2009, all through 2010 but nothing has happened as yet (see for example enthusiastic article by local news on the new proposal: Staff-Reporter, 2009. *UAE National Media Council Welcomes All Debates on Draft Media Law.*))

While the daily news tries to modify information in favour of the UAE government, the national TV shifts attention away from political topics altogether. The last part of this section will thus show how *Al Jazeera* as a global role model for a local channel was abandoned and made way for pure entertainment programmes. The more commercialised image of the UAE media (achieved by privatisation) seemingly justifies the entertainment channels, which import and copy best-selling shows from other countries and neglect more serious socio-political topics.[315]

3.2.1 A media law to 'protect' the country's integrity

The media law's list of banned content ranges from general journalistic ethical guidelines (such as libel, slander, violation of privacy, unbalanced coverage, etc.[316]) to matters of state security (publication of military communications, etc.[317]) and country-specific taboos. The latter includes slander; criticism of or "blemishing" the image of the local rulers. This rule extends to the presidents of any Arab, Islamic or friendly countries[318]. Anything deemed insulting to Islam, as well as any news which could cause "harm to the national currency",[319] are also forbidden. Particularly interesting for media dealing with cultural and social topics are articles 72 and 77. The former states that "no opinions shall be published if they violate public discipline and order, or involve insult to teenagers, or call for or circulate subversive ideas." This leaves a lot of room for interpretation. The latter is

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[315] Researchers such as Joe Khalil have explored the trend of the 21st century to import game shows of international appeal to the Arab world, programmes which are cheap in production, include audiences live interaction on screen, and do not have politically dimensions. (See: Khalil, 2004. *Blending In: Arab Television and the Search for Programming Ideas*.)

[316] UAE-Government, 1980. *Publications and Publishing Law*, Chapter 7, Articles, 80, 73, 79, 83, and 84.

[317] ibid., Chapter 7, Article 74.

[318] ibid., Chapter 7, Articles 70, 71, and 76.

[319] Ibid., Chapter 7, Article 81. The paragraph became specifically controversial for reporters dealing with the economic crisis, especially in Dubai starting in 2009, since its general wording makes it easy for companies to prohibit any news on local economic grievances and journalists unsure of how far it may be permitted to report on the local situation.

formulated in the same broad-brush way stating that "no article defaming Arabs and their civilisation and heritage shall be published".

While the publishing law is mostly open to interpretation, every case automatically goes to court, and the penalties range from fines and publication 'impoundment'[320] to its closure and/or imprisonment of the offending employee for a minimum of a month.[321] In the majority of cases imprisonment is avoided by the payment of a fine, but editors and journalists are aware that should a complaint be made, legal proceedings will swiftly be initiated against them. Given that a foreigner's stay in the UAE is dependent on his/her employment, expatriates could potentially endanger their residency in the country even if they were to win such a case.[322] The first recourse in cases of false information, slander, and related offences is to demand that the newspaper print a correction or a retraction. If the paper declines to do so, the editor or editor-in-chief faces imprisonment for a minimum of six months and/ or a fine of 1000-10,000 AED.[323] The potential prosecution of journalists is the most frequently criticised aspect of the media law, but strangely (and fortunately) this is not all that regular an occurrence.

A recent legal fracas was sparked by the Dubai daily *Al-ʿImārāt al-Yawm*'s 2006 allegations of horse doping at the Warsan Stables, whose owners promptly sued. Unfortunately for the defendant, this meant that the paper was taken to court in 2007 by the rulers of Abu Dhabi; regrettably for the petitioners, the publication belongs to Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al Maktoum. The protraction of the proceedings suggests that they may have been accompanied by a diplomatic quarrel: although the court's verdict had already been reported by *Reporters Sans Frontières* in 2008, the sentence was not executed until 2009.[324] The editor-in-chief, Sami Al Riyami, and the CEO of

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[320] Similarly to the impounding of vehicles, any publication in the Emirates deemed to contain non-compliant content may have all its offending issues confiscated.

[321] UAE-Government, 1980. *Publications and Publishing Law*, Chapter 7, Articles 86 ff.

[322] It is necessary to remember that the law is not limited to visual media but extends to publications. When the law was first imposed it mainly affected those individuals who wished to publish content: anything deemed subversive by the publishing institutions (some private but mostly government-owned) never made it to press.

[323] UAE-Government, 1980. *Publications and Publishing Law*, Chapter 4, article 42.

[324] The suit was filed on January 2007 and only decided in November 2008; a lot of misinformation and rumours evolved around the suspension of the daily newspaper (part of Dubai Holding) at the time. One report mentioned that the CEO, Abdul Latif Al Sayegh, said in an interview with Arabian Business in 2008 that he was

the Arab Media Group, Abdul Latif Al Sayegh, were each fined 20,000 AED (almost 3,500 GBP) and the paper was closed for twenty days, after which it continued as normal.[325] Despite international indignation the CEO of *Al-ʿImārāt al-Yawm* did not challenge the court ruling, but the incident promoted the topic of journalistic freedom in Emirati public discourse. The revised media law draft of 2008, which revokes the incarceration of journalists as a potential punishment, has to date not been passed.[326] Whether the government intends to pass the law at all is doubtful. The public proclamation of the draft is a political move to demonstrate the government's readiness to promote freedom of speech. The fact that media control remains in place is thus obscured by publicising and discussing the law in the local news and with the local Journalist Association.

As the regulatory body of the media, The National Media Council (NMC) deals with consumer complaints and distribution requests from producers: every professional has to obtain a licence before they may publish original content or even distribute imported material.[327] What specific content the publisher or distributor then decides to circulate is left his decision. . When, for example, the *Sunday Times* published a picture of Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum sinking into the Gulf in 2010 (as a satirical take on Dubai's financial misery), the paper's distributor decided not to circulate the issue. Foreign cinematic films have to be approved by the NMC before they can be shown in any local cinema, which allows members of the council to edit them before screening. Films to be shown on television are, however, censored by the broadcasting editors themselves, generally by cutting any scenes of a sexual nature.

A spokesman from the NMC remarked that there is a striking misconception amongst media producers and journalists about how much protection their rights for personal expression afford them.[328] According to him, these professionals "don't explore all

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not aware of any such court decision. It took until 2009 until the fine and temporarily suspension was executed. (See: Rasheed, 2009. *Emarat Al Youm Suspended as of Today.* and Staff-Reporter, 2009. *UAE Suspends Newspaper over 'Horse Doping' Claims*.)

[325] See: Kawzally, 2009. *Royal Horses Stomp Newspaper in the UAE.*

[326] The anticipation triggered by the announcement of the new media law led to a temporarily public discussion of censorship (see for example: Mohammed, 2008. *UAE Editor's Views on Press Freedom*.) However since 2008-2009 the topic was pushed into the background of public attention again.

[327] Obtaining a media license requires the individual to formally agree to conform to the existing law.

[328] Hellyer, 2010. *Media Laws and Regulations and the Role of the Nmc*, *[Interview with notes].*

of their possibilities" and instead stick to what they consider 'safe' material.[329] The representative also suggested that there may have been another misunderstanding regarding the role of the Council itself: provided that they do not flagrantly flout the law, professionals could be assured that the Media Council are there to assist them should complaints arise. He gave the example of an *Al Khaleej Times* article in which the writer criticised the management of Al Ain Zoo:[330] a member of the ruling family with a managerial position at the zoo swiftly called the NMC and demanded action. The Council, however, informed the complainant that the article's claims were well-supported and therefore could not amount to libel. Consequently, no further action was taken against the writer or the publication.

The NMC is eager to promote itself as an institution that champions Emirati values and protects locals from material that would surely offend them. During our interview, the spokesman suggested there was content local citizens do not want to see on television, just as they consider certain behaviour and clothing unacceptable in public. He held "multicultural differences" responsible for the majority of NMC-imposed bans and repeatedly identified Western journalists as a cause of friction.[331] According to the NMS spokesman many journalists from the new daily newspaper *The National* were ignorant of the local culture and unwilling to respectfully adapt to Emirati sentiments. He mentioned the example of a publication that had advertised a holiday in Israel, which the UAE deems an illegitimate state. The NMC considered it outrageous for a local newspaper to promote travel there when Emirati citizens are forbidden from doing so: the Emirates even prohibit foreigners from entering the country if they have visited this state previously. Regardless of whether or not the advert was aimed at expatriates, the promotion was clearly at odds with the nation's political stance and, as far as the spokesman was concerned, with public ethos. The examples show how much the cultural backgrounds of the journalists can challenge the media content the government wishes to provide. As controlling body the NMC envisions itself as an educative institution which protects local culture. The spokesman of the NMC did not see himself as an agent of government ideology but a protector of 'the public'. His

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[329] Ibid.

[330] Ibid..

[331] These 'frictions' were attributed to their notions of liberal investigative journalism they tried to apply to the conservative media landscape of the UAE.

statements show his conviction that government and Emirati nationals shared one notion of 'good media', while foreign journalists could disrupt the social peace and had to be reprimanded accordingly.

3.2.2 An atmosphere of uncertainty and anticipatory compliance

There remains a considerable discrepancy between what is officially sanctioned and what is actually undertaken in the Emirates, which can both confuse and incense writers unfamiliar with local journalistic customs. The UAE's stance on Israel has proven particularly difficult to maintain in recent years thanks to Emirati eagerness to play host to international conventions and sporting events. Accordingly a considerable degree of lenience to act in conformity with the government's official stand towards Israel has been exercised: in 2003, Israeli representatives came to Dubai for the International Monetary Fund's annual meeting; in 2004, Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum declared that a school for Middle Eastern athletes would also accept Israeli students;[332] in October 2009, the *International Renewable Energy Agency* (IRENA)'s meeting in Abu Dhabi was attended by Israeli cabinet minister Uzi Landau (the first ever visit to the Emirates by an Israeli official). While even Landau made it quite clear that the UAE were contractually obliged to allow all the agency's members to participate,[333] allowing an Israeli into the country was an obvious concession on the nation's part. The Israeli flag had even made a very visible début appearance in Abu Dhabi at the convention – a fact which attracted international attention, but was not reported in any local news.

It is not difficult to understand why journalists may have thought better of reporting the IRENA incident. The law after all prohibits any new which would set a negative light on the government. Emirati leaders welcoming representatives of a nation they do not acknowledge would hardly have been received well by locals, make the government appear

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[332] See: Staff-Reporter, 2009. *UAE Denies Visa to Israeli Tennis Player*. and Staff-Reporter, 2003. *UAE Hoists Israeli Flag*.

[333] Kloosterman, 2010. *Israeli Minister Heads to Abu Dhabi Renewable Energy IRENA Meet*.

inconsistent, and hence would likely render the reporters liable for prosecution. The mere threat of legal action is therefore sufficient to limit the roles of news reporters to spokespeople of an official narrative. An excellent example of this is provided by the case of Shahar Peer, who was prevented from entering the Emirates when she tried to attend the *Women's Tennis Association* (WTA)'s Dubai Championships in 2009. The stunt was a clear violation of WTA rules and had great potential to ruin the Emirate's sporting aspirations. It was also incredibly hypocritical given the events of recent years: Sheikh Mohamed's announcement in 2004 had indicated that athletes were not the intended target of any political hostility. Despite the incoherence of the measure (not to mention the international outrage that accompanied it), local news reported the debacle, albeit in a fairly neutral manner.[334] The tone of the report however showed that that the news must, to some extent, have anticipated nationals to be supportive of the state's stern stance towards the Israeli sportswoman. To ensure this, the report was framed by a reference to recent events in Gaza.[335] Such so-called 'anticipatory compliance' demonstrates how the regime is able to steer both the media and public opinion in any direction they so desire.

The strategy has occasionally backfired: when this happens, the local rulers find themselves in an even more difficult predicament than the one that journalists face on a nearly daily basis. The most striking (and famous) example of this is the much disputed and torture case of Sheikh Issa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, whose violent attack on a Pakistani was filmed and leaked on the internet in 2010. While all the papers in the land claim to be committed to open reporting, they are almost all officially government-owned. Often by the ruling families themselves, as in the case of *Al-ʿImārāt al-Yawm* owned by the ruler of Dubai, or in the case of *The National* owned by Abu Dhabi's crown prince. Although criticism or defamation of the local rulers is illegal under Chapter 7 of the media law,[336] failing to mention an event which the nation was already well aware of would have made the entire ruling family seem at best hypocritical and at worst, supportive of Sheikh Issa's actions. The local media was thus able to exercise an unusual degree of journalistic freedom and report the atrocity, as not doing so would have been even more damaging. So, international

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[334] See: Gomes, 2009. *Dubai Clarifies on Israeli Player Shahar Peer Entry.* And Hicks, 2009. *Ayumi Replaces Shahar Peer.*

[335] Gomes, ibid. *Dubai Clarifies on Israeli Player Shahar Peer Entry.*

[336] UAE-Government, 1980. *Publications and Publishing Law*, Chapter 7, Article 70.

attention can act as a bargaining chip in journalists' negotiations of existing censorship. Overall, the media law and its application create an atmosphere of uncertainty as to what is permitted. Accordingly, it is the personal interpretation and interests of the media makers themselves which function as flexible regulators of media. It is this reliance on how individuals evaluate and negotiate potential conflicts that ultimately constitutes self-censorship. As these interpretations vary on both a cultural and an individual basis, the proportionately large number of foreign journalists has the potential to both create conflict and prompt pre-emptive obedience depending on what they have experienced of censorship in their own countries. The NMC member quoted previously remarked that the first generation of journalists who came to the UAE were from Egypt and Sudan and therefore had a far more established framework of self-censorship. He reiterated that his Al Ain Zoo article was permitted because the facts were correct and that in his opinion, these journalists had been too cautious to even research certain stories. According to the spokesman *The National* has quite the opposite problem: while its largely Western staff introduced a more commentary style of journalism, the new reporters had to be 'made aware' of what is acceptable to write as an employee of a UAE newspaper.[337] The NMC has worked closely with *The National* to date and even provides training for the paper's staff in order to 'sensitise' them to local customs – in other words, to give them lessons in self-censorship.

3.2.3 Deflecting public scandals

Practices of self-censorship in the UAE demonstrate the strength of what Bourdieu called a people's "sense of limits", or their naturalisation of social boundaries to the extent that these are perceived almost as physical divides: making the possibility of transgression seem almost fantastical.[338] The theorist observed that over time the arbitrary nature of

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[337] Hellyer, 2010. *Media Laws and Regulations and the Role of the Nmc, [Interview with notes].*

[338] Bourdieu, 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 89 and p. 164ff. Bourdieu differentiates between objective orders and internalised orders. The internalised or naturalised orders result in individuals feeling

social orders is obscured, so that the categories once established for specific purposes seem, in hindsight, 'real'. Bourdieu also differentiated between 'objective' and 'internalised' orders: while the former may be empirically demonstrated, the latter will always be experienced as 'real' no matter what the evidence to the contrary. Such a theory supports the belief of the NMC spokesman (whose interview was detailed in the previous section) that Arab journalists have in the past been unwilling to publish material that the Council would not censor anyway.

There are many professionals who, despite having what Bourdieu would call an 'objective' take on censorship, have unwittingly become its agents. An example of this was provided by the English editor-in-chief of *Gulf News*, a popular English-language newspaper. He described how the paper negotiated with official censorship on a daily basis by ringing up the NMC whenever news involved official people or topics related to the economy. Especially during the financial crisis, involving *Dubai World* in 2010,[339] *Gulf News* editors would insist on reporting, and therefore had to follow a diplomatic route in close negotiation with the NMC.[340] His decision makes perfect practical sense: rather than risk publishing an article which could unexpectedly earn him a lawsuit, the editor gives the NMC full disclosure before the stories even go to press. By allowing the Council to detect potentially incendiary material, he has removed his own legal responsibility to do so and has therefore limited his professional (and personal) liability. He has simultaneously empowered the NMC by making them directly responsible for content featured and, in doing so, invalidated his position as editor-in-chief. While he has clearly refused to internalise the framework of censorship, he has also sacrificed his autonomy – and made his own role redundant.

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unable to obtain a certain position in life, or play a certain role in society despite their objective chances to pursue their aspirations.

[339] The Dubai government-owned investment company *Dubai World* was at the centre of the real estate market crash in Dubai in 2009. It was involved in international investment projects since its foundation in 2006, and at the head of major constructions in Dubai, such as The Palm and the Atlantis Hotel. During the decline of the Dubai real estate market in 2009, the debts of *Dubai World* and its subsidiary construction company Nakheel made up a major proportion of the emirate's debts, which had to be bailed out by Abu Dhabi in 2010. (For a timeline of the debts scandal involving *Dubai World*, see for example: White, 2010. *Dubai World: Timeline of a Debt Crisis.*)

[340] Matthew, 2011. *Embracing Change Is Vital: Changing Face of Media in the UAE over 30 Years, [Conference proceeding].*

Bourdieu believed that societies naturalise their own orders and so struggle to identify certain cultural attitudes as anything other than natural. Similarly, Foucault's theory of 'problematisation' suggests that in order to effect social change, this process must essentially be reversed. By scrutinising phenomena that have never previously been a subject of analysis ('problematising' them), public discourse can affect change by merely promoting the notion that change is possible.[341] The ever shifting media landscape of the UAE presents the ideal conditions in this respect.

Banning imported media is not always possible and can lead to discussions of topics censored in the local media. In the UAE a major incident which attracted so much international attention that the government had to deal with it in the public media sphere was the aforementioned torture video case of Sheikh Issa bin Zayed Al Nahyan. When, in April 2009, ABC news published a video showing the half-brother of the ruler and a police officer in uniform torturing a former business partner, the UAE's censorship authority TRA blocked all websites showing the video. The image-damaging dispute between the US government and the government of the UAE which followed was not reported in the local news until the international pressure and attention had become so strong that any further attempts to censor the information became counterproductive. Despite the blocking of all *You Tube* videos including the names or keywords describing the people involved, the torture video was repeatedly uploaded under misleading names. The trial against Sheikh Issa, which the US state department had demanded from the UAE government, was mainly ignored in the local media, until its final phase between December 2009 and end of January 2010. The daily news repeated the evidence leading to the verdict, which was that the Sheikh had unknowingly been drugged by his accuser, Bassam Nabulsi, and tricked into committing the taped torture.[342] Sheikh Issa was released due to "diminished liability" and his former accuser accused in turn. As an answer to the expected international protests against the show trial, the UAE Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed made the pythonesque statement

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[341] In order for this evolution to occur, Foucault explained that people must firstly be sufficiently distanced from the phenomenon: "For a domain of action, a behaviour, to enter the field of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity." (Foucault, 1984. *Polemic, Politics, and Problematizations*, p.388.)

[342] See: Morris, 2009. *Issa Abuse Trial Draws to a Close.* And: Youssef, 2009. *Trial of Sheikh Issa Adjourns for Expert Testimony.*

that the "government will not interfere in any court ruling".[343]As ridiculous and scandalous as the affair seemed from an international perspective, the government's strategy was a classical public relations move: dealing with a wider known fact which cannot be ignored and trying to turn a damaged image around, making a point of the UAE government not yielding to US demands. If the overall aim is to promote an image of uncensored media, the strategy is certainly more likely to succeed than the banning and jamming tactic. The former UAE Minister of Information, Sheikh Abdullah, stated in 2001 that "governments can no longer control the dissemination of information to their citizens."[344] Aware of neither having direct force over public opinion, nor the means to ban and jam all information from global media, an article from January 2011 went further to the "attack is the best defence"-strategy. The article accused the American human rights organisation *Human Rights Watch* (HRW) of being inaccurate and exaggerating in its attacks against human rights, especially of migrant workers and journalists, in the UAE.[345]

While HRW had attacked the UAE's violation of international human rights at least since 2006, more attention has been given to the situation of UAE migrant workers since 2009. The Abu Dhabi *Saadiyat Island* project for a cultural district in collaboration with the *Louvre Paris* and the *Guggenheim New York* put the labour situation under a spotlight and added pressure on the UAE government as well as the involved museums agencies, not to allow the project to develop at costs of humane working conditions.[346] Whereas before HRW reports were only mentioned in the UAE when accusing other countries of violations, the international attention on the UAE case changed the coverage of HRW in the local news. After reporting HRW's concerns for the labourers in May 2009[347] and the UAE government's

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[343] Youssef, 2010. *Sheikh Issa Acquittal: Government 'Does Not Interfere' in Court Matters.* The final verdict did not change despite international pressure, as the local UAE news proudly reported: "The court held that two Lebanese-American brothers, Bassam and Ghassan Nabulsi, former business partners of Sheikh Issa, drugged him and taped the Sheikh as he abused Mohammed Shapoor, in an apparent effort to blackmail the Sheikh. [..]Sheikh Issa is suing the Nabulsis over damage to his reputation." (Youssef, 2010. *Sheikh Issa Verdict Will Stand.*)

[344] Staff-Reporter, 2001. *Editorial Independence, Licence.*

[345] See: Rasheed, 2011. *UAE's Writers, Journalists Slam HRW Report.*

[346] See for example the 80-page report published by *Human Rights Watch* (HRW) in May 2009, downloadable on the HRW homepage: Staff-Reporter, 2009. *"The Island of Happiness": Exploitation of Migrant Workers on Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi.*

[347] See: Absal, 2009. *Government Urged to Protect Rights of Workers.*

rejection of the report on the same day,[348] more and more articles appeared questioning directly or indirectly HRW's integrity and highlighting local concerns for human rights. An article entitled "Does HRW have a hidden agenda?"[349] was published alongside the accusations and rejections in May 2009. The following year HRW admitting that the UAE had undergone efforts to improve their human rights situation was published under the headline "UAE scores better on human rights issues",[350] along with an article entitled "HRW reports are subjective and selective". The articles, often written in a polemic defensive style, repeatedly make the UAE appear to be a victim of a smear campaign, with sentences such as "Yet again, Human Rights Watch goes after the UAE continuing its sweeping generalisations".[351]

3.2.4 A new style of journalism: reporting 'with an angle'

The examples above show how the government channels the process of problematising the status quo, which could ultimately challenge it, by controlling small changes in UAE journalism. This enables the government to promote the image of supporting open media while in reality keeping a firm grip over its main postulate: no criticism of the ruling elite or challenge of the legitimacy of the government. The example of *The National* newspaper demonstrates how this strategy is implemented – not only in cases of international scandals. In 2006 Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed announced the launch of Abu Dhabi's first locally published English newspaper, *The National*. A shift towards a more controversial media could be expected. Just as *Al Jazeera* had taken its crew from the BBC, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed hired professionals from such esteemed publications as *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. These hiring choices encouraged the belief that *The National* would be run differently from its main competitor, *Gulf News*, whose content (as aforementioned) was practically chosen by the government directly. Following in the footsteps of the most successful Arab media institution in the world invites comparisons: as

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[348] See for example: Staff-Reporter, 2009. *UAE Condemns HRW Report on Labour Exploitation*.

[349] Staff-Reporter, 2009. *Does HRW Have a Hidden Agenda?*

[350] Al Baik, 2010. *UAE Scores Better on Human Rights Issues*.

[351] Staff-Reporter, 2010. *HRW's Reports Are Subjective and Selective.*

the recently-established media zones demonstrated, the rulers are serious about expanding the industry, and compete with the Qatari media empire. The most important appointment was the editor-in-chief position, for which Sheikh Mohammed hired former *Daily Telegraph* editor Martin Newland, who was described by British colleagues as "press freedom pioneer."[352] The choice was a signal that this paper would not be just another government exercise in self-flattery. Foreign media praised the decision as "Making Waves in the Desert" by initiating a "cultural revolution."[353] An Emirati TV presenter described how he kept a watchful eye on *The National*:

> "I want to see how they see our issues, because they don't have many red lines – but we, as locals, we have them. We have to watch out too much. They [The National] can reach more people than us and more important people than us. Because -, I don't know - that's what I notice." [354]

The National indeed deviated from the existing style of 'mouthpiece reporting' and featured stories that would never have been included in other publications, particularly ones involving infant deaths. The paper frequently reports on cases of children who have died as a result of unwitting parental neglect[355] and, more shockingly, on newborn babies found abandoned in public places. It was the first time some of the more sordid aspects of Emirati society had made it into print. Nevertheless, what the quoted presenter called "red lines", meaning taboo topics, also exist for *The National.* The paper only seemingly reports on 'everything' by using the same journalistic style observed in the Sheikh Issa case. Its portrayal of the country aims to distract readers from its state-enforced omissions.

This practice towards government officials and general criticism of the government from the outside reaches to all executive parts of the government administration. The most

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[352] Greenslade, 2008. *Making Waves in the Desert.*

[353] Ibid.

[354] Al-Zaabi, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

[355] The report on children falling from high-rise buildings has become a familiar topic in *The National* since 2008. (See for example: Bradley, 2008. *Young Girl's Death after Falling from Balcony Blamed on 'Neglect'.* and linked articles, or a more recent discussion: Editorial, 2012. *Blame-Game Won't Protect Children.*)

demonstrable example of this was the case of British tourist Lee Bradley Brown, who mysteriously died while detained in Dubai police custody.[356] His example illustrates how the UAE media has moved away from its policy of "just the good news, please"[357] towards a media style which is equally unchallenging for any governmental institutions. The 'bad news' of a tourist dying in UAE police custody is not excluded but presented in a way which does not point a finger at the police. Instead the report highlights the immoral actions of the tourist, who violated public decency and religious values thus insinuating that he himself was the initiator of his predicament. The British press reported that an anonymous inmate claimed he had been beaten to death, and maintained that he had not been drinking. *The National* (like every other local media outlets) stuck to the official line that the drunken Brown had choked on his own vomit, thus turning the story into a warning to where a wanton life leads to.[358] A similar strategy is applied in other cases of negative stories. Even if, for example the daily newspapers report on such shocking incidents as the abandonment of newborn infants, the articles never attempt to examine *why* this was so common in the Emirates. The fact that hospitals will refuse to treat women in labour unless they are married is never even alluded to.[359]

The confluence of direct censorship, self-censorship and a specific journalistic style makes the observation of the NMC spokesman that journalists do not explore the possibilities the media law permits them appear cynical. Despite any perceived limitations the fear of unemployment or worse is very real. How dangerous it can be to voice an unwanted opinion has become eminent in 2010 when the Dubai blogger Ahmed Mansoor was arrested and detained for calling for election boycotts.[360]

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[356] Staff-Reporter, 2011. *Briton Dies in Dubai Police Custody.*

[357] Staff-Reporter, 2009. *Just the Good News, Please: New UAE Media Law Continues to Stifle Press*.

[358] See: Issa, 2011. *British Prisoners Reject Move from Police Cells.*

[359] See for example: Kakande, ibid. *Second Abandoned Baby Found in Three Days.* and related articles.

[360] See: Staff-Reporter, 2011. *UAE: Government Detains Human Rights Defender.* The official media reported the incident by merely quoting the Dubai head of police, thus avoiding to mention even the reason for Mansoor's arrest. (See: Issa, ibid. *Dubai Blogger and Activist Ahmed Mansour Arrested.*)

3.2.5 Distraction from socio-political topics through mass-entertainment

Looking at local UAE television, a de-politicising strategy can clearly be observed in the case of the nation's capital television, Abu Dhabi TV (ADTV). Established in 1969 as a news channel for the nation, it was revamped in 2001. Media researcher Jihad Fakhreddine argued that with the re-launch Abu Dhabi TV aimed to follow the profile of the Saudi-owned satellite channel which combined both political programmes and entertainment.[361] Whether this was the goal or not, the change is significant: Abu Dhabi TV with its characteristic Falcon Logo had become famous during the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, when even *Al Jazeera* quoted its live reports. The channel caused global excitement when it aired alleged tapes of a fugitive Saddam Hussein for example[362] or an interview with the Iraqi Minister of Information.[363] This profiling of ADTV was not only approved by the government but under direct supervision of then Minister of Information, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, who as head of the channel was working closely together with the reporters in the newsroom.[364] However, after the Iraq war the channel disappeared from international attention (unlike *Al Arabiya* and of course *Al Jazeera*) and focussed on entertainment programmes.

Fakhreddine argues that in order to compete, ADTV had to choose between news and entertainment. He explains that "experiences of the main US news networks demonstrate to us that one premium-quality main news programme could be an anchor programme in a premium-quality general entertainment TV channel."[365] The argument that ADTV saw itself forced to decide towards one or the other priority is not convincing. Even if ADTV had a phase of experimenting, the success of the news programme encouraged the continuation of this priority. Reporters who are still working for ADTV's newsroom looked back nostalgically to the time when their channel was a vanguard of live journalism and not having been given any explanation for the shift of priority, they assumed that diplomatic

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[361] Fakhreddine, 2004. *Balancing Act: UAE Satellite TV Channels between National and Pan-Arab Markets*.

[362] Staff-Reporter, 2003. *New Purported Saddam Tapes Aired.*

[363] Staff-Reporter, 2003. *'Saddam's Mouthpiece' Re-Emerges.*

[364] Al Zaabi, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

[365] Fakhreddine, 2004. *Balancing Act: UAE Satellite TV Channels between National and Pan-Arab Markets.*

reasons were behind the decision.[366] It is likely that the US foreign office did not approve of yet another Arab news channel (next to *Al Jazeera*) damaging the image of the US troops in Iraq and the UAE government would have complied with the wishes of its powerful ally.

Whatever the explanation, the channel changed its focus, inexplicably to the reporters. The move confirms the remark Hafez makes about Arab satellite channels: "They are allowed to be populist and market-oriented as long as they do not go too far and become a real danger for existing regimes. A channel like *Al Jazeera*, which is at the centre of many debates about Arab democracy, can still be closed down at the whim of its patron government."[367] Looking at the development of the UAE media landscape, the observation Hafez makes can be extended: the media is not only 'allowed' to be populist and market-oriented, but *encouraged* to do so. Since 2007 (the official re-launch being in 2008) the focus has been on family programmes, series, in-house produced talk shows and game shows in the style of American reality shows.[368] The pseudo-privatisation of the government-owned *Emirates Media Incorporated* (EMI) into the shareholding *Abu Dhabi Media Company* (ADMC) in 2007 sealed the image change from trying to be a global news provider to a global entertainment provider. On a business level the channel has reached out to global media players such as *National Geographic*, *Walt Disney*, and CNN to establish Arabic language channels in the emirate. All provide entertainment for trans-national audiences.

This opening of the media to international companies does not challenge the established patterns of control and censorship, but distracts from their existence. It is the proactive counterpart to restrictions, ensuring that media remains worthwhile, even though they are deprived of information-value. Making media a successful entertainment business leaves the government's image untarnished: after all, the government supports the local media to become an internationally-recognised entity. The media zones support this overall

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[366] One presenter for example said: "Everybody was watching Abu Dhabi TV. That time I was working there: I proudly say 'Yes, I used to work there! I was working there at that time!'" (Al Zaabi, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview]*.)

[367] Hafez, 2004. *Arab Satellite Broadcasting: An Alternative to Political Parties?*

[368] The image change to a programme-oriented channel already started in 2007 with the introduction of new reality shows and programmes, a new brand and a new executive director appointed in 2008 to execute the updated image. Being the main television channel of Abu Dhabi, the re-launch has deeply influenced the image of the whole Abu Dhabi television landscape. (See: Staff-Reporter, 2008. *About the Channel*.)

image of the UAE being aware of, and open to, its own 'globality'. Simultaneously, the localisation of popular media formats adds to a distinct Emirati identity. ADTV for example copied the game show "Who wants to become a millionaire" and launched two poetry competition shows ("Prince of poets" and "Poet of the million"). Especially the latter, which promotes poems in Bedouin dialects, directly refers to a local identity. Together with the channels' brands (stings), they ensure that the media does not dissolve in a mainstream of transnational entertainment businesses.

The strategy conceals the government's unwillingness to make the local media a platform for the national community. Instead, audiences become consumers of narratives produced for them by the media companies. This strategy is linked to a shift of audience notion, which the head of the programming department of ADMC marked by stating that "we don't speak of audience anymore, we are talking about viewers." As 'viewers' the UAE nationals become *receivers* of the government's notion of nationhood, culture, and what should be screened on TV. Which role the people acting on this screen play in this scenario will be examined in the following chapter through the experiences of Emirati media professionals. Their accounts demonstrate the scope of a controlling structure which goes beyond restriction to modelling individuals into agents of the government's idea of national media.

4. A screen for representation: Emirati TV presenters as symbols of national identity

In order to reconcile commercial and ideological interests, the government media cannot merely follow the examples of transnational satellite channels such as *mbc or Al Jazeera*. Within the national ideology, the media has to remain representative of the local identity. The need to provide local content was described by the head of the design department of DMI, who stated, "as local channels we are stuck in the identity issue, whereas the global satellite channels want to get out of it."[369] From the perspective of the content developers, this problem is tackled through the stings and visual branding of the channels, which draw from symbols of the collection of Bedouin identity images and symbols. But the strategy of the media goes beyond such images by trying to provide programmes of local interest with news and topics from within the country. Of equal importance to having the necessary design-teams capable of creating representations of the UAE, the channels rely on media professionals to function as agents of the national identity. These media professionals have to be fostered to ensure their loyalty to the government's media policy. The following chapter will explore how the national television is set up as a space for national identity and which roles the people interacting on screen take in this scenario. The perspective of Emiratis working for the local TV will illustrate how presenters and scriptwriters experience the media domain and their possibilities to develop within it. Their views on the industry they are working in confirm that the structures of control are more complex than mere censorship and de-politicisation would suggest. Behind the scenes of the local TV the constellation of people contributing to the media mirrors on a small scale how individual Emiratis can act in the public domain. The restrictions develop into patterns of interaction and perceptions on the community of media professionals they feel themselves belonging to. The interviewed people may reflect on mishaps, or find roles which give them a sense of personal achievement, but fail to overcome the roles they are forced into. Why they are unable to form sub-communities to challenge the existing

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[369] Sidani, 2010. *UAE Media: Design and Content Development, [Recorded interview]*.

structure from below is due to several factors. Part 4.1 will investigate how presenters envision their own roles in an industry which restricts individual expression to an elite entitled by the government. Their experiences indicate possible frictions between government control and the ambitions of media professionals. The working atmosphere in the channels deflects rising criticism mainly by disparaging the validity of individual opinions whilst simultaneously offering incentives for employees. The roles designed for media professionals can be perceived as attractive, especially for Emirati women, as the interviews will show. Becoming a reporter or presenter offers them an alternative role and level of visibility which can be perceived as a way of evading other social roles.

While, in some cases, the framework provided by the media industry delivers inspirations and opportunities, the restrictive structures have developed into a media industry that goes beyond a mere discouragement of individuals from developing their individual potentials. Part 4.2 will explore how in an attempt to make the media recognisably Emirati while still restricting content the TV channels have developed a structure which focuses merely on public visibility. In other words, the images use Emirati content while topics from Emirati society are oppressed. This does not only reduce individual presenters to mere tokens of local identity, but makes them representations of the official identity narrative. Especially the public visibility of women is central for the image of the nation as 'modern' and 'developed.' Thus the women have to contest juxtaposed notions of forms of public expression acceptable for them. The section will also argue that the representations of publics on the screen ultimately enforce a certain way of seeing and interpreting other forms of public social action. By entering the public domain, the individual inevitably will be perceived as representative and evaluated on the grounds of entitlement and plausibility of such representation. As a result the structure discourages people to appear and re-enact their personal opinions of identities on the platform of the media – a phenomenon which is at the same time criticised.

4.1 The role of 'Emirati presenter': sticking to the script

The following sections are based on interviews with presenters and reporters, mainly working for ADTV. They took place as one-to-one interviews as well as two focus groups. The presenters were freelancers who I met while monitoring their respective shows. The reporters were part of the news department of ADMC. While the presenters did not have a close connection to their fellow presenters, the reporters were a close-knit team who shared their office space and due to irregular working hours had developed close working relationships and sometimes friendships. Several reporters had been part of the team before the re-launch of ADTV towards entertainment. They remembered the time when the news department had been the centre of the channel's campus and activity with some nostalgia. The participants of the focus groups were six Emirati female scriptwriters, film editors and researchers of different age groups. Some had been employed by the channel for over a decade, whilst others were newcomers. During the focus groups we discussed their ambitions as media professionals. Taken together, the perspectives of the thirteen interviewees on the media industry illustrate from a micro level how the government implements its strategy of control and with what results.

Three aspects will be examined in this context. The first section will show how the existing media setup is justified through a set of values. These can function as ideological gatekeepers which prevent employees from challenging the limits of the media sphere. The previous chapter has demonstrated the strategy of de-politicising the local media. Accordingly, the TV channels are obliged to show the government and its representatives in the best possible light. Media professionals can experience this rule as being forced into a role of submission. Therefore it is important for the channels to circulate narratives which relate these limitations to accepted notions, thus deflecting possible criticism of the government. The lack of accountability of public figures towards the media will lead to the second aspect of this section. The ruling elite dictate the setting, style, and content of the media, thus dictating their 'public visibility'. To ensure this, media professionals are moulded into the role of mere supernumeraries. The training programmes for TV presenters foster this role and preserve the media space as a stage for people entitled to speak publicly. While many employees interpreted the lack of skills as an overall backwardness of the local media, the review will indicate that here is another form of indirect censorship: the denial of know-how and content. With all these restrictions the question arises what

attractions the media industry can hold for Emirati media professionals. The last section will show why female Emirati presenters found the roles they are forced to play in the media an attractive career option. Finding alternatives to genderised spaces is only one incentive offered to them. The examples will show that they feel part of the official national narrative of distinction and pioneer spirit.

4.1.1 A hierarchy of values legitimising the lack of media power

The following experience of an ADTV reporter exemplifies just how the channels lose in significance in this scenario and how this is perceived by reporters working for it. The reporter recalled CNN's live interview with the UAE's Minister of Economic Affairs, Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi. As the interview was to be aired from the premises of ADTV, the news section inquired whether she could use the occasion to grant them an interview too: their request was declined.[370] Although her refusal may have had purely practical reasons, such as a full schedule, the reporter perceived it as a sign of disinterest in being interviewed by the channel of her country and even of disrespect towards the local presenters. For the reporter the incident showed that the local media had no power, even over their own public figures. This seemed even more ironic since, in his own words, ADTV would be more than willing to edit the interview to Sheikha Lubna's advantage, unlike channels like CNN which would utilise even the silence of political figures to tarnish their reputation. He said that:

> "The other channels, Reuters, BBC, whatever, they will say the idea [of the event], and they will talk about everything and they will cover the event and say at last, 'We tried to [ask for] any comment, but the minister did not give us an answer.' –This is the difference [to our local channels]!"[371]

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[370] See: Al Zaabi, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

[371] Al Zaabi, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi Tv, [Recorded interview].*

The story told by the reporter illustrates that he is aware of the fact that the Emirati media has no public power and is not deemed a relevant public space even to local personalities. The media has no power to hold them accountable or induce any public figure to answer questions they do not wish. Officially this lack of accountability is justified and thus legitimised as culturally specific. A renowned Egyptian presenter and producer who works closely with the UAE government, describes the relationship between the local media and public figures rather differently:

> "Here in the Gulf we are very respectful of public personalities. Any public personality must embrace their audiences [sic] and the public, otherwise they shouldn't be on screen! However it is always difficult to find a balance, and sometimes sacrifices, whether in career or family, have to be made. I try to find a compromise. As a result of our Islamic culture we are not subject to as much invasion of privacy as many personalities in the West."[372]

The local opinion of media expressed here is that it does not have the right to demand information, and has to 'respect' public figures. Even those individuals (such as the ADMC employee discussed above) who think politicians should be compelled to address their public still believe that their privacy is paramount. While this may seem admirable in the wake of certain tabloids' recent missteps, it also means that lack of accountability of public figures can be thinly disguised as 'respect', especially when it is argued to be 'culturally-specific.' The presenter justified the lack of investigative journalism in the Emirates by distinguishing it from the sensationalist reporting of 'the West', implying that local media merely has higher ethical standards than those of Western paparazzi culture. In this way, people who act for an imagined public are legitimately de-publicised, which serves to obscure the origins of certain policies and set Emirati media's 'cultural' practices at the top of an imagined hierarchy.

