Al-Jazeera's Democratizing Role

and the Rise of Arab Public Sphere

Submitted by

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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

Signature …………………………………

Dedication

To my wife Rachida

and my sons Haytham, Ilyas and Anas

Thank you to my mother and father, who brought me up to be who I am

Abstract

More than sixteen years have passed since the launch of the Qatar-based Al Jazeera news channel. Looking back, the state of Arab media and its relationship with the political sphere was different from what we see nowadays. The launch of Al Jazeera in 1996 was a significant event that led to subsequent changes both in the media and politics. Among these changes, the Arab spring, which started in Tunisia in December 2010, is certainly the most remarkable one. This ongoing event has already resulted in the fall of four dictatorships and is expected to unleash a democratization wave and reshape the face of the Arab region.

This research analyzes the Al Jazeera democratizing effect and looks at the political implications of the new Arab public sphere. In doing so, it seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature, which tends to ignore the Arab world that remains largely under-researched. Contrary to the top-down approach inherent in the dominant narratives on democratization, that pay almost no attention to the growing role of the media in political change, I adopted a bottom-up approach arguing that, particularly in the Arab setting, it has become almost impossible to separate changes in the media landscape from those in the political field. The Arab spring provides us with a telling empirical example where this interplay is remarkably manifest. In this context, Arab democratization is no longer an abstract; it is rather a developing process that needs our attention and requires concerted scholarly efforts.

To develop an original approach to understanding Arab democratization and analyze its complex dynamics, I used grounded theory and its powerful tools in theory building. Based on this theoretical framework I opted for qualitative methodology to elaborate the empirical part of this research, which consists primarily of analyzing and interpreting

in-depth interviews conducted with a sample of Al Jazeera's staff in various managerial

and editorial positions.

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Chapter 1:

Literature Review

1. Research question and rationale

What is the impact of Al Jazeera's paradigmatic change in the media-politics relationship on Arab democratization? How has Al Jazeera contributed to the creation of an Arab public sphere? These key questions articulate my research analytical agenda and will be examined in the following context.

The successive democratization waves that swept across the globe during the last four decades generated a rich body of literature exploring and comparing processes, attitudes and outcomes. In the context of these phenomenal changes, many transitions to democratic governance took place in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa; the one region that seemed to be lagging behind is the Middle East in general and the Arab world in particular. Accordingly, very few scholarly works focused on this region to explore the dynamics of social and political change and question the seemingly resistance of Arab political systems to democratization. Looking at the situation through the lens of the top-down dominating narratives can only capture segments of the scene but not the whole picture. The apparent stalled democratic change in the Arab world should not obscure the deep, long-term and open-ended processes involving a widening circle of non-state, non-institutionalized and non-elite actors. In this respect, the struggle for Arab democratization is better understood when local realities and specific contexts

are taken into account. Among these realities is the growing influence of previously marginalized, excluded and unheard voices. Besides, there is the noticeable growing role of transnational satellite television and online media, with all that it offers in terms of connectivity and flow of uncensored information.

As the media have always played a significant role in facilitating change in certain circumstances and reinforcing the status-quo in others, and since the Arab world has seen an unprecedented surge of media activity in the last fifteen years led by the Qatar-based Al Jazeera network, there is a need to rethink the democratizing role of the media in the Arab setting. This research is a contribution to the ongoing debate over the nature and scope of the Al Jazeera effect in a region where democratic politics seems to be going nowhere, at least until before the Arab spring. It is not my aim here to prove or disprove whether Al Jazeera is a democratizing agent. I will rather explore the ways in which this new phenomenon has redefined the spheres of public communication and how these emerging spheres are reshaping peoples' relations to their political systems and affecting the power relations between the rulers and the ruled. My aim therefore, is to fill the gap in the existing literature on Arab democratization, which either neglected or placed very little emphasis on the role of the media and the non-political elites.

By giving those actors a platform for public discussion and providing its cross-sectional audiences with unprecedented access to information, Al Jazeera has created a new media paradigm that is increasingly affecting both democratic and anti-democratic discourses in the region. The political dimension of this platform, where government officials,

opposition figures, civil society activists, academics and professionals from different backgrounds interact freely and show their agreements and disagreements on issues of general concern is what characterizes the debate mediated by this new media paradigm that is Al Jazeera. The more this debate assumes clear political functions and includes wider social strata, the weaker the stronghold of Arab autocratic regimes over public opinion and choices will be. It is through this complex and dialectical relation of intertwined advancements and drawbacks that democratic struggles in the region will be analyzed. Addressing Arab democratization from this perspective is therefore, never straightforward or unproblematic.

Drawing on the existing literature on democratization theory, media-politics relationship, the public sphere, and Al Jazeera, I propose to break down my research key questions into the following set of sub-questions which will articulate my analysis and guide my research agenda:

1. To what extent are the dynamics of social and political change in the Arab world "specific" and "particular" in a way that requires the development of an alternative theoretical approach to Arab democratization?

2. Can we build on the intellectual tradition of critical theory, especially the formulations of Habermas on the communicative action, the public sphere, and deliberative democracy to understand the impact of Al Jazeera on the changing relations between Arab media and politics?

3. In the last few years, there has been a number of writings about the emergence of an "Arab public sphere" linked to, and influenced by Al Jazeera. What are the characteristics of this Arab public sphere? And how is it contributing to the democratizing process in the Arab world?