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[372] Al Ruwaini, 2010. *"Media in the UAE" [Written interview].*

This hierarchy of values (cultural, religious, and hybrid) is not unchallenged. The aforementioned reporter, whose request for the interview was declined, did not perceive the limitations of the local media as cultural respect for public figures. For him it is important that media is relevant and popular with audiences. He describes how this can be achieved as follows:

"Before, the media was just [here] to say what the government wanted to say, now the media is not: it's about real media, it's about what really happens in the street. People can see it in the street and on the screen, really, really, without doing any changes (editing)."[373]

For the reporter "real" means an unedited transmission of happenings and people. This is contradicted by a supposedly respectful polishing of somebody's image on screen. For the channels we have seen that 'cultural acceptance' prevails over such opinions. 'Culturally-sanctioned' is what is sanctioned directly or indirectly by the government or whatever complies with the structures of media practice established over years and considered as safe. These vague notions are challenged by comparison to other media practices experienced by media employees in other channels, such as CNN in the case of the Emirati reporter. The argument of the Egyptian producer is designed to close any dispute on the subject by referring to the equally indistinct but unchallengeable notion of religious sentiments. Effectively the hierarchy of values prevents the phenomenon of problematisation from taking place: criticising the absence of a public discourse on accountability would mean to criticise an 'Islamic' identity.

To safeguard the legitimacy of censorship on a daily basis an ideological justification by agents of the government media does not suffice. Media employees could contest the restrictions and try to change ways of making media. From the perspective of media executives it is therefore important to ensure compliance to the government's ideal of national media: a stage for an elite of people who are officially entitled to speak. The

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[373] Al Zaabi, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

following examples illustrate how this exclusivity is complemented by a working environment which prevents media employees from becoming media personalities in their own right.

4.1.2 Presenters in a state of immaturity and dependence

To develop a public profile, a presenter not only needs professional qualifications but also relies on the cooperation of people she or he interviews or 'presents'. Both requirements are difficult to meet for a presenter in the UAE TV industry, where presenters agreed that the internal training courses were insufficient: A senior presenter in Abu Dhabi summarised the predicament with the remark: "we still don't have experience." He went on to explain that the two weeks training he was offered by the ADMC could not even prepare a graduate to read the news in standard Arabic.[374] Another presenter observed that there was no system in place to develop presenters' skills after this initial induction, and feedback was rarely – if ever – offered:

> "You don't watch the programmes of your colleagues, for example now my colleague is on screen and nobody watches her. How is one to know whether one made a mistake or not? How is my colleague now on screen to know whether for example this colour suits her? There is just no follow-up on these things, so with no follow up you just cannot know what you are doing right or wrong."[375]

The news presenter's observation implies that professionals experience the atmosphere on set as disinterested, which cannot possibly inspire either professional pride

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[374] Ali, 2010. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*
[375] Ahmed Essa, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

or what is colloquially known as a 'team spirit'. His comment suggests that in lieu of training from the channel's side the colleagues should support each other to enhance their shows. It is difficult to determine why this does not seem to happen. One reason could be that the reporters are simply too busy researching their own material to monitor others' performances.[376] Busy work schedules make sufficient training curricula even more important. Several presenters pointed out that the training centres in Dubai had promising curricula and Abu Dhabi already showed signs of following suit.[377] Yet neither emirate actively promoted strong media personalities who could attract a sizable fan base.[378] Rather than merely reporting or reading from a script such presenters would have to be charismatic and independent enough to become a brand in their own right (famous for their specific attire, style of speech, or the topics they address for example). One news presenter described the need for strong media personalities in the UAE by comparing the local landscape to that of Lebanon:

> "We don't have the idea of an industry to develop local presenters… We don't train them to become personalities, not like in Lebanon where they have real media personalities who are promoted by the TV industry, advertised etc…" [379]

This aspect is correlated with the lack of professional training: without capable staff it seems the local TV industry cannot boost them to become celebrities. A senior presenter in Abu Dhabi summarised the predicament with the remark: "we [the UAE media industry] still don't have experience."[380] Although he referred to the UAE media industry as whole, the argument can support a structure which disparages those working in TV, as the following example shows.

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[376] Al Hind, 2009. *Talk Shows on Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

[377] Several presenters believed the training in Dubai to be much better, a claim which might as well be deducted from the generally positive image of the channel in comparison with ADTV. (See: Al Ketbi, 2010. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV (Part 1), [Recorded interview].*)

[378] Ali, 2010. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

[379] See: Ahmed Essa, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

[380] See: Ibid.

The young Emirati presenter Fatima described how she had begun working on a weekly show with a team of four excluding herself, with equal responsibility for writing and organising the content. Yet she was not involved in production team meetings where the content of the next episode was decided. Additionally, though the last fifteen minutes of the show were originally supposed to be the audience's time to comment on what they had watched; this format was abandoned after only the second episode. From the third show onwards, the audience was no longer allowed to participate, and the discussion was left up to the expert teams alone. Fatima complained that her protests were not taken seriously. Instead, she was simply informed that the experts had more interesting things to say.[381]

The experiences show that presenters are more than subjected to a principle of so-called respect towards public figures. They are prevented from developing profiles as independent media personalities. Whether this marginalisation is intended or not, it effectively enforces the media status quo as a stage for a select group of people who are officially entitled to speak, or 'have something to say.' When a weekly society talk show from Abu Dhabi for example aired an episode on Sheikh Zayed, on the anniversary of his death, the only participants who were invited were members of the Executive Council and selected elders who had known Sheikh Zayed. These, it was supposed, would say positive things, and be authorised to give their opinions. Similar to self-censorship the exclusion of subjugated voices does not rely on fixed rules but perpetuates by praxis.

Through repetition the audience becomes accustomed to seeing presenters as mere visible frames of those 'people of significance' who are the only ones worthy of being heard in public. As such Fatima's experience is symptomatic of a top-down enforcement of entitlement and representation which prevents other individual expressions of self. One of the scholars who analyses forms of community representations in mass media is Ella Shohat, who understands the media as a symbolic battleground for delegations of representation.[382] She bases her observations on the semiotic principle of representation 'standing for' something or somebody else. In order to understand the complexity of the term it is necessary to highlight that the term 'representation' can describe different forms of public action. In one instance representation describes a person publicly speaking and acting on

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[381]Al Hind, 2009. *Talk Shows on Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*
[382]Shohat, 1996. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, p. 182-188.

behalf of a community, thus being delegated to re-enact their ideas, interests and even characteristics.[383]

Conflict arises with the power over delegating tools of mass communication and the entitlement of the media producers to appoint such representatives on behalf of others. In the case of Fatima's show, the script writers and producers of the programme delegated the role of 'speaking for' the audience present in the studio to the experts, thus silencing those studio guests who symbolically stand for the wider community of viewers. Fatima's indignation over this procedure shows the rejection of such an assumed authority as well as the inability to change it. The presenter, instead of representing the audience of a certain show, is thus utilised to represent a dominant elite and act as their mediator. More than anything else, this delegation of roles demonstrates that the function of such a media is not to stage public debates but represent and empower said elites of authorities.

4.1.3 Feeling part of the nation's pioneer-spirit

Despite such unattractive prospects, the reporters unanimously said they felt their jobs worthwhile and were confident that obstacles could be surpassed with enough personal engagement. A reporter from *Abu Dhabi Sports* describes her situation as follows:

> "I feel myself here, I love my job, I love *Abu Dhabi Sports*, this is my channel, you see, I chose it: I wanted to be the first lady in *Abu Dhabi Sports*. [..] I want to make a programme about ladies, local ladies in the UAE: ladies in sports. I planned to get it and I told my boss. Insha-Allah I will do that [programme] soon."[384]

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[383] Ibid. p.183.

[384] Al Ketbi, 2010. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV (Part 1), [Recorded interview].*

Her description says as much about her personal initiative in terms of content development as it does about the distinction she wants to make. As one of many reporters and presenters she sees a chance to distinguish herself by 'being the first. 'Significantly her description draws from the discourse of Emiratisation. The policy was launched in 2004 with the aim to raise the employment rate of UAE nationals. By 2008 the unemployment rate among UAE nationals was 13.8%.[385] To counter unemployment and raise the proportion of UAE nationals employed in the private sector, the government developed a variety of career programmes facilitated by the National Human Resource Development and Employment Authority (TANMIA).[386]

The Emiratisation campaign comes along with a notion of an Emirati generation who will have "top jobs", or as the popular slogan goes, becomes "future leaders".[387] The urgency with which the government tries to implement the Emiratisation campaign has led to various programmes for human resource development.[388] Their advertisement uses success stories of Emiratis who have become pioneers in their fields, and who are presented (on the government websites) as role models. On a micro-level the discourse is mirrored by the brands of the UAE, especially the Dubai brand, which boasts the tallest building, the biggest mall, the first metro in the Gulf etc. The rhetoric of motivation and success draws from superlatives and make Emirati locals the first, the best etc. Arguably in a young nation-state, there are more chances for members of the national community to be the first ever to

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[385] Statitistical yearbook 2009 employment table 3/49

[386] However, despite the government's best advertising efforts, the number of Emirati private sector workers is (as of 2011) still relatively low, causing a worried Minister of Labour to declare: "The overwhelming majority of UAE nationals are employed by the public sector… [but] the public sector is approaching employment saturation...Our priorities have less to do with dealing with the fallouts of the 2008-2010 global economic downturn and more to do with longstanding…labour and unemployment challenges." (Bladd, 2011. *UAE Mulls Wage Subsidies to Bolster Emirati Jobs.*) Observers see a main challenge in the benefits UAE nationals are legally entitled to by employers and which makes it more cost-effective for the private sector to employ foreigners. (See: ibid.)

[387] In October 2008 the UAE launched a human resource development programme for nationals called "Future Leaders Programme." Across all government sectors similar programmes are available and promoted as important step to empower Emiratis. (Staff-Reporter, 2012. *Press Release: UAE Government Leaders Programme Kickstarts 'Future Leaders' Programme.*)

[388] Tanmia, Tawteen, the Government Leaders Programme just to name a few. See also the Vision 2021 programme, which writes on its website "Ambitious and responsible Emiratis will successfully carve out their future, actively engaging in an evolving socio-economic environment, and drawing on their strong families and communities, moderate Islamic values, and deep-rooted heritage to build a vibrant and well-knit society." (e-Government, 2011. *2021 Vision: United in Responsibility*.)

achieve something. The narrative using this *topos* to create a pioneer spirit interprets individual achievements as achievements on behalf of the national community. In this context, the ambition of the quoted reporter is to become a role model and pioneer for the imagined community of Emirati women.

Whereas this particular presenter was confident she would become a role model, a group of long-serving staff looked back on their own careers and noticed they had in fact been pioneers. Among the six female employees there was a sense of pride of having been among the first Emirati women to start working in the media despite all obstacles.[390] According to them, it was Sheikh Zayed's support for women that broke the ideal of a 'mere housewife' and over time made any occupation, including the media, had become acceptable for women. Therefore more and more women chose to work in the media. For the participants of the focus group the obstacles they had to overcome in order to pursue their careers heightened their sense of pride in their achievements. One of the elder focus group participants was Muna, who had worked as a radio presenter, scriptwriter and editor for over ten years. She described how, for the duration of her first year working for the Abu Dhabi radio, her father asked her where she was going every day as she left the house to

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[389] Abu Dhabi TV, 2008. *"News presenters from the ADTV-News." [selection of screen-shots]*.
[390] Most of the focus group participants preferred not to be quoted by name. They were from different family backgrounds and aged between early 30s to later 40s. At the time of the interviews some were working as script-writers, others in Human Resources and the media-library. During the course of their careers, however, most of the women had changed positions and worked, for example, in the radio station or TV production.

signify his disapproval.[391] At the time (during the 1980s) her family had hoped she would become an engineer or doctor, which was considered a more prestigious choice than media. Muna describes how her father over time changed his mind:

"When people heard me [on the radio], and heard how educated I was and how I talked to [people who called into the show], they started to ask my father: 'Oh, we heard Muna, she said this,' or 'Muna said that.' All the people were saying 'she said this and it was not good', or 'she said this and it was good.' Over time, they started to believe in me. So my father changed his mind. He said: 'People are meeting me in the fish market and asking me about what you said,' and he started to listen to my programme. Slowly slowly [he change and] said: 'Why are you calling yourself Muna Al-D?' – My family name is Al-J, you see, Al-D is my middle name; so he said 'why don't you call yourself Al-J?' I said 'no, I won't, I took this name, end of the discussion: I'm Muna Al-D.' You see, he even wanted me to make the family name famous! That was around 1989. It was early for people to be so open-minded."[392]

Muna's story bears several significant aspects. It is a story of breaking boundaries through self-confidence and enthusiasm for her passion (media). She challenged the established belief that media is not a prestigious career and women especially should pursue other goals.[393] The dramaturgy of her narrative is telling for the construction of role models in this context. Her personal performance, according to her and her colleagues, has not only achieved self-fulfilment, but contributed to wider changes within her imagined community. Muna's story revisits the style the presenter from *Abu Dhabi Sports*, although retrospectively. What her young colleague was aspiring for has already been achieved by Muna. She convinced society and her father that she was not shaming but on the contrary

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[391] Anonymous, 2009. *Emirati Women in the Media*, *[Recorded focus group].*
[392] Ibid.
[393] What Muna's story conveys about the gendered space of media, which will be discussed in 4.2.

contributing to the 'good family name'. As such, her narrative exemplifies how the aforementioned 'pioneer spirit' is incorporated into the personal life stories. The government's narrative "From Rags to Riches" (see chapter 2) is used as interpretive material to create a personal profile. The rhetoric of the Emiratisation discourse invites such self-categorisations as role models and several presenters told similar stories of 'success despite all obstacles.'[394] While TV channels do not encourage individual representations of self, the individual presenters provide an array of 'faces' of the modern Emirati society. The following section will explore how this form of representation not only supports the government's national identity discourse in the media but also interacts with other spaces. It will show how the public visibility on screen influences the way visibility is perceived in other public spaces. Mediated images of people contextualise public action in a complex interpretive relation.

4.2 Just an image: The presenters as symbols of Emirati national identity

It is not surprising that in a media lacking meaningful content for the consumers, images and visual effects take on disproportionately large importance. Not only are the identity stings of the channels produced at a high level of technical finesse (see chapter 3) but the image of the people acting on screen is a central aspect of the programmes. A senior presenter lamented that most young Emirati presenters were pursuing fame rather than a serious career in journalism, saying that "they care about their beards, they care about their eyes: I don't care about these things, I care about what I have to *present* [content]."[395] The question is, what he *has* to present, or what he is allowed to say. The previous section has illustrated how presenters are utilised to represent the dominant elite and act as their mediators. More than anything this delegation of roles demonstrates that the function of such a media is not to stage public debates but represent and empower said elites of

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[394] The ADMC presenter Yasir related a similar story, describing his difficulties to convince his manager to become a reporter. He finally managed to get a chance and became a successful international reporter, active abroad and popular at home.

[395] Al Mansouri, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

authorities. As another Emirati presenter resignedly observed about the Abu Dhabi TV, "they only train you [in] what they want you to be…"[396]

The following sections will argue that what the channels 'want' the presenters to be deals with visual impersonations of the ruling elite who appear in public as brands and role models for the nationals. Therefore the interest in appearance on screen is more than an aesthetic consideration: Emirati presenters are sought after to symbolise nationhood to the nationals. The channels have to show cast the successful Emiratisation of the media sector. Accordingly, how many locals are working behind the scenes is not as important as the visual marketing of Emiratisation. Although employees may see TV broadcast as an opportunity to become role models, the 'roles' they can play are pre-prepared and pre-approved. The rulers' public images function as blueprints for the Emiratis who appear on screen. Accordingly, as the first two parts of this section will explore, becoming a presenter means to become a representation of national identity.

This role transforms individualistic expressions of self into one 'national self' but – as the first section will show – creates distinctions between different groups within Emirati publics. Simultaneously the unwritten guidelines of how to appear on screen allow different levels of self-expression depending on gender. The second section will show that the role can be perceived by women as a gateway to wider ranges of action. The Emirati employees quoted in the previous section already touched on the topic of 'empowering women'. Their experiences will show that becoming icons of the 'national self' leads to a problematisation of female public visibility, which they perceive as liberation. The third section will elaborate on the aspect of problematisation of public visibility. The dialogical relationship between mediated and real life experience will exemplify the potentials of media to influence genderised categories.

4.2.1 Women's visibility as nexus for class-distinctions

[396] Ibid.

The current media notion of appearing presentable requires presenters to visually represent the culture, primarily by wearing Emirati national dress. The Emirati presenters all remarked that the *sheela* (Emirati *hijab*) and *abaya* (women's gown) were essential for their self images.[397] Yet unlike their male colleagues, they were free to choose different styles of the *abaya* and variations of the Emirati *sheela*. While they could wear a typical Bahraini *abaya* design, the male presenters were actively encouraged to feature the particular Emirati *kandora* (male attire) and not, for instance, the Saudi style one. The media personality Marwan explained:

"If it's an Emirati show obviously they want someone who's gonna be dressed up in Emirati attire and showing people like, 'look this is what we wear and this is what we do' [...] It's a cultural identity thing and even in our Dubai TV they're asking us all to wear [it], when we dress up to represent our identity [...] They always tell us like 'Sheikh Mohammed is your role model of how you represent yourself when you dress up', and that's how they encourage us to wear [the *kandora*] as much as possible."[398]

Whereas young Emirati males like Marwan could privately choose to wear a baseball-cap with the *kandoora*, they felt obliged to follow the visual example of the rulers for their professional appearances. The wives of the rulers cannot become role models for appearance or style, since they are usually not visible in public. This lack of female fashion role models allows female presenters more flexibility to express individuality through attire. Simultaneously the gendered visibility of the ruling elite establishes differences, not only between men and women but the ruling elite and the majority of Emiratis. The only women of the ruling elite who are displayed in public are from the Al Maktoum family. The daughters of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid participate in international sporting events,

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[397]Anonymous, 2009. *Emirati Women in the Media*, [Recorded focus group].
[398]Parham, 2010. *Being an Emirati Presenter and DJ, [Recorded interview].*

such as the Olympics.[399] The wife of Sheikh Mohammed, Princess Haya, is the other exception. She continues her pre-marriage public life - in particular for the International Equestrian Federation. The other female members of the ruling elite do not appear in public. Significantly, they can have a 'public image', representing their role for the nation. The mother of the president, Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, has her own logo, similar to Sheikh Hamdan from Dubai, but without the element of personal display.

Image No. 4. 2: Sheikh Fatima's logo, "Mother of the Nation"[400]

As "Mother of the Emirates," her logo campaigns for women's causes such as higher education. While she is thus part of the public national discourse, she does not appear in public media. Whenever Sheikha Fatima attends public events, participants even have to switch off mobile phones to prevent them from taking pictures.[401] Her public activites, together with the invisibility of other sheikhas, establishes a class distinction: women from the ruling elite are only visible to select communities. Her husband, Sheikh Zayed, was famous for promoting women in all sectors, yet his wife does not assume the function of a visible role model. In the eyes of the interviewed students and presenters, this distinction was linked to her Bedouin background. Bedouin families were deemed more conservative and restrictive towards women. Several female students pointed out that their families

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[399] Gomes, 2008. *Shaikha Maitha Bound for Beijing Olympics.*

[400] UAE-Government, 2010. *"Mother of the Nation." In: Family Development Foundation: Mother of the Nation. [screen-shot].*

[401] A student from Zayed University complained she had no photos from her graduation ceremony due to Sheikha Fatima's presence.

would not allow them to work in front of a camera because they were 'Bedouin'.[402] Especially in Abu Dhabi, presenters considered the label 'Bedouin' with being more 'authentically local' than so-called 'mixed' families.[403] The ADMC presenter Fatima Al Ketbi described the different mindsets and gender restrictions through her own experience:

> "It's not easy for ladies to be on TV. For all families in the UAE it is not allowed [...] If you come to university, more and more ladies there want to become a presenter, but there are conditions [...] It [wasn't] easy for me [either], but because I'm the only daughter of my mother (just me, you know) it was easier for me. My mother is a little free, her family is a little bit like 'it's okay.' But my father, no! His family is Bedouin, so it's difficult. Until now for my family it's not allowed that they see me on TV, it's like they feel shy, or not proud. […] In Dubai this all is easier, because in Dubai [people are] more mixed, not pure local. It's like this: Bedouins can't change, because they're pure local – end of discussion: no change!"[404]

Fatima's story is significant in several ways: one aspect highlights that different tribes and families have different ways and views. These variations lead to frictions that children can use to their advantage. She is backed up by her mother who helps her convince her father to allow her to pursue her media career. Later in the interview Fatima described that several among her family members did not talk to her for some time when she became a presenter.[405] But apart from her personal achievement of having overcome the restrictions imposed by her father's family, Fatima's narrative is telling for the way different social categories are constructed in the UAE. Being a "pure local" is associated with distinct

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[402] See: Students, 2009. *UAE Media, Ramadan Series, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 1]*. Also all other Zayed University focus groups.

[403] This topic of ethnicity belongs to an important re-occurring discourse on nationhood and ethnicity which will be discussed in chapter 5 in the context of opposition to the government's media strategy.

[404] Al Ketbi, 2010. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV (Part 1), [Recorded interview]*.

[405] She said: "If I'm not working on TV, will I stay at home? I don't like that, TV is *me* and that's the end of it. My family, especially my brothers are not fine with that, some of my brothers didn't talk to me by God!" (Al Ketbi, 2010. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi Tv (Part 1), [Recorded interview]*.)

genderised notions of public behaviour - a behaviour for which the Sheikhas' absence from the public eye sets the example.

Notably, Sheikh Mohamed's wife, Princess Haya, is not an ethnically 'pure local', nor is his daughter Sheikha Maitha, who partook in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Sheikha Hind, the first wife of Sheikh Mohamed, is from the ruling Al Maktoum family, and neither she nor her daughters have public images or appearances. Since the rulers' legitimacy is linked to their Bedouin identities (discussed in chapter 1.3), an association with a Bedouin origin in turn translates to a higher status in society. In the context of an ethnicity-based notion of nationhood, being a Bedouin means, according to Fatima, to be a "pure" local. Based on this notion the invisibility of Sheikha Fatima is not a statement of hypocrisy on the side of Sheikh Zayed, the supporter of women, but a factor which strengthens the notion of 'otherness' between the ruling elite and the majority of UAE citizens. From the Abu Dhabi perspective this hierarchical distinction is also applied to the relationship of the emirate as a collective towards the emirate of Dubai. The latter is considered less 'pure', therefore less representative of the nation's idealised history of a Bedouin heritage.[406]

Dubai media employees in turn mentioned the 'Bedouin mindset' of Abu Dhabians as a barrier for progress. Aware that their televised representations of 'Emiratiness' were different, they appear on screen wearing variations of the traditional dress. The female presenters in particular felt free to experiment with personal taste and seasonal fashion. They thus contribute to what Shohat calls a "process of definition of the represented community and the individual self, which is inevitably part of the act of representation."[407] The presenters from Dubai have thus earned a reputation for their fashionable style.[408] Conscious that they must represent a certain image of Emirati women, especially younger presenters would reflect their own notion of contemporary Emirati women and team the

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[406] One of the students in the focus groups described what it meant to be a UAE national saying that "it comes with privileges. You can do whatever you want, because you're local, this is your country." (Students, 2009. *UAE Media, Ramadan Series, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 4]*.) Her distinction relates to different privileges between 'locals' and 'residents'. It shows how the hierarchy can be translated into all levels of society, from 'pure' local, over 'local' to expatriates, which are again distinguished by their residency statuses and countries of origin.

[407] Shohat, 1996. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, p.183.

[408] Several female employees from the ADMC focus group remarked on the style of the presenters from *Sama Dubai*, one saying that "all the female presenters wear the *hijab* in a fashionable way, which is very beautiful." (Anonymous, 2009. *Emirati Women in the Media, [Recorded focus group]*.).

abaya with skinny jeans and stilettos. These experiences show that contrary to the narrative of a homogenous Emirati society there are different notions of Emirati identity among different urban communities of the UAE. These are linked to ethnicity, which again is part of the constructed government narrative of a nation of Bedouin tribes.[409] The values associated with a Bedouin identity are enforced through genderised forms of representation. Interestingly, the support of women in public positions is upheld parallel to a system of values in which women do not appear in public. Effectively the coexistence of both frameworks enforces class-distinctions and different categories of an authentic Emirati national: the more 'Bedouin' and thus authentic, a family is believed to be, the less visible will female members of this family be in public. Fostering this hierarchical system of public visibility of women ensures that the government can appear as traditionally Bedouin and modern at the same time. The following section will explore how women are used as symbols of such a developed modern nation.

4.2.2 Female visibility as symbol of a 'developed' nation

As the government supports Emirati women in public positions, leading roles in the national media are occupied by women, like Nayla al Awadi, head of the channel *Dubai One* and member of the FNC, or Noura Al Kaabi, chairperson of *TwoFour54*. Not only do they appear on screen, but they even represent the media on an international management level. Although media employees attributed this feature to Sheikh Zayed's ideal, they are made part of the branding attributes of the channels (and as such the government narrative of identity): The support of women was a crucial part of constructing a national identity. Researchers such as Andrew Parker and Mary Russo have pointed out the general significance of the female body as a symbol for the nation, as the incorporation of domestic values the male political elite has to cherish and protect.[410] Alev Çinar analyses in her work

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[409] How the notion of an ethnic national community is challenged by those Emiratis who do not fit into the category will be illustrated by the discussion of 'mixed marriages' in chapter 5.2.3.

[410] They even stipulate that the nation (*qawm*) is imagined as feminine. (See: Parker, 1992. *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, p. 6.)

on nation-building in modern Turkey how the nation-state framed "the female body and women's public visibility as a strategic means [for the] project of modernization," thus using the role of women as a distinguishable symbol of the development of society.[411] Although Çinar's research admittedly evolved out of a different context, parallels to the UAE nation-building project are clear. She points out for example that the symbolic significance of female visibility in society is ultimately addressed towards a global community of (Western) nations.

The UAE government, eager to be accepted in the international arena of 'developed' nations, equally identified the role of women as an important factor by which the 'modernisation' of the nation can be measured. Government overviews of UAE society, tending to highlight the most developed aspects of the country, such as social welfare, education and health systems, and media, never fail to emphasise the importance of Emirati women.[412] Considering that international institutions like the UN assume the role of women in a society to be indicative for a country's development, such an assumption seems well founded.[413] For an image-conscious nation such as the UAE, a high Human Development Index is a further achievement. When the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) ranked the UAE 30th among 187 countries in 2011 Human Development Report, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi could proudly proclaim that "the UAE, through its wise policies, gave priority for consolidating the principle of people's participation, activating the relationship between citizens and authorities."[414] And just as the ADMC female employees attributed the improvement of women's status in society to the founding "father of the nation," the UAE Minister of Economy traced the nation's general human development back to Sheikh Zayed: "The UAE's wise leadership adopted an ambitious vision established by the late

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[411]Çinar, 2005. *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time*, p.59f.

[412] The website "UAE Interact", sponsored by the *National Media Council* for example opens its paragraph on women in the UAE by explaining that "the belief that women are entitled to take their place in society is grounded in the UAE Constitution." (See: Staff-Reporter, 2007. *Society.*)

[413] Sakiko Fukuda-Parr points out how since 1990 Human Development Reports by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have focussed on "people's political empowerment thus increasing attention to agency aspects of development." By applying the capability approach, gender analysis has become a major focus of attention. (See: Fukuda-Parr, 2003. *The Human Development Paradigm: Operationalizing Sen's Ideas on Capabilities,* p. 301).

[414] WAM, 2012. *Uae 30th Globally in the Human Development Index.*

Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, God bless his soul, who said, 'human kind is the base of any civilisation.'"[415]

In this scenario women play the role of symbolising the new spaces and identities constructed by the nation-state.[416] The disapproval shown by some Emirati families towards female presenters, the public domain as a sphere of action and visibility of women is problematised, thus contested. It is important for the nation-state to normalise this gendered notion in order to define and secure the spaces of action the government ideology ascribes to its citizens. Accordingly, the national media, aspiring to re-educate the nationals, promotes women in highly representative public roles. In the defined public domain of the national media the visibility and actions of the presenters can be ideally orchestrated in order to showcase what it means to be a UAE national. The presenters are sent to the spaces the government envisions the citizens to act in, hence preferably spaces of significance to the national identity: they are seen reporting from historical sites and heritage events, as well as at business functions, exhibitions, even in malls, as the new 'marketplace' for public interaction. And wherever they go, these symbols of the 'national self' are dressed in the official Emirati attire, thus explaining and teaching the viewers what an Emirati looks like and does. In this role, attire, habitus and language of the presenters acquire symbolic significance, as one student pointed out: "Wearing *abaya* comes with certain behaviour, because you are representing something."[417] Whilst Emiratis of either gender act out the national identity, the public visibility of men does not clash with any other framework defining social interaction. The female presenters however become the signifier of a contest between notions of self which are connected to gendered spaces and spheres. It is important to acknowledge in this context the constructed nature of multiple 'selves', which are embedded in different moral frameworks. They are enacted in the form of different, equally constructed, roles such as the role of a TV presenter or media personality.

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[415] Ibid.

[416] Çinar makes a similar observation in the case of the Turkish nation-building project, saying that women's bodies become the "effective tool by which the established boundaries of the public are challenged and unsettled." (See: Çinar, 2005. *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time*, p.57f.).

[417]Students, 2009. *UAE Media, Ramadan Series, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 3]*.

Depending on situation, space, and time, different concepts of self are prioritised and encouraged. Çinar points out that the ideological framework of nationalism "divides the world into the national self and its others."[418] Following this observation the problematisation of female visibility on screen can be understood as a conflict of 'selves.' The father, brother, or husband who disapproves of his female family members' wish to become a presenter does not have to reject the constructed national 'self' per se. When it comes to close family members, other 'selves' (such as the 'Bedouin self'), take priority – along with the gendered notion of a male public sphere. They equate female public visibility with a rejected aspiration for individual re-presentation or re-enactment of self. A number of female ADMC employees described how their fathers, initially disapproving, came to accept their daughters' decisions. Several described how they had navigated through family objections by obscuring their true career aspirations. One ADMC employee remembered that in order to study media and communications she had had to pretend that this was the only available course at the university as all the others were full.[419] Another recalled how she made her family believe she was merely taking a training course at ADMC and kept her first time on screen a secret. One described how she presented her family with the *fait accompli*:

> "I told them I was just taking a training course [in the channel] – what else could I do, I have to go step-by-step [...] Slowly slowly I got more freedom, and when I was on screen for the first time, nobody of my family knew: nobody saw me."[420]

They said that over time their families came to accept their careers, one even stating that her father meanwhile took pride in his daughter's skills in classical Arabic, the language of the media.[421] What these fathers just as well may have realised was that rather than attracting attention as an individual female, their daughters acted as representations of the

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[418] Çinar, 2005. *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time*, p.60.

[419] See: Anonymous, 2009. *Emirati Women in the Media*, [Recorded focus group].

[420] Ahmed Essa, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi Tv*, [Recorded interview].

[421] See: Anonymous, 2009. *Emirati Women in the Media*, [Recorded focus group].

nation. Because their images are circulated within the protective framework of nationhood, the scandal of their public visibility is defused.[422] In such cases the role as symbolic representation (rather than individual re-presentation) can help the process of normalisation and open possibilities to women who do not perform according to the moral frameworks imposed on them by their families.

One of the ADMC male employees was confident that female presenters were soon to be perceived not only as acceptable, but a normality: "It's part of the people: they are starting to observe this new thing, a woman, a local Emirati on TV. That's a good thing [because] I want to see *my* identity on TV."[423] His statement shows appreciation of the role constructed especially for women on screen as representation of the collective national identity. Although presenters merely act as the visual frame for an expert opinion, seeing them on screen is perceived by him as an important advance. Not only foreigners are visible in the media, but also Emirati locals of both gender. The following section will explore how these media representations correlate with other spaces in which female visibility becomes representative of an imagined collective.

4.2.3 The burden of representation and how it creates 'ways of seeing'

From the presenters' perspective many feel deprived from individual displays of their ideas towards their audience. The urge to be the master of their own shows, as expressed by presenters such as Fatima, reflects the other dimension of representation Shohat defines: the individual re-enactment or re-presentation of self.[424] In this meaning of representation the entitlement to perform has to be based on a mutual acceptance by the imagined community that as a society they are not homogenous, and furthermore that

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[422] Just as the nationalist ideology constructs a boundary between national self and others, Çinar observes that "women's bodies function as 'symbolic border guards' towards the drawing of these boundaries of difference, and their protection by the state." (See: Çinar, 2005. *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time*, p.60.)

[423] Al Zaabi, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

[424] Shohat, 1996. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, p. 183.

displays of individuality are worth circulation. While the delegated representative is assumed to speak for the community, the individual re-presenter steps out on the stage with a message of individuality which is appreciated. In contrast to this, on the screens of the UAE media, the combination of expert voices and choreographed representatives of Emirati identity creates a pattern of public visibility in which whatever happens on screen is representative of an imagined community.

The presenters are forced under what Shohat refers to as the burden of representation. Whoever appears on screen will be assessed on the basis of an 'ideal national', the prototypes of which are the rulers. This burden of representation is directly linked to both their direct physical visibility and enforced by their lack of individual expression. In contrast, a film maker or artist will stand behind his media product and be in the first instance scrutinised through his work. While the latter may feel the burden of re-presentation of Emirati identity and culture, the presenters on UAE TV are judged by their ability to enact the ideal. Yet this ideal only has male role models, the sheikhs, while female presenters have to impersonate a more abstract definition of Emirati womanhood. While male presenters can be evaluated by their ability to copy their male role models, the yardstick for the correct impersonation of female Emiratiness is negotiable. As seen in the previous section, this gives them a wider range of individuality in terms of dress style. In a way Emirati women with public profiles take the vacant places of public visibility left by the sheikhas. Yet unlike the rulers, they become role models who are not exempt from criticism.

Significantly, the topic of misrepresentation of the Emirati women was raised by women (female students as well as media employees), whereas their male peers displayed a more indifferent attitude towards the phenomenon. Several women highlighted the importance of wearing the *abaya* "in the right way."[425] This scrutiny of women by other women is indicative of what art critic John Berger coined as "ways of seeing."[426]

Berger analysed the ways art and advertisements visualise gender relations and enforce their acceptance as normalised social constellations through their mass circulation. Especially in advertisements, according to Berger, men take an active role and are 'seen' and

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[425]Students, 2009. *UAE Media, Ramadan Series, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 3].* and Ahmed Essa, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

[426] Berger, 1972. *Ways of Seeing*, p.46ff.

judged by the viewers through their 'acting'.[427] Women however are 'looked at' by the men and evaluated by them through their physical appearance. As a result, the viewers of the advertisements learn a certain 'way of seeing' women and men, which Berger phrases as "men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at."[428] Transferring Berger's observation to other media, it is necessary to remember that every genre features its own specific forms of consumption, which is furthermore connected to time and social sphere of circulation. The review (in chapter 3) of how television has lost credibility with Arab audiences demonstrates how 'ways of seeing' are subjected to contestation and change. In the case of the contemporary UAE, the style of the national television encourages a specific 'way of seeing' TV images and people as representations.

Why women are subjected to particular scrutiny by other women can be understood in the context of problematisation of female visibility. Berger's observations on European art signify a similar social discourse, which ascribes the public sphere of activity and consumption to men. Images visualise the attribution of activity to men by making the female body an object of their consumption: a person sees a picture in which men are scrutinising women.[429] This visualisation of gender roles educates viewers, both male and female, to scrutinise the female body. In the case of the UAE, female viewers are additionally accustomed to TV images being representative, not individualistic. Their way of seeing women's images on screen is therefore 'educated' in two ways: they scrutinise women as representations of female Emiratis and as objects of male consumption. Both perspectives are imagined but the assumption of how the 'other' will interpret and judge influences their own evaluation. Every imperfection of the representation affects the collective public image of Emirati women. Aware of the problematisation of female visibility, Emirati women have to guard the ways in which 'they' are consumed.

The fact that these ways of seeing are constantly problematised and related to different sub-communities has been illustrated earlier by the different ways fathers see their daughter on screen. Another example shows not only generational but genderised

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[427] Berger coined the phrase: "Men act and women appear." (ibid. p. 47.)
[428] Ibid. p. 47.
[429] Ibid. p.48.

ways of seeing can change. A reporter described his difficulty finding volunteers for street interviews as follows:

"If I say to people of my age 'okay, guys, I need people to interview' – and they are free by the ways, we are just hanging out in a coffee shop: they just run away. The older [generation] are ready to talk. Those who are more than 40 or 45 years old are like, 'go ahead, ask me anything.' I was so surprised how they are really ready [to make a statement in front of the camera], but young men: 'no *way*, gosh, we'll be on TV! Girls will see me on TV!"[430]

Different notions of public scrutiny are expressed in this example. The older men could draw their confidence from disinterest in TV publicness or in reverse see themselves as representative for the so esteemed generation of elders. It may be suggestive to remark that many oral history projects interview people from the Trucial States generation, so the aspect of normalisation of public attention is probable. Most significantly is their description in comparison to the younger men. The latter problematised their public visibility towards an imagined female audience. They have internalised women as 'active' media consumers who 'see' men. This reverse process reminds of Lacan's infamous mirror stage, which can be encapsulated as the realisation of somebody looking back whenever I look at somebody.

How this shift in awareness of the 'other' as consumer of the own body developed is connected to changing image worlds not only in the UAE. Images objectifying male bodies have become a global trend, which has led observers of popular culture to remark that in our age "men are also succumbing to the traditionally female preoccupation of looking good on the outside, too."[431] Phenomena like bulimia, plastic surgery previously gendered as 'typical female' have more and more become aspects of masculinity as well.