4. Is there a normative agenda behind Al Jazeera's journalistic practice that distinguishes it from other news networks by mediating the struggle for democracy and constructing an intellectual framework for plurality, diversity, and mutual recognition?

5. On the other hand, if the existence of a real "public sphere" is often regarded as a key factor in the democratic change, is the emergence of a virtual "public sphere" not providing an illusion of participation, which encourages citizens to feel as though their democratic rights are being exercised? Is Al Jazeera not contributing to the displacement of the democratic protest away from its real battleground?

6. By acting as representative of the views of its transnational audience and giving platform to different social and political groups regardless of their commitment to democracy, is Al Jazeera not adding further obstacles to the seemingly stalled democratic change? Where does that leave us with the advancement of Arab democracy?

2. Literature Review: a critical assessment

There is no such thing as a long piece of work, except one that you dare not start

Charles Baudelaire

In the following section I present a literature review in four areas pertaining to my research topic. The distinction I made between democratization theory, politics-media relations, the public sphere, and Al Jazeera is thematically driven; in essence they all complement each other and intersect in many areas. Choosing to arrange my literature review in this way helps me organize my ideas, prioritize my research themes, and figure out the contours of my study. I start with investigating democratization theories with special focus on the three main approaches: the modernization approach, the transition approach and the structural approach.

For decades, the debate on democratization has been framed by the interaction between those three competing theories. The different explanations they offer to the story of democratization by focusing on different variables and emphasizing certain elements rather than others complement each other and consolidate the same theoretical framework within which they all operate. They all share and make up the same Euro-American, ethno-centric, top-down approach to democratization. This section concludes with critical remarks outlining the weaknesses of existing narratives when applied to the Arab context. Among these weaknesses is the near complete silence on the role of the media in

fostering political change in a region where information has, until recently, been entirely monopolized by authoritarian governments in place.

The media-politics relationship and the possible avenues for democratic change is the second area of my literature review. In this section I explore the major analytical approaches to the relation between these two domains. Among the theoretic models included in the review are Siebert's four theories of the Press: the authoritarian theory, the libertarian theory, the social responsibility theory, and the Soviet Communist theory. Developments in the field of comparative study of media and politics gave birth to a number of subsequent formulations of this changing relation.

Hallin and Mancini present us with three models: the polarized pluralist model, the democratic corporatist model, and the liberal model. With the rise of new communication technologies in mediating politics and the human experience in general, new frameworks have emerged. Here we talk about the growing influence of the media over politics and the kind of issues and tensions the new phenomenon has created to democratic societies. Some of tensions are identified by Bennett and Entman: the tension between commonality, the tension between the free information choice and the necessary citizen education, and the tension between treating people as consumers of media products or as citizens. This debate takes another dimension in the next section of my literature review: the public sphere.

Revolving around Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* most of the literature in this section is either a critique of the original formulation or an attempt to apply the concept onto new social and political settings. Feminist studies emphasize the rise of women public sphere while Habermas's version of the bourgeois public sphere was declining. Marxist literature draws our attention to the existence of non-bourgeois, proletariat, plebian public spheres. New and transnational media created new forms of communications leading to the emergence of what some prefer to call virtual or online public sphere. This plurality of public spheres and the role of the media in creating or consolidating existing platforms for public discussion bring me to the last section of my literature review: Al Jazeera and its contribution to the dynamics of social and political change in the Arab world.

Literature on Al Jazeera is organized in this review into three categories. The first category is more descriptive and tends to present the network with the maximum of information, sometimes at the expense of the quality of analysis. The second category includes a number of comparative studies where Al Jazeera figures along with other news networks like the BBC, CNN, Telesur, Al Arabiya etc. The third and last category looks at the impact of Al Jazeera in different Areas. Some of the literature in this category devoted individual chapters to particular aspects of the Al Jazeera's impact, while others devoted whole volumes to investigate the scope of this impact at the regional and global levels like Philip Seib's "The Al Jazeera Effect". Regardless of how each of these three categories approached Al Jazeera; there remains a real need to further explore the impact of this media paradigm shift on Arab Democratization.

Theories of Democratization

It is evident to all alike that a great democratic revolution is going on among us,

but all do not look at it in the same light. To some it appears to be novel but accidental;

to others it seems irresistible, because it is the most uniform, the most ancient,

and the most permanent tendency that is to be found in history.

Alexis De Tocqueville

Democratization has been a major global political phenomenon in the twentieth century. Starting from the 1970s, a large number of authoritarian regimes gave way to democratic forms of government almost everywhere across the globe. The literature on democratization has also seen a phenomenal surge, trying to explain this phenomenon from different perspectives and different theoretical approaches. Theories, views, concepts and understandings of democratization will be examined in the course of the following section.

In simple and general terms, democratization refers to "political changes moving in a democratic direction."[1] It is a composite process by which governments, states and societies move away from some form of authoritarianism towards some form of democracy.[2] But, democracy has no clear core meaning that is timeless, objective and

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[1] Potter, David., Goldblatt, David., Kiloh, Margaret. and Lewis, Paul. *Democratization: Democracy - From Classical Times to the Present* (Polity Press, 2005), p. 3

[2] Grugel, Jean. *Democratization: A Critical Introduction* (Palgrave Macmillan 2002), p. 12

universally applicable. Even if scholars agree on some sort of idealized concepts or models of democracy (Held, 2008), or minimal requirements, in Robert Dahl's terms (Dahl, 1971), existing democracies do not always conform to these conceptual standards and conditions. Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl provided a more comprehensive definition of democracy where they distinguish between "concepts", "procedures" and "operative principles."[3]

At the procedural level, they build on Dahl's seven "conditions" and add two extra elements in an effort to make their definition as inclusive and all-encompassing as possible.[4] However, according to these standards, many real existing polities including a number of well-established western democracies fail to qualify for the label. Switzerland before 1971 for instance fails the test on the "universal adult suffrage" as only then women gained the right to vote. Similarly, the "Westminster" model, with its over-riding legislative power of the unelected House of Lords in Britain fails to fit Schmitter and Karl's eighth criteria.

Since the meaning of democracy remains unsettled, fundamentally contested and marked by conflicting interpretations, defining democratization is also problematic and cannot be objective or straightforward. It is a complex, long-term, dynamic, and open-ended process as described by Laurence Whitehead. It consists of progress towards a more rule-

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[3] Schmitter, Philippe C. and Karl, Terry L. *'What Democracy is… and is Not'* in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds.), *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (John Hopkins University Press 1993), p. 45
[4] The eighth element is popularly elected officials able to exercise their power without being subjected to over-riding opposition from unelected officials. The ninth is that the polity must be self-governing and able to operate independently from the interference of external political systems.

based, more consensual and more participatory type of politics.[5] To explain this process, a number of theoretic approaches had emerged. Much of the literature on democratization focuses on three main theories. David Potter lists the following three approaches: the modernization approach, the transition approach and the structural approach.

As Potter himself points out, there is no categorical distinction between these three approaches. None of them offers a totally separate and different type of explanation, but the emphasis of each one is certainly different.[6] They share ideas, concepts and analytical procedures. They also group a number of sub-categories and authors with different perspectives, explanations and sets of arguments. Sometimes the distinction is simply made between structure and agency approaches because of their different positions regarding the role of structure or agency in driving the change. Even this distinction may seem arbitrary if we consider that a varying degree of structuralism is embedded in all approaches. In what follows, I adopt Potter's three-approach categorization. I present a critical review of all three approaches, highlighting their theoretic frameworks, their main theorists and their key concepts and arguments.

- **Modernization approach:**

It has been true in Western societies and it seems to be true elsewhere that you do not find democratic systems apart from capitalism, or apart from a market economy, if you prefer that term.

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[5] Whitehead, Laurence. *Democratization: Theory and* Experience (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 27
[6] Potter, Goldblatt, Kiloh and Lewis, Paul, *Democratization,* p. 11

Peter L. Berger

In his seminal article "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy", Seymour Martin Lipset sought to relate democratization to socio-economic development or level of modernization. His study, which focused on European, English speaking and Latin American nations demonstrates that, in the first two regions we find stable democracies, unstable democracies and unstable dictatorships while in Latin America we find democracies, unstable dictatorships and stable dictatorships. After comparing these countries according to their average wealth, degree of industrialization and urbanization, and level of education, he found that, in each case, these indices of economic development were much higher for the more democratic countries. He then concluded, "democracy is related to the state of economic development. Concretely, this means that the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy.[7] In other terms, "most countries which lack an enduring tradition of political democracy in its clearest forms lie in the traditionally underdeveloped sections of the world."[8] Lipset's direct causality between capitalism and democracy has been subject to criticism even from within the modernization perspective. Larry Diamond presents quite a different view of this relationship: "the more well-to-do the people of a country, on average, the more likely they will favor, achieve, and maintain a democratic system for their country."[9] On his part, Walter Rostow identified

[7] Lipset, Seymour M. *Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy* (The American Political Science Review, Vol. 53, No. 1, March 1959) p. 75
[8] Ibid. p. 73
[9] Diamond, Larry. *Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered* (American Behavioral Scientist, Vol. 35 no. 4/5, (March 1992) pp. 468

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four stages leading societies from traditionalism to modernity where democracy can prevail. In a strictly lineal path, the universal route to capitalism starts with "traditional societies" through "pre-take-off societies" which in turn "take-off" before "maturing" and transforming into "mass consumption societies.[10]

According to modernization theory, economic development is at the heart of democratization because it brings higher level of income, which in turn leads to the diminution of class distinction, struggle and conflict. It also brings higher level of education where citizens come to value democracy by becoming more tolerant, less radical, moderate and rational with regard to different views and other social groups. Although these socio-economic factors may well explain democratic transitions in certain parts of the world, they become problematic when used to analyze the situation in the Middle East. Compared to other developing countries argues Tim Niblock, a number of Middle Eastern countries score relatively highly on indices as education, industrialization, social mobility, urbanization and standard of living, yet they have been surpassed on the road to democratization by countries with lower scores.[11]

The importance of education in developing a particular culture that favors democracy over other forms of government led to the emergence of what has become to be known as the political culture approach within modernization theory. Political culture theorists argue that education creates civic culture without which democracy cannot be stable or