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[430] Al Zaabi, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*
[431] Day, 2008. *Depressed, Repressed, Objectified: Are Men the New Women?*

In the context of changing ways of seeing, another significant aspect of the quoted anecdote is the notion of representativeness. The men in the reporter's story do not see themselves as representative for 'Emirati men', but objectified masculinity. Unlike TV presenters who make a career of public visibility, they do not feel subjected to the framework of national representation. They reject mass consumption of their visibility and evade the camera. For presenters the notions of representation on screen on the other hand can merge with other spaces, such as the possibility to be recognised by viewers in public places. A young presenter from ADMC stated that despite being compelled to stick to a prescribed text, she appreciated the public visibility she had gained through her talk shows.[432]

Nevertheless she was anxious to restrict her public image to the official media discourse and explained: "I like it if I go to the mall and people recognise me and say they liked my show; the channel takes care that my picture is not on *You Tube*, because that would be bad."[433] Her statement illustrates that she is aware of different contexts of being 'looked at.' It also demonstrates what the aforementioned 'right way' of wearing *abaya* and *sheela* means for women: not only does the representation have to be 'right' but the image of the female has to be consumed in the 'right way.' For women it is particularly important to remain guarded by the interpretive framework provided by the channels.[434] Embedded in the orchestrated and defined discourse of TV production her image is legitimised. However within the realm of an alternative public domain, such as *You Tube*, her femininity might be consumed differently − by a different audience, for different purposes.[435] Being a TV presenter can therefore satisfy her desire for public performance, but "within limits," as

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[432] Al Hind, 2009. *Talk Shows on Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

[433] Al Hind, 2009. *Becoming a Presenter, [Recorded interview].*

[434] In the wider public sphere of the UAE the nation-state defines and regulates the 'citizen selves' of male and female Emiratis, legitimising them by the national ideology. In her research on the Turkish nation-state, Çinar observes a similar role assumed by the nation-state to rescue "the female/nation from adverse conditions, and brings it under its own guardianship, thereby acquiring a masculine mode of agency and power." (See: Çinar, 2005. *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time*, p.60.)

[435] Indeed You Tube clips from ADTV shows are scarce. It has to be noted that copy-righted material can be requested to be removed by the owner. In such cases, the website owners request removal of clips from the person who uploaded it, under threat of blocking the respective account. Although ADTV could enforce this form of control, it is more likely that the shows in question simply do not attract enough viewers who would upload them. On the other hand, more popular shows from ADTV were uploaded and quickly removed again, so the assumption of the female presenters is possible.

another female presenter said.[436] The 'national self', connected to specific spaces and mannerisms for all Emirati citizens, is enacted as a role, which does not eliminate other selves. The female presenter is consequently aware that she is also consumed as a gendered object. If in the public domain of national media female visibility, framed as representation, becomes normalised, other spaces can be reversely affected.

The burden of representation has repercussions for all who enter the media stage, not only the professionals. Any person who appears on screen is likely to be interpreted as representing or being representative for an imagined community. The religious expert for example obviously assumes the role of speaking for an imagined community of Muslims. Even a lay person, who might talk about a mundane issue will be 'seen' as representative for an imagined community of people with similar disorders. The interpretive framework of the TV has created a genre specific way of consuming the people entering it, which is different than for other media. On television, an individual's body inevitably becomes a representation. Whether the audience really sees it this way is neither here nor there, but internalising this notion is certainly intimidating for anybody, who considers herself or himself 'just a normal person' – with an opinion, but nothing representative to say or show. The wish to contribute, to be seen and heard gets into direct conflict with a notion of publicness, which can only be surpassed by anonymity or at least non-visibility.

People will, for example call into radio shows and television shows to complain or talk about personal issues. A weekly counselling show from Dubai for example thrives off people calling in to the presenter on screen and talking about their psychological problems.[437] However, it seems that the anonymity albeit the imagined audience mitigates the reluctance to enter the public sphere. Whilst callers into a radio or television show act on the basis that their identity is known to the producers of the programmes, their identities are unknown to the audience, their faces blacked out on screen and their voices

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[436] Anonymous, 2009. *Emirati Women in the Media*, *[Recorded focus group].*

[437] The weekly show, "*Lawn Ḥayātak*" *("Colours of Your Life"),* aired on Dubai TV, is hosted by psychologist and counsellor Dr. Ahmad Al Najar. During one hour, incoming calls from patients are answered by the psychologist who remains the only person on screen throughout the show. (See the profile of the show and past episodes on the Dubai TV website: Staff-Reporter, 2010. *Lawn Ḥayātak*.)

equipped with voice changers.[438] Such reluctance to visibly state opinions in public could ultimately be ascribed to a fear of rejection as an individual by an imagined audience. After all, as long as no visible image is connected to an opinion, it merely remains one statement among a discourse of comments. But if people appear on screen, they at least on a small level represent not only their individuality but a community, be it family, tribe, nationality or others. A purely individual opinion would be considered irrelevant and therefore inappropriate.

In the interpretative discourse of TV, the studio guests symbolically represent the larger community of viewers, ultimately imagined as 'the Emirati society'. On the UAE television this miniature image of society is mainly mute, leaving the talking and acting to people who are entitled to represent an opinion. It thus contextualises ways of seeing which are interrelated to other public spaces in which people are 'seen', 'watched' and 'looked at'. It would go too far to state that television educates people to assume a certain way of public behaviour but it can certainly enforce a notion which already exists. The case of women not being allowed to appear on screen illustrates that they were perceived as acting representative for 'the women' of their family. One male presenter even stated that families would fear their daughters' public visibility could shed a bad light on the image of the whole family.[439] This fear is in line with Middle Eastern social norms of representation and public behaviour which goes beyond the realm of media. Several presenters labelled the rules of representation which govern public spaces as typically Bedouin.[440] By entering public spaces 'private' individuals do not only become publicly visible and scrutinised, but assume the role of representing the communities they are supposed to belong to, such as their families.

These observations confirm the remarks made by Barbie Zelizer discussed in chapter 1 on the correlation between media and culture. She asserts that media creates categories

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[438] The weekly society show "Khutwa" *("Step")* on Abu Dhabi TV will be discussed in more detail in 6.3. For an overview of the show see: ADMC, 2011. *Barnāmij Ḫuṭwa ("Step" Talk Show)*.

[439] Ali, 2010. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

[440] Anthropological research in Bedouin communities supports this notion of cultural norms. Lila Abu Lughod, for example, describes what she calls the "politics of representation" among Bedouin families in Egypt. (See: Abu-Lughod, 1993. *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*, p.6f.) As shown previously, the representative roles of members of the ruling elite mirrors this notion: the women of 'pure' Bedouin heritage, such as Sheikh Fatima, only appear in semi-public spaces (such as an all female university), the media tries to prevent publicity of inappropriate behaviour of relatives to the rulers (Sheikh Issa case), and the other ruling family member appear only in public in their roles as representatives of their tribes.

which reflect the 'real' world and define categories. These media representations become in turn categories by which 'real' world phenomena are labelled. Thus the "image world" of media establishes and validates ways of perceiving and evaluating phenomena.[441] Rather than merely suggesting different roles of individuals, their mediated performances are confirmed as normative behaviour in public. In the case of the UAE media, the roles enacted by people appearing on screen are set up by the government as part of the national identity discourse it seeks to control. Especially the support and framing of female visibility in the public domain has demonstrated that presenters become agents of the government's brand of an open and modern nation (without entitlement to determine the content of their shows). This strategy is designed to distract from the lack of politically-critical information and leave national ideology untarnished: nationhood is not a topic of dispute or negotiation on screen, but becomes part of the brands of various entertainment channels.

The perspectives of Emirati presenters have illustrated how this strategy perpetuates and enforces itself from a micro-level through incorporation of employees into a media structure. By creating a media elite of UAE nationals who homogenously enact a defined role, the media tries to enforce its norm for leading a public dialogue. It is this normalised structure that poses the main challenge to media professionals who want to challenge the existing media sphere. Their endeavours rely on the approval of audiences which are influenced by certain ways of seeing – not only those of the local media. Whether the set up allocation of roles is accepted however remains to be examined. The following chapters will explore which aspects of the media strategy are criticised and how they are challenged by Emirati who both consume and produce media.

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[441] Zelizer, 1997. *Blurring Distinctions: Media, Culture, and Identity,* p.586.

5. The disrupted dialogue between the national media and Emirati audiences

In the present media landscape of satellite channels and internet access, the UAE media is juxtaposed between an educative media and a commercial entertainment provider. Through its media strategy the government tries to open the media domain to popular trends, make it commercially successful, and yet remain in control of its overall message. Obviously, this set up needs audience acceptance to succeed. UAE nationals are targeted as consumers of media – not partakers in a media discourse. By joining the trend of global entertainment channels the local media is subjected to a comparison between other commercialised formats. These provide mainstream entertainment for different fan groups without specifically targeting local communities and national sub-communities.[442] The UAE media tries to follow this trend through specialised sports channels, drama channels, or a newly launched Bollywood channel on ADTV.

The question whether national media can cater to the conglomerate of communities within one nation-state poses a general problem of how various sub-communities can contribute to a media sphere which is produced by an elite of media professionals. In lieu of organised interest groups, communities have to either adapt to the offer or find media catering for their needs elsewhere. This chapter examines the needs of Emirati nationals and shows that they have a different idea about what national media 'should' try to achieve in an age of seemingly unlimited choice: a domain to experience locality. It will show that people do not see local television as particularly local.

The first part (5.1) is mainly based on focus group discussions with Emirati students of media and communication. Their criticism of the local TV channels will show that their

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[442] Following the concept of 'communities of sentiment' reviewed in chapter 1 the term 'sub-communities' describes different communities of sentiment who form under the umbrella of the national community. Members of sub-communities feel connected through the notion of mutualness which does not necessarily have to have a political dimension: fans of sports, hobbies etc. can just as well be described by this term. The challenge for national media is to provide affirmative experiences to individuals assuring them that they are not only part of the national community but contribute to its diversity.

brands are not enough to qualify as 'national media' in the eyes of Emiratis who demand more in-depth relatable content. While the former is considered to be implemented more or less successfully, the latter is missing. By not succeeding in representing experience and stories from the daily lives of Emiratis, the local media merely becomes an unsuccessful copy of other channels. The criticism of the students revisits the question of relevance of national television in an age of commercialised mainstream entertainment. The lack of attraction of the UAE media is in dialogical relation to media usage and expectations of media, which are formed through the consumption of transnational programmes. Since the local media does not permit a creative dialogue between sub-communities (of the Emirati national community) and the government's media, the national television loses its potential to act as a symbolic focus point for the nationals.

The disappointment Emirati students feel towards their local media is often explained by Emiratis as a result of the high proportion of foreign media experts. The second part of this chapter (5.2) will explore how the media students explain their estrangement from the local media as a 'foreign conspiracy.' Their perspective on the media industry is that of a parallel discourse to their Emirati communities. Accordingly they are juxtaposed between an acceptance and a criticism of the official media. The usage of alternative media domains will show how these can be used to challenge the official media.

5.1 "Who watches TV anyway?" The loss of relevance for a national community

The first part of this section will illustrate what happens when local TV is not relevant or interesting to students. Their experience with and assessment of the role local TV given a seemingly unlimited choice will be discussed. The popular belief that 'TV is dead' will be tested through the opinions of the students. A recurring topic in the focus group discussions with students of media and communication was the identity of the channels and their programmes. The participants, mainly undergraduate students, were in discussion groups of 10 to 15. They were bound together by their shared interest in the media industry and

similar age, gender and nationality. By their mutual interest in and study of media they form what Appadurai calls a "community of sentiment".[443] His term describes a specific aspect of imagined communities, which form around the visual images of media. Individuals can identify with the image-worlds constructed on screen and form both intimacy and a feeling of belonging to the thus *imagined* community.[444] He writes that:

"[The] greatest force [of sentiments] is in their ability to ignite intimacy into political state and turn locality into a staging ground for identity, have become spread over vast and irregular spaces as groups move yet stay linked to one another through sophisticated media capabilities."[445]

For Appadurai the communities formed around concrete images beyond local restrictions and their dynamics are specific to the global media age. Communities of sentiment evolve around centralised constructed representations of people and individuals.[446] Hence, for members of audiences the encounters with such media images are a form of social interaction and reassurance of their personal sentiments. Communities of sentiment are conscious individual choices which are detached from the belonging to a national community.[447] Appadurai's concept is useful to describe the imagined media community of the interviewed students, since it distinguishes them from organised interest groups of fan bases. Though not yet fully-fledged media professionals, the students are more than mere media consumers: they create their own films, shows and designs for their class projects, thus interacting with media as a source of inspiration to relay and articulate their world view and opinions and share them among each other. Appadurai stipulates with regards to migratory audiences that:

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[443] Appadurai, 2005. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p.7.
[444] Ibid. p.41.
[445] Ibid.p.41.
[446] Ibid.p.44.
[447] Ibid.p.44 and p.198.

"The work of the imagination is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined, but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern."[448]

For the media producers and students this is applicable in a similar way. They feel part of a community of media makers which draws from the image-worlds of de-territorialised media to create their own versions of locality – and enter the mediated contest between those versions. With their specific perspective on the media, the research participants question the relevance of the local UAE media for the national community. In the second part of this section their practices of media consumption and criticism will challenge the homogeneity of a national audience aspired by the media set-up.

5.1.1 Local TV losing control over audiences of global media

Despite their specific shared interest in media the students did not consider themselves regular television viewers. The most used medium in their daily lives was the internet and *BlackBerry*, which they mainly attributed to their out-of-the-house routines.[449] Most students said they did not watch television on a regular basis, but rather watch selected programmes, or merely zapped through the channels for background entertainment. One student remarked: "I don't watch TV, or on holidays only. That is, because we study and come from 'uni' late, so I don't have time."[450] This style of media

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[448] Ibid. p.4.

[449] "We spend all our time on our laptop[s], and I have a television in my room, but I don't watch." (Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 3].*) Students from all focus groups named the internet and *BlackBerry* as prime sources for information and entertainment. The wide spread use of the business phone *BlackBerry* among students is directly connected to cheap offers by the national telecommunications providers *etisalat* and *du*, which have lead to a rapid rise of usage among non-business people. One student stated that *BlackBerry* was "not new, but good offers came from *etisalat*, so people use it now." (Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 5].*)

[450] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 1].*

consumption is symptomatic of the internet and smart phone era, which has challenged TV broadcasting just as mobile phones have the traditional land line.[451]

Nevertheless, there are certain occasions when citizens voluntarily submit to the structure TV imposes on their daily routines. These occasions are most obviously live events and reports, but in the case of the UAE students, it most significantly happens during the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan. When the rituals of media consumers change in compliance with the religious fasting schedule watching television becomes an integral part of social gatherings.[452] During that time students watch popular dramas and other family programmes, and while during the rest of the year most students would prefer the Arab satellite channels (such as mbc or *Showtime TV*),[453] local channels enjoyed a surge of popularity during Ramadan. In 2009 for instance all students appreciated the Emirati cartoons aired on *Sama Dubai* and appreciated the Kuwait series *"Umm al-Banāt"* ("Mother of the Girls") on *Abu Dhabi Al Oula*.[454] Although completely different genres the students could relate to both, saying about the cartoons: "They represent our society."[455] They mirror character and situations viewers identify with strongly enough to exclaim: "this is us!"[456]

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[451] Several experts have already prophesised the 'death' of television and accordingly TV broadcasters have widened their range of programmes to the internet with *iPlayer* for instance. (see for example an interview with Vinton Gray: Martin, 2007. *TV is Dying, Says Google Expert.*)

[452] Students described their usage of the TV changing during Ramadan as such: "I don't like TV at all, but for Ramadan" (Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 1].*) Others specified that only during Ramadan news and interesting shows were broadcasted (Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 4].*) One student said for example: " My parents open the television [in Ramadan], so you get encouraged." (Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 3].*) However other students stated even during Ramadan they perceived the television as a background entertainment and would watch specific series online.

[453] Students from all focus groups rated *mbc* and its sister channels *mbc2* as most popular. One student even claimed that she only watched Arabic channels at Ramadan. (See: Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 5].*)

[454] *"Umm al-Banāt"* ("Mother of the Girls") was named by students of all genders as very engaging and touching relevant topics in Gulf societies, such as favouritism of boys by their fathers, and how polygamy is trying women's patience. (Al-Ṭawīl, 2009. *Umm Al-Banāt (the Mother of the Girls).*)

[455] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 4].* As will be discussed in chapter 6, Emirati cartoons enjoy high popularity through the way they humorously picture different daily situations of Emirati society.

[456] Students, 2010. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 17].* The comment is related to the cartoon series *"Šaᶜabīyat al-kartōn"* which will be discussed in chapter 4.

This form of media consumption illustrates the challenge for a local media which aspires to be a point of reference for a national community. With people who can choose from an array of media and are free to choose when to consume media, the national media loses its power to structure nationals' daily lives through their national media and thus to create a uniformity of actions or, on a bigger scale, a world view or simultaneity. According to Anderson, simultaneity of shared experiences forms a strong link between members of an imagined community. His notion of Simultaneity is "steady", "anonymous", and structured by the homogeneous "clock-time" of the nation.[457] As a mechanical view on time, Anderson introduces the concept of a homogeneous "empty" time, which is the "temporal coincidence, measured by clock and calendar".[458] The imaginary and uniform nation-time is articulated, textualised, and represented via media. Using the example of the ritualised action of reading a daily newspaper, Anderson points out that such action creates the illusion of a "mass-ceremony" shared by members of the imagined community of newspaper readers.[459]

Anderson's idea of a homogeneous time of a nation has been criticised by scholars such as Homi Bhabha and Partha Chatterjee as not considering that real spaces of modern life consist of many temporalities, which makes time heterogeneous and "unevenly dense".[460] Certainly, a completely homogenous "clock-time" was never possible even before the satellite and internet era. Nevertheless the programme schedule of TV or radio could structure daily lives of nationals and induce imagined simultaneous actions according to a national hegemony of images. Nation's news, prayer times, programme structure into prime-time, family television, etc. are constructed to homogenise the actions of the national community and provide the viewers with a common basis for identification.[461]

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[457] Anderson, 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, p.26.

[458] Ibid.p.33.

[459] Ibid. p.33.

[460] Ibid. p.166.

[461] Allen and Hill describe how global satellite channels have scheduled their programming forms and scheduling strategies around different logics than the terrestrial broadcasting. Because they target a global audience they do not aim anymore to homogenise the hours of the day of their viewers. Thus they built their schedules around programming forms. In this way satellite channels create their own hegemony of time which contradicts that of the national television broadcast. (See: Allen, 2004. *Modes of Television: Introduction to Part Three*, p.163.)

Even if the citizens do not adhere to the national 'time' they can appreciate its existence as a point of reference and structure of time which they imagine they share with their fellow citizens. Some students deemed it important to have breaks for prayer times on their local television. While criticising *Abu Dhabi TV* for their absence they appreciated that *Dubai One*, the DMI's English language channel, displayed the prayer breaks. Presuming most English-speaking audiences to be non-Muslim, they interpreted this as a symbolic statement that in the locality of UAE, a pulse of Emirati identity permeates other non-local spheres. [462] Since citizens are no longer dependant on the time schedule of the national TV in order to be informed and entertained, the hegemony of time and space which the nation-state is eager to construct loses its power. However, as the prayer time example shows a homogenising 'clock time' can be seen as a characteristic of the imagined community of nationals. This leaves the media no choice but to explore alternative means to attract the viewers.

The Abu Dhabi channel tries to attract its audiences by importing successful show formats, such as game shows and reality TV. *Abu Dhabi Al Oula* even tried to capitalise on the popularity of Turkish series, which when first aired were a big success in the Emirates. Accordingly, the channel bought all the airing rights only to discover that viewers lost interest. A marketing employee from ADMC marketing division describes how user feedback was acquired in focus groups, and how different age groups were asked to give criticism. She summarises the overall impression:

"Most of [the participants] said: 'We don't believe in the Abu Dhabi TV anymore because they underestimated us, they don't treat us well, they don't respect our mentalities.' [...] About Turkish series [the participants]

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[462] The students considered it important for the identity of their country and its religion to have this symbol of their religion even on channels which called themselves international: "Even if it is an international channel, it's from Abu Dhabi and it's an Islamic state ... hmmm ... emirate, so like for example if I travel abroad and I look for *Abu Dhabi TV*, I might want to know the prayer times for example, like even though the prayer time would defer, if I was in another country, but I'd still like to count the difference and maybe to rely on that." (Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 3].*) Another student from the same focus group remarked: "What we see on *Abu Dhabi TV* is not representing our culture, it is not representing our tradition, it's not even our religion: the prayer time [for example], they're not bringing the prayer time [...] They say that it's an international channel."

said: 'We can see one romantic stories from one time to another but it doesn't mean that we need to see the romantic stories for more than six months.' [...] They [rather] like to watch real show[s], talk show[s] where it's more close to the real world, their world."[463]

Her evaluation is confirmed by the criticism expressed by the students. Although they eagerly watched shows with stories they could relate to yet did not find these on local channels outside Ramadan, the range of programmes on the local channels did not entice them. One student explains that she usually watches English television only: "I only watch Arabic channels in Ramadan, because they are not interesting normally."[464] Female students in particular state they prefer the "Oprah Winfrey Show" on mbc4 over local talk shows.[465] The idea of importing and 'localising' successful foreign programmes seems to be a foolproof way to make the local channels more attractive. However, although the students liked watching the "Oprah Winfrey Show" (females more than males), they ridiculed the UAE version "Nashwa."[466]

Overall the local channels were discarded as "boring"[467] and not "real."[468] These keywords can be interpreted as 'not professional in style' and 'not relevant to the lives of the viewers.' The question posed by such feedback then is whether the channels are merely 'unprofessional' or whether audience preferences have changed. *Abu Dhabi TV* especially, which is aiming to be the television of the nation, was mainly discarded as old-fashioned, one students saying for instance: "My grandma watches the Emirates channel, we don't

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[463] Sharaf, 2009. *Developments in Abu Dhabi Media*,

[464] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 4].*

[465] Some of the students from Zayed University also found "The Doctors" highly attractive and pointed out they liked the idea from *Abu Dhabi Al Oula* to transfer the concept to the UAE (*"Ḥikmat an-Nisaʾ"/ "Wisdom of Women"*). By the time of the interviews the local version of the show was relatively new though, so it is not clear yet how successful the show will be in the future. (Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 2].*)

[466] Whether or not *"Nashwa"* could be described as the UAE "Oprah Winfrey" was discussed in two focus groups: ibid. and Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 5].* On the topic of importing international show formats, another student commented on the news show "Inside the National" that it was merely a copy of an American format.

[467] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 6].*

[468] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 4].*

watch it [...] Even if I'm scrolling through [the local channels,] I never saw anything interesting."[469]

The detachment students expressed towards the local media indicates that the government's media strategy to control yet remain relevant for the nationals is flawed. The students' preferences towards imported television shows confirm what media scholar James Curran states about countries with weak local TV economies. He remarks that American and Hollywood productions would fill the gap left by the local media and become the main consumed media.[470] Similarly, in the UAE TV series from Egypt and Lebanon fill the gap of missing local content during Ramadan. The question is whether this has already becomes a cultural *habitus* which make pan-Arabic media the nexus for communities of sentiment, and thus a national media obsolete. The feedback of the students does not confirm this though. The willingness to turn towards local media on certain occasions (such as Ramadan) signifies a willingness to form a local media community. The following discussion will argue that in the UAE global media providers and local media can co-exist if it was not for the lack of convincing content in the UAE media.

5.1.2 The co-existence of sub-communities and mass audiences under the umbrella of a 'national' audience

In his analysis of Arab satellite broadcastings, Hafez raises the important aspect of the customisation of audiences to mass entertainment. He remarks that "the market orientation of Arab television, in contrast [to public broadcasting], reinforces the trend of perpetuating audiences' cultural preferences (and biases) in order to receive large transmission rating and advertising."[471] While in the case of the UAE media the previous review of media policies confirm this observation, it has to be differentiated when it comes to audiences. The pursuit of a commercial policy of mass entertainment has led to a

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[469] Students, 2010. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 11].*

[470] See: Curran, 1998. *Crisis of Public Communication: A Reappraisal*, p.180.

[471] Hafez, 2004. *Arab Satellite Broadcasting: An Alternative to Political Parties?*

perpetuation of a certain media style. The perpetuation of symbols, narratives, show formats and other elements of mainstream media can therefore lead to viewers getting accustomed to certain media forms. Hafez's statement presumes that audiences over time appreciate this homogenising media style. Yet media has to change constantly to attract attention and reach sub-audiences which re-form continually. And a media which tries to reach the largest possible mass audience can also create a hostile reaction for just that homogeneity. An example: commercial mass media in the USA led to protests by various interest groups during the 1960s who felt that the interests of minority publics were neglected. They demanded a "public service network that shall broadcast what is good, not what is popular."[472] The result was the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 and the foundation of the *Public Broadcasting Service* (PBS).[473]

In the case of PBS, communities opposed the trend of a homogenising best-selling media style rather than accepting it. Media scholar James Curran argues that only a diversification of the media can induce local audiences to remain focused on their local media industry. This diversity however does not mean a mere specialisation into fan-channels (sports, drama, etc.) as is the case in the UAE, but making the media accessible to the different communities of the nation. The example of *Baynounah* channel illustrated that the government media assumes to 'know' what kind of media the national viewers want. It solely appoints *itself* to provide such media and carefully safeguards its integrity. Despite seeming diversified the representation of the nation remains homogenised across all channels. Curran uses the example of public broadcast in the UK to argue that global media alone does not necessarily sever ties between nation, television, and audiences, but that on the contrary a different form of unity can be provided by the national media, a "unity through diversity, a sense of togetherness informed by an awareness of regional difference."[474] In a scenario such as the UAE the government media strategy does not permit a form of public broadcast in which various sub-communities could feel represented in one national media. Since other media offers are accessible, these in turn compensate for the lack of diversity.

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[472] The *Public Broadcasting Act* of 1967. aimed to serve minority publics which were neglected by commercial media targeting a mass-audience. (Hutchison, 2004. *Protecting the Citizen, Protecting Society*, p.55f.)
[473] Even though PBS caters only a small community of viewers, the channel adds to the overall diversity of the media landscape.
[474] Curran, 1998. *Crisis of Public Communication: A Reappraisal*, p. 177.

A national media which can no longer attract local audiences is a challenge for any nation-state with wide access to transnational media. Scholars such as Morley and Robins, Elihu Katz, Gitlin and others agree that national media and consequently national identity is threatened by globalised media.[475] Elihu Katz remarked that interest groups evolve around niche media and form new specialised identities. As a consequence they grow more and more apart from the nation-state and re-form into de-nationalised communities.[476] Yet the feedback of the Emirati students has shown that there is still an interest in the national media and a willingness to consume it. What Katz pessimistically calls splintering and fractured mass publics does not necessarily mean that national media becomes obsolete by principle.[477] Although students interviewed mainly watched foreign TV shows and movies, they were eager to find programmes which represented their regional communities and social phenomena. Their appreciation of the Emirati cartoons during Ramadan illustrates that they chose programmes close to their daily experience. The need to see stories depicted on TV they can relate to could also be observed in the discussions about the other blockbuster of Ramadan 2009, *"Umm al-Banāt"*. Both male and female students agreed that the story of the Kuwaiti mother, her daughters, and her selfish unloving husband was the most popular of the season.

The storyline of the series led to heated discussions about its plausibility and applicability to Emirati society. Some students dismissed the main characters as irritatingly unrealistic, while others acknowledged that, though it was obviously exaggerated for the television, similar cases of neglect and humiliation of wives and daughters could also occur in Emirati society. Other students identified the family troubles of the series as a typical Kuwaiti phenomenon. One girl even commented that such a situation was unlikely to occur in the UAE because the long-suffering wife would have been supported by her family: when asked why the depicted situation could happen in Kuwait, she responded that family bonds

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[475] See for example Morley and Robin discussing the possibility that "where people once turned to the state to represent their interests and guarantee their rights, the danger is that they will now turn to group solidarities for protection." They however see a weakening of national identity as a "way for cultural identity to become both refuge and solace." (Morley, 1995. *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*, p.186.)

[476] See: Katz, 1996. *And Deliver Us from Segmentation,*

[477] See: ibid.

were not as tight or as meaningful as they are in the Emirates.[478] A male student in another focus group remarked that Emirati men were far too fond of their daughters to neglect them as the man did in the series.[479] Although the majority of their peers dismissed these notions as overly idealistic, the discussion itself demonstrates that if on-screen content is deemed unconvincing, it can propagate a belief that the depicted phenomena simply do not happen in real life.

In the case of *"Umm al-Banāt"* those viewers refusing to use the impulse of the series to reflect on mishaps in their own society could comfortably refer to the foreign origin of the series in order not to openly discuss problems. Yet as a Kuwaiti production, the series was deemed more relevant to the daily lives of the students than, for example, Egyptian or Syrian dramas. In lieu of an equivalent Emirati series, the students resorted to *"Umm al-Banāt"* as the one they could identify with more. These observations show that contrary to Hafez's evaluation of the Arab satellite broadcasts the supposedly 'perpetuated preferences' of Arab audiences are much more complex: the media can reproduce a popular style (such as Hollywood) which attracts audiences while alienating them at the same time. The feedback of the Emirati students has demonstrated that a shared interest in a media format or programme (i.e. Ramadan series) does not annihilate the other imagined communities individuals attribute themselves to. Their consumption of, and their interest in, the mass media can bring people together as a mass public (i.e. a fan group or political party) - yet it is crucial to bear in mind this is topical and situational.

Remembering Fraser's notion of multiple publics and the concept of situational identities discussed in Chapter 1, this means that media audiences are diverse and shifting. A remark made by a media professional shows how belonging to one community does not eliminate the other. About the game show "Tons of Cash" aired on Abu Dhabi 1, she stated:

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[478] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 6].*
[479] Students, 2010. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 15].*

"I will tell you something: the programme, it's not bad, it's nice. But if I see it in LBC channel I will like it more. If I see these programmes in Abu Dhabi channel, I feel that it's not showing me or my country, this is different."[480]

Her comment suggests that foreign media do not fill the need for national media, but that both are evaluated differently by the audience. The situational identification with a media genre, topic etc. does not annihilate the association with other communities. Katz' criticism is based on a definition of 'mass-publics' (as dichotomy to 'splintering', minority publics) which does not consider their situational character. Although mass media is considered to conceptualise viewers as one audience or 'mass', a different notion is more adequate: mass media can be understood as entertainment for the largest possible group consisting of various sub-communities or the lowest common denominator. Accordingly, it has to be encoded with specifics which are understood and appreciated by a wide range of communities in terms of their tastes and expectations. Since these are raised by the genre 'blockbuster', 'independent', 'family film' etc. the product will be judged accordingly.

The quoted Emirati said that she is looking for "me or my country" when she switches to a local channel. She is looking for confirmation or what Homi Bhabha described as a feeling of 'homecoming' which the channels, in their eagerness to produce mass media, do not provide.[481] As another students remarked with regards to the local channels,

"Local channels don't represent local culture. They show what most viewers would watch and most viewers are foreigners, so that's why they don't really portray our culture; they just give you something."[482]

This statement expresses the core of the discrepancy between a one-sided media and audiences in the UAE. It has become clear that the lack of diversity represented through

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[480] ADMC Focus Group 2, 30/09/2009: ADMC premises Abu Dhabi, min 29:37 – 29:56.

[481] See: Bhabha, 1997. *The World and the Home*, p.450.

[482] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 3].*

sub-communities of the nationals is not a specific UAE phenomenon. Other national media struggle to remain relevant in their localities albeit global commercial media. However, in the UAE those who oppose mainstream media interpret the problem according to the conditions of their media landscape. A look at how media students and professionals explain the discrepancy between audiences and media will show how the notions of 'local' and 'global' are translated into an interpretive framework of 'otherness.'

5.2 Beyond detachment: media as a 'foreign' parallel discourse

Building on the notion of mass media meaning 'accessible to the widest possible conglomerate of audiences,' a similar notion can be applied to 'global media.' Global satellite channels and cinema films can be 'local media' at the same time. Their globality means that they use code systems which are understandable to a wide range of local audiences and appreciated by them. As an example, though Hollywood or BBC are produced in specific localities, their complex funding strategies and their content are not bound to a specific locality.[483] The previously discussed media usage of the interviewed students showed how the belonging to both global and local territorialised communities of sentiment can co-exist. In the framework of Appadurai's communities of sentiment the power of imagination translates de-localised images into local practices.[484] Yet paradoxically Stuart Hall and Homi Bhaba have observed that locality can simultaneously be experienced as juxtaposed to globality. The latter can be experienced as opposed to Bhabha's notion of "home-coming", which is a notion semantically connected to 'local' and 'authentic.[485]'

The UAE national media enforces these dichotomies by its inability to convince Emirati audiences of its relevance to their daily experiences. Since its establishment the UAE media landscape has strongly relied on foreign expertise. Since they are involved in all

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[483] This definition is based on Appadurai's notion of globality outlined in chapter 1.4.2, which dissolves the dichotomy between global and local. (Appadurai, 2005. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*,p.49.)

[484] App ibid. p.49.

[485] Bhabha, 1997. *The World and the Home*, p.450.

aspects of its production, the expatriate media professionals are intrinsically linked to the media's image. The first part of this section will observe how this connection manifests itself by making foreign media professionals responsible for the media's lack of local authenticity. The ways in which these notions are experienced are unique characteristics of the UAE media landscape: global media is not only consumed in the UAE but located within its territorial borders. Equally, media producers are not only influenced by global media styles but are foreigners themselves. Although the foreign media professionals are recruited by a government-owned company, the Emirati students interviewed for this chapter thought of them as invaders who deprive Emirati nationals from job opportunities. They labelled the mainly Levantine media professionals as 'Lebanese Media Mafia'. As a generalising argument the discourse of a 'Lebanese Media Mafia' conceals the actual role foreigners play in the media industry and glosses over other reasons for an unattractive media. The opinion that only local media professionals are able to translate Emirati identity into a plausible national media is telling in itself. It reveals a basic assumption that 'localness' is a value to be extracted and protected from an imagined 'outside'.

Theoretically Emiratisation of the media should dissolve this obstacle and create an Emirati media elite. But for the government the merits of the campaign are in its marketing value.[486] Therefore the opinions of media employees will be considered in the discussion. Their working relationship with foreigners will lead to a different conclusion on the role played by foreigners.

As the second part of the section will show, complex structures are established within the TV industry, based on agents willing or forced to perpetuate variations of censorship. These structures cannot be considered as shrewdly designed but evolving through human interaction in the work space. The initial set-up of the national media had allocated the role of 'apprentices' to the Emiratis – a role which the newer generations have outgrown. The 'experts' were positioned under the ideological framework of the

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[486] There is still an overall imbalance between locals and expats between the ages of 25-29, with 581,277 non-nationals to 80,517 Emiratis. This leads to a strong competition for jobs. It is telling that the government statistics did not publish the percentage of local and expatriate employees in the government sector. Again only the news which feeds into a close government-citizen relationship is published; in this case reports about the progress of Emiratisation. (Statisctics Centre Abu Dhabi, 2010. *Statistical Yearbook of Abu Dhabi*, table 2/9.)

government. This framework however can only be challenged by UAE nationals, while the expatriates have a personal material interest in complying with restriction and maintain their position as 'teachers' of the Emiratis. Rather than feeling patronised by a one-sided media structure, the conflict between Emirati sub-communities and an authoritarian mainstream is deflected into a conflict between 'us' and 'others', or 'local' versus 'foreign.'

As a result the diversity of Emirati locality becomes a subjugated discourse. The last part of this section will exemplify how being Emirati can become an alternative discourse, which even erupts into the official media. The dispute will illustrate how the Emirati audiences have not lost interest in their national media, but consume and appreciate it if controversies are depicted. The interaction between official and unofficial media in the discussed case will be indicative of the possibilities for grassroots changes in the UAE media.

5.2.1 How the 'Lebanese Media Mafia' is held responsible for the insufficiencies of the local media

The perception of media students that their national media is not relevant to their daily life experiences can be traced back to both weak content (not 'real', 'boring' etc.) and lack of visual representation of Emirati identity. The shortage of engaging content was only in exceptional cases attributed to government censorship but more often explained in general phrases such as "The things you can say here are very limited. Even if you open social topics, they won't like what you are saying."[487] Many students were convinced that 'they' represented the TV management and executives who, incidentally, were Arab expatriates. Similarly the detachment from what and whom the students see on screen was explained by the fact that a majority of foreigners present shows, are news reporters, or are interviewed.[488] The large number of Egyptian or Moroccan TV presenters is not attributed to a lack of Emirati presenters per se but a domination of foreigners. The popular opinion is

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[487] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 2].*
[488] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 3].*

that since the staff behind the scenes is not Emirati, the media output naturally cannot mirror Emirati identity and culture.[489]

The argument that a UAE national media should be produced and presented by insiders of the community can be convincing and even DMI's head of design acknowledged that his Lebanese team initially had difficulties targeting the Emirati TV audience. Invited from Lebanon to the UAE in 2006 specifically to re-brand Dubai channels, he explains that most of his team's difficulties in producing a convincing local brand stem from insufficient local knowledge:

> "It's very hard to work for people you don't know. There was a period of four years of work: down the drain. All my understanding of the culture was totally wrong. We [the Lebanese designers] had a vision that the area is decadent, people are not moving on, it's a closed culture; then you come here and it takes some time. So you discover the differences, then you start to understand the nuances. We were just thrown into it [...] and we made a lot of mistakes."[490]

On the long run his expatriate team succeeded with an admittedly foolproof strategy which did not require any 'inside knowledge' of the Emirati society: they interpret and project the official narrative in a way young audiences could relate to, by mixing symbols of the UAE past with contemporary landmarks. Accordingly one student remarked that the layout "represents the traditional way. Even [though] they are creative, you feel that it's something related to our culture."[491] This statement expresses the internalisation and acceptance of the ideology of national identity – yet only on the surface of symbolic representation: the programme content was discarded as irrelevant. None of the students watched programmes which 'modernise' local traditions or 'modern' achievements such as the poetry competitions. While in terms of branding, the high percentage of foreigners does

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[489] Ibid.

[490] Sidani, 2010. *UAE Media: Design and Content Development, [Recorded interview].*

[491] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 3].*

not necessarily lead to a less 'Emirati' media the involvement of foreigners in media production has become a ready-made justification for numerous grievances locals have with the media landscape. Blaming the expatriates for all aspects in which the media does not meet the demands of the UAE nationals has developed into a self-supporting discourse which in turn dictates how insufficiencies in the media are interpreted. The high proportion of Levantine Arabs in the industry has inspired the conspiratorial notion that they are the ones running the show, succinctly conveyed by the widely-used expression: 'Lebanese Media Mafia'.

While it is impossible to verify exactly how many foreign experts are employed by the local channels,[492] several visits to different departments have empirically demonstrated that the design, production and administration teams are predominately staffed by non-GCC Arab expatriates. Emiratisation policies that have been continuously implemented since 2005 have done little to counteract these demographics. Without going into the details of these policies (and their shortcomings), it is worth noting that although the government has tried to enforce employment quotas, Emiratis and expatriates both remain reluctant to recruit locals. The practice to import experts into the country has resulted in an abundance of international talent for local employers to choose from.[493] Despite these difficulties, the government is eager to impress the public with stories of their success: *Sama Dubai* was swiftly identified as a leader in Emiratisation and ceremoniously for meeting Ministry of Labour targets.[494] However, the quotas of Emirati employees may be easily manipulated, at least on paper, so that government entities may appear to employ more locals than they actually do. Many government sectors (and state-run companies) are employing development consultancy teams on a freelance or project-related basis. Therefore, these

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[492] The channels are notoriously reluctant to release data on their staff.

[493] Emiratis, however, seem to find the prospect of working for the private sector equally unappealing. For private sectors it is more attractive to employ non-Emiratis, who are entitled to less financial and labour benefits, while from the Emirati perspective the government sector additionally brings more job security. As Randeree remarks in his report, "currently, nationals predominantly prefer to seek employment in the public sector due to better conditions, better salaries, more comprehensive packages, shorter working hours and job security." (Randeree, 2009. *Strategy, Policy and Practice in the Nationalisation of Human Capital: 'Project Emiratisation'*.)

[494] See: Ammari, 2009 *Dr. Sheikh Sultan Honours Dmi's Sama Dubai Tv for Promoting Emiratisation.*

sectors may be largely reliant on an imported workforce without ever having to disclose the fact.[495]

Regardless how many DMI and ADMC employees are actually Levantine, the idea of the 'Lebanese Media Mafia' is rather indicative of a common feeling among Emiratis of marginalisation from foreign experts in general. Emirati actor and producer Ali Al Jabri explored the experience of young Emirati job seekers in his three-minute film "The Consultant", which debuted at the 2011 Dubai Film Festival. The short film shows a young Emirati going to a job interview, where he presents his idea to a board of only mildly attentive Emirati businessmen. When he leaves the room, however, a European-looking applicant walks straight in after him, flips over the intricate structure chart his predecessor had left behind, and fluently begins his own presentation without even a second's pause. The board members immediately sit up straight and follow his elaborations with great interest. At this point, one of Al Jabri's colleagues at the Film Festival explained: "You see, they always listen to the English".[496] The short film expresses a general feeling of discrimination towards competent Emiratis who by default will be disadvantaged despite equal or even greater competence. In ADMC several local employees expressed their confidence of having outgrown the phase of learning from and depending on expatriates, yet being prevented from proving their capabilities. An employee from ADMC described a typical situation as follows:

> "What happens is: they ask us 'what is the meaning of this? What's the meaning of that, what's the meaning?' I tell him, 'why?' He said 'I want to make a local programme.' I told him, 'Give it to me. I will do it the right way.' [...] If you have the experience [as an expatriate], if you are graduated, if you know what you do, I will respect you: you will add [value]

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[495] The government sector relies strongly on foreign consultancy firms, and benefits politically from this structure. Effectively this practice secures the government position as autocratic regime. Gause remarked that Gulf monarchies 'tame' tribal influence by incorporating them into government institutions (see chapter 1). But while Emiratis thus form the majority on the management floor, the executive jobs and all lower positions only employ a minority of Emiratis. Thus a career path is blocked for Emiratis who could over time influence management decisions.

[496] Al Jaberi, 2011. *Meeting at Abu Dhabi Film Festival, Raha Beach Theatre*, [Meeting].

for me, right? But if you don't know anything, you will spoil everything and you will damage everything."[497]

The employee made it quite clear in this interview that he felt foreign expertise could be a valuable asset, but that the locals are more than capable to produce their own media. Especially with regards to 'local' programmes, the views of the students were confirmed by the employees: local people should produce the local media, simply because their being Emirati can make them produce better local content. As another ADMC employee ascertained: "We are the local people, we have to do everything and they [the foreigners] can [as well], no problem, doesn't matter the degree, the salary... This is not the point. The point at the last is what you will see on this screen."[498]

The last remark is significant with regard to an ideal community of media producers: the aim should be the shared interest in media production. However the term 'Lebanese Media Mafia' summarises a discourse which characterises the expatriate Arab media experts as a closed-off community of their own.[499] On a grassroots level teams with mixed nationalities can have a good working relationship, yet interviewees will refer to the Lebanese controlling everything without realising they are indirectly including their own colleagues.[500] The discourse runs parallel to the performance and experience of the individuals involved yet does not seem to be perceived as contradictory. As a narrative reality it draws its strength and validity not from personal experience (though this can of course strengthen it) but by the way it meshes structures and exaggerates them in a plausible way. It is true that media executives are often from Lebanon, a major centre for Arab media, the logic along which the Lebanese media mafia then develops makes sense: 'of course they will employ their friends from Lebanon.' The consequence, 'We Emirati's are alienated from our media and jobs taken away', appears just as logical. Given this, there

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[497] Anonymous, 2009. *Working in Abu Dhabi Media*, *[Recorded focus group].* Significant in this statement is the deduction from one personal experience with an expatriate TV editor ("He") to a general impression of "They" (the expatriates).

[498] Ibid.

[499] It may not be surprising that foreign and local media producers do not develop into one multi-national media elite given that expatriates are often employed by project rather than long term.

[500] Al Huraiz, 2009. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*

seems no need to examine the true scope of the phenomenon and personal experiences strengthen the discourse further. This form of internalisation, an interpretive process which intertwines experiences and their narratives enforces structures from which they originate and forms a strong element of their persistence. People will act upon the assumption and acceptance of the structure which is perceived as truth but relies on its circulation via narratives. At the same time Emirati media employees experience that, although a minority in numbers, they are supported by official Emiratisation policies as well as by their Emirati programme managers. One presenter stated clearly that her Emirati superior editor was especially eager to train and develop young Emirati presenters and Emirati news presenters from ADMC also confirmed the support they received from their Emirati management. [501] The examples show that the power of a Lebanese Media Mafia is indeed a conspiratorial theory. Embedded in a wider discourse, in which the 'foreign element' is a general label for other phenomena as well. Emirati students could easily interpret story of *"Umm al-Banāt"* for example as a foreign case, an imported story from Kuwait, which could not happen in the Emirates. The exclusion of specifically Emirati stories and social issues from the media fosters a psychological comfort zone, in which the Emirati society appears as harmonious and untarnished.

5.2.2 The 'Media Mafia' as scapegoat for the government's tight grasp on the media sector

Though employees of the broadcasting companies do not usually deal with the NMC directly, anticipation of editorial censorship serves as a major hindrance. Presenters and media professionals working for the channels perceive themselves as being subject to the executive decisions of the media institution. The Lebanese head of creative design department in DMI stressed that while he was expected to bring international mainstream standards to the national media (hence why foreign experts have often been recruited), his team had to fight for the implementation of their ideas in their daily work. Any new content

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[501] Al Hind, 2009. *Becoming a Presenter*, *[Recorded interview].*

requires approval from a higher management level, and the designer complained that it is often difficult to convince the relevant bureaucrat that a certain design or image should be realised. He did, however, concede that novelties were sometimes permitted, provided that the artist was willing and able to provide good reasons for the creative decision.[502] Whether they are Emiratis or expatriates, media professionals who are eager to 'push boundaries' and challenge established patterns of (self-)censorship will encounter uncooperative individuals, and must evaluate potential benefits and risks before they choose to proceed.

Although expatriates risk losing their jobs (and therefore their residency), UAE nationals risk the disapproval of an (imagined) social mainstream which stand firm behind the government's narrative of a homogenous UAE community. After all, the media discourse has established the image of 'one nation', hence 'one national identity'. By voicing an alternative opinion, an individual might not feel backed up by a sub-community but as one denigrator breaking the ranks of an otherwise harmonic community. As a result the alternative voice may be perceived as an attempt to distort the portrayal of their own society and subvert the social discussion they had hoped to inspire. Whether this would happen or not, these are serious considerations for any individual in the course of doing or saying anything against the public mainstream: will I be backed up by anybody or find myself alone and rejected. While more self-confident individuals may be less wary of these outcomes, individuals who believe they are vulnerable to prosecution or public criticism are most likely to fall victim of self-censorship in their day-to-day lives. Famous Emirati journalist Sultan Al Qasimi, on the other hand, can confidently criticise the Federal National Council in a daily newspaper: the prestige and respect his family name (he is a member of the ruling family of Sharjah) legitimises and excuses his opinions, no matter how 'subversive' they might otherwise seem.[503]

Some interviewees assumed that if the decision makers were expatriates then their personal interest in a secure job would prevail over their aim to produce interesting content. The presenter of local TV show *"Shababna"* ("Our Youth") complained that she was rarely asked which topics she would like to cover. She attributed this to foreign

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[502] Sidani, 2010. *UAE Media: Design and Content Development, [Recorded interview].*

[503] Al Qasimi writes for the daily newspaper *Al Emarat Al Yawm* and has become famous for his articles' critical treatment of the Emirati regime. See for example: Forum-Moderator, 2009. *News: National Council Responds to an Article by Saoud Sultan Al Qasemi.*

scriptwriters' reluctance to cover socially relevant – yet taboo – topics such as flirting, homosexuality, and anything related to young people's struggles with societal restrictions. In her opinion this was due not only to the maturity of the writers, which rendered them "out of touch" with young audiences in the UAE, but to their desire to keep it "safe": sticking to re-covering previously aired topics to avoid clashing with their editors-in-chief. She summarised: "They are afraid, and why should they do something which might make them lose their job?"[504]

By drawing together the demographic imbalance of the Emirati media industry with the content it produces, the presenter reached a popular conclusion: that expatriates cannot identify with the local media landscape and are therefore disinterested in their own productions (and perhaps even in the country). It is useful here to remember the opinion expressed by interviewees that expatriates do not understand the Emirati society or respect their values. Bringing these opinions together this would mean that the 'Emiratiness' of the UAE media was indeed a lost cause. The question is whether a detached and disinterested group of foreigners are producing what is supposed to be the platform, screen, and mouthpiece of Emirati identity. Such a generalising conclusion is not only insupportable but a convenient excuse not to look deeper into the real causes for an experienced detachment of the media from Emirati society.

Like other discourses of discrimination, the group considered to be the cause of discontent can very easily become a scapegoat for other grievances. Many ADMC employees, dissatisfied with executive-imposed changes, perceive the large recruitment of foreign expertise as indicative of more than industrial instability and distrust of local competence. The notion of being held back by managers and editors-in-chief, who are mainly Arab expatriates, is obvious from statements such as "working in the media is not nice, because it's the only field [in which] you will find like – like, a mafia inside it".[505] The notion that a 'Lebanese Media Mafia' is controlling the content and presentation on screen has gained popularity with the increasing number of Lebanese media professionals.

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[504] Al Hind, 2009. *Talk Shows on Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].*
[505] Al Mansouri, 2009. Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV, [Recorded interview].

The ethnic imbalance in media production aside, Lebanese pop culture and content is currently in demand, and channels are obviously eager to cater to this. The industry therefore faces a serious dilemma: foreigners working in the media are producing content which is supposedly alienating locals while simultaneously meeting their expectations of visual media. Thus the UAE is thought by locals to have employed agents deemed capable of meeting global standards at the expense of locally relevant content. The regional and professional demographics do not, however, support this belief: media students and employees alike made clear in various interviews that they perceived Dubai's channels as more authentic (more 'Emirati') than Abu Dhabi's, yet both industries are dominated by Arab expatriates.[506]

The notion of an industrial 'invasion' also presumes that local media producers would not face the same difficulties of self-censorship. Such naivety was perfectly illustrated by Al Hind's aforementioned criticism of foreign scriptwriters for shying away from socially relevant topics such as sexuality, when locals are equally wary of depicting this. The idea of a 'Media Mafia' enables the Emiratis to blame someone else for their own internalised belief that locals will never be able to achieve true self-expression in the current climate. Students who had never previously worked for the local media industry proved this when they were questioned about their future ambitions. When asked whether they would like to one day participate in or even host their own talk show, one student sardonically remarked: "The things you can say there are very limited. Even if you open social stuff and they don't like what you're saying."[507] This statement is significant for the conspiratorial yet imprecise nature of a discriminatory discourse: "They" are undefined yet powerful. In the context of the discussion, this student most probably referred to ADTV media executives and editors-in-chief, but resonating in the inexplicit term 'they' could just as well be 'the government' or the 'policy makers.'

Once again, Abu Dhabi suffers by comparison: when asked why they would prefer to work for DMI rather than for ADTV, students often cited their lack of respect for ADTV decisions regarding what could or should be discussed on screen. One Abu Dhabi student stated: "*Sama Dubai* encourages people to talk about things, here [people] think everything

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[506] See the discussion of Emirati students' feedback on the channels in section 3.2.3.

[507] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 2].*

is *ᶜayb* [shameful/ not to be talked about] for example, 'child abuse'."[508] Her peers agreed with her on this point, which suggests that Dubai is popularly perceived as being more daring than its neighbour.[509] The conspiratorial notion of a Lebanese 'Media Mafia' does not withstand closer observation, but it certainly serves as a locum for other obstacles Emiratis face when trying to screen original content.[510] It serves as an explanation and excuse for a structure which is based on the anticipatory compliance of agents who translate censorship postulates of the government. As such the reference to a 'Media Mafia' distracts from a closer observation of the government's role in controlling freedom of expression. As a result, the government appears to be on the side of the complaining Emirati media professionals: after all the media sector is part of Emiratisation policy. Yet the campaign is mainly a contribution to the government's public image. Although it has been up and running since 2004 it was not until early 2010 that the authorities began to talk about establishing a national committee for the purpose of Emiratising the media sector in particular.[511] During the first quarter of 2010 FNC member Amal al-Qubaisi remarked that there was still a remarkable imbalance towards foreign experts in all sectors, elaborating that "Emirati broadcasters account for only 17.8 percent of the total staff of radio and TV (stations), while the percentage is as low as 10 percent in the press."[512]

These observations indicate that it is actually in the interest of the government, which controls everything, to uphold the established structure in the media. Without replacing the conspiratorial idea of a 'Media Mafia' by equally conspiratorial assumption of a sophisticated government plan, the reliance on foreign media employees does seem conveniently designed to ensure the practice of self-censorship. The daily experience of an

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[508] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 4].* The topic of child abuse was highly discussed during the time of the focus groups due to the murder or a child during a religious holiday in 2009. The case was closed with the execution of the perpetrator in 2010, but the topic of child rights has continued to be topic of public discussion. For a review of the case proceedings, see: Za'za, 2010. *Dubai Court Upholds Death Sentence for Mosque Murderer.*

[509] See: Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 4].*

[510] From a hegemonic position it is easier to have non-citizens experience censorship directly, whereas the majority of employees will meet the editor-in-chief, the manager, the foreigner as a gatekeeper. At the moment the structure of the media landscape can easily defer the fact that foreign domination in the media is after all created by the channels and ultimately government policies. From daily experiences with foreigners competing for jobs or acting as gatekeepers, the 'Lebanese Media Mafia' not intentionally but effectively acts as a scapegoat for the government.

[511] See: WAM, 2010. *UAE Editors Back Emiratisation of Media.*

[512] Staff Reporter, 2010. *UAE Media Watchdog Failing on Emiratisation.*

Emirati media professional is that she or he is being controlled by expatriate editors. The government meanwhile can market itself as the supporter of Emiratis. In this scenario, locality is watered down to banding attributes of the government, thus the local relevance of media content is left behind. The Emiratis, who discard the local media as non-related to them resort to alternative media spheres to enter a dialogue on their national identity. How these alternative discourses can reflect back to the official media is illustrated by the following dispute.

5.2.3 The excitement about "mixed marriages": how sensitive issues erupt into the official media discourse

Since topics Emirati audiences can relate to are not critically reflected in the official media, interviewed students resorted to other forms of media, where communities of sentiment can be formed, such as *BlackBerry* and social networks. While speaking to media students from the Abu Dhabi Higher College of Technology, one group, after complaining about the lack of interesting topics discussed on television, half jokingly requested somebody should organise grassroots media. Asking them why they needed somebody to organise this for them, given that they were more than capable to start such a project themselves, one student jovially remarked: "Miss, we can't do that", and mimicked a cut-through throat, laughing.[513]

But far from being content with dialogues in unofficial spheres, whenever hot topics or scoops are picked up by the official media, audience attention can be assured. When a local counseling show discussed female cross-gender dressing and homosexuality in the UAE, the episode not only made the daily news, but was immediately uploaded on *YouTube* and achieved 56,678 viewing hits within a week.[514] The demand for public discussions makes audiences ready to become TV consumers as well as perceptive to media

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[513] Students, 2010. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 15].*

[514] The news report was: Al Ameri, 2010. *Tariq Habib: 'Boyah' in Need of a Psychiatrist and Not a Religious Preacher. 'Mustarjila' Wants to Marry and Have Children with Her Lover.* The episode from the programme *"Khutwa"* was aired on January 4th, 2010 on *Abu Dhabi Al Oula.*

interactivity. But it seems that participation in the media discourse is merely triggered by the official discourse and then retreats into the unofficial media sphere. However, since there is media interactivity, there is also the potential for the unofficial discourse to bounce back into the official media. A rather explosive example for such a case developed around the ongoing discourse of the preservation of Emirati identity on an ethnic level. Recurring topics of the discourse on mixed marriages are the high expenses of marriages for young Emiratis as well as the phenomenon of Emirati men marrying non-nationals, which is repeatedly raised from officials as a potential threat to the community identity.[515]

According to newspaper reports the trend of Emirati men marrying foreign women that started in the 1980s caused the government to introduce policies which would support inter-Emirati marriages, such as a limitation on dowries, as well as setting up government institutions to support national couples' wedding expenses and to help set up family homes.[516] The UAE Marriage Foundation was founded in 1992 to implement the government's plan to preserve the Emirati national population as an ethnic community.[517] The foundation campaigned for health checks on local couples to reduce genetic diseases, such as thalassaemia.[518] Since the number of mixed marriages has risen constantly to reach a new high in 2010, with 30% of marriages being mixed, the institution of a Marriage Foundation is in danger of being perceived as a tool of racial discrimination rather than a preserver of local identity. During the last few years the Marriage Foundation's public relations have become less openly concerned with ethnicity than being supportive of successful marriages.[519]

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[515] For a discussion of 'mixed marriages' and its cultural roots in Gulf society, see Paul Dresch's discussion of nationality and marriage in the UAE in Dresch & Piscatori, 2005. *Monarchies and Nations: Globalisation and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf*, p.136-157. Dresch stipulates that the phenomenon of discriminating against the descendents of mixed marriages signifies a shift from a traditional notion of tribal Bedouin families. While in the old days wives from outside the tribal alliance were considered an asset within a polygamist patri-linear system, the situation has changed since the establishment of the nation state (p.143ff.).

[516] See: Al Haddad, 2010. *More Emiratis Are Marrying Foreigners to 'Save Money'.*

[517] In the mission statement of the Marriage Foundation the entity aims to "provide support and awareness to those on the verge of marriages as well as to contribute to the formation of the soundly-footed UAE-based families in order to achieve consistency and stability" (See: e-Government, 2011. *Sunduq Az-Zawaj (Marriage Fund)*.)

[518] See for example: Staff-Reporter, 2010. *The Choice Is Yours, for a Uae without Thalassemia: Admaf Supports Marriage Fund's Thalassemia Health Awareness Campaign*.

[519] See: e-Government, 2011. *Sunduq Az-Zawaj (Marriage Fund)*.

The topic of mixed marriages is embedded in the discourse on national identity, fear of foreign domination in the UAE, and gender inequality. Heated discussions were ongoing on the internet, while the government remained firm in its policy on ethnic identity and advertising for the cause by focusing on different aspects of the problem. The famously high dowries demanded by Gulf families are an important part of the debate, repeatedly brought up by officials and commentators as the main reason for the decline in marriages between Emirati nationals. Over the last few years the focus of the official discourse has been on supporting stable families, picking up on the phenomenon of high divorce rates in the Emirates and trying to imply that children from a mixed background are more likely to grow up in troubled family circumstances. In Ramadan 2010 the grand Mufti of Dubai caused controversy when he picked up an idea already voiced in 2005[520], that of legally restricting the possibility of Emiratis marrying non-nationals. At a forum discussion he pointed out that mixed marriages were more likely to end in a divorce and harm the psychological well-being of children from such marriages. Accordingly he stated that "personal freedoms can be restricted for the benefit of the public interest."[521]

Another discussion participant, representing the Juvenile Care Association in Dubai, was even more outspoken, stating that mixed marriages could "create a generation of Emiratis with mixed loyalties".[522] The report caused immediate emotional disputes, being distributed via social networking sites. The responses from journalists quoted nationals with mixed parenthood, showing how the Grand Mufti's statement had personally insulted some Emiratis. A more comprehensive article by the renowned commentator Sultan Saoud Al-Qassimi was published both in Arabic and English newspapers almost a week after the original report[523] and posted online via *Twitter* and *Facebook* with comments such as "Yeah! Mixed and proud!"[524] Sultan Saoud Al Qassimi is a member of staff at the Dubai School of Governance, and an active media personality, whose controversial articles are frequently

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[520] Mussallam, 2005. *Marriage of Locals to Foreign Women to Be Curbed.*

[521] Issa, 2010. *Grand Mufti of Dubai Calls for Curb on Mixed Marriages.*

[522] Ibid.

[523] English version: Al Qassemi, ibid. *Mixed Marriages Bring Strength Upon Strength to the Uae.*

[524] FB news feed post from August 30th 2010.

posted and discussed in local internet forums.[525] His article on mixed marriages followed the same structure as the previous one, giving examples of famous Emiratis who have become role-models for the new generation, and asking: "So are they Emirati enough?" [526]

While on the basis of social reality of many Emiratis the discrimination against mixed marriages causes discontent, the issue ultimately has further reaching consequences for the rulers' legitimacy. After all, the ruling elite are defined along tribal lines, which are perceived as lines of origin. Based on the image of legitimate historical rulers of the nation, marriage is a political act for the ruling elite and throughout the classes of Emirati society, a statement of national identity, or even a service to the state. If the social reality develops towards more and more mixed marriages and even if an Emirati national may have one national and one foreign wife, the next generation is already discriminated against by birth. One of the 2010 forum discussants was even quoted by newspapers to have highlighted forms such discriminations could take. He claimed that "he had seen figures suggesting more than 60 per cent of Emiratis who marry outside their nationality earn less than Dh10,000 monthly." The official reason was attributed to a lack of Arabic language skills, rather than diminished access to better jobs.[527]

If the current trend continues, the government can no longer uphold the prestigious image of the pure Emirati family it has tried to establish. One can expect the question of lineage to be questioned more and more, and develop into a discussion about the importance of a pure lineage, with which a large percentage of the population will not identify anymore. At the moment the lineage of the ruling families makes them appear very different than the masses and symbols of an imagined shared identity of authentic and pure

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[525] One of the most popular articles was an attack on the NFC, published October 25th 2009, which caused the NFC to publish an official response (See the discussion on the internet forum UAEEC: Forum-Moderator, 2009. *News: National Council Responds to an Article by Saoud Sultan Al Qasemi.*). Another notable article on UAE national identity was discussed on the forum *Bidoun (See: Zayed-Girl, 2009. Thread: What Sultan Al Qasemi Said.)*

[526] On day after the report was published, a journalist from *The National* published a response entitled "Mixed marriages 'not the problem'." The article quotes an Emirati with a mixed family background, alongside the opinion of a foreigner working with young Emirati employees. Both state that in their careers "'youth from mixed marriages often tend to go the extra mile. Perhaps this is their response to overcome social obstacles they've faced due to their mixed background, or as a way to prove their loyalty to the country?'" (See: Issa, 2010. *Mixed Marriages 'Not the Problem'.*)

[527] Issa, 2010. *Grand Mufti of Dubai Calls for Curb on Mixed Marriages.*

Arabs. If a higher level of prestige based on lineage becomes problematic and perceived as unjust, the legitimisation of the established ruling class becomes questionable in turn. With the coming generation of rulers, who in many cases have foreign mothers, especially in Dubai, the whole notion of the UAE nation as an ethnic tribe union will become questionable.

The way in which the official ideology was challenged in this case, and led to an interaction between official and non-official media, is telling for a generation of Emiratis ready to introduce new topics into the media arena. For once it seems the leap from unofficial media into the official media has taken place, which has in a way transformed an imagined community of sentiment into an interest group. Such encouraging behaviour with media shows that if a topic stirs enough emotions, people are indeed willing to make their opinions known to more than an imagined community of online friends and forum readers. At the same time the peculiarities of the dispute also highlight major difficulties. Although the internet discussions indirectly reflect back on the official discourse, they are brought into the official media by self-appointed agents with confidence to make their opinions public.[528] Media personalities such as Sultan Saoud Al Qassimi are exceptions: as a member of the ruling family of Sharjah, he can bring up controversial topics without anything happening to him. But in order to develop the exceptional cases of public articulation into a practiced norm, Emiratis from less privileged backgrounds have to follow his example.

Is fear of government prosecution preventing Emiratis from utilising the national media to represent their ideas and identities? The government's presumes the role of guardian of national identity, but the media industry as an executive does not succeed. Hence, both media industry and national audiences have an interest – economic as well as ideological – in changing the media status quo and reconciling their control with the admittance of sub-communities. This explains why, despite a tight network of hindering factors (one of which is censorship, another is the imagined community of media producers), Emiratis can influence the official media. Just like the government is eager to appear as the legitimate representative of the people, the media wants to be recognised as backed and supported by the Emiratis. In the discrepancy between what Emiratis and the

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[528] In the online version of the local news for example people commented on the articles, but the comments were either by expatriates or posted anonymously.

channels deem acceptable, relevant or 'real,' lies the potential for a change in the channels, given the approval of the government. In practice with such different aims and priorities, Emiratisation of the media sector could gradually lead to the formation of an interest group of Emiratis inside the media industry.

6 Trying to make a difference: media personalities and their ways to fame

Despite Emiratisation the government will not allow journalists to cross the red lines of established political censorship. Enthusiastic Emirati media professionals may profit from Emiratisation policy when seeking employment, but they cannot rely on the government's support if they want to freely explore their notions of what Emirati society should publicly discuss. Critics have already remarked that the focus on Emiratising the media distracts from the real issue of censorship.[529] Taking up the term 'authentic' Emirati media, it has become clear: from the government's perspective Emiratisation of the media sector does not equal a majority of Emiratis, but the creation of a dominant media discourse to promote the government's notion of national identity. This results in a lack of authenticity in the eyes of Emiratis who long for a relatable local media.

The Emirati media professionals who could produce the relevant content feel subjected to a structure which prevents them from developing their individual public profiles. According to their understanding this structure is enforced by their families (especially for women) as well as by expatriates dominating the media industry and acting as gatekeepers of the government's media guidelines. The previous chapter has demonstrated how this scenario weakens the role of national media. Notions of representation are currently contested by the disapproval of both audiences and Emirati media professionals. The statements of the students and presenters that the media is not 'real' or authentic challenges the rules of 'seeing' followed by the national media. Just as the satellite era changed the way people expected media to be, national media in the UAE has to reshuffle its forms of representation and set of approved topics in order to remain up to date. This chapter will show how individual Emirati media professionals have taken it upon

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[529] Abu Dhabi-based *Gulf News* editor Abdullah Rasheed writes in an article published in Gulf News: "Of course, the issue of Emiratising the media in general and newspapers in particular should be discussed. But the media is faced with two major challenges. The first is the unregulated media openness, represented by the huge flow of information in the foreign media. The second is the inability of the national media to compete due to the restrictions imposed on them." (Rasheed, 2009. *The Ceiling of Press Freedom in UAE is Falling*.)

themselves to make a difference and contribute their own ideas. These individuals follow a variety of different strategies to achieve their goals.

One way is to try to affect change from within the channel by finding a 'middle way' between the channels' expectations and personal goals. The lack of competition opens possibilities for Emirati presenters to attract local audience and try to offer it a public platform. The morning shows on *Sama Dubai* and the Abu Dhabi channels (such as "*Sabāh al-ʾImārāt*" ("Emirates' Morning") on Abu Dhabi's Emirates Channel, or "*Sabāh al-H̱ayr ya Baladī*" ("Good Morning to my Country") on *Sama Dubai*,)[530] are for example keen to recruit local participants. These shows are not critical but create a space for local celebrities to talk about their projects and achievements. These might range from music and art to business ideas. Other shows focus on achievements of Emirati women from the established angle of representation.[531] Emirati shows often follow government campaigns and cover state-sponsored events.[532] This opens a content gap which bears potential for presenters to cater audiences with different topics and to become famous.

Part 6.1 will demonstrate how the university professor and talk show host Dr. Khalifa Al Suweidi achieved just this with his popular society talk show "*Khutwa.*" There is indeed an interest group among UAE media professionals who are attempting to change the current mainstream of the official media from within, and introduce formerly taboo topics into the public sphere. The diplomatic relationship with the existing practices means that they have to translate their ideas into a language suitable to the channels' messages and show formats.

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[530] These two ongoing shows are conducted in the typical style of local morning shows, inviting guests to talk about miscellaneous subjects, announcing events, and giving weather forecasts. Their profiles can be viewed on the websites of the channels: ADMC, 2011. *Sabāh Al-ʾimārāt*. And DMI, 2011. *Sabāh Al-H̱ayr Ya Baladī*.

[531] An example is "*Nisaʾun Jiddan*" ("Women Indeed") on Dubai TV. The show was a 2010 re-launch of the show "*Al-Marʾa al-H̱alījīya*" ("The Woman of the Gulf") and featured successful, comfortable and content females, presenting a government-friendly image of empowered local women.

[532] Not all of these rely on inviting officials as guests. The society talk show "*D̠ull al-Kalām*" on Dubai TV, for example, chose to broadcast various businesspeople discussing the recession that had hit the emirate's economy hard. "*D̠ull al-Kalām*" also covered sensitive topics that were featuring heavily in public discourse at the time. When a child was raped and murdered by a UAE national on *Eid Al Adha* 2009, the topic became unavoidable. Newspaper reports and journalists' comments swiftly began to document the shock experienced by the public. Accordingly, the host of "*D̠ull al-kalām*" invited a team of experts to discuss child abuse on his talk show.

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While the attempt to change the media 'from within' is always in danger of assimilation, the independent path has to navigate around funding issues and direct censorship in order to create a media product. Another strategy is to create a public profile independently and to collaborate with the government media only once they have established enough of a 'fan base' to be able to dictate their own terms. The latter seems to be the method chosen by filmmakers and producers of genres such as cartoons and films. The 'middle way' approach might be thought of as the diplomatic method of negotiating internalised expectations as well as official requirements.

The second strategy, referred to here as the 'Maverick approach', will be discussed in 6.2. It will show how producers who are working independently but in collaboration with the government channels deal with funding issues, censorship, and what can be summed up under the name of 'publicity.' The latter outlines the complex communication with their potential audiences which they have to develop into a fan base. To achieve this, a public resistance to or scepticism towards publicity has to be overcome. It seems difficult to pinpoint the source of these boundaries, since they seem to be perpetuated by individuals who themselves question them. It seems too easy to refer to cultural boundaries and perceptions of private and public in the light of media behaviour of Emirati audiences.

The stories of independent media producers explore how, at a certain level of success and publicity, the official media, though initially unsupportive, will gladly broadcast the popular productions. This structure mirrors what, on a personal level, the ADMC employees have voiced. Many of the female employees had experienced how their families approved their working in the media, but only in hindsight after the women had obtained a certain level of success. The pattern seems to be as expressed in the famous "Field of Dreams" quotation, "if you build it, they will come": the media professionals cannot expect support and development of individuality and creativity in the first stage, but as soon as they gain them by other means, they have a good chance of becoming the new poster boy or girl for the local media.

6.1 The 'middle way' approach: changing the media from within

A prominent presenter from DMI, Nashwa Al Ruwaini, described the future of the local media in a written interview as follows:

> "More social issues will start to be addressed through awareness campaigns and through TV content. I think we will start to see more discussion of the role of women in society as well as economic and development issues. There is a large drive and there will be more of this in the future to make Arabic a wider used language in the media. The quality of journalism will also improve, creating a new generation of thinkers and decision-makers too."[533]

Her wording follows the previously discussed language of government campaigns encouraging the future generation of "decision makers" and "leaders". She accepts the notion of a government supporting educational media and expresses an interest in making Arabic media productions global players. Her optimistic view on upcoming developments comes from the position of a media producer driven by economic interests. For the individual media makers at the grassroots of the industry, the challenges for media look different: can a pseudo homogenous media landscape be shaken?

Dr. Khalifa, the host of a famous Abu Dhabi counselling show, certainly sees it that way. As the first part of this section will show, he sees his programme as an educational tool to "transform thinking" and every episode is a step in a whole curriculum to lecture the audience on how to interpret society and what topics are important for the UAE to address. Like Nashwa Al Ruwaini, his experience and credentials make him eligible to join the ranks of those 'entitled to speak' in the public domain.

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[533] Al Ruwaini, 2010. *Media in the UAE, [Written interview].*

Dr. Khalifa's show called "*Khutwa*" ("Step")[534] is to date the only live society show led by an Emirati host. Each episode includes at least two experts on the topic of the week and approximately two guests who talk about their personal experience or seek help with a problem. Between the parts when the experts are analysing the topic of the week, montages show glimpses of the lives of the cases discussed or other cases. Towards the end of the episodes Dr. Khalifa takes live phone calls and reads e-mails from viewers. The montages and calls, as well as the studio guests, are the basis for the discussions between Dr. Khalifa and the experts on the stage.

The setting of the show is laid out to attract the viewers' identification with individual life stories and Dr. Khalifa is particularly keen to address topics of a private and sensitive nature. The topics range from domestic violence, sexual education, ED to obsessions, addictions and phobic covetousness.[535] Dr. Khalifa identifies such episodes as adult topics at the beginning of the show and studio guests are mostly kept anonymous behind an isolation glass. Montages of collecting opinions on the streets are sometimes presented during breaks.

Although most of the interviewed Emirati students stated they barely had the time or interest to watch TV at all, "*Khutwa*" was at least considered worth watching occasionally, when an interesting topic was to be discussed. The latter is an exceptional show by Emirati television standards as it is to date the only talk show featuring live consultation and call-ins. By examining social phenomena, Dr. Khalifa Al Suweidi has managed to become famous over his three years on air for his willingness to address sensitive topics.

However, as the second part of this section will discuss, Dr. Khalifa's aim to educate make him an agent of the mainstream, which – at least on TV – homogenises Emirati society and alienates subjugated voices. After examining the style of the show, the last part of this section will focus on its contribution to the overall TV landscape. The question will be whether his live society show can satisfy the demand for 'real' media.

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[534] The weekly show went on air in 2006 on *Abu Dhabi Al Oula*.

[535] Other topics are anger, addiction, sexual harassment at work, and relationships between partners.

6.1.1 *Khutwa*: Changing society or strengthening the image of its TV channel?

Asked in an interview what induced him to host such a society show, Dr. Khalifa clearly stated that he saw his calling in educating 'Arab society'. A university professor himself, he said his students motivated him to widen his audience from the lecture theatres of UAE University to the general public. Approaching Abu Dhabi TV with his idea he was offered an attractive salary and a support team to produce the show.[536] For the channel the cooperation with Dr. Khalifa is ideal due to his high marketing value: he is clearly Emirati, as his dress and language signify, and therefore an asset to strengthen the channel's local character. As a university professor, he speaks with authority and clearly reveals his conservative framework in his speech. A less experienced presenter might, involuntarily or intentionally, provoke criticism from conservative viewers or even from the government if allowed to host a live broadcast. Not being a government official, Dr. Khalifa's credentials nevertheless sanctify him as 'safe' not to push too many boundaries, whilst at the same time promoting the image of an open and even daring media. Accordingly *"Khutwa"* can be seen as a positive way and example for other presenters to be more daring. Yet the show confirms and thus strengthens the rigid media style which does not permit multiple opinions but frames stories according to a conservative ideology. Dr. Khalifa's strategy translates onto screen what has previously been observed in the daily news: negative or controversial stories are not longer blocked out from the public discourse but interpreted within one dominant framework, thus strengthening the image of a homogenous society they claim to question. Media personalities following such a strategy are ensured the support of the channels, as other examples show.

Nashwa Al Ruwaini, an Egyptian media personality, hosts a weekly society show on *Dubai TV* advertised as the 'Emirati Oprah Winfrey Show'. It follows the same concept as Oprah, by inviting experts as well as people with specific experiences to discuss. As a media personality and head of a media production company (*Pyramedia*) she works closely with government channels and authorities. Her most famous contribution to the local media is

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[536] Al Suweidi, 2009. *Khutwa, [Recorded interview].*

the production of the poetry competition shows "Prince of Poets" (*"Amīr al-Šuᶜaraᵓ"*) and "Poet of the Million" (*"Šaᶜir al-millyūn"*). The "Poet of the Million" is a flagship for the government's project to create a distinctly Emirati media identity by publicly boosting the tradition of poetry in Bedouin dialect. The big prizes for the winners of the shows attract competitors from all over the Gulf Region (as well as Jordan and Iraq), thus raising the UAE's profile as a cultural promoter with a distinct Bedouin touch. Nashwa explains her view of media responsibility as follows:

> "[The Emirati viewers] need support in developing a balance between old and new. As the UAE's development is growing so fast, it is often confusing for people where their identities lie. Media helps to convey the basic concepts of modernity and upholding culture."[537]

This statement shows Nashwa's notion of an audience which has to be educated via media. Dr. Khalifa and Nashwa Al Ruwaini see their roles in media not only as educators and preservers of traditions but reformers as well. This aspect is what makes them so compatible with the channels' politics and enables them to solidify an already monopolised public discussion. Comparing the styles of *Nashwa* and *"Khutwa"*, especially Dr. Khalifa by being one of the few Emirati presenters, creates the illusion of being the mouthpiece of a homogeneous community. It would go too far to assume that he sees himself as such, but the problem for different opinions using his shows as a gate into the official media, is that there is no alternative. They have to accept being subjected to patronisation and, as such, they strengthen the dominant discourse.

The set up of the stage in "*Khutwa*" supports a formal atmosphere which is contradicted by the personal and counselling aspect. Unlike other society shows like "*Nashwa*" on *Dubai TV*, or morning shows with different topics and celebrities, the set is not in a room or living room-like atmosphere but in a studio with small centre platform, where Dr. Khalifa and a team of experts sit at some distance from the approximately 36 silent guests in the auditorium, who remain in semidarkness. The light focus is on the stage and so

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[537] Al Ruwaini, 2010. *Media in the UAE, [Written interview].*

the personal level between Dr. Khalifa and the audience is merely achieved by his speech, which never addresses the studio audience but the viewers.

Dr. Khalifa's position of authority over the audience is enhanced not only by the repeated mention of his scientific academic background but also by the focus on the spotlight on the centre stage with no furniture or decor except the chairs and a small side table for the host. However, although the setting of the studio does not support a communal feeling, Dr. Khalifa addresses "everybody" as he says and feels a part of an imagined community beyond the circle of present people, through his use of formulas like "we think", "we talk about", "we all..." He thus establishes a community which agrees on not only the importance of the topic he is about to present but on the way he presents it. The silent audience becomes part of the Dr. Khalifa community, just as other talk show hosts tend to establish themselves as a centre of e.g. a "Dr. Phil" family.[538] And while he patronises guest on the show by friendly or jovially telling them off or correcting them if it seems necessary [539], he still accepts them as part of his community of shared traditional values. Dr. Khalifa insinuates his position of traditional values which he considers so normalised to 'all' that they do not need to be discussed or questioned. Yet he claims a position of authority within the community due to his exceptional daring to tackle taboo topics, of which he takes pride in, saying in one episode:

"The Arabic viewers are not used to such daring but we in the "*Khutwa*"

program either talk about topics or we don't talk about them. When we

talk about them we do it in further detail."[540]

Advertisements for the show focus on Dr. Khalifa with close-ups to his face looking stern and concentrated, yet friendly. His Emirati dress identifies him as somebody from

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[538] Phillip Calvin McGraw is the host of the live counselling talk show "Dr. Phil." Aired since 2002 the show has attracted global attention due to its controversial style of. (For an analysis of the show see for example Egan, 2005. *"You Either Get It or You Don't:": Conversion Experiences and the Dr. Phil Show,*)

[539] In an episode about ED for example a studio guest is counselled by Dr. Khalifa and a doctor for STDs.