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[10] See Walter W. Rostow, *The Process of Economic Growth* (Clarendon Press, 1960).
[11] Niblock, Tim. *Democratization: A Theoretical and Practical Debate* (British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 25, Issue 2, Nov. 1998), p. 225

durable. The link between democracy and a particular political culture is clear in Almond and Verba's "The Civic Culture". The basic thesis underlying their work is that a democratic form of participatory political system requires as well a political culture consistent with it. It is "a pluralistic culture based on communication and persuasion, a culture of consensus and diversity, a culture that permitted change but moderated it."[12] The relationship between political culture and democratization has also been highlighted by Pye and Verba in "Political culture and political development"[13] and Larry Diamond who argued that long-term democratic consolidation must encompass a shift in political culture.[14] On his part, Michael Hudson stresses the importance of political culture and argues for the case of bringing it back in to better understand Arab politics, especially with regard to civil society, political liberalization and democratization. While advocating the political culture approach, Hudson is clear about the necessity of avoiding "the excessive generalizations that marked political culture studies in their heyday: artificial dichotomization between "traditional" and "modern", the oversimplification of "subject-parochial-participant" classifications, and the application of a single "culture" to a whole nation."[15]

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[12] Almond, Gabriel A. and Verba, Sidney. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 8
[13] See Pye, Lucian and Verba, Sidney. *Political culture and political development* (Princeton University Press, 1965).
[14] See Diamond , Larry. *Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered* (American Behavioral Scientist, Vol. 35 no. 4/5, March, 1992) pp. 450-99
[15] Hudson, Michael. "The Political Culture Approach to Arab Democratization: The Case for Bringing It Back-In, Carefully", in Rex Brynen and Bahgat Korany (eds.), *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World: Vol.1, Theoretical Perspectives* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), p. 64

Subsequent studies on democratization brought into light a number of weaknesses of modernization theory, whether in its economist or culturalist forms. The following critical remarks summarize these weaknesses:

Modernization theory is widely viewed by its critics as linear and causal with very limited solid empirical evidence that supports any claim to universal applicability. There is certainly a positive correlation between economic development and democracy, but not in a law-like fashion. Other variables like political institutions, social norms, ethnic cleavages etc. should also be considered. Its ethnocentrism and culture specificity caused it to ignore a range of other forms of socio-economic development including that of the third world and the Middle East in particular.

Lessons and rules drawn from the Western experience cannot always apply to non-Western societies without falling in the trap of unsubstantiated generalization. In this respect, modernization theory is seen as ahistorical in that it does not recognize the fundamental differences between societies and their different historical experiences. It presumes that all societies can replicate a transition, which actually occurred at a particular moment in space and time.[16] From a transitional perspective, Dankwart Rustow criticizes modernization theorists describing "their key propositions" as "couched in the present tense" and only concerned with preserving and enhancing the stability and health of existing democracies.[17] He adopts a historical approach where he compares the histories of Turkey and Sweden and concludes that the road to democratization is marked

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[16] Grugel, *Democratization*, p. 49
[17] Rustow, Dankwart. *Transitions to Democracy* (Comparative Politics, Vol. 2, 1970), p. 339

by social conflict rather than the timeless social requisites. According to Rustow, societies in general tend to establish their "national unity" first, then they enter into a prolonged "political struggle" before they reach a "historical decision" whereby the conflicting parties choose to compromise and adopt democracy. The last phase in this historical process is "habituation". This stage is achieved when democratic rules become a habit. The "decision" and "habituation" phases will subsequently be incorporated into the transitional approach, which will be considered later in this review.

Considering the structure/agency debate, critics view the modernization approach as simplistic and reductionist. It ignores the human factor or agency as it overemphasizes structure effects. Relying on economic structures (capitalism) to explain complex situations like political change plays down the role of other factors including the human factor, the role of groups, classes.[18]

As for the political culture approach, criticism comes from both the structural and transition schools. Democratic culture for structuralists is more likely to result from democratization than to cause it. On their part, transition theorists pay no much attention to the political culture factor. Democratization for them comes as a result of rational calculations, mutual compromises, and negotiations between political elites. It is the common interest that drives change not the pro-democratic ideas, beliefs, or shared values.

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[18] Schmitz, Hans P. and Sell, Katrin. "International Factors in Processes of Political Democratization: Towards a Theoretical Integration" in Jean Grugel (eds.), *Democracy without Borders: Transnationalization and Conditionality in New Democracies* (Routledge, 1999), p. 24

If political culture cannot explain democratic transition, it cannot explain the failure to democratize either. Here, the Arab world seems more concerned than any other region since cultural explanations traverse most literature on Arab democratization. Resorting to psychosocial or cultural explanations to account for the absence of democracy in the Arab world shows the failure of social scientists "to distinguish their normative biases from their analytical frameworks" says Lisa Anderson. Anderson opposes this sociological trend because it "treats the Arab world as congenitally defective, 'democratically challenged' as it were, and seeks to find biological, cultural, and/or religious causes for this disability."[19] Besides this normative bias, Anderson points out to the lack of survey research through which the impact of political culture on politics could be established. Most analysts who use political culture to explain the absence of democracy in the Arab world "either draw their data from general (and usually unsystematic) observations of political behavior, or extrapolate from other realms of belief and behavior – notably religion- to ascertain values and habits that might bear on politics."[20]