[540] Al Suweidi, 2010. *'Bōyāt' Aw Mustarjilāt ('Boyahs' or Women Who Appear Like Men), [TV broadcast].*

within the UAE society and sets him apart from the majority of Arabic society shows (not including religious consultation shows).

6.1.2 The monologue of authority: validating a dominant discourse

Dr. Khalifa's image portrays him as one of the people he is talking to, though more experienced and wiser and thus able to help. Conversely, whenever somebody is not conform with Dr. Khalifa, he or she is not member of the community – not only the community of Dr. Khalifa fans but of the Arab society in general, which is symbolically present in the studio as "forth wall" audience. This is a symbol of the assumption that there is such phenomenon as a homogenised Arab society which consents on traditional values – the values constantly referred to by Dr. Khalifa. This consensus is embedded in a conservative and religious discourse and in order to maintain its claim of validity, Dr. Khalifa has to repeatedly position himself as member of the 'one Arab public' he is addressing. At the conclusion of each episode in which Dr. Khalifa gives a message to the audience, he often uses religious phrases. At the end of the episode about addiction for example, he looked directly into the camera and said:

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[541] Abu Dhabi Al Oula, 2012. *Khutwa. [hero-shot].*

"Take your last cigarette, say 'In the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate' and smoke it; then you say 'All praise and thanks be to God, thanks are due purely to God,' and throw it away."[542]

In many cases religious phrases are also used by other experts from the team, which leads to a fusion of scientific and religious authority, thus enhancing their claim.

Nashwa, who does not take the advisory role directly, uses a similar structure supported by her selection of experts. Hence she communicates tendencies, values and opinions through their authority while herself siding with the audience. In one episode for example the topic of female students living in University accommodation away from their families is discussed.[543] Nashwa invites a former guard from a student hall as well as a student who had lived in a hall and resisted all temptations to follow her roommates in going "the wrong way." A former student who tells about her experience with smoking, parties and sexual experiences before changing her ways remains anonymous. She admits that one day she saw the wrong of her actions and moved out to a family lodging – an account which is commented by Nashwa with exclamations of relief. In fact the case of a talk show guest not siding with the presumed values of the show is an exception.

The audience of such shows is presumed to be in need of education and is objectified from the perspective of the presenters. This top-down notion of the relationship between the producers and the viewers is already manifested in the titles of shows such as "Shababna", ("Our Youth"). The name does not reflect the purported aim of the show to engage the Emirati youth in discussion, but it is phrased from the perspective of an educator lecturing "our" young generation. Minority voices are not necessarily blanked out of such a media discourse, but objectified just as all other non-experts appearing on the show. As a result, a mainstream opinion on minorities is identified or stated, then, reproduced and circulated through the media. This strategy, which does not censor or ignore whoever lies

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[542] Al Suweidi, 2009. ʾidmān (Addiction). In *Khutwa, [TV braodcast].*
[543] Al Ruwaini, 2009. *Nashwa, [TV broadcast].*

outside the dominating opinion, is more likely to stabilise the existing hegemony of ideologies. The dramaturgy of a media event set up to strengthen an ideological conservative opinion is best exemplified through one episode of *"Khutwa"* which attracted particular attention.

It was the first time on UAE television to talk about the phenomena of *Boyahs* (also called *mustarjilāt*), i.e. women taking appearances of men.[544] In line with his image of not shying away from controversial topics and giving voice to people from the street, Dr. Khalifa invited two anonymous female guests to talk about their different experiences and views about their gender and homosexual tendencies. The episode was aired at an strategically inconvenient time, the day of the opening ceremony of *Burj Khalifa* in Dubai, which was broadcasted live on *Dubai TV*. Nevertheless, this particular episode provoked lively discussions in official as well as alternative media spheres.[545] The episode was uploaded to *You Tube* a day after (with 56,678 views within only five days) and mentioned on several internet forums.

The overall message of the show and the way how Dr. Khalifa presented the topic followed the same lines as Evangelical treatments of homosexuality. He claimed openness and tolerance by addressing a topic, but actually adjusted it to a set case of values and assumptions about the topic without giving voice to the people who he was talking about. In his introduction to the episode Dr. Khalifa justified his addressing the topic by taking a clear stand against the phenomenon, saying:

> "Our topic in this episode will analyse a phenomenon which in the
> beginning – thanks God – [only] appeared in universities, colleges,
> and institutes but has now invaded even preparatory school […]
> Those who do not acknowledge its existence and disagree with me
> can simply call one of the social or psychological counsellors at any

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[544] Since the term is ambiguous, the Arabic term *"mustarjila"* (plur. *"mustarjilāt")* or" Boyah" (plur. *"Boyahs"*) will be used. In some cases the term is used for lesbians, in others for transvestites.

[545] It was discussed in one of the most read newspapers in the UAE, *Al-ʾImārāt al-Yawm* (See: Al Ameri, 2010. *Tariq Habib: 'Boyah' in Need of a Psychiatrist and Not a Religious Preacher. 'Mustarjila' Wants to Marry and Have Children with Her Lover.*)

high school or ask student advisors in colleges or universities whether this phenomenon exists; the answer will certainly be 'yes' – How do we deal with it and how do we get rid of it; this is our topic for today's episode of "*Khutwa*".[546]

His statement opposing the phenomenon and seeing it actually as an illness is repeated after every advertising break. Dr. Khalifa had to ensure to side with the values of the channel and that he was merely the analyser trying to help.[547] The two anonymous *Boyahs* invited to the show were set against a psychologist and two female students who were not tomboys themselves but who talk about their perception of the *mustarjilāt*. Throughout the show, Dr.Khalifa distanced himself from his 'case studies,' even when addressing them. Normally he thanks the guests who talk about their personally experience with sensitive topics; in this particular episode, however, he introduced his studio guest as a woman who wants to marry her female friend, and the following dialogue took place between them:

Khalifa: 'Let's welcome Badriyya. Badriyya, welcome to the programme.'

Bandar: 'Thank you.'

Khalifa: 'You have two names, Badriyya and Bandar, how shall I call you?'

Bandar: 'Call me Bandar.'

Khalifa: 'Bandar?! Forgive me, I cannot call you Bandar, sister Badriyya, bear with us during this episode that we call you Badriyya. Why do you want to be called Bandar?'

Bandar: 'As to me, I prefer the name for me.'

Khalifa: 'But you say you still have a name that is longer, or better.'

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[546] Al Suweidi, 2010. *'Bōyāt' Aw Mustarjilāt ('Boyahs' or Women Who Appear Like Men)*, [TV broadcast].

[547] With 'values of the channel' I am referring to the established pattern of only choosing topics which have been tackled before and are therefore 'safe.' In its profile *Abu Dhabi TV* states that it has "an important role to play in educating the public and in raising awareness of issues as diverse as the environment, culture, healthcare and religion." Behind this general phrase are patterns and structures of selecting suitable topics which are in line with the self censorship patterns discussed previously. (ADM, 2011. *Community*.)

Bandar: 'I do.'"[548]

Dr. Khalifa proceeded by asking Bandar since when she had chosen a male name, and hence addresses her as Badriyya throughout the show. The expert guest for the episode balanced this overruling of Bandar's personal choice by calling her Bandar. In his conversations with the psychologist, Dr. Khalifa repeatedly used the phrase "normal girls" when describing girls who dress in a feminine way and show interest in makeup, as opposed to *mustarjila*. The psychologist and one of the present students agreed with Dr. Khalifa's evaluation of the phenomenon as "wrong" and strengthened his introducing words by adding the theoretical view and the experience of a student who feels "scared" by these 'un-normal' and "aggressive" girls.

To give the impression of presenting different opinions, the other student invited to give her opinion stated that she does not feel threatened or disturbed by students who did not behave like "normal girls". But her lack of conformity with the opinion dominating the show was explained by her being educated in the West, which Dr. Khalifa repeatedly hinted at during the discussion. He left it to the viewers to make the connection between foreign upbringing and 'non-conformity' with the official discourse.[549] The example shows that although shows like *"Khutwa"* interact with misrepresented publics, their public visibility is only seemingly supported. Both Nashwa's and Dr. Khalifa's shows support a discourse designed to unify and bundle opinions rather than mirror a diversified society. Although their shows interact with various publics, their patronising style does not give a voice to alternative opinions. Minority groups and marginalised voices in the UAE resort to other spheres to discuss and scrutinise media productions.

The setting in which the show *"Khutwa"* is presented demonstrates what Bakhtin labels as "monologic" style, as opposed to dialogic. He describes literary genre in which the author uses refutation and confirmation in a catechism style to enhance their image of

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[548] Al Suweidi, 2010. *'Bōyāt' Aw Mustarjilāt ('Boyahs' or Women Who Appear Like Men)*, *[TV broadcast].*

[549] The official narrative promotes the same gender behaviours promoted by Dr. Khalifa. Not only is homosexuality punishable by law, but state universities launched campaigns against the 'phenomenon of *Boyahs*.' Al Ain University for example launched an awareness campaign under the slogan "Excuse me, I'm a girl" and Zayed University in Abu Dhabi circulated pictures on campus information boards encouraging students to wear *abaya* in a conservative fashion.

being knowledgeable and thus entitled to lecture the readers. Bakhtin remarks about thus presented opinions and counter opinions:

> "In dramatic dialogue or a dramaticized dialogue introduced into the author's context, these relationships link together represented, objectified utterances and are therefore themselves objectified. This is not a clash of two semantic authorities, but rather an objectified (plotted) clash of two represented positions, subordinated wholly to the higher, ultimate authority of the author."[550]

Conceptualising Dr. Khalifa and ultimately the TV channel as 'authors' of the show, "*Khutwa"* is another example of how an official identity based on a top-down relationship of patronising and 'guiding' the citizens can be enforced. As in the case of print media the examination of local talk shows raising sensitive topics raises doubts as to whether they may over time lead to a more open public discussion of these. Are individuals like Dr. Khalifa first signs of approaching change or merely agents of a dominant discourse, strengthening it by making it appear more contemporary?

6.1.3 If live shows are not 'real': can the local media be of real value for Emirati identity?

Identifying "*Khutwa"* as an ultimately monological format raises the question of its value for Emirati audiences. Dr. Khalifa sees himself as a pioneer in UAE media simply by voicing topics publicly, which previously were unheard of – and, most importantly, unseen. He said that in order to make a change he had to conform to viewing patterns as not to

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[550] Bakhtin, 1984. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p.188.

'shock' the audience.[551] From this perspective, the introduction of a live society show like *"Khutwa"* is telling for an audience-media relationship: although the multifaceted character of Emirati society is homogenised in this framework, government channels cannot simply ignore the necessity of including various voices into the media (even if merely to bring them into line), without risking to lose their audience. Since Emiratis have a wide choice of media usage, alternative communities can – and in fact do – utilise alternative spheres to strengthen their imagined communities, mainly via the internet.

As in the case of the debate on mixed marriages, the patronising monologue can be transformed into a dialogue in alternative spheres, which will in turn influence the official media. By raising the topic it becomes a product of consumption. Media analyst Dabbous even points out that unwillingly and indirectly programme such as the live talk show exposes the "non-universal, temporal nature of dominant [...] discourses" which leads to a problematisation of established dogmata.[552]

The students and presenters interviewed for this research did not accept the monologic style of the show, which they perceived as 'boring'. Only a few students watched *"Khutwa"*, but after the airing of discussed episode on *mustarjilāt*, several interviewees referred to it. When asked about social topics on local television, a presenter mentioned *"Khutwa"* and said, "I watch it by subject, like the *Boyah*-thing. Many people watched it."[553] The choice of local programmes by topic not only confirms a general interest in local topics on television, but indicates what is perceived as entertaining and 'real'. Audiences demands are not satisfied merely by being a local presenter, just as raising sensitive topics, alone, does not establish a regular fan-base. What the monologic style lacks is the illusion of being personally related to the lives of the viewers.

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[551] See: Al Suweidi, 2009. *Khutwa*, *[Recorded interview]*.

[552] Dabbous-Sensenig uses an example from *Al Jazeera*, the live show *A-Sharia wal Hayat,* which features a similar format as Khutwa but in a religious discourse. The show is set up to stabilise the opinion of orthodox Sunni Islam, by using a television format which is by genre not well-suited for the educational aim of the show but in fact to question naturalised definitions of reality and ideologies. It seems that, like in the example from Al Jazeera, the government-affiliated channels in the UAE incorporate and bring innovative or new concepts into line. (See: Dabbous-Sensenig, 2006. *To Veil or Not to Veil : Gender and Religion on Al-Jazeera''S Islamic Law and Life,* p.81.)

[553] Al Ketbi, 2010. *Being a Presenter in Abu Dhabi TV (Part 1), [Recorded interview].*

Since television 'liveness' is in itself orchestrated and edited, no talk show may be truthfully called "real"; yet the main strength of society talk shows lies in how well they can maintain the illusion that they are so. They are the best candidates for the task of creating an authentic media, i.e. a media which is based on 'real life', or at least one which is considered to accurately reflect reality. Their editing process, however, makes them creators of reality in their own right, from the participants they select to how they filter viewer call-ins. Nevertheless, as Bourdon observed, 'liveness' still promotes "a belief in the status of what we see on the screen".[554] The attractiveness of such television shows is the illusion that "real" people are imagined to be extracted from the audience to tell their own stories; the illusion is made complete when the show ends with the discussion of how the individual will then return to 'normal' life – and therefore to the viewer community. If a talk show succeeds in its illusion of 'liveness', it can function in the minds of its viewers as a microscopic view of society. Such a show can induce the viewer to feel concern for or estranged from an individual who, despite all individual differences, is still a part of the larger imagined community. Television guests can create a strong bond between individuals of a society.

Bourdon argued that mass events and spectacles are capable of making a viewer feel part of a community, which is imagined as larger than the stage of the event itself (i.e. the cinema auditorium). A talk show guest who is identified as representative of a socially-accepted opinion can in this way lead those individuals who share that opinion identify with, by allowing the individual to imagine that other viewers feel the same identification. Yet, no matter how focused (or one-sided) the representation of an issue is or seems to be, it is still interpretative and will be taken differently by different individuals. Inviting a person whose behaviour or preferences do not fit the professed agenda of the collective identity[555] can reassure a similarly inclined viewer that their 'otherness' does not exclude them from their imagined community. Such is the dual nature of representation: 'reality' shows can simultaneously represent parallel publics.

Such public discussion of social issues can reinforce the dominant discourse as it does not allow a plurality of perspectives. As aforementioned, even techniques such as

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[554] Bourdon, 2004. *Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise*, p.166.
[555] Ibid. p.163f.

asking viewers to call in can be manipulated merely by a production team choosing to air people offering similar opinions only. Yet editing can ruin the appeal of such shows by distorting their inherent duality. A biased programme limits the spontaneity of a discussion and solely presenting a singular perspective is inauthentic, especially for an audience used to the incendiary debates often featured on similar American shows. 'Liveness' is therefore as important for the imagined societal approval of individual otherness as it is for entertainment purposes: making it both an important integral tool for an imagined community and a major attraction of such shows to viewers. Such 'liveness' is constituted not only by communicating the idea that 'anything could happen', but also simply by the liveliness of the discussions on screen.

A show which tried to combine both expert advice and the opinions of the "audience on the street" was launched in 2009 on *Emirates Channel*. The idea of local show *"Shababna"* was to discuss topics of interest to young Emiratis and to solicit opinions of an audience of approximately twelve students. The show was hosted by young Emirati presenter Fatima Al Hind who, being a student herself, seemed ideal for the show's target audience. The producers of the show faced several difficulties in realising this concept, mainly due to the lack of audience integration – and motivation. The students were reluctant to offer their opinions to the panel of experts, who were often either university professors or government representatives.[556] Recording the show also hindered the spontaneity or liveliness of the discussions: often parts had to be re-recorded several times, so that the 45-minute show ended up taking hours to shoot. The audience participation was also scheduled for the end, by which time many students had lost interest in participating at all.[557] Most talk shows are neither live nor include participants who seem 'real' enough for the viewers to identify with – and who they could simultaneously be entertained by.

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[556] In a conservative patriarch society it is not astonishing that young people hesitate to openly contradict 'elders'. The setting of the show however contradicts its supposed aim to provide a platform for the youth; rather than trying to break the atmosphere of adherence to authority it uses the participants as a third wall in the studio.

[557] During the breaks some students complained that they did not find the topics overly engaging or exciting, but rather mainstream. The show was stopped after ten episodes. It was more a pilot project by the re-branded channel than a potential hit. It was not highly advertised too. The media students of the focus groups I interviewed by and large had not even heard about the show.

[This image has been removed by the author of this thesis/dissertation for copyright reasons.] [558]

"*Shababna*" is in this sense completely compatible with the established method of producing talk shows for Arab government channels. For a talk show the combination of 'liveness' and liveliness together with a presenter who is representative for an imagined community are certainly the key factors. Fulfilling these can make them valuable virtual gathering points for communities of sentiment ranging from shared experiences over sexual orientations to religious convictions, nationhood, etc. The "Oprah Winfrey Show" is convincing in its own right, which makes it the overall more appealing media product. Oprah even manages to symbolically merge mainstream and subaltern by visually representing the Black American minority while her language, body language and attire associates her with a stereotypical middle class white American.

Had the UAE media any show and media personality to compete with Oprah, no doubt the audience would watch it, but again, the various aspects discussed hinder the developments of such strong television brands. Since realness is not synonym for 'live', reversely any media genre which is not live can be a nexus of a community of sentiment. Given the interest of students in seeing authentically Emirati and original content on screen, one can see that other genres have a large potential to gain the approval of the Emirati publics and to become interpretive materiel for the negotiation of Emirati identities. Producers of other media genres (film, animation, etc.) still have to navigate the channels' established practices. The question is therefore similar to the case of talk shows: is it worth entering a tactful relationship with the official media and try to change media from within, or is there a third way? The following part will outline how producers of other media genres

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[558] Abu Dhabi TV, 2009. *"Shababna: Studio and the presenter, Fatima Al Hind." [screen-shots].*

have found a more independent approach to distributing their productions and gain more influence over their original content.

6.2 The Maverick approach: how to become a media celebrity

The interviews with female media employees have highlighted the perceived categories hindering women to become public figures. The unwillingness to be seen is almost a *sujet* in the visual media industry, not only for private people but, as we have seen, media professionals: the female local media employees mentioned the reluctance of families to let their female family members be on screen like the foremost mentioned presenter described the reluctance of Emiratis to participate in "on the street"-interviews. Asking why this was, the interviewees often refer to ready-made answers such as "this is what we do", "for us Arabs, it's not acceptable,"[559] etc. At the same time performance of individuals defies the validity and strength of such categories. Women have found ways around the categories and their actions have retrospectively been approved by their families, just as Dr. Khalifa has found ways to discuss so-called taboo topics. While the latter becomes an agent of the authoritarian discourse, other media producers have different means to push boundaries. Following the approach to produce independently from the channels, they can navigate through channel production structures for example. Yet these media professionals have to navigate among other obstacles and find ways to reach audiences.

The examples discussed in the following sections will show how independent media producers take advantage of both Emiratisation, demand for role models, and audiences longing for local content. The first part of this section will introduce two of the most popular media personalities and their different ways to fame. Not actively supported by the local TV channels, the latter soon noticed their 'popularity value' and made them Ramadan

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[559] These and similar phrases were repeatedly used by students from the focus groups. (See: Students, 2010. UAE Media: Talkshows and TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 17]. & Students, 2010. UAE Media: Talkshows and TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 16].)

blockbusters. Their examples not only boosted the popularity of cartoons and animation in the UAE but motivated other aspiring media producers to follow suit.

The second part of this section will elaborate on the popularity of this particular genre. Several students found comical stereotypes of Emiratis closer to their experienced daily lives than staged 'live' shows. The discussion of the relationship between humorous genres and censorship institutions will highlight the problems and opportunities of such cartoons. The topic of censorship and independent media producers will lead to the third part of this section, which focuses on film-makers. This particular genre does not only have to navigate through censorship and funding but find spaces of distribution. As mentioned before, the national media defines media accessibility from a technological point of view. While satellite, telecommunication channels, and internet are well provided for, the social accessibility is not perceived as necessary to develop. Curran remarked on the challenge to provide a media infrastructure which gave minority communities a voice in the media.[560] His observations can be expanded to an accessibility of spaces of distribution: since the government holds a monopoly over the media sector, it also defines where and in which context media can be consumed. This poses a particular problem for film-makers, who are restricted to film festivals. While these are public, their audience is pre-selected. Short films by directors who are not famous or established in the market are for example often screened at times when many people are at work.

The last part of this section will bring together the discussed examples and show how they have managed to become role models by means of public relations techniques. By constructing and marketing a public image they break the pattern of restricted public visibility. They use 'framed' publicity in official media or with advertising companies to induce people to visit their private websites or *Facebook* pages, on which they create a new way of 'being seen': a celebrity culture.[561]

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[560] Curran, 1998. *Crisis of Public Communication: A Reappraisal*, p.191.

[561] I am calling it "culture" rather than Appadurai's term of the "cultural" to distinguish that the phenomenon is an established discourse with patterns of actions, perceptions etc. which are not spontaneously performed by the individual celebrity; in order to become a celebrity certain unwritten rules have to be followed.

6.2.1 Emirati cartoons and their makers: an overview of trend setters

Since independent media producers have the advantage of dealing directly with the NMC and potential clients (rather than being employees of the latter) they can compromise and modify their products for potential financiers. The first difficulty lies in finding these opportunities. Looking back to his early beginnings the producer of the popular animation series *"Freej"* (Emirati dialect term for 'neighbourhood'), Mohammed Saeed Harib, recalls how he had to transform from designer/artist to businessman in order to produce his series at all.[562] Retrospectively his persistence has been rewarded by immense fame and he has become the creator of an important part of Dubai's media identity, accepted by both industry and audiences.

After studying general arts and animation in the US, the Dubaian animator developed the characters which he had started as a university project while working in marketing in *Dubai Media City*. In 2003, with the support of *Dubai Media City*, Harib started developing the 3D animation further, but very quickly faced serious funding problems. As he stated in an interview with *The Economist* in 2011, "we have a problem with Emiratis who don't trust Emiratis. Many CEOs don't see an Emirati talent as worth spending money on."[563] After realising a small demo version of the series, he finally managed to obtain funding from the Mohammed bin Rashid Establishment for Young Business Leaders[564] in 2005 and founded his own production company, *Lammtara*. In order to complete the first series Mohammed Saeed Harib utilised as many support channels as he could, even engaging media students to volunteer for the project.[565] By going the way of producing the project himself, Harib finally managed to produce a marketable product, which *Sama Dubai* aired in Ramadan 2006. After this difficult start the show was an immediate hit and the blockbuster of Ramadan. It was the first Arabic 3D-animated cartoon with the additional value of being perceived as authentically Emirati. The storyline of the comedy is based on four Emirati grandmothers who in their traditional attire (including the *burqa*) not only

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[562] *"freej"* (dialect Arabic for 'neighbourhood')was first aired on Sama Dubai in Ramadan 2006 and remained part of the annual season programme up to date. The episodes have been published as DVDs.

[563] J.F., 2011. *The Q&A: Mohammed Saeed Harib, Animator.*

[564] See: Staff-Reporter, 2012. *Mohammed Bin Rashid Establishment for Young Business Leaders*

[565] See: Saffarini, 2006. *Students Help Bring Cartoon to Life.*

represent stereotypical women of the old generation, but different characteristics attributed specifically to Dubai society.

The first character, named after Harib's own grandmother Umm Saeed, represents a sharp-witted conservative Emirati from the pre-oil generation, who has a suitable poem and saying for any occasion. Another, Umm Khammas, is the troublemaker of the group, an outspokenly-loud energetic Bedouin, with a knack for finding unconventional solutions to any obstacle. Umm Alawi is the upper-class geek from Iranian descent, who is better informed than any of the others on what is going on outside their area and time, although she still prefers to live the traditional way. Finally Umm Saloom represents the mild-hearted grandmother who misplaces her medicines, gets lost, and constantly misses the point of conversations and events by snoozing off. The slogan of the show warns that with "Old Ladies, anything is to be expected", and the style of the comedy manages to combine social criticism with an affectionate glance on how much Emirati society has become estranged from the older generations. As Harib said in a personal interview, his aim was to make viewers start talking about their roots, their heritage and identity.[566]

[This image has been removed by the author of this thesis/dissertation for copyright reasons.] [567]

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[566] See: J.F., 2011. *The Q&A: Mohammed Saeed Harib, Animator.*
[567] Lamaterra, 2009. *"The Freej Characters – Wallpaper."* [screen-shot].

The first season was such a success that by the second season a large fan base was already anticipating the series. Using the flow of the moment, a wide merchandising industry was set up ranging from school supplies, clothing, and many other paraphernalia. Although the hype around *"Freej"* subsided after a few seasons, the students from the focus groups still considered it a landmark in UAE media production: very "us"[568], very funny, and professionally made. *"Freej"*, so they felt, had distinguished the UAE in terms of technical standards as well as content. Both aspects are important for the collective notion of having a unique identity which is not only traceable on a local level.

The content provides an image of Emiratis as rooted in a unique historical past (with particular attire, language style, and habits), yet at the same time blessed with an equally-distinguished present which taps the full potential of what modern technology and invention can offer. The narrative thus translates the official narrative of clashing differences of lifestyle before and after the oil-boom in a reconciling manner: both are valid sources of pride for the community. The ability to communicate this understanding of the own heritage and present identity to a mass audience becomes an act of profiling, and the series a point of reference to explain what characterises Emirati society. By gaining not only recognition for the show in the Arab language market the sense of distinction is even heightened. Emirati fans could identify with the international recognition Harib achieved because it contributed to Dubai's international brand image, thus recognisability.

The creator of another cartoon series called *"Šaᶜabīyat al-Kartōn"* has gone a different way to market his product. The caricaturist Haidar Muhammed Haidar developed his first 2D-animations as small 50 second clips, which were distributed via mobile phones.[569] The cartoon brings together a collection of multi-ethnic male and female characters portraying the multiple facets of Emirati society. The strength of the cartoons lies in its sarcastic humour targeting all stereotyping nationalities and gender via their accents and tempers as they deal with everyday situations. In the classic Donald Duck-style exaggerated choleric outbursts and mishaps are reoccurring themes. The focus group students appreciated its multifaceted reality: by not only showing the perspective of the Emiratis, but the interaction and coexistence of all ethnicities it seemed a real mirror of

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[568] Students, 2010. *UAE Media: Talkshows and TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 18].*
[569] See: Haidar, 2010. *Arabic Cartoons, [Recorded interview].*

society. Also, by bashing all groups portrayed, it avoided seeming unfair or racist. Unlike Harib, Haidar did not found his own company but is working with the company for mobile content production, *Qanawat Media*.[570] The cartoon started to be circulated in 2004 and slowly became more and more popular among young Emiratis. By 2006 its popularity was recognised by the channels *Sama Dubai*, who broadcasted it in daily two-minute clips, until it became established as regular 15-minute episode series in 2008.[571] Following the trend of 3D animation *"Šaʿabīyat al-Kartōn"* managed to remain true to its caricaturist origins by leaving the characters in 2D, but setting them up in front of a 3D background. This modern-vintage mix gives the series a unique distinctive style reminding of "Les Triplettes de Belleville."[572] By 2009 the hype around *"Šaʿabīyat al-Kartōn"* had made it a brand similar to *"Freej"*, with an array of merchandising.[573]

Image No. 6. 2: The 2012 advertisement for the animation series "Šaʿabīyat al-Kartōn" on Sama Dubai.[574]

With two highly popular Emirati animation series established in the UAE media landscape, the third animation broadcasted by *Sama Dubai* was up against a great deal of competition. Najla Al Shihhe could rely on a certain amount of fame as a scriptwriter for *"Freej"*, when she decided to start her own animation series *"Khousa Bousa"*, which was

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[570] See: Anonymous, 2010. *Qanawat Media*.

[571] Speer, 2008. *Muḥammad Ḥaydar: Šaʿabīyat Al-Kartōn as Mediator between the Government and the Public.*

[572] Chomet, 2003. *Les Triplettes De Belleville*,

[573] Haidar, 2010. *Arabic Cartoons*, [Recorded interview].

[574] Sama Dubai, 2012. *Šaʿabīyat Al-Kartōn. [hero-shot].*

broadcast in Ramadan 2009.[575] It shows a modern Emirati family and their everyday adventures. Having experience not only from working with *Lammtara* but also from being a marketing director before, the author founded her own animation production company for film and TV production to finance her project. The focus group students remarked the series did not meet the artistic standards of *"Freej"*, which it seemed to copy. And even the content did not convince many students, who mainly thought it was an attempt to merge elements of *"Freej"* and "*Šaᶜabīyat al-Kartōn"*. Although it hit the market at a time when everybody seemed to be crazy about Emirati animation it did not have a unique flavour to the design or even content. Some focus group students even said they perceived it as racist in the way it stereotyped for example the Egyptian mother of the Emirati family, or other Arabs.

6.2.2 Wrapping criticism into comic relief or becoming main stream: what kind of humour is acceptable?

In an interview with Najla Al Shihhe she stated that so many scenes were cut by the NMC that several jokes changed their meaning and thus appear merely flat or meaningless. She mentioned a scene, which incidentally had been pointed out by a student in the focus group, to illustrate the dilemma.[576] In the original scene the Emirati family drops off their child at a private day-care centre run by a retired Syrian school teacher. The teacher demands a high admission fee to her nursery and explains that given the rising living expenses in Dubai, she does not have a choice. In her fluent speech she complains that everything needs to be paid for in Dubai, lately even the parking spaces, so that you cannot make a move without spending money somewhere. According to Najla, the NMC rejected this elaboration on rising costs of living in Dubai and cut the scene. As a result the joke,

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[575] To produce the series, Najla Al Shihhe founded the production company Busy Bee Studios. The title of her first animation series are the first words of a popular nursery rhyme, and are not translatable (child-language). By 2012 the company shifted its focus to applications and online games for children. The animation series was only aired for one season. (See: Staff-Reporter, 2012. *Busy Bee Studios*.)

[576] Al Shihhe, 2009. *Arabic Cartoons*, *[Recorded interview].*

which was hinting towards the newly established 'Park & Pay' system, became deflated and the meaning of the whole scene shifted accordingly. As the focus group student pointed out when she described the scene as it was broadcast, it seemed like a joke on behalf of Syrians who are supposedly greedy for money and highly inventive in finding ways to obtain more than justifiable from their customers.

In this example the producer, Najla Al Shihhe, felt that the NMC executed a direct violation of her media product, and said that the reasons were probably shading a potentially bad image on Dubai.[577] During 2009, when the discourse of the financial crisis was in full flow, certainly any reminder of the financial dilemma which Dubai saw itself in was treated as extremely sensitive. Seeing themselves as upholders of moral and protectors of the UAE's public image, it is not surprising that the NMC rejected any allusions to a social fact which was not yet normalised. After all, the new 'Park & Pay' system affected almost all UAE residents and was not established enough to allow any jokes about it. In this light it does not appear so random that the NMC let other similar scenes go by uncensored. For example in *"Šaᶜabīyat al-Kartōn"* a scene makes fun of another government invention, the public complaint system.[578] In a 2009 episode for example the main character clashed with the pseudo complaint system at a government entity. Unable to apply for a service using the ready-installed brand new complaint box, his application merely dropped to the floor several times instead of even landing in a post box. The scene refers to non-functional government services going with a widely advertised complaint system, which never seems to reach the right people.

Why the two different allusions to potentially critical or at least laughable practices invented by the government were estimated differently by the NMC cannot be said for sure, but the examples hint towards a phenomenon specific to humorous genre and censorship, not unknown throughout history: humour, satire, cartoons, and cabaret have a strong potential in states with high level of censorship. This is because they can distort the reality in a way which seemingly detaches it from experienced real life but at the same time highlights things which are to be criticised. Therefore satire and caricature have always been

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[577] Ibid.

[578] Many government entities in the UAE offer 'complaint-boxes' for customers, and Taxi companies feature complaint-hotlines in every car; even company trucks can often be seen with a sticker attached to the back of the vehicle stating "Am I driving safely? If not, call [hotline-number].

among the most dangerous media genre from the perspective of the censorship authorities, and at the same time highly popular among viewers. Autocratic regimes would like to keep humour harmless, reducing it to slapstick and situational comedy. But allusions can easily be slipped in, recognisable to those who are sensitive or looking for them.

A famous cabaret performer and former citizen of the GDR described in his dissertation on subversive humour how the audience would evaluate the quality of a play by the political references which were so distorted that they managed to remain undetected by the authorities.[579] The audience however, was looking out for them. By walking the line between euphemism and debunking, cartoons thus create a higher level of closeness to real life than other genre.[580] It is important to consider why some criticism is potentially inflammatory and other is not? Allusions to elements of society which are already established or carried by an assumed consensus of their usefulness (in this case the complaint system) are not perceived as potential threats. Newly established rules which are still under scrutiny and criticism by the people who are not yet used to having them in their lives will be estimated differently. What is not normalised and established might still face collective opposition. Whether the NMC really considered the scene from *"Khousa Bousa"* as such a case may not be proven but the general line of thought is useful to keep in mind when considering the popularity of cartoons. In one focus group the theoretical question was raised as to how series like *"Šaᶜabīyat al-Kartōn"* would be perceived if they were not animations, and many students said they would find several things rather insulting.[581] By wearing the masque of exaggeration, criticism is not perceived as "personal", and the comic genre can become "charitable, but at the same time [...] not gullible", a basis on which it "has the potential to form a strong sense of belonging among its fans."[582]

Putting aside possible ideological considerations from the NMC, in practice Emirati producers such as Najla, perceive their censorship as coincidental and arbitrary, which makes it difficult for her to adjust their content. Especially when working towards a pressing

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[579] Dorfer, 2006. *Totalitarismus Und Kabarett*,

[580] See: Burke, [1973] 1941. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*,

[581] In two focus groups, discussions evolved around comic relief and the opinions were mixed. Some students remarked that "it's not nice for [people who are stereotyped in cartoons]," whilst others perceived it as acceptable within the genre. (See: Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Talkshows and TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 1]* and Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Talkshows and TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 8]*.

[582] Burke, [1973] 1941. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*,

deadline, this arbitrariness leads to anticipatory self-censorship just to avoid delays and extra production costs. Furthermore, the amount of censorship by the NMC seems to vary from season to season: what may pass by in one Ramadan might be cut during next. In any case, from the cartoonist's perspective they have the difficult task to be just as provocative and critical as they are funny in order to remain popular with their fans. Becoming successful and mainstream can potentially weaken the critical aspects, as the development of *"Freej"* over four seasons of shows. The potential of the blockbuster effect during the first season was rapidly scooped out, and by 2009 *"Freej"* was already broadcasted with English subtitles to expand its fan base to non Arab speaking audiences or those unfamiliar with the local dialect.[583] With the focus groups' students, *"Freej"* has gone down in popularity over the years. By season three it was perceived as lecturing, boring and since it lost its novelty effect of the animations, not worth watching anymore.

Looking at the development of *"Freej"* during the four years it has certainly gone through phases of controversy in the beginning, but become tame and harmless with further development. In its second season, one episode caused a minor scandal among religious figures. In the episode in question, Umm Khamas who is diagnosed to die shortly becomes over religious and ends up establishing herself as a religious advisor for other women of the local community. Lacking any religious educational background, she invents her own fatwas, which are accepted by her admirers without questioning, although they are blatantly silly.[584] Although the episode can be seen as a criticism of gullible people who rather have guidelines from seemingly religious people than think for themselves, Harib was criticised by religious authorities for this episode.[585]

Unlike other media producers the episode was neither banned nor cut, which encourages a cartoonist to continue along provocative lines. But Harib chose to avoid criticism and benefit from the branding potentials of the show. By and by *"Freej"* has over the years lost its inflammatory potential and become more a brand for the pending theme

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[583] Through the subtitles, the jokes get lost in translation and the overall humorous character of the show is reduced to a slapstick comedy with cute animations.

[584] For instance she rules that the annual hajj pilgrimage should be performed at least thrice a year, if not more. (Harib, 2007. *False Alarm*, *[TV broadcast].*)

[585] The article was no longer available from the website of the newspaper *Al Ittihad*. A copy can be found on the internet forum: Al-Ittihad, 2007. *Freej Joking About.*

park in Disneyland-style and other major publicity stunts. Mohammed Said Harib uses all marketing options to the full, and using playful humour makes *"Freej"* more sellable. At the same time, by eliminating political criticism he gains more and more official support by the government. Their aim is after all to establish the image of young Emiratis as "leaders" and "innovators" of the future as the employability campaigns proclaim.

It is useful here to recall the priority for Emiratisation of a population who is massively under 30 years of age and facing difficulties in finding employment. Multiple government training programmes are designed to strengthen the confidence of these young Emiratis and enable them to compete in a labour market defined by the high standards of expatriate consultancy companies. Since the government wants to motivate Emiratis to seek employment in the competitive private sector, the narrative of 'empowerment' is an important aspect of Emiratisation campaign. This overall discourse of a nation who proudly looks into its past and confidently faces the future needs role models. Local rulers like Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid and his children lead by the example of their self branding but are not so much practical role models as idealised figureheads. An Emirati who can be presented through a narrative of identification is an invaluable agent. His story can motivate others because it follows the line of 'he was one of us, had high ambitions and managed to fulfil them – so can you'.[586]

Accordingly the case of Mohammed Harib illustrates how individual priorities can change not by negative ruling factors such as direct censorship but better opportunities. What may initially be motivated by the urge to translate a part of self into a creative format and share it with the members of the imagined community can become overpowered by the importance of heightening success. Thus the urge to satisfy all members of society, the religious conservatives, the government, adults as well as children can lead to a loss in uniqueness – as seen with *"Freej"*. Therefore, ultimately, compliance with a de-politicised uncritical mainstream makes Harib act similar to television channels' policies: play safe, don't risk confrontation or offence in order to 'stay in the game,' as the phrase goes. And similar to the channels, this approach leads to a simultaneous loss of character and hence popularity with the audience.

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[586] See for example his initiatives with university students: Saffarini, 2006. *Students Help Bring Cartoon to Life.*

How difficult it is for a media producer to "stay in the game and exceed his business prospects became apparent in 2010, when the production of *"Freej"*, had to be stopped after the ninth episode of the 5th season due to the lack of sponsors.[587] After having already limited the show to a mini-series in style of a game show in 2009, this seemed to hint that *"Freej"* was in serious financial trouble.[588] But by 2011 Mohammed Said Harib seemed to have picked himself up again and was back with seven full length episodes on *Sama Dubai*.[589]

6.2.3 The trouble with financiers and censorship for film makers

For independent media producers around the globe financiers always have influence on the content of a media product. The difficulties of financing a media production and navigating censorship have an even more pressing quality n the UAE. To make the media project with a minimum of interference (i.e. by letting the government finance a production) producers have to become business people. If they do not want to rely on government funding the best way forward seems to be for directors to establish their own production companies and the necessary networks to realise their own projects. Film maker Nayla Al Khaja from Dubai chose to go this way. Her production company *D-SEVEN Motion Pictures*[590] produces advertisements among other things. Just as cartoonists, Nayla sees her original vocation in using media as a creative way to express her identity and view of society. She has produced several short films for which she wrote the script and which she directed. The topics she chose for her first two short films were sensitive enough to get her

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[587] See: ᶜAbd Al-Maqṣūd, 2010. *Sponsors Abandon Freej*. and ᶜAbd Al-Maqṣūd, 2011. *'Freej' Yaᶜūd ʾila 'Samā Dubay' Fī Ramaḍān Al-Muqbil (Freej Back to 'Sama Dubai' Coming Ramadan).*

[588] In 2009 the series was set up as short clips of riddles which would be solved in the following episodes, instead of the full-length episodes of previous years.

[589] See: ᶜAbd Al-Maqṣūd, 2011. *'Freej' Yaᶜūd ʾila 'Samā Dubay' Fī Ramaḍān Al-Muqbil (Freej Back to 'Sama Dubai' Coming Ramadan).*

[590] Staff-Reporter, 2010. *About D-Seven*.

into conflict with the NMC but she found her own ways of dealing with the censorship authorities that have to approve the scripts before the films can be screened in festivals.[591]

Nayla Al Khaja described how she managed to produce her first two short films, by handing in film scripts which were not clear and possibly misinterpreted by the NMC members. In the script for her short film "Arabana" she intentionally wrote the script in a way that it could be interpreted as a statement against the neglect of children by their parents, whereas subtly the film describes the dangers of child abuse.[592] She later reflected on her experience with censorship in an interview with *The National*, saying that "Arabana" "was actually banned, in a sense that the script was not very… Well... They didn't really like it, the authorities, because it was a bit too controversial at that time, and the funny thing is that after two or three years the same person who sort of tried to keep the film from happening was the same person who actually gave me an award once the film was done. So that was kind of ironic and you can see that – You know the changes that happen in the region within a very short span of time, so at least now they are becoming more open to the idea of film making."[593]

Her other movie *"Once"* (2009) which was screened at the Dubai International Film Festival 2009 (DIFF) touches another critical topic which is present in everyday life but generally not addressed by the media: dating and romantic encounters between young Emiratis.[594] The issue of flirting in the malls via *Bluetooth* on mobiles and secret meetings between unmarried lovers has certainly been acknowledged and observed by the media and thus has become a part of the public sphere. Nayla's film approaches the topic from a unique angle: it takes the perspective of a young Emirati girl who is not seduced by a man (not an innocent victim), but is trying to meet with her flirt. In order to arrange a rendezvous she has to lie to her father, cruise the night in parts of Dubai unknown to her, and finally arrives in an empty flat, which was set up as a meeting point.

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[591] Film makers have to hand in their film script to the NMC before getting the permission to shoot within the UAE. However, the approval from the NMC is not connected to the sponsoring and production of the films, which is interesting in cases when high ranking personalities from the UAE support and fund a film project.

[592] The film is uploaded on Nayla Al Khaja's website: Al Khaja, 2007. *Arabana*.

[593] Staff-Reporter, 2010. *The National Interactive: "Women to Watch"*

[594] The film is uploaded on Nayla Al Khaja's website: Al Khaja, 2009. *Once*.

The fact that the Emirati girl is behaving in such a manner perceived as inappropriate by social morals is daring in itself. By showing the story from the girl's perspective and exploring her moral conflict, her fear of discovery and even of the unknown unspoken sexual experience she is about to encounter, "Once" drags the viewer into the position of the girl about to commit a sin. She used the film to showcase experiences from her own life as a teenager.[595] The camera takes her POV (Point Of View), so that the viewers cannot easily distance themselves emotionally from the story and take a judgemental position. By making public the story of a girl meeting her lover in secret in a film, Nayla reaches out to an imagined audience of girls with similar experiences. Remembering how the mainstream media either ignore such topics or deal with them within a moralising framework, the fictionalised genre has the potential to create an emotional identification with the topic. It invites other Emiratis to form a community of sentiment as well as to acknowledge that the scenario is not singular in UAE society.

As was the case with her first short film, Nayla managed to receive the permission for the film script by the NMC by distorting the "true" story slightly and by setting the focus on values and issue which the film contains but which could be presented as more judgemental in the script than they appear on screen. The act of the young girl being caught by her father at the end of the movie can appear as a rightful punishment for her lying to him, and thus change the focus of the whole movie to tackling the problem of young teenagers distancing themselves from their families and vice versa. In her official statement about the film, published as a production leaflet, Nayla stresses this point, adding that it was her objective "to increase the awareness and get young people connected with their families through effective communication."[596] Most importantly however, in the script handed in to the NMC, she left it unclear that the two young people who are to meet for the first time are actually not married, thus leading the NMC committee to understand that the plot is about a couple already married by contract but – as it is not unusual in the UAE – who have not met before.[597]

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[595] See: Al Khaja, 2010. *Being a Film Producer and Director in the Uae, [Recorded interview].*

[596] D-Seven, 2009. *"Once" Production Bible*, p.2.

[597] Thus their meeting is not only legal, but also part of a government-supported criticism of conservative families in the UAE, which is in some circles made responsible for the high percentage of divorces among the young generation (See chapter 4 on mixed marriages debate).

Another film producer, Ali F. Mostafa, had to go to more lengths before obtaining the necessary approval to screen his now hailed feature film "City of Life" (2009). The NMC did not give approval for the script, without stating any reason, so the producer decided to start shooting meanwhile, to edit and finalise it, and signed up for the Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF), where the film was accepted under the condition that by the time of airing the approval would have been handed in. The NMC claimed that it did not give approval for the film due to inappropriate alcohol scenes which gave a bad image of Dubai and the UAE.[598] Ali however stated in a personal interview, that the NMC never justified its decision. He managed to obtain approval to screen the film, through his contacts who personally appealed to Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum a few days before the film festival.[599] Through the ruler's intervention, "City of Life" was featured at the DIFF, and when after the festival a private organisation scheduled a screening in a local cinema, the NMC gave a last minute approval of the event.

After the approval from the ruler and the enthusiastic support by the audiences Ali F. Mostafa has become a role model and public figure in the film making scene, invited to events, universities and hailed as the pioneer for Emirati feature films. These events leading up to the film being sanctioned as welcome contribution to the Emirati media discourse illustrate just how different interests often conflict inside the government apparatus. The authorities did not seem able to take the risk of permitting a film which had the potential to become a showcase for Dubai lifestyle, but could just as well backfire. Only the connections of the filmmaker enabled him to jump hierarchies and obtain sanctification from the sheikh who is not bound by government or set of rules. The episode effectively adds to the observation that the government's control over media appears unpredictable. At the same time it de-legitimises the NMC's role as executive authority to observe and regulate media.

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[598] Hellyer, 2010. *Media Laws and Regulations and the Role of the Nmc, [Interview with notes].*
[599] Mostafa, 2010. *"City of Life" and Film Making in the UAE, [Recorded interview].*

6.2.4 Nourishing and widening a fan base: the self marketing game of getting myself out there

Both Nayla and Ali are willing to test the limits, and after having established themselves with a fan base and amount of publicity, they obtained a certain level of independence to go their own ways in film production. What specifically distinguishes cartoonist Mohammed Saeed Harib and film maker Nayla Al Khaja is the level to which they use their success to make themselves public figures. In lieu of a star industry to make media personalities from television channels' sides, they explore their own marketing possibilities to become celebrities. For Mohammed Saeed Harib the obvious way to go, was to use his success with *"Freej"* to become a self-made star. He has continued his close relations to the local universities, thus encouraging more media students to pursue their ambition to become animation producers. Media students I met remembered his visit to Zayed University Abu Dhabi and Dubai where he gave inspirational accounts of how to start such a career.[600] But when Harib entered a sponsorship contract with Dubai's telecommunication provider *du* in 2006,[601] he had gained more than a sponsorship: he became one of the faces of *du*, smiling from every advertisement across the UAE.

Image No. 6. 3: Two examples of the public image of Mohammed Saeed Harib, on the cover of the magazine Dubai Society, and as seen on the advertisement for *du*[602]

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[600] See: Students, 2010. *UAE Media: Talkshows and TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 12].*

[601] See: Novakovic, 2006 *Du Announces Corporate Sponsorship of Freej, Middle East's First 3d Animated Series.*

[602] The New York Times Company & DU, 2009. *"Mohammed Saeed Harib, the Creator of the Series 'Freej.'"* [edited image compilation].

In comparison, Haidar Muhammed Haidar's "Šaʿabīyat al-Kartōn" was ranked more popular among the focus group students, but only few knew him as a person, or even his name. His fame is his product, and the way he widened his audience from a grassroots start-off via mobile phones to the national television screen is singularly significant. But in terms of self marketing the creative brain behind "Šaʿabīyat al-Kartōn" (although there are newspaper articles and television shows about him and his team) does not go the length to widen his fan base by for example engaging in *Facebook*.[603] Nayla Al Khaja's case is slightly different.

As a film-maker her productions are to date restricted to film festivals and therefore cannot reach an audience as broad as television Ramadan series. She equates this initial disadvantage through self marketing, using the government's interest in promoting Emirati women to establish herself as a celebrity. The focus on Emirati women in media is a general trend, implemented by the channels by positioning women in key-roles.[604] The appointment of Noura Al Kaabi as chairperson of *TwoFour54* can be seen as such a step. If media presenters complained about the unwillingness of individuals to be seen on screen as talk show guests and interview partners, Nayla al Khaja could be called the opposite. She gives interviews for all media, distributes press releases for her latest projects and achievements as a film maker and the local media is glad to provide her with the publicity she seeks. What the country needs are role models - especially for women. And Nayla uses that trend, not only to market her films but to create a network of film support with her in the centre.

Among the achievements that make her a pioneer in media development is the establishment of a film screening club (the *Scene Club*). On her website, *Facebook* page, and *Twitter* she updates about her productions and publishes her achievements. But her engagement goes beyond establishing herself in the media scene. Like Mohammed Saeed

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[603] In addition to a *Facebook* fan page for "*freej*", Mohammed Saeed Harib has a personal Facebook page with over 1,000 friends, where he frequently publishes images and related posts. (See: Lammtara, 2011. *Mohammed Harib.*)

[604] Seeing women in executive positions was identified by media employees as an important step towards a better image of women working in the media. Nevertheless, at the time of the focus group, the participants considered Abu Dhabi not yet ready for a woman in charge and the discussion went on to whether or not it would be possible for a female to be the channel director or whether it would compromise her dignity. On that subject, opinions first deferred but then came to a consensus – it was possible. (See: Anonymous, 2009. *Emirati Women in the Media*, [Recorded focus group].)

Harib, she struck a deal with *du*, not to advertise her productions however, but to create a support network for business women in the UAE. The slogan tells a lot about Nayla's vision for herself in the business world: "Behind every successful woman entrepreneur is her Business Super Plan."[605] The visual advertisement is an abstract portrait of her. Her eagerness for publicity invites criticism as well as praise. In several interviews with film making students remarks such as "there are much more talented people" or "she only wants publicity" were made – yet she has it. And by marketing herself she has not only created fame and public visibility (certainly a tough call for film makers in a country without an established film industry), but benefited financially from it.

In the context of public visibility and 'ways of seeing' (discussed in chapter 4) commercially-driven people like Nayla can be seen as more than mere business people banking on fame. They widen the acceptability of publicity from the rulers to 'ordinary' Emiratis. The rulers use publicity to appear close to their people, while business people exemplify that being in the public domain is something every Emirati could do. Whatever opinion one might have about the culture of celebrities, the concept once established can lead to a generally more relaxed attitude towards performances of self in public. Noura Al Kaabi stresses the importance of building up a community, developing local talents, and training UAE nationals, in order to produce local media. But without role models, who will the coming generation of media producers relate to?

Especially female media professionals have stated that they often encountered resentment from their families for being on television. They could not refer to many local role models identifiable enough in order to encourage other women to pursue their dreams. The women interviewed from the ADMC *Emirates Channel* were pioneers in their own right: as they narrated their stories, it became obvious that they had overcome many obstacles to convince their families that working in the media was an acceptable option for Emirati women. With no suitable example to strengthen their argument albeit their families, they outperformed the common path for female careers and became scriptwriters, radio presenters and news reporters. However, since their stories are not known, they are in a way useless to the next generations of women who cannot use them as examples in their

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[605] Al Khaja, 2011. *Nayla Al Khaja: Her Business Super Plan*.

cause. Moreover, sheikhly female role models cannot qualify as examples, since they are from the political elite whose rules do not apply to ordinary woman. In this sense Nayla fills exactly the need of both the government and an audience – the need for role models and pioneers who do not shy away from publicity.

[This image has been removed by the author of this thesis/dissertation for copyright reasons.] [606]

Nayla and Mohammed Harib are perhaps among the most famous – but certainly not the only – Emirati media professionals who made themselves publically known without waiting for a channel or other authority to discover and promote them. The Dubaian TV presenter and DJ Marwan Parham (alias DJ Bliss) has his own publicity manager who ensures his visibility in the public domain. Like Mohammed Harib and Ali Mostafa, he accepts invitations to talk to university students. Like Nayla, he is active via social media, and by hosting an Emirati heritage show in English language he rounds up his public image perfectly. He represents the modern yet heritage conscious Emirati of a new generation. What these mentioned people have realised is the nature of the visibility-invisibility complex of Emiratis when it comes to media. They have realised that there is an audience for

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[606] Al Khaja, 2011. "Nayla Al Khaja on the front page of DigitalStudio. '*Rising Star: Nayla Al Khaja Has Her Stars Mapped Out*' and studio image." [screen-shot compilation].

celebrities and not many people willing or capable to cater this audience. Their ambitions are mainly commercial, which helps them overcome shyness towards exposure.

As media producers they at the same time use the media they have to get financial independence, which will lead them to more possibilities in terms of freedom over content. By outperforming and bypassing the official censorship, filmmakers Ali F. Mostafa and Nayla Khaja have shown that there are ways to take advantage of the inconsistent censorship habits of the NMC and the blurred rules existing around "sensitive topics." Their actions confirm the statement by the NMC member that local producers are often not aware of what they can actually do and thus are led to censor themselves in advance instead of pushing boundaries. Since they are willing to push boundaries of censorship they can take advantage of the fact that often censorship in the UAE is based on personal preferences and estimations of individual NMC members, opinions which can change or be influenced by higher authorities – as in the case of Ali F. Mostafa. These possibilities make Nayla look positively into the future of Emirati film making, when she states:

> "We do have a long way to go [...] Whenever I'm writing a script, there is always this thing in my mind that flashes, like 'that's not going to pass through! Find another way to do this!' - I don't want to have that. Right now I have no choice, but I think it is changing and it is changing fast."

And she adds: "I do think that within a couple of years I will not be worried about censorship whatsoever."[607] With raising fame and popularity these film producers can potentially widen their possibilities backed by a fan audience, the government's need for Emirati media pioneers and role models, and their own financial independence. Producers like Nayla Al Khaja and Mohammed Harib are using publicity as a contributing pillar for their careers, following the strategy 'publicity is power'. From a non-government incorporated angle all reviewed media producers are contributors to the demand of both government

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[607] Nayla's CNN interview "Inside the Middle East" is no longer available on the CNN website, but uploaded on *You Tube*: (Alias), 2010. *Emirates' First Female Film Producer Tackles Pedophilia*.

and audiences: a diversified media landscape which is recognisably Emirati. Instead of joining the official media from the off-start and getting disappointed by the lack of support from the media companies, they build themselves financial back-up and public recognition to face the government media on terms they can negotiate better to their advantage. This seems to be the only way at the moment for media talents in the UAE to implement their projects.

On first sight it might seem astonishing that the government, with all its restrictions and censorship, supports such attempts, but on the other hand the government media itself is struggling with the reconciliation of different interests in terms of media and Emirati identity: the political control, the commercial interest, and the nourishing of a local brand which can be a stabiliser of the ruling elite. In a way, government media and independent media professionals follow the same interests from different angles, and whilst a film maker might mainly be driven by talent and personal ambition, the goal is to become known, to become profiled and recognised as the creative special 'self'.

[This image has been removed by the author of this thesis/dissertation for copyright reasons.] [608]

This aim matches media identity aims of the government as well, and by supporting independent media producers the national brand of the country is enriched – on a local as

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[608] Ali F. Mostafa images from homepage." [screen-shots].

well as on a global level. Especially with regard to films, the global outreach is inherent in the genre, which makes them even more attractive from the government's side to use as contributors for their branding policies. How the branding on local and global levels interrelate and how the UAE government is trying to ameliorate its identity image beyond an audience of nationals is the starting point of the following chapter. Whilst the set up of a film industry for the UAE seems to mainly run along the same paths as TV industry, there is a noticeable difference between the genres when it comes to audience support. What is contested by Emiratis on a local level, such as the homogenisation of audiences, is met with approval on a global level.

7. Let's go global: buying into global media culture

The demand for Emiratis to be visibly represented does not stop at the borders of its territorial space. Not only is the government eager to promote a brand, Emiratis themselves want their national identity to be displayed towards non-Emiratis. They are embedded in a dialogue with international media and on a daily basis encounter foreigners who form a large proportion of their local population. While the representation towards a non-Emirati community has to find a different media language than that consumed by nationals, on the level of images and narratives popular media has its own mainstream code which is understood and most importantly appreciated by a multinational community.

Previous chapters (see chapter 5) have shown that the acceptance of a mainstream does not necessarily imply a loss of local identity. Mass-media was defined as productions which try to address as many audiences as possible. Building on a definition of mass media as productions which aim for maximum dissemination, a mainstream enters into a dialogical interaction with other media styles and narratives. This chapter will use the example of representation via films to further explore the correlation between global and local images of national identity.

For the analysis of Emirati cinematic films it is useful to remember Appadurai's observations on the globality of media. He stresses that global media is interpreted differently in different localities, thus creating "cultural landscapes."[609] From a consumer's perspective, global media will be interpreted by each community as it suits them. On a practical level the dichotomy between local and global is dissolved.[610] Fraser makes a similar observation when she describes "parallel discursive arenas"[611] for various publics. But while

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[609] Appadurai, 2005. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, p.48f.
[610] See the discussion of global and local in chapter 2.2.2
[611] Fraser, 1992. *Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy*, p.123.

these are in practice interlocked,[612] the ideological dimension of representation of communities is more complex.

On an ideological level, all media are associated with production centres and the ideologies of interest groups who finance and produce films. The Hollywood industry is a prominent example of a media industry which exports the values of US interest groups and influences media productions around the globe. Hollywood is not only a dominant discourse of narratives but the carrier of ideological messages, and its persuasive potential can lead to a competition with local ideologies, such as the official UAE identity narrative. The aim of the government is to engrain the official narrative of national identity into the Emiratis, so that they will perceive it as their 'natural' identity and themselves as part of a unified community. Censorship and the complex structure of the local UAE media industry try to safeguard the citizens from fragmentation into interest groups which could contest the government's claim to legitimacy.

At the same time both the people and the government of the UAE "buy into" global cultural phenomena. This colloquial expression pinpoints the socio-economical aspects and dynamics in its own way: not only do UAE business people buy shares in global businesses (such as football clubs, cultural institutions, the car industry and the media), but these assets come with an appreciation of, and willingness to contribute to, the cultural meanings evolving around these enterprises. People "buy into" car brands on an ideological level, and the students of focus groups "buy into" American talk shows such as Oprah. They do not merely consume: Their acceptance does not remain on the level of interaction on a local level alone, but goes hand in hand with the urge also to interact on a global level with these circulators and creators of cultural meaning. While this is still merely financial on several levels (like buying a football club) the ultimate goal is certainly to become part of the producers on an ideological level.

How this is undertaken in the UAE and which difficulties emerge from this task is the topic of this chapter. As with the development of the local television industry, the UAE's attempt to join the global film industry causes conflicts and requires negotiations of self-

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[612] Fraser, 2007. *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World.*

perception and representation towards an imagined other. On an industry level the dominant discourse of UAE identity has to be reconciled with equally strong global media narratives. The same process is triggered on a personal level through media consumption. The interviews have shown that through the prism of TV the official image is problematised and perceived as neither contemporary nor relatable to daily experiences. The question is whether similar notions apply if the UAE media joins the global film market.

Part 7.1 will introduce the concept of a Hollywood narrative and mirror it with an Emirati feature film. Based on this example Part 7.2 will explore the details of localised stereotypes and their perception by Emirati viewers. The previously applied concept of 'ways of seeing' will be reintroduced here as the experience of the 'other's' gaze. Part 7.3 will bring the observations together with the notion of branding and marketing the UAE on a global scale. The main question will be whether the usage of established stereotypes can re-interpret their message or simply emphasize their supposed validity.

7.1 The Need for Diversified Local Media and profitability of Mainstream Cinema

As we have seen in previous chapters, media makers are juxtaposed alongside a dominant mainstream media in the UAE, which is not structured to allow diversification in either business set-ups or content. Especially in Abu Dhabi, government-affiliated media companies monopolise funding and training possibilities, so that film-makers are left with few opportunities to express their own notions of identity in a new way. In Dubai the situation is slightly different due to the more commercialised character of the media industry itself. DMI's strong preference to sell media to as many audiences as possible has given the viewers more say in what kind of media is produced. The business strategy to establish a diversified media, even if only within the DMI, has led to a variety of channels with clearly distinguishable target audiences and genres. In Abu Dhabi channel identities are still in a phase of development and experimentation, trying to serve as many communities

as possible but not yet managing to develop a clear character for each channel (with the exceptions of the sports channels).

Even so, the reconciliation of economic and 'cultural' interests threatens the government's control over the media message. In order to be sold, media has to be accepted by audiences who have affinities to, and experiences with global media. The focus of the first part of the following section is on dimensions of the local mainstream media which has developed under the umbrella of the government. This aligns film producers with the style and content dictated by the film-producing companies.[613] But as is the case with TV broadcasting, the dialogue between different audiences equally influences the film productions.

The second part of this section will discuss how global media styles influence local audiences and how, consequently, the knowledge of media and its global content moulds the way Emiratis perceive and consume films. Their demand for local film productions mirrors the difficulties Emiratis experience with their local media: mainstream global cinema homogenises audiences under one best-selling product or brand, just as the local government media tries to impose a one-sided national identity.

In practice the member of a marginalised subaltern community can just as easily be a consumer of several variations of mass-media without seeing it as a contradiction. Appadurai and Eickelman's stand on the cross-fertilising nature of interpretive exchange supports the notion of complex and creative affinities to various – even contradictory – publics. These observations will illustrate how different 'ways of seeing' are interlocked with multiple layers of understanding, utilising and identifying with symbols introduced by the different media products and situations. What has been observed with regard to television consumption can be applied to other imagined communities: an individual imagining herself or himself as a member of a mainstream opinion or dominant imagined community can as well feel mutuality towards a marginalised group or subaltern counter-public. Interest groups thus formed are not fixed and their members can simultaneously belong to several publics. Depending on genre and situation, symbols of cultural identity can be perceived as

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[613] The training of future media personnel specifically for the needs of the media companies is another of such phenomena, as we have seen with the example of training producers. The film school in Abu Dhabi shows similar patterns of training students specifically to become future producers for the local media companies.

reinforcement of the collective identity towards another imagined community, or as stabilisation between the members of the imagined community of nationals.

Since different 'ways of seeing' can exist side by side, one person can be part of both global and local audiences at the same time. How a local film tries to reconcile mainstream 'ways of seeing', global outreach and a unique Emirati locality will be exemplified by the Emirati production "City of Life" in the last part of this section. A review of this film's plot and style illustrates how the producer translates his personal view on Emirati society into a cinematic language understood by both local and international audiences.

7.1.1 Reconciling profitability: independent film industry or Hollywood Mainstream

Within a wider perspective of media politics in the UAE, the rapid establishment of a film industry through semi-governmental production companies such as *Imagenation* in Abu Dhabi, and *TwoFour54*, is certainly an ingenious step towards ensuring a monopoly over the local film production market. Yet, as is the case in the television industry a major problem lies in the perception of diversification and accessibility of media. Following Habermas, the public sphere is established by institutions which step into dialogue with the government. Only with access to the public sphere can public opinion be formed.[614] Accepting the existence of multiple publics, the latter still have to be given access to various platforms of exchange in order to formulate their collective identities and become interest groups. It is my belief that communities of sentiment will search for space in which these identifying dialogues can take place. If there are no institutions to offer such platforms, alternative spheres will be utilised. When applied to media, examples have shown that, if they cannot find points of contact in the official media, people turn to form communities around alternative media - such as the internet.[615] If 'diversity and accessibility' simply mean providing media channels, the UAE has a diversified and accessible media with widespread

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[614] Habermas, 1999. *The Public Sphere*, p.93.
[615] See the discourse on mixed marriages in chapter 5.2.3

provision of internet and telecommunication opportunities. Taking the perspective of communities the access to media is limited to voices representing a homogenised public rather than diversity. True diversification which would promote a public sphere would have to support public institutions which, as Curran says, promote a collective and, most importantly, public dialogue,[616] rather than sophisticating the delivery of media from large media conglomerates to as many consumers as possible. The development of media which are independent of government-controlled companies would have to be supported by an environment encouraging private investors. In the field of film production this would mean fostering the development of an independent film landscape.[617]

The discussion among financiers on local film production during the Circle Conference 2010 evolved around different approaches towards the definition of independent films and their distribution. Most representatives of financing companies focused on commercial considerations, highlighting the importance of a wide distribution market. Their strictly commercial point of view defined independent film as a co-production of several companies from possibly different countries in contrast to films produced and linked to one studio (such as *Warner Brothers*). A content-based approach characterises independent films in terms of content, acting, and techniques. Depending on the financiers' view on what an independent film should be (i.e. profitable of ideological), their readiness to support specifically local films will vary. It is this ideological difference which has resulted in European cinema (especially French and Italian) be repeatedly mentioned as role models for Arabic film industry.[618]

Representatives of European production companies showed an interest in unique local content which should not only satisfy an already existing demand but also cultivate and

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[616] Curran, 1998. *Crisis of Public Communication: A Reappraisal*, p.191.

[617] Independent films try to break the structure of the Hollywood narrative and its constituents. They address particular interest groups which are part of the mainstream audience yet appreciate the breaking of 'tried and tested' practices. It requires diverse interest groups to develop an industry or environment of film making which can afford the production of such films. Given the political and habitual frameworks of media production, it does not seem likely that the UAE will establish an independent film industry any time soon.

[618] A panel discussion the managing director of *Arte* during the 2010 Circle Conference in Abu Dhabi revolved around the examples set by the channel and other co-national media producers. (See: Burah, 2010. *Funding Independent Features in a Global Market, [Conference proceeding].*) How the UAE media industry could learn from the example of European producers was also raised in other panel discussions, with reference i.e. to the support of young film makers. (See: Parent, 2010. *Moving from Shorts to Features, [Conference proceeding].*)

nurture society. They spoke as representatives of countries with a national film culture, in which the state was interested in developing and strengthening local films and thus local identity. This was achieved by the support of short films, films clubs and other screening events, which allowed local films to be shown to a wide audience. This created and supported a demand and in return motivated exhibitors to see local screenings as profitable.[619]

Film clubs would certainly be a step on the way to changing the UAE screen culture as can be seen from examples from other countries, such as France and the UK. They worked together with art societies to develop a demand for non-mainstream cinema which eventually influenced cinema chains. In these countries the government intervened to diversify the cinema landscape by providing financial support and premises.[620] The film club within the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation was shut down in 2008 after a period of at least three years, during which it merely screened blockbusters after they had been removed from the general cinema programmes. Small film clubs are run by private sponsors in Dubai, such as Nayla Al Khaja's *Screen Club*, and the film screening events established by Mahmoud Kabour, director and owner of *Veritas Films*. Other groups organise film evenings and rent cinema auditoriums.[621]

Such initiatives are aimed at offering spaces for different publics, which ultimately contribute to a diversified media promoting unity through diversity.[622] Trying to unify such acts of diversification under one government institution is ultimately counterproductive and can only lead to what Curran classifies as a weak media economy, in which one mainstream media dominates the market.[623] Letting aside the economic aspect, on the level of

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[619] See: Parent, 2010. *Moving from Shorts to Features, [Conference proceeding].*

[620] How effectively such projects can influence a local screening culture can be seen from the example of Ireland where a local film culture was practically nonexistent before 2006. Accordingly strategies to develop the audience and strengthen screen culture were implemented on various levels. One initiative was, for example, the revival of showing short films before the main movie in the cinemas, purchased by advertisement time, financial support of film societies and a cultural cinema conservatorium. A discussion of the developments and the role played by the Scannán na hÉireann/the Irish Film Board (IFB) can be found in: Crosson, 2003. *Vanishing Point: An Examination of Some Consequences of Globalization for Contemporary Irish Film.*

[621] Such was the case with *Emiratweet,* an online community from Dubai in 2009. (Al Samt, 2009. *Emiratweet: For the Emirati by the Emirati.*)

[622] Curran, Curran, 1998. *Crisis of Public Communication: A Reappraisal*, p. 177.

[623] Ibid. p.180.

practically-experienced daily culture, the attempt to limit the media sphere to a homogenous community with government-approved narratives of identity can only clash with the aim to strengthen a local identity. A mere mainstream media can neither reflect nor cater for a diversified national community, especially if it is produced for a wider regional or global audience. Certainly, in the process of diversification of local television broadcasting, the government can potentially play a controlling role to ensure that multiple publics are catered for by the range of channels.[624]

If the government takes an interest in nourishing the national community, regulations of the media landscape have to make space for multiple identities. Otherwise, as seen in the case of television, the local media loses its role as focal gathering point for nationals and remains merely a reminder of what Emirati identity should be rather than what it is. Potentially the government's role as controller and educator may not necessarily be experienced as patronising or unwelcome to the national community. With a demand for authentic local media, in the particular case of television, the stimulation of local film productions could widen this demand in the film sector.

As the government's policies do not reflect the desire to create a framework which admits multiple national identities into the media sphere, the comparison with other countries merely highlights the difficulties media makers face in the UAE. The incorporation of local talents into a commercialised and government-affiliated UAE film industry is about to limit the possibilities of developing an independent film industry and culture: The establishment of private funds for film production, as called for by Nayla Khaja[625] will become obsolete considering scholarships and financial support given by *Imagenation* and the official film commissions. Within the establishment of government-affiliated companies for film production lies a danger of bringing individual potential in line with established structures from the start, which in turn may jeopardise the potential to develop a UAE own style of cinema. The pseudo-diversification and privatisation of the film industry does not force individual producers to approach official institutions for funding. But since these institutions offer easier access to production support, they are currently establishing

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[624] An example is PBS in the USA which was founded as a response to private channels only broadcasting best-selling genres. As a result other publics were not provided for.

[625] Olivia, 2009 *Persistence Is Keyword for Emirati Film-Maker.*

themselves as a monopoly on the production scene. The style they import (via teachers and other staff) will influence the way local cinema will develop and since they will be the key players in the media landscape, it will be difficult to develop an independent cinema inside the country.

The evolution of independent cinemas is an expression of criticism of Hollywood mainstream cinema. A key concern of alternative industries is to find an individual or local cinematographic style. In this context the language of the film or style of communication is the main determinant of identity, making a film, for example, specifically European, Indian, or Egyptian and recognisable as such. Yet in order to reach a global audience, an independent local film industry has to establish a trans-national fan base and be known before it has opportunities to be screened in cinemas around the world. The Indian film industry is a perfect example of this, having already produced more than 200 films per year during the 1930s[626], it was not until 2000 that it established a global fan community.

The development included adaptations of Hollywood style structures and ideas; but over time, Bollywood has developed into a specific cinema genre, which in turn influences Hollywood productions. Since the support of an independent film industry relies not only on the support of film makers but on the development of audiences, the current focus of media companies with regard to the support of local film makers appears short sighted. The profitability of a local film industry relies equally on audience demand, which makes it profitable for cinema exhibitors to screen independent films. After all, cinema is an event which has to be sold, hence the development of mainstream cinema culture as a global phenomenon. Offered by global cinema companies, the screening is sold as an event. As Mark Woods, head of the Melbourne International Film Festival Investment Fund, remarked when attending the Abu Dhabi Film Festival 2010, the establishment of a local screening culture cannot merely transfer audience demands from television to cinema.

Contrary to television, which is licensed and controlled by the government, cinema theatres are part of a privately-owned event industry, making more money from selling beverages than from actually screening a movie.[627] People all over the world can see good

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[626] Gulzar, 2003. *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema*,

[627] Film Festivals hosted by cinemas are exceptional, although they also benefit the theatre owners, by attracting new customers.

films on DVD or television; therefore going to the cinema has to be worth the effort. Expectations towards a movie event include more than a well-made film with a strong narrative. Instead the experience of going out, seeing other people, having popcorn, and enjoying special effects (good sound, 3D-effects etc.) makes people choose to go to the cinema rather than watch a movie at home.[628] From the exhibitors' perspective, Hollywood blockbusters embedded in globally successful events and rituals promise financial success, whereas independent and art films are a financial risk. A panel member of the Circle Conference explained that people going to the cinema would seek the "other" experience, not the everyday local stories, meaning that Arab youth would rather watch a Vin Diesel movie, than a story from the neighborhood.[629]

7.1.2 The Hollywood narrative applied to a local story

The lack of independent films or, in the case of the UAE, non-government-funded films, suitable venues for screening, and audience development are phenomena of a more general issue of UAE identity: the relationship between local and global in the perception of those who make and consume media. What lies behind the struggle in media production is in the eye of the viewers who are highly globally trained in media consumption.

The Hollywood Narrative is a structure which sketches the field in which a filmmaker can elaborate and expand his ideas. It determines expectations of a story line and dramaturgy. The structure is, within the Hollywood school of films, closely linked to the stereotypes used in the development of the characters, images, *topoi*, etc. Hence, it indirectly determines the stories best suitable for the structure (black and white characters,

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[628] The subject was discussed in a non-recorded interview with former member of the Irish Film Board, Mark Woods during the Abu Dhabi Film Festival on October 17th 2010. His personal experience of the film industry in Ireland is confirmed in the observations of the article on Irish film development by Seán Crosson (See: Crosson, 2003. *Vanishing Point: An Examination of Some Consequences of Globalization for Contemporary Irish Film.*)
[629] Jaafar, 2010. *Funding Independent Features in a Global Market, [Conference proceeding].*

clear hero, elements of a coming of age story etc.).[630] It is a phenomenon of a globalised media community that a global mainstream cinematographic language is not only accessible but understood within the global community of cinemagoers. In the process of standardising narratives to produce films with a good chance of making a lot of profit, the Hollywood industry and its early conflict with regional media expectations and ideal of public sphere, sheds light on a conflict which until now can be observed in UAE (visual) media. As Hansen points out, Hollywood cinema engendered a new global media-defined community as "a collective, public form of reception shaped in the context of older traditions of performance and modes of exhibition."[631]

As a profit-making film production industry it elaborated on and standardised a certain mode of narration, which limited unpredictable reactions by the audience and, as a consequence, the commercial success of a movie too.[632] This has created a media community with shared anticipations towards a movie as well as a public which is less engaged in rational judgement of the media but rather in the consumption of "an alternative horizon of experience."[633] The dream industry Hollywood has created a global interpretive community consuming popular culture consumers. But it also created tension between different demands of publics towards media. Hollywood provides entertainment at a high level of technical perfection combined with narratives which do not disturb the comfort zones of film-goers. In juxtaposition are the demands of media to be educational and informative. As such (since they are globally accessible) Hollywood standards have set a landmark for the other commercial film industries, which have to merge the Hollywood-influenced expectations of the audience with local bases of identification in order to sell.

As Vasudevan explores in his analysis of Indian popular cinema, the incorporation of "Hollywood codes of continuity" with narratives of national identity and plots rooted in Indian society, made the Bombay cinema a successful global phenomenon rather than only

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[630] Michael Hauge coined the term Hollywood Narrative and outlined its components in Hauge, Michael. 2010. *Screenplay Structure: The Five Key Turning Points of All Successful Scripts.*

[631] Hansen, 1991. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film,* p.3.

[632] Ibid., p.16.

[633] Ibid. p.2.

in countries of Indian immigration.[634] The plots of Indian cinema are rooted in the logic of kinship relations and Indian family structures but the acceptance of Hollywood editing features has resulted in a new genre which does not simply copy Hollywood but forms a new dramatic genre with characteristic structures of "narrative, performance sequence, and action spectacle", thus finding a "way local forms reinvent themselves to establish dialogue with and assert difference from universal models of narration and subjectivity."[635] Egyptian film production, which is the largest and most popular Arabian film industry, followed a similar strategy and thus successfully established itself in the Middle East. Both examples are worthy of observation due to the way they translate national identity into a film language which can survive alongside Hollywood.

The rise of local film industries, such as in Egypt, show that there is a demand for local stories told in a cinematic style which television productions cannot achieve. The local film industries, therefore, have to incorporate global cinema standards (set by Hollywood) into plots which reflect national identity by telling stories from within their societies. Whenever a local film industry emerges it faces a power struggle of cultural spheres for a largest possible audience, as with television dramas. As Niewkerk shows, a struggle of ideologies for the media consumer takes place in both genres but with different proportional distribution of (financial) powers regulating and influencing the media product. Many local television and film producers are torn between the consumer's preferences and the demands of the channels. The latter have a clearly-set line on how each ideology should be transmitted. The film industry in Kuwait for example produces specifically for a wider Gulf audience, counting on the surrounding countries to buy their content as a "Khaleeji" soap opera. In the case of a non-existent film industry, as in the UAE, the producer is not yet obliged to adjust his film to the demands of established financiers who represent a mainstream.

Based on such observations an Emirati film producer faces the question: how commercial do I want to be, who do I want to address with my film and how do I acquire the audience I want? A film about the personal experience of an Emirati youth, for example, can

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[634] Vasudevan, 2000. *The Politics of Cultural Address in a 'Transitional' Cinema: A Case Study of Indian Popular Cinema,* p.131.

[635] Ibid., p.131.

attract young Emiratis who had a very similar experience and then form a micro public brought together by an emotional reaction of recognition. The same is true if the producer visualises a very personal interpretation of UAE society or specific aspects of it. An interpretive community will identify with the notion, and hence experience the film as a visualisation of their perception of reality. But such an individual expression of self can easily fail to be financially feasible. To widen the audience spectrum the producer can therefore draw upon technical features and effects, expected and appreciated by a wider audience.

Another possibility is to change the plot and narrative, to make a very personal experience more general so that it can be a basis of identification for a wider audience. This option reduces individuality and provocative potential of the film. By adapting the Hollywood success-strategy, the film maker will be more successful on a commercial level if he or she merges different narratives and techniques to satisfy more diverse expectations – at the expense of being more personal, more local and thus more plausible in the eyes of an Emirati audience. Films which manage to embody the multi-ethnic character of the emirate and attempt to 'go global' are in danger of losing the support of the locals, locating these films in a mesh of overlapping public spheres.[636] Applying Appadurai's observation that globalisation is a "marker of a new crisis for the sovereignty of nation-states" to the conflict a UAE film producer faces, one might say that the globalised film narratives, funding possibilities, and global interpretive communities mark his or her crisis in translating individuality, national identity and 'the local' into the film.[637]

7.1.3 "City of Life" as a local translation of the Hollywood narrative

The Emirati feature film "City of Life" by Ali F. Mostafa is to date the only example of a local feature film which managed the leap from film festival to the Grand Cinema complexes of Dubai. With strong support from government officials and social networks it

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[636] See: Fraser, 1992. *Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy*,

[637] Appadurai, *Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination,* p.4.

has become both a poster child of UAE culture and a falsification of it. By adapting a Hollywood format to a storyline set in Dubai the film managed to win over audiences from different Dubai communities. By using a mainstream style to translate and dramatise social reality in Dubai the film had to put a gloss on details in order to be understood by a global audience. Its global character makes it a local answer and message ("this is who we are") to an imagined global cinema audience. Accordingly the film was viewed by the local audience as a blueprint for global scrutiny of UAE society and Emiratis.