This arbitrary connection between Arab culture, with Islam as the main component, and the lack of democracy is part of a long-standing orientalist tradition advocating the thesis of Middle East/Arab 'exceptionalism'. The trouble with this thesis says Beetham, is that it treats religions as monolithic, when their core doctrines are typically subject to a

variety of schools of interpretations."[21] The historic experience shows that a number of Muslim countries moved to democracy. Along these lines, Tim Niblock argues that the flexibility of the Islamic framework allows for a wide range of different interpretations, "many of which have no problem in accommodating liberal parliamentary institutions". Furthermore, "some elements in Islam are specifically favorable to democratic values (e.g. the emphasis placed on extending full participation in the sacred community to all, and on universalism, the 'rational systematization of social life' and spiritual egalitarianism."[22] Azmi Beshara distinguishes between Islamic culture and Arab culture when it comes to democracy. He asserts that "serious empirical investigation confirms that there is no Islamic exceptionalism with regard to democratization, but there is an Arab exceptionalism."[23]

As we shall see with the other two approaches, modernization theory remains almost completely silent on the role of the media in democratization, especially in its socio-economist form. The political culture approach though, addresses this issue but in an implicit way. Media is only needed as a platform to circulate and propagate the civic culture that is required for the stability and endurance of democracy.

- **Transition approach**

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[21] Beetham, David. *Conditions for Democratic Consolidation*, (Review of African Political Economy, No. 60, 1994b), p. 168
[22] Niblock, *Democratization*, p. 223
[23] Beshara, Azmi. *Fil-Masa'la Al-Arabiya: Prelude to an Arab Democratic Manifesto* (Markaz Dirasat Al-Wihda Al-Arabiya, 2007), p. 9

Transition is the interval between one political regime and another

in which domestic factors play a predominant role

O'Donnell and Schmitter

Instead of focusing on the socio-political factors and therefore, waiting for economic conditions to mature and become favorable to democracy, transitional theorists emphasize the role of committed actors in bringing about a democratic change independently from the structural context. It was Dankwart Rustow's critique of modernization theory that marked the transitional turn. Rustow's focus on "how a democracy comes into being" in the first place, and "What conditions make it thrive" shifted the debate over democratization away from modernization theory and laid the ground for the transitional approach to elaborate its theses.

Rustow's third and fourth phases (decision and habituation) were later transformed into the two axes around which, revolves the whole corps of the transitional approach (transition and consolidation). The "decision" phase according to Rustow is characterized by a deliberate "compromise" on the part of "political leaders to accept the existence of diversity in unity and, to that end, to institutionalize some crucial aspect of democratic procedure."[24] At the final phase (habituation) "the population at large will become firmly fitted into the new structure by the forging of effective links of party organization that connect the politicians in the capital with the mass electorate throughout the country."[25]

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[24] Rustow, *Transitions to Democracy*, p. 355
[25] Ibid p. 360

These ideas were later elaborated by Guillermo O'Donnell and his colleagues in their collective work "Transitions from Authoritarian Rule", which has become a key reference for transition studies. Democratization according to the editors of this path-breaking work is a process of interaction between the democratic elites and authoritarian leaders. It is a combination of "overlapping moments" of conflict and political negotiations undertaken separately from economic circumstances. Democracy in political reality, argues Adam Przeworski, has historically co-existed with exploitation and oppression at the workplace, within the schools, within bureaucracies and within families.[26] Crucial to the transition approach is the division within the authoritarian regime, which creates openings for other political actors to become involved. "There is no transition whose beginning is not the consequence – direct or indirect – of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself, principally along the fluctuating cleavage between hard-liners and soft-liners.[27]

The next major theoretic contribution to the transition approach since the work of O'Donnell/Schmitter/Whitehead is the "path dependence" developed by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan. The key strength of the path dependency approach lies in contextualizing the strategic choices made by the elites within the structural constraints of the legacy of the past. The type of authoritarian regime in place at the time of transition is one of the main structural elements and components of this legacy that political elites have to deal

[26] Przeworski, Adam. *Some Problems in the Study of Transition to Democracy* in O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead (ed*s*.) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule, Vol. 3: Comparative Perspectives* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 63

[27] O'Donnell, Guillermo and Schmitter, Philippe C. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule, Vol. 4: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies,* (Johns Hopkins University Press 1986), p. 19

with. As Richard Snyder explains in his examination of non-revolutionary transition, the form and contours of the non-democratic regime affect both the process of transition and to a lesser degree, the structure of the post-transition regime.[28] Later, Linz and Stepan expanded the debate on democratization beyond the "uncertainty" of the transition phase. They make a clear distinction between "transition" which does not always lead to a democratic outcome, and "consolidation". Consolidation is what makes a democratic transition come to a successful completion. A consolidated democracy is "a political situation in which democracy has become the only game in town."[29] To endure and become the only game in town, this situation has to incorporate three combined conditions: Behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional. In the face of these conditions, Samuel Huntington identifies three types of challenges: 1) transition challenges, stemming from the phenomenon of regime change and including problems of establishing new constitutional and electoral systems. 2) contextual challenges, stemming from the nature of the society, its economy, culture and history. 3) systemic challenges stemming from the way democracy works. These problems would include: stalemate, the inability to reach decisions, susceptibility of demagoguery, and the domination by vested economic interests.[30]

[28] Snyder, Richard. *Explaining Transitions from Neopatrimonial Dictatorships* (Comparative Politics 24, 4 July 1992), p. 379

[29] Linz, Juan and Stepan, Alfred. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 5

[30] Huntington, Samuel P. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), p. 210

From a critical perspective, the transition approach is too simplistic as it reduces a complex process such as democratization to the contingent choice and tentative arrangements of political elites. The dynamics of elite interaction is necessary but insufficient to create democracy; the experience shows that in some transitions, the popular struggles played a determining role in democratization. Jean Grugel rightly describes the transition approach as being excessively elitist to the extent that it stripes the democratic process from its popular base and contradicts the spirit of democracy when it "consigns the mass of the people to a bystander role in the creation of new regimes."[31] In addition to ignoring the role of the masses, the transition approach also downplays the role of non-political elites. Civil society is either completely ignored or reduced to a purely instrumental tool.

Another weakness of the transition approach is its overwhelming focus on immediacy and short-term changes. This hinders its ability to explain deep-rooted obstacles to the process of democratization. By not paying attention to the long-term course of socio-historical development of the concerned society, transition studies fail to adequately explain why the outcomes of transitions are different in different circumstances. As noted by Graeme Gill, the short-term perspective tends to obscure to operation of long-term trends and therefore only brings into focus "the tactical maneuvering which fills the canvas, the sound and fury of elite conflict and compromise, and the political posturing of the main actors."[32]

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[31] Grugel, *Democratization,* p. 61

[32] Gill, Graeme. *The Dynamics of Democratization: Elites, Civil Society and the Transition Process* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 81

Finally, the overwhelming majority of the literature on transition was produced to account for, and explain the successful experiences of transition to democracy in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America. This makes it difficult to apply these theories onto other parts of the world i.e. Africa, the Middle East, or to understand the cases of non-transition as shown by Darren Hawkins in his study of the Cuban example.

- **Structural Approach**

Structure as the medium and outcome of the conduct it recursively organizes; the structural properties of social systems do not exist outside of action but are chronically implicated in its production and reproduction.

Anthony Giddens

Unlike the transition approach which focus on contingency, the explanatory focus of structuralism or historical sociology as is sometimes called is on long-term processes of socio-historical change. Another point of disagreement between the two approaches: democratization is not explained in the structuralist literature by the agency of political elites, but rather by the changing structures of power (state/social classes). The third dimension of structuralism is its state-centric view, which sees democratization as a

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process of state transformation. This view came partly as a reaction to "the excessively society-based accounts of political change implicit in behaviouralism in the 1960s."[33]

Barrington Moor's comparative study of eight countries (Britain, France, the US, Germany, Russia, Japan, China and India) represents a reference point in the literature on democratization from a structural perspective. After analyzing the historical trajectories of these countries, Moor came to the conclusion that different patterns of structural interrelationships in different countries produced different political outcomes. His comparative analysis showed that, among the eight selected countries, only Britain, France and the US moved towards the political form of liberal democracy. The changing structures of power in the other five countries led to fascism (Germany and Japan) and communism (Russia and China), while India remained a "special case".

Democratization according to Moor's study can only take place if the long-term changing relationship between peasants, landowners, urban bourgeoisie and the state functions in a certain way that leads to the creation of the following five conditions: 1) the development of a balance to avoid too strong a state or too independent a landed aristocracy. 2) a turn towards an appropriate form of commercial agriculture. 3) the weakening of the landed aristocracy. 4) the prevention of an aristocratic-bourgeois coalition against the peasants and workers. 5) a revolutionary break from the past led by the bourgeoisie[34]

[33] Grugel, *Democratization*, p. 51
[34] Moor, Barrington. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern* (Beacon Press 1966), p. 430

Moor's analysis of the first democracies was later complemented by the work of Dietrich Rueschemeyer et al. who extended the comparative historical sociology approach a step further by considering more democratic cases and incorporating new analytical elements. Their "new comparative political economy" as they call it, rests on the interaction between three power structures: class conflict, the role of the state and the impact of the transnational context.[35]

They borrow from Marxism the view that class conflict is the driving force behind social and political change. They add to Moor's three-class model (the peasantry, the landed upper class, the bourgeoisie) a number of other subordinate classes with a special emphasis on the urban working class. "The organized working class appeared everywhere as a key actor in the development of full democracy."[36] However, taken alone, the role of the working class is not sufficient in introducing a working democracy. A stable democracy is only possible if a) landlords were an insignificant force, or b) they were not dependent on a large supply of cheap labor, or c) they did not control the state.[37] The state is the second key factor in fostering democratization. The role of the state in bringing about democracy is conditioned by the reforms imposed upon it by the organized working class on the one hand and by the interstate context on the other hand. In this respect, democratization in a capitalist state does not result automatically from the development of the capitalist relations of production. There has to be a reformist strategy on the part of the subordinate classes and the organized working class in particular. In

[35] Rueschemeyer, Dietrich. Stephens, Evelyne Hubert. and Stephens, John D. *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Cambridge University Press 1992), p. 40
[36] Ibid. p. 270
[37] Ibid. p. 270

addition to the class and state factors, Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens stress the role of geopolitics as a third element in the democratization process. The configurations of transnational power affect the nature of the state and class alignments alike especially in the under-developed and dependent countries.