The film revolves around different ethnic groups, represented by the main characters, and describes their experiences and dreams in Dubai. Their paths are determined by their origins and occupations, which portray them living in parallel societies, only interacting by chance in a car accident at the climax of the movie. Not only does the intertwining of parallel lives in a car accident seem a UAE version of "Crash" (2004), but like Paul Haggis, Ali F. Mostafa was inspired by personal experiences incorporated into the story of young Emirati Faisal, a pampered upper-class idler who gradually realises that he has to change his lifestyle and assume responsibility for his family, status, and society. Throughout the story, his father acts as the voice of morality and traditional values by confronting Faisal with the expectations Emirati society has towards him and the shame he causes his family by not assuming his role as a useful member of society. The philippics of his father and loss of his best friend Khalfan, an Iraqi-Emirati from the lower classes, lead him to accept his expected role. He abandons his dandy friends and makes amends for Khalfan's death in the car accident by marrying Khalfan's sister.

Image No. 7. 1: Faisal and Khalfan in the movie "City of Life"[638]

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[638] AFM-Films, 2009. "City of Life", [hero-shots].

The other main protagonists of the film are, like Faisal, stuck in positions and roles strongly defined by those ethnicities that they try to escape from: Basu, an Indian taxi driver has to work in Dubai to support his family in India, while trying to use the opportunity of being there to fulfil his dream of becoming a Bollywood star. After taking up a low paid moonlighting job as a singer in an Indian night club, the car accident costs him his job and leaves him scarred for life. He reinvents himself as an actor in villain roles supported throughout the movie by an Indian businessman who acts as his 'fairy-godmother'. Another protagonist is the Romanian ex-ballet dancer Natalia, who is safely but unhappily employed as a flight attendant, is thrown into the path of a British advertising businessman Guy and falls in love with him. After he betrays her and threatens to ruin her if she does not abort their child, she learns to go her own way instead of being led by circumstances and the decisions of others. While Natalia came to Dubai merely for the job, her Russian flatmate and colleague Olga is a fortune hunter of another kind, taking every pleasure the flamboyant city can offer while trying to catch a rich beau.

Each protagonist's story rehashes the stereotypes associated with different nationalities and their occupations in the UAE. In real life, flight attendants of Emirates Airlines, the largest major airline in the Middle East, are not only visible everywhere in Dubai but form an important part of the local clubbing scene, which would otherwise be dominated by male businessmen.[639] The cabin crew form a class of their own in Dubai with an average age of 26 years, and their general perception can be pinpointed in a journalist's statement, observing that "many of the airline's recruits are from developing countries in Asia, Eastern Europe and across the Middle East. For them, the airline is a rare ticket to see the world in style, and for women from conservative countries like Iran and Egypt, it's a chance for independence."[640] Whereas Olga is portrayed as a negative stereotype of a hedonistic Russian, the naive Natalia is intended to create sympathy and moments of

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[639] The dominance of the Emirates flight attendants in the Dubai night-life has attracted the attention of the international media. While it is not possible to ascertain how many of them actually frequent popular Dubai clubs, the manager of the Crown Plaza night-club *Zinc* is quoted to estimate up to 70% of his guests being flight attendants. (See: Fassihi, 2008. *Rich Dubai Flirts with Hard Times, but Its Airline s Still Flying High: Emirates Flight Attendants Live It up; Champagne and Strict Rules on Weight*.)

[640] Ibid.

identification for the young single working European who gets caught in the maelstrom of Dubai, struggling to find her way in life.

A similar constellation is set around Faisal: his best friend is the careless, hot-blooded but honest and truthful Khalfan. He follows his juvenile impulses while disregarding his responsibility as only male family member towards his grandmother and sister. Consequently, though good natured, he perishes. The actor who plays him, Yassin Al Salman, describes his Khalfan as "representative of the Arab society. There are so many of us out there racked by an identity crisis of some sorts."[641] Whereas Khalfan's honesty makes him a sympathetic figure, Faisal's other friend represents the negative image of a pampered Emirati dandy, standing at the end of the road which Faisal is taking and developing away from. Rashid is introduced as a young man dedicated to pleasure, fast cars, and parties with women and alcohol. His cowardice when Faisal is in trouble turns him into a despicable character.

Drawn as representatives of different aspects and people of Dubai's multi-ethnical society, the protagonists are developed to draw the audience into the day-to-day lives of the different 'Dubais.' They engage viewers to experience 'their Dubai' from a different angle – an angle of which they have an inkling, but will never experience themselves due to their ethnicity and social class. An example of this is the taxi business. Most people who take taxis only know what it means for an Indian taxi driver to live in the UAE via brief encounters in the car. Basu is taking them "behind the scenes" of what really troubles and drives these people they know so little about. The same is true for all the other protagonists and forms the great potential of the film storyline: the opportunity to see what 'my Dubai' is like for others, alongside seeing 'my Dubai' experienced by a protagonist to empathise with. In such recognition lies the key to both the success and the flaws of the film. A reader of *TimeOut Dubai* commented accordingly: "Strictly recommended to all Dubai residents who will tremendously enjoy seeing and recognizing all familiar places, situations and characters, and to those non-residents who think Dubai is a 7-star paradise."[642]

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[641] Radhkrishnan, 2009. *A Close-up of the City of Life.*
[642] Chubb, 2010. *City of Life - Reviews; Time Out Dubai.*

Looking at the success of "City of Life" and its overall positive perception by UAE residents (both Emirati and foreign) one might call it a successful projection on screen of multiple identities in a metropolis combining global narratives and cinematographic techniques with "a local story". Being as such a *novum* for UAE film production was certainly a key factor in its success. Most viewers appreciated the changing perspectives on Dubai via the multi-ethnic protagonists, remarking for example: "the whole things, the movement from the expats to the Indians to the nationals it was great how he managed to put them all in one film."[643]

7.2 Representing Emiratis via stereotypes

By adapting a standardised narrative and style, "City of Life" became part of what Donald calls "a normative discipline for living in a mediated present."[644] The standardised narrative draws its appeal from stereotypes and narrative patterns expected and accepted by the members of a globalised interpretive community. At the same time the standardised style hand in hand with the knowledge of its global nature and distribution.

The protagonists of the movie are, strictly speaking, not characters but stereotypes, reinforcing those already existing in Dubai society, such as the hedonistic Russian, the dishonest English businessman, or the pampered Emirati[645]. The protagonists in "City of Life" are allegories of the ethnic groups in the Dubai population. Whether confirmed or criticised, they are always evaluated on the basis of how they will be perceived by the audiences. Accordingly, certain perceptions towards specific ethnicities already existing in Emirati society are reinforced rather than questioned. Most Emirati viewers commenting on the movie not only accepted but confirmed the stereotypes as plausible, with remarks such as: "how he showed the Indian I think he did picture him in the right way, he just pictured

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[643] Al-Samt, 2010. *Social Media in the UAE, [Recorded interview].*

[644] Donald, & Hemelryk, 2000. *The Publicness of Cinema*, p.119.

[645] Some critics remarked on the clichés, two-dimensional characters, and stereotypes (See: Chubb, 2010. *City of Life - Reviews; Time Out Dubai.)*

them as how they are, he didn't add didn't remove just how they are: he pictured the poor Indians who are here."[646] Only a more multifaceted character could question a notion of otherness, for example from an Emirati perspective towards that of an Indian, and show similarities between them. Significantly while Russian, Rumanian, Indian, and British are each represented by one 'typical' protagonist, the Emirati identity is translated into several different ones who themselves embody different stereotypes. Hence the image of Emiratis is more diversified and seemingly more 'real'.

The first part of this section will explore which aspects of "City of Life" were perceived as Emirati embodiments. The opinions of local viewers will indicate another dimension of Berger's 'ways of seeing': his concept was used in previous chapters to describe interpretive frameworks influenced by media consumption. In this part the focus will be on the 'watching' other. After introducing the concept of the 'global gaze', the last three parts in this section will examine different aspects of this notion in relation to experiences of media consumption. The real spaces of film viewings will merge with the imagined dimension of a global cinema auditorium symbolised by the screen.

7.2.1 Reactions to images of Emiratis *à la* Hollywood

The necessity to differentiate the Emirati stereotype from other ethnicities shows not only an Emirati perspective but exemplifies the situational redefinition of categories and the stereotypes attributed to them. In certain situations imagined communities will be reformed and referred to as ethnic, regional, religious etc. In a business context, for example, with European work colleagues, an Emirati and a Palestinian may form a "we" group of Arabs. In the next instance the Emirati might join the "we Emiratis" and categorise the Palestinian as "S*hami*" (Levantine), again narrowing the definition down to "Palestinian", when talking to "the Lebanese", and finally over lunch with all of named people plus an Indian Muslim he can join the group of "we Muslims". These notions of

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[646] Al-Samt, 2010. *Social Media in the UAE, [Recorded interview].*

communities of sentiment can take as many forms and allegiances as required depending on the situation, and do not have to be perceived as contradictory.

In the film "City of Life" the individual storylines of the Emirati protagonists become representations of the story and characteristics of a whole community. Hence, Faisal's development is not the story of an individual character but stands for the difficulties faced by young Emiratis from the upper class when finding their way through various temptations. Comments from the audience show that the Emiratis perceived Faisal and his father as representatives – either accurately or by misrepresenting Emirati society and identity. Faisal's drinking habits, for example, were perceived by some Emiratis as negative, not because it made him an unsympathetic character, but because it supposedly gave a wrong impression of Emiratis.

The organiser of a movie screening for a local social networking group summed this criticism up, saying:

> "The feedback we got was 'yes the movie was nice and yes it does represent some [aspects] of the Emirati culture, the things that happen in the city but still it showed that alcohol was something normal, something we do'"[647]

As such the scenes involving alcohol were criticised within a framework of representation towards an imagined other, when for example a viewer said that "some people are going to see it later and they don't know anything about Dubai and the Emirates, you know and if they look at it they will assume that drinking is not prohibited or drinking everywhere in Dubai is normal." She added that

> "Even if it's happening we still shouldn't highlight it as something we are proud of, [..] if we're not proud of [it] we shouldn't show it that much,

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[647] Al-Samt, 2010. *Social Media in the UAE, [Recorded interview].*

even if it's happening we should tell people that these things are happening but we're not proud of it, we don't do it as Muslims, as Emiratis, you know."[648]

Another negative image of Emiratis was represented by Faisal's upper-class Emirati friend Rashid, who, like Faisal, lives a pampered carefree life but in contrast to Faisal is not reformed in the end. The actor Saoud (Faisal) summaries:

"Faisal is better than Rashid in the movie, because Rashid: he's lost, that's it, this is his life but Faisal started to think in a good way and also because of his problems his emotions he had a best friend and he had his father who always told him to do the better".[649]

As a counter balance to Faisal, who finds his way to a religious lifestyle in harmony with the expectations of his Emirati heritage, the figure of Rashid could be important to highlight how exceptional Faisal's reformation is. However, in the movie version of the film several scenes with Rashid have been deleted, thus changing for the better the overall perspective on Emiratis.

When Faisal is kidnapped by a gang of Ajamis[650], Rashid calls Khalfan for help and stays in the background crying and not daring to interfere to help his friend. His cowardice is set in contrast to Faisal who, when threatened with mutilation by knife faces his opponent bravely, saying "Go on then, you coward!" By cutting the scene of the helpless Rashid the focus of attention is drawn to Faisal's bravery together with Khalfan's who literally drops everything to rush to the aid of his friend. While the decision to delete the scenes may just as well be attributed to arc of suspense, the effect is that the one negative Emirati protagonist is marginalised and less influential within this Emirati quartet.

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[648] Ibid.

[649] Al Kaabi, 2010. *Being a Presenter and Actor in the UAE, [Recorded interview].*

[650] UAE nationals with Iranian ethnic background.

The general acceptance of stereotypical protagonists as well as its evaluation within a framework of global representation shows how local audiences are instantly aware of an imagined global audience if a film follows the established Hollywood style. Accordingly, the representation of the own imagined community through such a film is evaluated under the influence of an imagined outside scrutiny, or what I call global gaze.

7.2.2 The global gaze of scrutiny

As a term analogous to the "male gaze" introduced by Laura Mulvey in her criticism of Hollywood cinema, the global gaze expands on the notion of "to-be-looked-at-ness".[651] The concept is based on the dialogical relation between object and viewer, which determines that a spectator, when seeing an object, instantly steps into a relation between self and object. Laura Mulvey draws on psychoanalytic frameworks based on Freud and Lacan to explain how Freud's concept of scopophilia is satisfied, and at the same time intensified through visual media.[652] The "pleasure in looking," as Mulvey calls it, is strongly focused on isolated aspects of the human body, especially erotogenic zones.[653] Women in this constellation are objectified and castrated as objects of desire and marginalization. Even more, the pleasure of consuming such media comes from what Mulvey calls "voyeuristic separation", i.e. the knowledge of being the spectator who is not scrutinised in return.[654] The consuming audience takes a unified stand with the protagonist, which necessarily implies that female spectators also adapt the gaze of the "ideal ego", the hero on screen, thus objectifying themselves.[655]

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[651] Mulvey, 1975. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,* p.6-18.

[652] This aspect of sexual instinct objectifies others by "subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze."(ibid. p.3.)

[653] Ibid. p.2. Since mainstream Hollywood cinema classically focuses on the male protagonist, the camera, and with it the viewer, adopt his position and relationship towards other objects in the film. (ibid. p.8.) Accordingly, "the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence." (Ibid. p.5.)

[654] Ibid. p.3.

[655] Ibid. p.4ff.

Mulvey's psychoanalytical-political concept has triggered, as Chandler points out, a whole new angle on spectatorship studies, which "focus on how 'subject positions' are constructed by media texts rather than investigating the viewing practices of individuals in specific social contexts."[656] In these contexts class, race, ethnicity, and gender are analysed to explain a link between political power relations and individual representation via media.[657] Foucault's precept, "Power is everywhere: not that it engulfs everything, but that it comes from everywhere,"[658] can be seen as a link between the psychoanalytical approach of spectatorship on a micro-public level and political power relations on a state level. The texts of a popular culture discourse are reinforced by events, such as the spectacles of viewership. These contribute towards consolidating a related discourse on a macro-communal level. The cinema auditorium and act of viewing symbolically represent the nations, regions, and on-looking world community, who judges or excludes, or evaluates in any form.

Although his genre of interest was not primarily film but literature, Edward Said's concept of Orientalism brings together many of the concepts related to the "gaze", the texts, the audience and the political power relations it consolidates. All these evolve around narratives which influence people's notions of others as imagined communities. In particular, the stereotypical objectification of Arabs since 9/11 has been a central interest of post-colonial criticism of American media and Hollywood. Many analysts showing how in Hollywood films Arabs and Muslims are portrayed as terrorists, Islam as a violent religion, and how this discourse has created the hyphenated American-Muslim, marginalised and discriminated against by a Western audience.[659] This stereotyping, particularly of Arabs, can best be summarised under the term Orientalist gaze, since it mainly relies on visual signals and concepts observed within the discourse of Orientalism. The Arabs as portrayed by Hollywood and Western-dominated media are thus subjected to the gaze, a marginalisation and

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[656] Chandler, 2000. *Notes on 'the Gaze'.*

[657] See for example Collins & Lutz, 1991. *The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes: The Example of National Geographic.* Also, on race and class: Traube, 1992. *Dreaming Identities: Class, Gender and Generation in 1980's Hollywood Movies;* on ethnicity: Schlesinger & Emerson, 1992. *Women Viewing Violence*.

[658] Foucault, 1978. *The History of Sexuality*, p.121-122. Foucault linked the "inspecting gaze" of surveillance to power, taking the more text-focussed discourse analysis of cinema to a level of social power relations. (See: Foucault, 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.*)

[659] Multiple analysis of Western films have been conducted with regards to the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims. A selected bibliography with further links can be found under: UC-Library, 2012. *Arabs in Film and Television: A Bibliography of Materials in the UC Berkeley Library.*

scrutiny, experienced by other communities. The criticism follows the lines of Spivak's differentiation of the burden of representation in terms of re-presentation or "placing there." Arabs are portrayed in a certain way and these media texts form what Spivak calls the construction of "the Other simply as an object of knowledge, leaving out the real Others because of the ones who are getting access into public places due to these waves of benevolence and so on."[660]

The importance of analysing these discourses of stereotyping others is important in order to change the status quo of groups in power over marginalised communities. However, attention here should be drawn to another aspect, which goes back to Mulvey's original concept of "ideal ego." Her idea of the audience, even females taking the position of the ideal ego on screen means that (guided by the camera) women take on the male gaze: at least for the moment of the screening event, women see their own bodies objectified. Is this possible, and transferrable to other marginalised communities? Mulvey's concept of the (male) gaze implies the transferability, situational or permanent, of the gaze to a community marginalised by it. For example, a Tunisian could watch Indiana Jones sweeping the humongous and dim witted Arab from the streets with one stroke of his infamous whip. And while he, contrary to most non-Arab speaking viewers, will additionally be able to identify the ridiculed enemy as Tunisian, he can still laugh and enjoy the scene and the "Raiders of the Lost Ark" movie as a whole. This does not contradict his ability to walk out of the auditorium and angrily write about the stereotypical marginalisation of non-White races in Steven Spielberg movies.

The gaze shifts and changes, just like the notion of mutuality to different imagined communities depending on ideological priorities and complex situational factors. It is important to highlight that in practice an individual can experience affiliations to different imagined communities simultaneously. The viewer of "Raiders of the Lost Ark" could have gone to the movie with an American friend, both talking throughout the film and laughing together. In this situation it is most likely that enjoyment as well as criticism of the scene in question will overlap. Mulvey highlights the importance of feeling unobserved in a dark auditorium, seeing but not being seen; for her this consolidates the voyeuristic pleasure of

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[660] Spivak, 1990. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, p.63.

media consumption. However, this does not fully describe what happens in an auditorium in terms of group dynamics.

7.2.3 Experiencing 'the gaze' first hand

In the UAE the spaces where the 'gaze' that mediated through film can be experienced first hand, are cinemas and film festivals.[661] The event of coming together to view a film in the public space of a cinema auditorium breaks the dichotomy of private and public spaces in a unique way. The act of coming together for a limited period of time with strangers, sharing emotions and reactions, as well as cathartic experiences, is a strong factor which makes cinema survive in a society where individuals can easily access the films they are interested in (by buying them or even downloading for free).

Every weekend cinemas in the UAE are crowded with groups of youths, families, and couples who form an engaged audience interjecting audibly and responding to the events on screen by texting, talking on their mobile phones, laughing and commenting together. In a way the cinema auditorium can be seen as a micro-representation of a public media sphere, one where different communities come together to form one audience and interest group. At the same time they foster an understanding, not only of the screened film, but of reactions from others, as represented by cliques of cinema goers. The awareness of representation towards an imagined global community is the extension of the local spaces of screening (linked to the spheres of circulation). It is the imagined space of all cinemas screening the same movie implanted around the same rituals. The knowledge of the global fan community of movie goers complements the global film narratives (such as the Hollywood narrative) and induces awareness of the global gaze on representations of identity.

Film festivals, just as film clubs, are an extension of the film screening as a spectacle, since they involve direct discussions between audiences and producers, hence for a moment

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[661] Television, though not restricted to a private sphere, features different qualities of publics.

bringing all parts of the media process together in one media experience. Apart from the value of offering a platform for possible distribution, the importance of such spaces for encounters lies in their ability to directly channel interpretation and clarify misunderstandings of concerns translated into the screened media. In the event of film festival screenings the notions of direct and imagined scrutiny of a media identity come together.

The knowledge of multiple communities present in the space of the cinema auditorium is not only directed towards international communities, but can also lead to confrontations between local groups. A minor incident during the Middle Eastern International Film Festival 2009 (MEIFF) exemplifies how this can occur. Since the films screened during the festival are not censored,[662] the universities for female students are anxious not to expose them to indecent scenes when sending their classes to the films. A public relations coordinator working for the MEIFF received complaints from Zayed University Abu Dhabi for not informing them that the American movie "The Messenger", which was attended by a class of female media students, included a sex scene. The latter caused offence and could potentially lead to complaints by parents, thus making the Faculty of Media and Communications responsible. Interestingly, a student within a focus group interview who had attended the screening remarked that she and her classmates had felt obliged to leave the cinema. According to her, it was not the sex scene itself which led to that decision, but the embarrassment of being subjected to such a scene in a mixed auditorium: the male students from another college would all look over at the girls to see their reactions.

As Hansen points out in her review of cinematic history, cinema has particularly reformatted public and private domains with regard to women.[663] She refers to the phenomenon of popular culture which projects the male body, semi-nudity, and intimate physical action on screen, thus offering them to a female spectator who has traditionally been banned from such sights. For the UAE the shift of traditional gendered domains of public and private goes even further: the participation of women in the event – be it within

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[662] In the case of foreign productions; for locally-produced films, regulations imposed by the National Media Council apply beforehand.

[663] Hansen, 1991. *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, p.2-3.

the protective circle of their family, school- and university classes, or even more freely as a group of friends, is a novelty in itself. Gatekeepers and agents of decency certainly try to minimise such a development by censorship of films. Even if the perception of the class in question regarding this singular event is not representative for Emirati female audiences, it exemplifies the unique position of cinematic screening as a dramatised spectacle. This brings together members of the public sphere who form an interpretive community consisting of sub-communities. They communicate and interact with each other, triggered by the mediated events on screen. The group of Emirati students who decided to leave the auditorium reinforced a conservative notion of public and private domain and gender. Other female Emiratis within the audience who did not leave[664] also made a statement towards their male observers with regard to the acceptance of UAE women being part of public visualisation and commodification of sexuality.[665]

Interpretive communities, coming together for a film screening, do not only communicate their interpretation of the film narrative directly (via interjections), but can be forced by the film to make a statement. Feeling under scrutiny by other members of their society, such a statement can reflect their opinion on social standards, values, and gender formations.[666] The notion that women should not be exposed to nudity on screen does not necessarily lead to a "walking out" statement. Reactions from the audience and participations in discussions of the films can consequently be seen as events during which representation is negotiated and different reactions tested. While in the example described the group of females performed an act of protection from the situation by extortion, other cases in which the audience remained are a statement in themselves. They could for example be interpreted as a non-awareness or nonchalance towards an outside gaze. However, within a framework of knowing that Emirati females are potentially viewed as a part of society which has to be protected by exclusion (a view indirectly voiced by the

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[664] I actually attended the screening before I met with the students telling me about the incident, as well as the public relations manager, so I noticed a group of females leaving, whereas others remained.

[665] Very unfortunately I did not have any male students in my focus groups who attended the screening. It was a coincidence that I went to the screening and later found the group of female students who left the event in a focus group at Zayed University Abu Dhabi.

[666] The incident described is juxtaposed to other screenings of uncensored films during which all members of the audience remained.

interviewed Emirati news presenters earlier) they can even represent an act of defiance and change.

7.2.4 The global gaze experienced through watching a film

Similar to the exposure to the male gaze is the notion of a global audience being made aware of and looking critically at UAE society through the film. In the case of "City of Life" this scrutiny was directly present through the protagonists. In fact, the concentrated observation of the 'national self' by 'others' was perhaps the most 'local' aspect of the film. It translated the "burden of representation" on screen.

Faisal's father has the important role of correcting the otherwise crooked image of Emiratis. Accordingly, one viewer stated:

"The good thing they had this sentence saying that the father said 'you do not represent the Emiratis, remember when he said 'you're not a good example of an Emirati'? This was the strongest thing that they had in the film because they showed the part of the Emirati which they don't want us to be, like some people are like this but we don't want to be like this."[667]

Throughout the plot, Faisal's father appears in staged confrontations with his son and is perceived by Emirati viewers as a 'typical' Emirati of the older generation, representing dignity, pride and social consciousness. Some Emirati viewers appreciated him as the voice that transferred a moral message. One scene in particular, where the father reproaches his son, was identified as a reflection of social reality for young Emiratis. One viewer described the scene as follows:

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[667] Al-Samt, 2010. *Social Media in the UAE, [Recorded interview].*

"The father used terms that we hear from our parents every day, like what he said: 'I've always told you that Dubai is a small city and everything goes, everything goes [round] quickly and people know about it' so this is what we hear every day before leaving the house: 'be careful and remember that Dubai is small'".[668]

Thus, reconciled by the father and with a positive ending to the film, the four Emirati protagonists serve as a warning to young people to listen to their parents . What the film did not attempt, is a critical exploration into the generation-conflict between Faisal and his father. The father's failure to prepare his son for the role he was expected to take in life was not voiced neither were the completely different worlds in which both men live. The film "City of Life" does not have the potential to arise or provoke such social criticism but brings the official discourse of Emirati identity onto a new global level. The need to protect local culture and the local image emanates from the global outreach of the movie: the audience, aware of the global target audience, adapts its way of viewing the film as a representation. Since several ethnic groups are present on screen, 'the Emirati' protagonist is directly compared to the other characters. Accordingly, the film cannot touch sensitive topics without causing a feeling of shame among Emirati viewers.

Distancing self and social reality from the story on screen is, on the other hand, what Donald suggests as the potential of films. Through their ability to translate and represent events into a dramatised spectacle, the audience (though distanced from the event by time and location) experiences the mediated reality as a "mediated public." This can provoke a feeling of enthusiasm for the actual event represented via the film.[669] The effect of distancing oneself can trigger self awareness and criticism, or as Donald points out, the audience, although distant from the actual scene of action, will form an opinion based on

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[668] Al-Samt, 2010. *Social Media in the UAE, [Recorded interview].* (This view was supported by a Dubai resident of Indian descent, who remarked on the amount of social consciousness within the different social and ethnic groups.)

[669] Donald's observations follow Foucault's lectures on Kant's enlightenment theory (See: Donald, 2000. *The Publicness of Cinema*, p.116.)

aesthetic judgement. The film not only triggers face to face or mediated discussions about the event (e.g. via social internet media); social reality is translated into a spectacle which Donald describes as "an aesthetic-political mode of judgement which sustains the new force of public opinion."[670] The reactions of Emirati viewers show identification with those characters of "City of Life" who re-narrated established positive clichés of being Emirati (as embodied by the father). Simultaneously they distanced themselves from less comfortable aspects, such as the indulgent lifestyle of Faisal, or the consumption of alcohol by Emiratis.

This interpretation of the film prioritizes a positive image over a potential opportunity to address unflattering social issues. The focus on the ability to project a positive image is directly related to the imagined global gaze, which it tries to rectify by applying an accepted established narrative. The more conventional narrative of Emirati identity in an anticipated genre and style as communicated through the film, found strong acceptance while disguising the less pleasant aspects. These were considered minor flaws in the film or uncomfortable elements which did not threaten the overall positive image of UAE identity perceived by the viewers. Rather than evading the global gaze, the film attempts to join the dominant discourse of global media production and change it from within. But following the mainstream (in this case Hollywood cinema) jeopardises the potential to trigger discussions and change local social dynamics. As it is, the film aims to rectify an image which is presumed to be distorted.

7.3 Mainstreaming films to represent 'our city' as a brand

The inflammatory potential for the local community is diminished in "City of Life" by the stereotypical protagonists and predictable narrative. To use a film's potential to become a forum for the articulation of public opinion,[671] it would have to use a more precise and direct language as a basis for identification of an interpretive community of locals. Hence it might not be understood by a mainstream audience. As it is, the film is a prototype for the

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[670] Ibid. p.116f.
[671] Ibid. p. 117.

developing mainstream media industry in the UAE, which is oriented towards optimum sales.

How the emerging film industry, with Abu Dhabi as its vanguard, tries to capitalise on such best-selling practices will be the subject of the first two parts of this section. By promoting more Emirati film makers to follow the example set by Ali F. Mostafa's film, the government once again shows its eagerness to become the sole facilitator for media outlets. In the case of cinema, *TwoFour54* particularly tries to induce Hollywood film producers to spread the word about the new filming location in the Middle East, Abu Dhabi.

As a flagship for the global ambitions of local media productions, "City of Life" is the translation of political directives and becomes even more significant by not being funded by government institutions and its struggle to obtain screening permission from the NMC. Indeed, the director, Ali F. Mostafa, had not only to cut several scenes but ultimately deploy his personal connections to the ruler of Dubai.[672] As a prototype for a unique UAE film style, "City of Life" could be flatly rejected as an attempt to copy Hollywood style, or to apply a globally understood narrative, while at the same time drawing attention to the locality of Dubai. The strongest statement of identity made by the film is in fact its failure to use an own unique language and style. Instead it features local characters behaving like protagonists from an American street-gang movie but wearing *kandōra* and speaking Arabic. This reflects the conflict displayed in the UAE's attempt to present itself as a globalised modern city while at the same time preserving touches of local identity.

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[672] He describes: "I get a phone call saying: 'Ali, unfortunately your film has been seen by the head of Sheikh Mohammed's media office [Dubai media regulatory body] and it has been banned: they've seen your film and your film is officially banned.' They said the film will not be distributed in any shape or form whatsoever. By the way I don't think they even saw the movie, I think they only saw the first five minutes and decided to ban it; this is how crazy they are. Anyway, so what happened was I said that I will not listen to this. If Sheikh Mohammed himself tells me this movie is banned I will listen, but this is ridiculous [...] I got Saoud [actor playing Faisal] I gave him the DVD and I said to him 'I don't care what happens: you wait outside his Sheikh Mohammed's front door and you give him the DVD. And you tell him that the fate of Emirati cinema lies in his decision on this movie.' Which happened: he had gone there. He had given it to him." According to this dramatic account of events he thus got the approval directly from Sheikh Mohammed a week later (Mostafa, 2010. *"City of Life" and Film Making in the UAE, [Recorded interview].*) Whether the approval really occurred in this way or not is difficult to prove, given that Saoud confirmed the events, but both could be dramatising the events for image-purposes.

The eagerness to become a global player leaves no time to focus on an Emirati cinematographic style or to challenge stereotypes. They are accepted as a set of images to be modified and countered via contra-stereotypes, while leaving their dimensions unexplored. The third part of this section will pose the question of whether "buying into" the global film market does not only reproduce clichés but lead to their internalisation.

Going a step further, the significance of the internalised global gaze will be discussed. The film had to perpetuate the polished version of 'the Emirati' as it was intended for a multinational audience and therefore representative of Emirati life and society. Audience reactions showed that they tacitly accepted the censorship policies of the NMC, although this meant excluding elements characteristic of the community. It can safely be assumed, for example, that the Emirati audience approved of the censorship of one scene showing the main Emirati protagonist drunk-driving through the UAE.[673] The audience's reception of the film while, underlining the demand for an international film about the UAE, also reflects a notion of art as being representative of parts of the 'culture', which therefore has to be protected (e.g. by an institution). Drawing from Edward Said's observations on representations of Arabs, this last part will question how the film projects notions of representation into dichotomies of global and local.

7.3.1 Government attempts to mainstream local and global films

The political struggles evolving around the production of "City of Life" make it a prototype for the direction the UAE media industry is currently leading: in a way the film's only novelty in a way is featuring the city, or brand of Dubai; everything else is based on existing patterns. This is confirmed by the comment of Masoud Amralla al-Ali, director of the Gulf Film Festival (GFF), in an interview with Lebanese *Daily Star* newspaper:

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[673] The scene was deleted from the cinema version of the movie.

"In most of the stories that [depict] the past, you see human relationships. The city is always there in the background but very few films allow you to feel the pulse of the city and to understand how the city works."

According to him, making Dubai the hero makes "City of Life" "the first film of its kind […] Maybe the start of a different quality of film than what we've seen until now."[674] The city in the movie is more than a random location for a plot, but the moulder of identity and provider of the experiences the protagonists undergo. Because their constellation and experiences are specific for Dubai they could not easily be set in a different city. It is specific for Dubai for example, that Natalia has to fear losing her job due to pregnancy outside wedlock, that in a city of about 3.5 million inhabitants, word of Faisal's fight on Jumeirah Road reaches his father even before he returns home the same evening, or that a former clerk in a UK advertising company can afford a luxurious lifestyle with villa and a yacht. These aspects make the film specifically "local" in the eyes of its residents, and a representation of Dubai's atmosphere and pulse of life consistent with its global brand.

As a brand the representation of Dubai is of flourishing urbanism well able to attract international attention and investment ranging from real estate to business, media, and tourism.[675] Since the economic crisis in 2009, in particular, the Dubai Media Affairs Office 'Brand Dubai' (DMAO) was established specifically with the aim to "facilitate greater communication and coordination among different organisations that are directly or non-directly responsible for Dubai's image."[676] Television channels directly pick up the brand idea in their mix of urban and Bedouin style symbolism. But while television is directly influenced by political guidelines, "City of Life" was not a direct government production. Hence it reflects an acceptance of the brand by the producers.

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[674] Quilty, 2010. *Hostile Environment of Opulence.*

[675] Samer Bagaeen calls it an "instant city" following Singapore as a role model. (See: Bagaeen, 2007. *Brand Dubai: The Instant City or the Instantly Recognizable City.*)

[676] According to CEO Mona Al Marri, quoted in*: Manibo, 2009 'Brand Dubai' Media Office Launched.*
The office was a direct response to the negative international press around Dubai's financial crisis. Its overall aim is to "work on preserving and enhancing Dubai's image as an Arab city of international spirit and sensibility," thus boosting the overall image of Dubai. (Gangal, 2009. *Sheikh Mohammed Creates 'Brand Dubai' Office.*)

Although "City of Life" is merely one film, government-supported film productions currently underway are likely to follow a politically defined brand, thus using the potential of a globally marketable film to advertise the Emirates. Abu Dhabi's developing film infrastructure is supported by an own brand, distinguishable from Dubai, which in its essence is reflected in the film projects sponsored by *TwoFour54*. Abu Dhabi's brand is less urban and more traditionally Bedouin than Dubai's. Under the slogan "Travellers Welcome" it largely relies on desert romanticism and symbols globally associated with a Bedouin past, such as camels, falcons, Arabic coffee pots, tents, mysteriously veiled women with *burqa*, and wise old men in *kandōra* stirring a fire in the vast dark sea of the Arabian desert.

The first Emirati feature film produced by the production company of *TwoFour54*, *Imagenation*, is the coming of age film "Sea Shadow",[677] mainly set in the less urban northern Emirates. Its director, festival award winner Nawaf Al-Janahi, said about his film:

> "We want the world's movie industry to sit up and take notice of what we are doing here in the Emirates. *Sea Shadow* will help us do that. It is a perfect showcase for our local acting and film-making talent and offers genuine cultural insights which should be at the heart of all good films."[678]

While the film is hailed as a purely local production, it has also been the centre of alleged corruption and government interferences with the director's work.[679] As an upcoming prototype of Abu Dhabi's film productions, it already showcases the monopolisation of film content by government-related institutions, previously observed in television broadcasting.

The incorporation of local talents in the global branding and marketing process of the country is certainly the best strategy to find a local brand which is accepted by viewers

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[677] The shooting of the film was finalised in early 2011 and the film premiered at the 5th Abu Dhabi Film Festival 2011. By the completion of the research phase of this thesis the film was still in planning, shooting, and postproduction. Currently it is featured at several international film festivals.

[678] Aftab, 2010. *Emirati Film-Making Comes of Age.*

[679] See: Newbould, 2011. *Djinn Beset by Djinn?*

outside the UAE and appreciated by locals as a representation of their identity to the world. The outrage caused by "Sex and the City 2" has shown how the attempt to utilise an American production to represent the country can backfire. Despite the censorship problems revolving around the film's production, which ultimately led to a banning of the film in the UAE, "Sex and the City 2" blatantly advertises the country as a tourist destination. To achieve this, it uses symbols from the Abu Dhabi brand as well as narratives from cultural books and translating them into a language understood by an audience unfamiliar with life in the UAE - yet with a certain image of the oil-rich Gulf States.

Although the film was eventually shot in Morocco due to differences with the NMC, the movie clearly promotes the emirate of Abu Dhabi as a luxurious and exotic tourist destination. Not only is the name "Abu Dhabi" repeatedly mentioned by various protagonists throughout the movie but the famous New York friends take the audience on a luxury airline designed in the colours and style of *Etihad Airways* to a world class hotel similar to the new *Shangri La* in Abu Dhabi. Pampered by private butlers with exotic food lounging between divans, pool parties, and discos, the protagonists set off to follow the typical advertised tourist programme for the emirate: camel trips, dune bashing, and shopping. Throughout the film, one of the characters takes on the role of informant on local culture by reading to her friends from a tourist guide. She explains the *abaya* and *kandōra* fashion, import regulations, as well as local customs of decency in dress and how to behave in public.

All possible pitfalls of Western tourists are thus explained and experienced by the protagonists, ending in a comical twist when one of the characters violates the local decency rules and the friends get deported. The signal is clear: you can have luxury and fun in Abu Dhabi but must take the laws seriously. The analogy to repeatedly occurring cases of inappropriate clothing by tourists in public is obvious. The fact that the film undertakes to promote holidays in Abu Dhabi, gives rise to the question of whether or not the production team's break with the local authorities was final. It is therefore unclear whether not the Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority paid for promoting their country. If that were the case, the film would be a strong statement of Abu Dhabi's willingness to outshine Dubai as a tourist destination. This features most significantly in a scene with an invented sheikh from Abu Dhabi, Khalil, who introduces his emirate to one of the Americans by saying "Dubai was

yesterday, Abu Dhabi is the future."[680] Unfortunately, since the movie wasn't released in the UAE only very few impressions from local viewers could be collected. Those viewers of the movie who gave their opinion were mainly outraged by the distorted image of the UAE, the marginalisation of Dubai, and especially the condescending image towards local women, who are portrayed as secretly aspiring to become like the friends from New York.

The incident showcases a failed attempt to utilise a global brand ("Sex and the City") to market their Abu Dhabi brand. It notably backfired due to censorship regulations but also because of the way in which local identity was portrayed. Admittedly, not a single Emirati character plays a role in the film but the comments on people, the image of the city, and especially of the women was enough to cause offence and for the NMC to appear as an institution backed by a majority of Emiratis.

7.3.2 'We appear like this, but...' Reinterpreting stereotypes to create a global identity

The translation of local culture into a representation which is understandable to a global audience is bound to become a subject of negotiation between conflicting interests. Transnational media has to utilise a mainstream code and satisfy expectations not only towards a certain story line but to the image of people and culture. Hence the portrayed community becomes subjected to the global gaze.

Reinterpreting established stereotypes requires a process of educating and guiding the audience towards a new code. Existing images have to be used and modified. The recognition of, and identification with, an introduced image or narrative can form the basis of a change in perceptions. Such a process runs along the line of argumentation: "we might appear like this, but..." In their very different ways the films "City of Life" and "Sex and the City 2" showcase the encounter of stereotypes on screen. The general acceptance of the

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[680] King, 2010. *Sex and the City 2.*

former and rejection of the latter shows that the local audience shares an interest in reinterpreting what is perceived as strong globally-established stereotypes.

It would go too far to state that the attempt to create a globally acceptable image of the UAE (via brand marketing for example) is merely a top-down government policy. In the focus groups with students they expressed their appreciation of global events to establish an image of the UAE as part of the Western world – a notion they associated with openness and a fun life-style. Many students, for example, saw events such as the Formula One race as a tool to change an existing negative image of Arabs and making themselves known to the world. Students from Abu Dhabi repeatedly remarked that whenever they were travelling, nobody knew Abu Dhabi or even the UAE, only Dubai. The need to change a negative image of Arabs in general was expressed by one student, saying:

"I think it's hard changing the idea of Arabs in[the] media, it's too hard because even when they are making movies outside, they always represent Arabs as.... like : they are rich, [...] always searching for [a] woman, they are stereotyping. It's too hard to change this."[681]

Another student added:

"Even if we try to have shows that represent us in the right way, it will be hard to show them [because] they won't show this TV show in the US or other countries." [682]

These comments express not only anger at being misrepresented as a "community of Arabs", but the need to be represented fairly as a community Hence the strong support for the development of an Arab cinema which can rectify the distorted image of the Hollywood discourse. Only with an additional discourse and alternative narratives can the marginalised community introduce 'ideal egos' with which viewers can identify and which can change the existing representation of Arabs in the media.

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[681] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 6].*
[682] Ibid.

This strategy seems to be accepted as the right way to go forward, sanctioning the interpretation and validation of "City of Life". However, with this aim the community of Emiratis is voluntarily taking up competition with an already established strong narrative discourse - let alone industry. The hurdle of distribution must obviously be overcome: in order to be seen, the rectifying narratives have to be screened beyond the limited spaces and audiences of film festivals. As a student from one of the focus groups remarked:

"They [the Emirati film festivals] do help, but there is just a limited type of people who would come to the film festivals here and might get a different idea – might change the idea he (the Film festival visitor) already got about us Arabs."[683]

Moreover, as is the case with the branding of the cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, a characteristic film style and language has to be found to make the Emirati productions recognisable. However, by entering into competition with an already established structure the Emirati film makers will need to re-code the own language along already defined lines. The pattern thus runs along parallel lines to the individuals who attempt to change the local television industry from within. As with the control over the television industry, productions focus on making a name for Abu Dhabi and marketing Dubai as an "Arab city of international spirit and sensibility."[684] This focus makes it scarcely possible to have the potential to through a new angle on UAE society, tackle taboo topics, or develop a unique style. Feeding into a global media language means to focus on the importance of representation towards the global other, hence reinforcing the global gaze.

Such was the case with "Sex and the City 2", a brand which the UAE could not compete against. It touched aspects of the local culture which were considered necessary to shield and protect towards the global gaze. Its message was twofold. For one, the UAE might appear as a place of luxury and high life, but underneath there are conservative

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[683] Ibid.

[684] Gangal, 2009. *Sheikh Mohammed Creates 'Brand Dubai' Office.* An example of the press coverage for *Imagenation*'s new film projects is: Newbould, 2010. *Imagenation Reveals Six New Emirati Movies.*

values represented by rules of decency. While this message is merely taking a different angle at the message conveyed in "City of Life", the second message was unacceptable to the local audiences: Arab women might cover themselves up, but underneath they aspire to be like their Western role models represented by the quartet of women from New York. This was conveyed in a key scene where the New Yorkers, escaping from an outraged mass of Arab men, are rescued by a group of fully covered Arab women. The latter take off their *abayas* in front of the dazzled Americans, displaying the newest Italian fashion and stating: "Oh yes, Arab women are the most elegant." The presumption of global keenness on fashion might have been excused just as the devotion to cars is shown by the Emiratis in "City of Life". But true to its female target audience, "Sex and the City 2" fell into a trap which "City of Life" carefully avoided: the exposure of the Emirati woman to the global gaze. The flagship city of Dubai and even Emirati men may be considered critically yet necessarily subjected to global scrutiny. But the female aspect of Emirati identity is still under so much internal scrutiny and negotiation of acceptable representations, that it does not seem ready for the leap onto the global screen, let alone portrayed as twinned with its Western counterpart.

Criticism of Emirati women as soon as they expose themselves to the scrutiny of an imagined global audience does not only concern fictional characters. Exactly how much rejection of the imagined audience is a realistic fear became apparent in the incident of Dr. Lamees Hamdan from Dubai. The wife of a prominent Dubai business man, she appeared on the "Oprah Winfrey Show" in October 2009 talking about women's lives in the UAE.[685] In one focus group several female students criticised the fact that she was not entitled to speak for and about Emirati women. During an animated discussion, one student pointed out: "Dr. Lamees is not even truly Emirati, she is Iranian." But when another suggested that their student and her colleagues might have been able to give a more realistic impressions of life in the UAE, there was a strong objection. The quoted student suggested that an older Emirati, preferably a Bedouin woman, should have been on the show.[686] A crucial discussion point was Dr. Lamees' role as representative of Emirati women. Some people defended her

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[685] Winfrey, 2009. *Oprah on Location: The Happiest People on Earth*. The show was aired on *mbc Channel 4* on November 7th with Arabic subtitles, making Dr. Lamees' performance an immediate sensation among the Dubai population.

[686] Students, 2009. *UAE Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, TV Brands, [Recorded focus group no. 6].*

by pointing out that Dr. Lamees had not claimed to speak for all Emirati women. In fact she insinuated exactly that, by mentioning "we in Dubai" several times, but leaving this aside, the discussion makes an interesting point about representation and individuality. The students demanded 'credentials' for anybody who speaks publically about their society. Perceived authenticity is the key to having a right to speak for all. Some students remarked on ethnic authenticity as an Emirati, while others considered social class crucial. For them Dr. Lamees did not represent mainstream UAE lifestyle, given that she was an upper class privileged woman. Again other students focused on religious purity, criticising Dr. Lamees for not covering herself in any form.

Dr. Lamees's message was similar to the fictional character in "Sex and the City 2", trying to create a basis of mutuality between UAE and Western women. She obviously tried to reinterpret the stereotype of Arab women being forced by an oppressive religion to veil. Her statement that *sheela*, *abaya*, and *burqa* were treasured symbols of tradition rather than religious obligations was surely given with the intention of building bridges between cultures. But she was attacked for misrepresenting the collective of Emirati women by removing any religious connotations from the traditional female gown. Given the reality that many Emirati females do not wear their local attire in a religious way, it becomes clear that the criticism was due to the discrepancy between ideal and reality. Those attacking Dr. Lamees as a misrepresentation felt that the ideal should prevail over the reality with regard to representation to outsiders.

With such a focus on an ideal outside image, the creation of an industry of representation can develop its own perpetuating dynamic which covers up the existing diversified national identities. The multiple identities disappear behind the brands of cities and self-created stereotypes of identity. As such the case of "Sex and the City 2" highlights more than the indignation felt by Emiratis shows more than the notion of being misrepresented and subjected to the global gaze. The attempt to change a dominating discourse from within by literally "buying into" the Hollywood industry at the same time validates the latter. Even "City of Life", trying to provide different perspectives on multi-ethnic communities in Dubai and multiple Emirati identities, copies stereotypes as seen previously. By using these it becomes assimilated to the approved structure of stereotyping.

Hailed as a pioneer of Emirati cinema it indicates a local cinematographic language which has accepted the structure of subjection to the global gaze.

7.3.3 Acceptance and internalisation of the global gaze

In her article "Can the subaltern speak?" Spivak argues that Foucault's writings on centuries of European imperialism actually reinforce narratives of imperialism. The very structures and spaces which consolidate the power of elites and limit the possible range of action of other communities are "screen allegories that foreclose a reading of the broader narratives of imperialism."[687] Drawing from theoretical works of Derrida, Spivak's criticism of Foucault's historical and example-based works targets the fact that his criticism of classes and structures ultimately consolidates their validity of dominance: "Foucault's appeal can hide a privileging of the intellectual and of the 'concrete' subject of oppression that, in fact compounds the appeal."[688] From her linguistic framework she observes that the subaltern is perpetually reconstructed by its attempts to break out of the subaltern objectified position.[689] Hence the subaltern cannot speak as long as it uses the language of the dominator. Spivak's criticism of Foucault goes further to say that a stereotyping and objectifying view on the own imagined community involuntarily accepts and consolidates established frameworks. Even criticising these on a theoretical analytical level (by writing against them or deconstructing their discourses) ultimately gives them validation.

Spivak's concept can be applied to the attempt to counter negative stereotypes of Arabs in the media. The media has to be encoded in the understandable mainstream language, thus re-enacting and solidifying the discriminatory discourse. Furthermore, by focusing on such an ideological aim, the Emirati media productions will be evaluated on the basis of how well they answer to or make relative the global image of Arabs, rather than on the basis of how well they translate an Emirati identity which perceives itself as free from outside scrutiny. The power of the

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[687] Spivak, 1990. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, p.279.

[688] Spivak, 1988. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* p.292.

[689] Ibid. p.290.

global gaze, as with the power of oppressing social categories, lies in its application as a prism through which all mainstream media is evaluated. Accordingly, instead of evaluating a film on the basis of how real and identifiable it portrays Arabs for Arabs, it is assessed with regard to how it represents Arabs to non-Arabs, and to what extent it demolishes prejudices.

If the global gaze becomes the yardstick of evaluation of representations, it can easily transform from narrative reality to internalised reality. The stereotypes then become the only, the 'right way' of representing the community of Emiratis. Seemingly, "City of Life" fulfils the demand for global recognition and rectification of a negative image. Applying its message to the named formula, it would be: 'We might appear as fun driven pampered big-shots, but underneath we have values of our pre-oil days, of religion, honesty, courage, and loyalty.' These are represented by the old generation (Faisal's father in "City of Life"), and they form a basis of constancy to which the younger generation will resort as soon as they comprehend that the shallow high-life leads to disaster. The 'right way' of representing is linked to ownership of the produced image, thus breaking free from the role of Spivak's "subaltern". Just how strongly Emiratis felt the need to take ownership over the representation of Dubai, is revealed through their criticism of the film, which targeted aspects relativizing the prominence of a polished representation of UAE society. One viewer, for example, said Faisal's father should have played a larger role. Several other viewers independently criticised the last scene of the movie, which shows a paperboard collector winning 1,000,000 AED from a scratch card found in a bin and crossing himself thankfully. One viewer felt that this scene took the film away from the Emiratis of Dubai showing it as a "city of Christians rather than Muslims", whereas the same viewer positively remarked on the ablution of the dead Khalfan because "it showed non-Muslims some aspects of Islamic identity."[690]

Calling for 'the right way' of representation runs along the same lines as foremost comments about the "right way" to wear *sheela* and *abaya*, which Dr. Lamees neglected and Emirati news presenters found so important when representing on screen. What has

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[690] Al-Samt, 2010. *Social Media in the UAE, [Recorded interview].* Ali F. Mostafa also mentioned criticism of the last scene, commenting: "I can't listen to every comment I get, because then my brain is going to go mash. So, I have to indulge. I didn't even think about the fact that he [the paperboard collector] is a Christian. Why would they think I have some subliminal message? Obviously, my main reason behind that scene was to show the diversity [of Dubai society]." (Mostafa, *"City of Life" and Film Making in the UAE, [Recorded interview].*)

been criticised on a local level is demanded on a global level: a homogenized censored image. The underlying structure of a firm basis in traditional values, represented through Faisal's father, is similar to the strategy applied by Dr. Khalifa in his TV talk shows: when featuring what is potentially perceived as image-damaging content he pacifies his audience by his repeated reassurances. Whatever phenomena of UAE society he may broadcast and discuss, in his person he reassures the underlying agreement of existing traditional values. Hence the sting is taken from acknowledging the phenomena of *mustarjilāt* or drunken Emirati youngsters.

On a local level the demands for a diversified media admitting various publics show an acceptance of different discourses of identity which are in constant negotiation and change rather than in conflict. However on a global level, the marketable image gains priority. The overall moral message of identity makes the flagship film "City of Life" withstand the global gaze. The negotiation of Emirati identity on a transnational level therefore seems one step behind the television discourse, where the lack of plausibility has led to an acknowledgement that there is no such thing as a homogenous Emirati identity. People feeling excluded from the media discourse aim to be heard and seen by their various audiences. This aim acknowledges that there are different yet overlapping identities within the Emirati community.

It seems that the exposure to multiple publics via alternative media helps overcome the need for one perfect and pure representation. Although on a local level it is accepted that it is not possible to isolate one 'local' culture, this is exactly what is demanded for a global level. Based on such a notion media products will tend to be a reaction or response to a thus accepted notion of the global gaze. Certainly one might argue that such developments need time to evolve[691] as well as reconcile government and communities' interests. The monopolisation of the existing media industry as well as the growing film infrastructure by the government hindering the development of independent films therefore remains a main obstacle. However, as a concept internalised by audiences themselves, overcoming the global gaze seems more complicated and deeper rooted.

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[691] The statement shows a trend following the example of *City of Life*: communicating identity to the world, instead of tackling what moves the locals. A*s* the film festival organiser Amralla remarked, "Film schools need to teach filmmakers how to think. This takes a hell of a lot of time." (Quilty, 2010. *Hostile Environment of Opulence.*)

7.3.4 Shifting from stereotypes to self-orientalisation?

Spivak's observations on the relationship between dominant and subaltern discourses show how the subaltern 'other' is objectified and unable to deconstruct the dominant discourse without developing an own language.[692] The way in which Emirati audiences perceived both television and cinema industries with regard to representations of their identities, shows a practical dimension of her concept. In the TV channels the presenters felt subjected to a structure which is already in place and which it is almost impossible to evade. Similarly, the Emirati film makers appear as 'newcomers' on the stage of global film production and have to navigate their way through various obstacles.

For the individual film producer, translating an ideal 'self' becomes problematic when this representation has to be incorporated into a code the 'other' (in this case, the international audience) understands. Ultimately the 'quality' of the other's gaze is imagined, but it is fuelled by experiences and images. By using stereotypes as representations, the producer enters a sphere of ambivalent contesting meanings. The stereotypes are reinforced by their perpetuation and can thus be confirmed as valid or 'true' images and experiences. Based on the fluctuant meaning of such codes, their usage also grants the possibility of modification.

The established structures and discourses are at the same time part of the individuals' media consumption, thus contextualising their lives and experiences. The images of the worlds in Hollywood films are part of their identities as Emiratis, hence the aim to re-contextualise the stereotypes rather than opposing them. The students expressed an imbalance of media exchange between their imagined community, which consumes 'original' content produced by Western media, and their Emirati forms of expression.[693]

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[692] Spivak, 1988. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* p. 290ff.

[693] As the student quoted previously complained, the Emiratis had few opportunities to represent themselves directly to American audiences. (See: Students, 2009. *Uae Media: Ramadan Series, Talkshows, Tv Brands*, *[Recorded focus group no. 3]*.)

While Emiratis are consuming a primary source from which they can form an opinion of American society. Arabs, however, have their impressions represented for 'them' by others. Such representations are secondary sources and portray Arabs through the prism of Western stereotypes. The frustration of not having a voice despite an international community of TV and film consumers, explains the interviewees' approval for "City of Life": the character of Faisal represents the stereotype of oil-rich Arabs criticised by the student, but he transforms during the movie to become a 'self-made' stereotype. By the end of the film he has become the prototype of the 'modern' yet 'authentic' Emirati, exemplified by Sheikh Zayed. The aforementioned Dr. Lamees was perceived as a misrepresentation for not conforming to the official narrative, which is perceived as the only acceptable one towards 'outsiders'.

The example illustrates the remark made by Edward Said regarding reinterpreting misrepresentations of the 'other'. In the context of representations of the Orient, he stresses that they "can also be unmade and rewritten, [...] always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated, so that 'our' East, 'our' Orient becomes 'ours' to possess and direct."[694] The students welcome the stereotypical representation of Emiratis, which they criticised in local television shows, when confronted with an 'other' (Hollywood) which enforces a negative image of Arabs. Since both positive, as well as the rejected stereotypes however, draw their interpretive material from an Orientalist discourse, the question arises whether this indicates a form of 'self-Orientalisation'.

As a technical term derived from Edward Said's "Orientalism", several researchers have used self-Orientalisation to describe how the validity of Western scholarship to analyse the Orient has influenced scholars from the Middle East and Asia. Mehmet Akif Kirecci analyses how Western images of a declining Orient were accepted as 'facts' by Egyptian intellectuals.[695] Other researchers use the term in the context of Agehananda Bharati's concept of the "Pizza-effect."[696] This approach, often applied to studies of popular culture, explores how 'Oriental' artefacts invented by the West, are re-imported into their supposed countries of origin. Ann Marie Leshkomich and Carla Jones, for example, analyse the

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[694] Said, 2003. *Orientalism*,p.xiv.

[695] See: Kirecci, 2007. *Decline Discourse and Self-Orientalization in the Writings of Al-Tahtawi, Taha Husayn and Ziya Gokalp: A Comparative Study of Modernization in Egypt and Turkey*,

[696] Bharati, 1970. *The Hindu Renaissance and Its Apologetic Patterns,* p/ 267–287.

phenomenon of "Asian chic" as a trend in China.[697] They show how Western fashion designers have invented an image of the mysterious Orient and now benefit from marketing it globally. In China, which has been used as an inspiration, this trend is adapted as distinctively 'Chinese', thus symbolically affirming the validity of the invention. Such research touches upon the topic of 'cultural origin' which is relevant for the adaptation of stereotypes of 'self' alluded to in the previous sections of this chapter.

Based on the concept of dialogism and authenticity as a practice (as discussed in part 2.2), disputes about 'cultural ownership' do not lead to a better understanding of the dimensions discussed in the context of self-stereotyping. The Arab perspective could also argue that images of the Orientalist discourse are as 'originally' Arab as Ibn Khaldoun's romantic laud of the Bedouins during the 14th century.[698] Homi Bhabha pointed out that the Orientalist colonial discourse is ambivalent. He stipulated that "the reason a cultural text or system of meaning cannot be sufficient unto itself is that the act of cultural enunciation – the place of utterance – is crossed by the difference of writing."[699] Similar to Barthes' "Death of the Author", Bhabha acknowledges that languages (or code systems) are hybrid and potentially independent of the initial ideology. Simply using or "tolerating" stereotypes cannot therefore be considered as self-Orientalisation. "City of Life" is what Cameron Bailey called "cinema of duty"[700]: the attempt to reinterpret stereotypes of a subjugated community. This reaction to a strong discourse is based on the film producer feeling representative of her or his imagined community, which does not have access to the mainstream 'world cinema'. "City of Life" not only re-stereotypes 'the Arab', but discredits the foreign Orientalist view of the Gulf: the English clerk, who, in an Orientalist manner, sees "the East as a career"[701] is vilified as superficial and dishonest.

Whether the use of Orientalist symbolism succeeds in re-labelling stereotypes is doubtful on local as well as global levels. The international community of Hollywood consumers can easily reject attempts to define a 'new' stereotype for the Orient as lip

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[697] Jones, 2003. *What Happens When Asian Chic Becomes Chic in Asia?,* p/ 281-300.

[698] See: Ibn Khaldūn, 1377. *Muqaddimat Ibn Khaldūn,*

[699] Bhabha, 2006. *Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences*,p.207.

[700] Bailey, 1996. *Beyond the 'Cinema of Duty'? The Pleasures of Hybridity: Black British Film of the 1980s and 1990s*,p.203.

[701] Said, 2003. *Orientalism*,p.4.

service by a marginalised group wanting to be recognised. This attempt therefore only confirms the validity of Western superiority. An example from the aforementioned film "Sex and the City 2" illustrates this interpretation: in anticipation of their trip to Abu Dhabi the friends from New York are frequently told that "this is the *new* Middle East", only to be persecuted by a mob for their promiscuous apparel.[702] Among a local Emirati audience, on the other hand, the stereotypes find only approval under the influence of the global gaze. As soon as the imagined community of Emiratis considers itself to be among peers, the lack of diversity is criticised. Examples of local society talk shows have amply demonstrated that there are multiple situational 'burdens of representation.' In the sphere of local TV, individuals demand re-presentations as opposed to the patronising representatives in the official media.

The burden of representation, however, is protected by the official narrative of identity. The image of collective self, which is deemed suitable for the global community, is imposed on the Emiratis by the ideology of nationhood. The nation-state defines being Emirati and how it is expressed, ultimately assuming the role of the 'omniscient' Western researcher in the Orientalist discourse.

In the case of "Asian chic", Jones observes that "those who partook of the Orientalist trend adopted a distanced, self-Orientalizing perspective on the charms of their imagined ethnic heritage."[703] This comment is very similar to the heritage discourse in the UAE. The Emiratis perceived the 'stings' of their local TV channels in a similar way and appreciated the imagery of Bedouin heroism. The difference between these cases is that in the UAE this 'imagined ethnic heritage' is not 'imported' through consumer goods but as local production.

For Said there is no "real" Orient, but since the Orient cannot represent itself, Orientalist texts act as a substitute, using "techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, 'there' in discourse about it."[704] Thus Orientalists construct a representation of the Orient which claims to contain its essence.[705] In his survey of

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[702] King, 2010. *Sex and the City 2,*

[703] Jones, 2003. *What Happens When Asian Chic Becomes Chic in Asia?,* p.282.

[704] Said, 2003. *Orientalism,* p.22.

[705] See: ibid.p.21.

"Orientalism Now", Said stipulates that "the modern Orient […] partakes in its own Orientalizing."[706] He explains this as an active re-enforcement of Western dominance through consumerist behaviours along with unreflected acceptance of stereotypes:

> "There is a vast standardization of taste in the region, symbolized not only by transistors, blue jeans, and Coca Cola but also by cultural images of the Orient supplied by American mass media and consumed unthinkingly by the mass television audience. The paradox of an Arab regarding himself as an "Arab" of the sort put out by Hollywood is but the simplest result of what I am referring to."[707]

His view is problematic: it applies the same concept of cultural ownership as the previously mentioned 'Pizza effect.' Following Appadurai's remarks on globalisation of cultures, it has to be acknowledged that even if originating in the USA, Coca Cola has a different cultural meaning and involves different connotations depending on the local context of its consumption. Coca Cola does not 'belong' to the USA any more, and criticising its adaptation needs to target a multi-corporate enterprise, not the nation in which it was invented. As an inventor of a corporate identity, Coca Cola and other companies indeed exert a colonialising power by inventing mainstream identities (such as consumerist behaviours), but as this does not specifically target the Orient, its acceptance can be labelled as commercialism or materialism, rather than Orientalism.

Secondly, as this research has shown, the stereotype of "Arab" is not simply accepted. It is not only academics who criticise the stereotype but 'ordinary people' too experience it as a burden. The fact that they feel categorised as "Arab" or "Emirati" is not because of the Hollywood stereotype but the omnipresent ideology of (in the case of the UAE) being Emirati. A mainstream Hollywood film is not 'seen' as reality but for what it is: a piece of entertainment working with master narratives and stereotypes. This is criticised

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[706] Ibid.p.325.
[707] Ibid.p.324f.

and considered a misrepresentation. But while the self categorisation as "Arab" is situational and genre-specific, the government discourse is not. Whatever an Emirati does, Emirati identity is unavoidable, and any expressions of self and individualism are framed by the official identity.

Whether or not individuals accept the content of the discourse, as soon as they enter any kind of public domain, they get caught up in the network of being representative of and having an Emirati identity. A film maker like Nayla produces films about very personal issues, such as dating for the first time, or, in her latest production in 2011, boredom within married life. Invited for an interview on Dubai TV, the focus of discussion was not the provocative content of her productions but her national identity and gender representation. The interviewer inquired as to how she felt as an Emirati woman who makes films, whether she had any messages for other Emirati women, how the experience of shooting a film in India was for her as an Emirati woman, and so on.[708] As in the case of the TV presenters, the individual disappears behind the predefined categories of representation.

I therefore propose a modified reading of what Said calls the Orient's "own Orientalizing." The government ideology 'Orientalises' the Emirati citizens, by monopolising the narrative of identity, as invented by the privileged ruling elite. To enforce this ideology all best-practices of manipulation are utilised, as far as the branding of a national 'history'.

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[708] Check interview on Nayla's website

Conclusion

The aim of the research was to explore perceptions of Emirati national identity through the prism of the media. At the centre of the research were Emirati media makers who are not part of the ruling elite but have an interest in both being consumers in relation to the media and in translating national identity into a product for consumption. Accordingly, they have to make sense of contradictory narratives and practices, to define their own position within the social discourse and create their own personal contributions. The research focused on their experiences of situations and narratives, as well as their ideals and role models. The interviews illustrated local specificities of the UAE media landscape and the significance of anthropological grassroots theories for research on Gulf societies.

A general benefit of the research conducted was the focus on individuals as central figures around which communities gather and which they use as inspiration to create their identities. While other pieces of research on Gulf societies have focused on rituals and artefacts this research draws attention to role models.[709] The construction of role models in the UAE has significantly changed over time. It started with the imported personality cult around Nasser, which demonstrated the importance of a local figurehead for the nation. More modern figureheads include sheikhs such as Sheikh Hamdan. A political personality cult has developed using modern methods of branding usually reserved for celebrities. The political leaders of the nation have become part of a wider celebrity discourse and indirectly compete with other Emiratis with high public profiles. Case in point is Sheikh Hamdan, whose public image is not created by focusing on any political agenda but on his role as representation of the nation's people. By choosing the angle of representation as one which operates through individuals, this research has contextualised the UAE media audience of nationals and the ruling elite within a transnational discourse revolving around individuals and their symbolic meaning for communities.

While the media landscape in the UAE demonstrates several similarities to local media in other Arab states, the specific demographics of the UAE have led to features which guide the dynamics of its development. The large proportion of foreign media professionals involved in the local media production has strongly influenced the relationship between Emirati audiences and their national media. The creation of content for local TV copies or emulates what international media

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[709] See especially Sulayman Khalaf's discourse analyses of collective acts and symbols of representation, such as camel races and poetry competitions.

channels create. This means creating mainstream content to please the widest possible audience. However, in catering to this lowest common denominator, the local media makers miss the chance to have the diverse communities of UAE nationals identify with the content and thus become loyal viewers. The dedicated fan channels (such as Bollywood, drama, and sports channels) have resulted in a media landscape which is intended to 'have something for everyone' but which is instead considered to have no relevance for the national community. This development provides evidence which corroborates the prediction of media scholar Elihu Katz that the availability of private television networks and independent production companies has fragmented audiences and reduced the potential of 'national media' as a form of mass communication for an audience within the territory of a nation state.[710]

Simultaneously the UAE provides a strong case for James Curran's perspective on national media in a global age. He argues that national media has to produce "unity through diversity" to preserve its relevance for the nation.[711] According to Curran, public broadcasts ideally attempt to create the conditions for sub-communities to co-create a national media which accounts for its different and sometimes contradictory expressions of national identity. In the case of the UAE, the government is obviously unwilling to provide such a framework and has instead developed a media strategy which ensures that the integrity of its invented national identity remains untarnished. What makes the UAE's version of a homogenous media landscape stand out among that of other local Arab media industries is not the degree of governmental control itself, nor the orientation towards uncritical, complacent mainstream entertainment. What is unique about it is how the status quo has been received by many Emiratis and, more importantly, the opposition it has triggered. Rather than opposing the government as initiator of an unconvincing media, or even the conspiratorial notion of global media corporations invading the local media landscape, criticism is deflected towards the country's expatriates who sometimes occupy senior roles in the local media production industry. They symbolise the 'other', non-Emirati element of the local media and are consequently referred to derisively under the collective term 'Media Mafia.' The conflict between homogenous and diverse media is thus deflected away from an inner-Emirati conflict between ruling elite and people. The notion of the Lebanese "Media Mafia" plays into the hands of the government who can thus maintain their image of closeness to the Emirati nationals.

Another particularity of the UAE case lies in the government's specific concern with representing a polished image of the ruling elite and the nation as a whole. This preoccupation

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[710] Katz, 1996. *And Deliver Us from Segmentation,* p.33.
[711] Curran, 1998. *Crisis of Public Communication: A Reappraisal*, p.177.

translates itself into the control and manipulation of media discourses on all levels of production. The media are caught between the governmental urge to control and the desire to appear open both in their relationship with the community of UAE nationals and in that which they enjoy with members of other nation states. This aim spreads from the macro-level of legislation into individual notions of representation of the nation. Ella Shohat's concept of the "burden of representation" defines a pressure experienced to develop a positive and distinctive image of the collective community.[712] In this scenario individual deviations from the invented ideal image are discouraged in favour of that image. The imagined 'other' becomes a main consideration in the production of media images. This research has shown that in practice Emirati media personalities reject the necessity to represent an ideal image but simultaneously agree with the principle. Just as the government wishes for the nation to be acknowledged and recognised by other nations, the Emiratis are overanxious about the assessment of Emirati identity by outside communities. This fixation is intertwined with media representations of collectives through stereotypes and can be overcome on a micro level through personal encounters and dialogue with individuals from 'outside' the Emirati community. The international film festivals are examples for places where communities to gather in real time, interact, and have a dialogue. But these events are exceptional and limited to a select group of media professionals.

On the whole, the focus on ideal representations hinders the development of a distinct Emirati media style, so strongly sought for by producers. Rather than permitting space for experimentation and development, films, in particular, are produced with the sole aim to compete with established film industries such as Hollywood. Master narratives and their symbols are adapted in the attempt to re-interpret them and use them to showcase the Emirates to a global community of movie goers. The necessary internal dialogue between ideal, constructed images and varieties in practice within the community thus becomes a self-initiated limitation of expression.

Confirmed and challenged frameworks

On a theoretical level the research of this thesis has demonstrated the applicability of Arjun Appadurai's concept of globalisation and the dimensions of its possible relevance to

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[712] Shohat, 1996. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, p.183.

anthropological studies of the Gulf region. Similarly to Stuart Hall, Appadurai criticises the dichotomisation of 'global' and 'local.' Its limitations are indirectly expressed in the term 'glocal', a term which ultimately tries to dissolve a previously created dichotomy. Appadurai and Hall highlight that 'global' is part of a framework which tries to discover 'authentic' local elements by contrast. Most importantly both scholars criticise the perception of the notion as a 'modern' phenomenon.

This thesis has treated the terms 'global' and 'local' as components of what Eickleman calls 'world views', which do not contradict each other. They are part of a framework which defines identities but can neither claim empirical 'truth' nor be completely discarded as obsolete theory. In the context of media the research has suggested an understanding of 'global' as a collection of economic practices and code systems which are accepted as convincing and meaningful by media consumers around the globe. This does not exclude its 'localisation', since every society attributes different meanings to such code systems. The use of branding strategies for example can be called a global media phenomenon although it is contextualised differently in each situation. Especially with regard to film production, global code systems have been criticised due to their stereotypical forms of representation. The review of their incorporation into Emirati films has illustrated both the power and limitations of their use in local media contexts. Familiar with global media, the research participants have appreciated the attractiveness of global media formats whilst simultaneously criticising the lack of uniquely Emirati expressions of identity. Whilst the copying of stereotypes and mainstream narratives in the local media was criticised by the research participants, their media usage and the taste displayed in their adaptation dissolved the dichotomy.

In the context of the UAE, the dialogical nature of identity formation, as outlined by Michael Bakhtin, was often vocalised as a power struggle between 'us' and the imagined 'other.' Harmonised in practice, global influences were interpreted by many as a potential threat to the local identity. An imagined international media audience, for example, was experienced as judgemental scrutiniser of Emirati and Arab communities. In anticipatory defence, media audiences demanded representations of their collective identity which could deflate any possible criticism. This prism of the evaluation of their own media has

illustrated the effects of the dichotomising world view observed by Appadurai in other local contexts.

To reiterate, the intensity of the need to represent and deflect any possible challenge to local integrity is correlated with the demographics of the UAE. Since the nationals are a minority in their own country the notion of the overwhelming 'other' is a daily experience. This explains the emphatic demands of Emiratis to have a specifically local media. Their longing for a media space exclusively for UAE nationals has confirmed the applicability of Homi Bhabha's remarks on 'homecoming' in literature to the visual media.

Consideration of the discrepancies between local influences and those deemed to be global through examination of the media has shown how they influence the negotiation of forms of representation. Merging global trends of representation with local audience needs whilst simultaneously criticising 'global' as 'foreign' has also shed light on the conceptualisation of Orientalism in the UAE. The negotiation of hegemonic forms of representation has raised the question whether Emiratis orientalise themselves. From within the framework used here for the analysis of media structures this research does not lead to such a conclusion, whilst the acceptance of a dichotomy between global and local would support this perception. As signifying a form of imposed representation, Orientalism is not mediated by the Emirati media consumers or producers but by the UAE government. The element of "Orientalising" does not lie in the fabrication of a stereotypical discourse and set of images but in its enforcement and it is through a complex structure of control that the UAE government exercises this power.

The means by which self-Orientalisation is enforced is as complex and various as were the linguistic discourses originally analysed by Edward Said to define the concept. Media accessibility is high in the UAE and anybody can construct and circulate representations of self − for example on the internet. While individuals and small communities can enjoy their notions of mutuality and community, the official local discourse is closed to alternative voices. Even more so, the currently developing film industry already features the attempt of the government to transfer its structure of control to foreign producers. The method is similar to the structure established in the local media: foreign producers are offered incentives to use the UAE as a shooting location in exchange

for content limitations. This has already led to conflicts and ultimately stands in the way of the UAE becoming a real competitor to favourite Hollywood shooting locations such as Morocco and Tunisia.

The structure of incorporating all available means and stories and aligning them into a one-sided narrative of UAE identity means that variations are existent but prevented from a fruitful, dialogical exchange with other images. Communities interact among themselves in their specific media spheres. The power of this structure of parallel monologues to express national identity is criticised and challenged by Emiratis who demand diversification within the media. However, the real power that produces such a homogenised world of images to signify identity lies in the fact that the media industry is controlled by a monopoly. In the UAE, the government is the sole owner of the infrastructure and in order to access it, Emiratis have to navigate it and compromise their individuality to satisfy the demands of the local media sponsors. An Emirati film maker applying for funding for a film project will have to modify her or his script to make it nationally significant.

Despite the aforementioned difficulties, there are some film makers and animators who have shown how they can use this structure to their advantage and, while feeding into the Emiratisation discourse, introduce small variations from the official narrative into their productions, which the audience will recognise. These micro-dynamics of change can change the tonality of the official narrative over time yet still strengthen its validity. The repeatedly expressed willingness of Emirati media makers to change the one-sided profile of the media and their practical attempts to challenge the government's control cannot be interpreted as the first signs of a media revolution. To induce more open and drastic change, the discontent would have to outweigh the benefits offered by the governmental media institutions, and the government strategy takes care that this will not happen.

How will the media landscape develop?

The specifics of the UAE media landscape and the aims of the research participants for the national media are indicative of the directions in which the local media may develop.

Modifications of official media policies, effective at the micro-level of Emirati media producers, have already led to the incorporation of former taboo topics into the media. In particular, the example of talk show host Dr. Khalifa has shown how the aim to educate Emirati audiences can result in opening the media stage to subjugated communities, such as lesbians. In society at large, these voices are strictly controlled and framed by an authoritarian set of values In fact the official media can be seen as using such marginalised communities in this way to strengthen its own image of openness while at the same time demonstrating the legitimacy of ostracising them as disruptions to an otherwise harmonious Emirati national community. This framework matches the media practices of other Arab satellite channels, as Dabbous-Sensenig observes for *Al Jazeera*. She highlights that live talk shows unintentionally problematise the absence and marginalisation of counter groups in society at large.[713]

Examined from this perspective, it is possible to see how a live TV show which catches the popular imagination can, perhaps, lead to a significant adjustment in social discourse, or create a media trend. Currently Dr. Khalifa's live show is the only show in UAE society specifically dealing with personal and taboo themes. He has filled a need and managed to establish an Emirati fan base, thus strengthening the channel's profile. It is to be expected that more Emirati presenters will strive to follow his example, profiting from the lack of Emirati media personalities. Several young presenters have already referred to Dr. Khalifa as a source for inspiration – even if only to highlight what they would do differently. More live shows on social issues can act as reminders of a social diversity the media currently ignores. Even if Emiratis differentiate themselves from the style of Western talk shows, arguing that their idea of UAE identity does not promote a display of personal issues worthy of the tabloid press, they have explained that they nevertheless watch these foreign shows. Their displeasure with Emirati versions of this format may indicate that closing the debate on certain issues may well problematise their absence.

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[713] Dabbous-Sensenig uses an example from *Al Jazeera*, the live show *A-Sharia wal Hayat ("Islamic Law and Life"),* which features a similar format as *Khutwa* but in a religious discourse. The show is set up to stabilise the opinion of orthodox Sunni Islam, by using a television format which is actually by genre less well suited to the educational aim of the show than to that of questioning naturalised definitions of reality and ideologies. It seems that, as in the example from *Al Jazeera*, the government affiliated channels in the UAE incorporate and bring innovative or new concepts into line. (See: Dabbous-Sensenig, 2006. *To Veil or Not to Veil : Gender and Religion on Al-Jazeera''S Islamic Law and Life,* p.81.)

Another development is conceivable with regard to the form of national ideology circulating through the media. The disputes on national identity disrupting the official media are telling for the amount of personal interest Emiratis take in defining what it means to be an Emirati. In their daily practices as media professionals they find ways to navigate obstacles to self-expression or reinterpret them to their advantage rather than openly confronting the official national identity. Female presenters, for example, count their blessings for being able to widen their range of actions rather than criticising the patronising policies of the channels they are working for. The cases in which authorities were directly opposed have been rare but of significant magnitude for the notion of Emirati identity. The example of the mixed marriages dispute is directly related to a gap between the formal narrative of a shared ethnicity and the social reality. The outrage it provoked shows how the notion of an ethnic community of Emiratis is no longer sustainable. This will have implications for the official narrative of the Emirati heritage, yet will not eliminate it from the discourse of community identity.

For the government, the nationhood narrative is a form of legitimising rulership, by presenting themselves as the 'sons of the nation's fathers'. For more and more Emiratis, however, this notion does not relate to their family backgrounds. Hence they criticise the notion of an ethnically 'pure' Emirati as racist. They see themselves as patriots and Emiratis in their own right and demand to be acknowledged as such. The case of the mixed marriages was one case in which people were so infuriated that they disputed official nationalism. The government is thus confronted with a dilemma: Emirati nationals are a minority in their own country, and the government needs to accept all sectors of society as Emirati. The nationals they recruit for the policy of reinforcing the officially sanctioned nationhood narrative, however, are mainly 'mixed' and hence do not fit into the original ethnic national ideology. Either the government will have to change this ideology or allow the people themselves to change it. I am confident that the dispute over what makes a person Emirati will more and more be focussed upon by the media, because 'mixed' Emiratis feel discriminated against. Their perception of media as a tool to express the individual self may assist in this: the media makers do not simply see themselves as educators of the masses, but as individuals whose personal life experiences can be transformed into a product of consumption. Because their stories are of interest they may

increasingly use their profession to communicate this. Media personalities can draw from the pool of symbols and narratives fabricated by the nation's founders and re-interpret them. It is possible that the symbols of Bedouin identity for example may no longer be directly linked to the ethnically 'pure' Bedouin but to values this imagined past represents.

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Appendix

The change of Abu Dhabi's media brand in pictures

Abu Dhabi Media Company 2007

Abu Dhabi Media 2011

The change of the Abu Dhabi TV brand

The modernised Falcon-Logo of Abu Dhabi TV
from 2000-2008

Abu Dhabi TV 2008 (generic logo)

Selection of brands from the TV channels of Dubai

Dubai Media Incorporated

Dubai TV

Dubai One

Sama Dubai

Dubai Racing