The structural approach has been subject to criticism from different angles. The most apparent weakness of the structural approach is its failure to explain the short-term and sometimes sudden transitions to democracy. Its emphasis on long-term historical change does help in understanding such clearly empirical cases as those transitions of East and Central Europe. Advocates of agency theory, point to the failure of the structural approach to recognize the role of individuals and elites in the process of democratization. Social structures cannot by themselves explain political change. There has to be a conscious political leadership able to make decisions and lead the change to its desired end.

Relying on Marxism in explaining politics by class struggle alone has become out fashioned. Marxist class analysis has largely been challenged by the post-modern understanding of power as too diffuse a concept to be analyzed in any static way.

As for the geo-politics factor, the problem with is that transnational powers are not always favorable to democracy. In certain cases the economic dependence of one country on another can affects the growth of the urban working class and therefore contributes to the delay of democratization. In other cases, economic and military aid can strengthen the

state apparatus unduly and therefore hinders the class struggle for democracy. History shows us that, especially in the Middle East, transnational powers have in many cases supported established dictatorships at the expense of democratic change.

Larbi Sadiki's *Rethinking Arab Democratization* addresses democratization in the Arab setting from a different perspective. It critically engages with the dominating ethno-centric, Euro-American narrative on democratization and the applicability of its 'transitolgy' approach to the Arab world. Besides questioning the four underpinning problems of this 'grand narrative' (ahistoricity, exceptionalism, foundationalism and essentialism/Orientalism), Sadiki presents his own understanding and analysis of the problems of transition to democracy in the Arab Middle East. Familiar with the long-standing struggle for democracy in a region where experiments of written constitutions, elections and parliaments date back to the mid-nineteenth century, the author offers what he calls an indigenous perspective on Arab democratization that is "historically situated, flexible, contingent, fragmented, nuanced, non-linear, and variable". Along these lines, he analyses the Arab electoralism phenomenon or "the election fetishism" to use his own terms, noting that electoral activities in much of the Arab world seem to coexist with authoritarianism rather than reversing political singularity and loosening the tightly excessive executive power of the regimes in place. Arab elections which "prolong autocrats' stronghold over polity as in the case of Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt, Abdullah Saleh in Yemen, Al-Bashir in the Sudan."[38] fail not only Huntington's third wave theory, but also the whole top-down structuralist approach to democratization. Arab

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[38] Sadiki, Larbi. *Rethinking Arab Democratization: Elections Without Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 14

democratization is better understood through a bottom-up lens, placing more emphasis on societal dynamics. Here we are presented with a reinterpretation of the rise of Arab electoralism of the late 1980s and 1990s that challenges Lipset's well-established and rarely contested thesis on the relationship between economic prosperity and democracy. Sadiki argues that social events like the bread riots, which took place in a number of Arab countries in the mid-1980s and later (Sudan, Algeria and Jordan) were at the roots of the rise of electoralism in these countries. Similar pressures in other countries (like Tunisia and Egypt) helped consolidate or, at least, place political reform on the agenda of de-legitimized ruling elites.[39]

By including a chapter on Al Jazeera and the Internet as sites of democratic struggle, *Rethinking Arab Democratization* fills the gap in the literature on democratization, which to a large degree neglects the role of the media in the transition to democracy. The importance of Al Jazeera in particular and the new media phenomenon in general to Arab democratization is crucial as a platform supporting the bottom-up struggle against authoritarianism, says Sadiki. In doing so, these new means of mass communication participate in fostering other forms of protest politics that are not confined to bread riots.[40]

The significance of Sadiki's work consists not only of the indigenous and contextualized account of Arab democratization, but also and more importantly, of opening the path to new and different narratives contesting and challenging the Euro-American paradigmatic

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[39] Ibid. p. 200
[40] Ibid. p. 240

authoritative approaches to democratization. It is this spirit of plurality of understandings and interpretations that stands in the face of the imposition of any singular approach to democratization that informs my research and gives it more relevance.

Three critical remarks: First, most of the literature focused on successful transitions to democracy in Europe, Asia, Latin America, but failed to account for non-transition cases. The Arab world, where authoritarian governance is still largely the rule, has almost been left out except for a very few studies. Second, the state-centric, top-down approach shared by the dominating narratives does not seem to capture the essence of Arab democratization which is better explained by placing more emphasis on societal dynamics rather than on the state apparatus Third, in view of the massive body of literature on democratization, the role of the media has been neglected and attracted very little attention.

Media, Politics and Democratization

The first problem of the media is posed by what does not get translated, or even

published in the dominant political languages

Jacques Derrida

The literature on political communication has grown dramatically since the publication of "Four Theories of the Press" in 1956. The fundamental transformation in the field of communication and its technologies is undoubtedly at the roots of this unprecedented

rapid growth. This section of literature review will focus on the main theoretical approaches on the relations between media and politics and how the interaction between the two domains relates to democratization.

Perhaps the first and most influential work on media and politics was "Four Theories of the Press" (1956) by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm. This comparative analysis of media systems was an attempt to answer very basic questions: "Why is the press as it is? Why does it apparently serve different purposes and appear in widely different forms in different countries? Why, for example, is the press of the Soviet Union so different from our own, and the press of Argentina, so different from that of Great Britain?"[41] It is not so wrong to suggest that subsequent studies that tried to theorize the relationship between media and politics still revolve around these key issues raised by the authors of "Four Theories of the Press". Each of the four chapters of the book deals with a particular theory of media-politics relationship. In what follows I will briefly introduce these theories: the authoritarian theory, the libertarian theory, the social responsibility theory, and the soviet communist theory.

1. Frederic Siebert defines the authoritarian theory of communication as "a theory under which the press, as an institution, is controlled in its functions and operation by organized society through another institution, government."[42] The roots of authoritarianism inherent in this theory go back to the early days when the press and other forms of mass

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[41] Siebert, Fred S. Peterson, Theodore and Schramm, Wilbur. *Four Theories of the Press*: *The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press should Be and Do* (University of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 1
[42] Ibid. p. 10

communication were first introduced into the highly organized and controlled Western European societies such as those of Britain, France and Germany. Since most governments of Western Europe were operating on authoritarian principles when the popular press emerged, these same principles became the basis for a system of press control.[43]

2. The libertarian theory of the press as conceived by Siebert is a development of the philosophical principles underlying the basis for the liberal social and political system. It only applies to societies, which adhere to the principles of liberalism. The basic characteristic of the function of the press in a liberal democratic society is "the right and duty of the press to serve as an extralegal check on government."[44] In a democratic political system, the press acts a watchdog over the working of democracy to expose any arbitrary or authoritarian practice. And to fulfill this function adequately, the press had to be completely free from control or domination by those elements which it was to guard against."[45] Libertarian theorists advocate the view that the public at large should be exposed to a multiplicity of voices of the press without restriction or censorship by the government. It is through what they called the "self-righting" process that the public distinguishes between what serves its interests and what goes against.

3. In a way, the social responsibility theory of the press comes as a development of the libertarian theory. It establishes the "public's right to know" and the public responsibility

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[43] Ibid. p. 10
[44] Ibid. p. 56
[45] Ibid. p. 56

of the press" as conditions for "good practice" on the part of the publishers who had no such obligation from a libertarian perspective.[46] It is worth noting that the climate of criticism of the liberal press contributed a great deal to the birth of the social responsibility theory. The general themes of criticism can be summarized as follows: 1) The press has wielded its enormous power for its own ends. 2) The owners have propagated their own opinions. 3) The press is controlled by one socioeconomic class and has been subservient of big business and at times has let advertisers control editorial policies and content. 4) The press has resisted social change. 5) The press has invaded the privacy of individuals. Against this background the new theory developed a culture of ethical codes. The earliest of these codes, "the Canons of Journalism" was adopted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1923 and called for "the responsibility for the general welfare, sincerity, truthfulness, impartiality, fair play, decency, and respect for the individual's privacy.[47] The key principle underpinning the social responsibility theory is that "freedom carries concomitant obligations". Freedom under social responsibility theory is defined in positive terms: "freedom for" as opposed to the negative concept of freedom under libertarian theory: "freedom from external restraint". This understanding of freedom is reflected in the media-government relations. Social responsibility holds that "the government must not merely allow freedom; it must also actively promote it."[48]

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[46] From a libertarian perspective, the publisher has no moral or public responsibility. This position was clearly expressed by William Peter Hamilton of the Wall Street Journal: "A newspaper is a private enterprise owing nothing whatever to the public, which grants it no franchise. It is therefore affected with no public interest. It is emphatically the property of the owner, who is selling a manufactured product at his own risk…" See Siebert, p. 73

[47] Ibid. p. 85

[48] Ibid. p. 95

4. In the last chapter, Wilbur Schramm draws a theoretic outlook for the Soviet Communist theory of mass communication. He traces the roots of the Soviet understanding and practice of the media back to the Marxist tradition and the transformations it has gone through with Lenin and Stalin. He draws a sharp contrast between the liberal democratic system which "defends the rights of men to disagree with each other, with their government, with religions" and the Soviet system which inherited much of its views from Marx including "authoritarianism, fixedness, a tendency to make hard and sharp distinction between right and wrong, an amazing confidence in explaining great areas of human behavior on the basis of a small set of economic facts."[49]

Schramm emphasizes the fact that the Soviet mass communication developed as an integral part of the Soviet state where the mass must submit to the dictatorship of the Party, and the Party must submit to its central bureaucracy and leaders. In such a political and organizational setting, the basic responsibility for all mass communications is put in the hands of a small circle of top Party leaders. "All the mass media in the Soviet Union become speaking trumpets for these leaders, and the editors and directors listen anxiously for the latest Olympian rumblings of 'the truth'."[50]

To summarize, the main characteristics of the Soviet Communist theory of mass communication are: 1) mass communications are used as an instrument of the state and the Party. 2) They are closely integrated with other instruments power and Party influence. 3) They are used almost exclusively as instruments of propaganda,

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[49] Ibid. p. 107
[50] Ibid. p. 119

mobilization and agitation. 4) They operate strictly under the tight control of the Party and are supposed to follow the Party line, tell the truth, and preserve the unity of the Party and the state.

Subsequent comparative works on the media-politics relations included that of Jeffery Alexander whose study focused on the analysis of the development of news media in the Western society with particular emphasis on the United States and France. In his essay "*The Mass News Media in Systemic, Historic and Comparative Perspective*" Alexander tried to explain the strength of the autonomous journalistic professionalism in the United States. His basic assumption is that the media system follows a path parallel to that of the state. They both struggle for their freedom movement vis-à-vis other social institutions. According to Alexander, three major forces drive the progressive autonomy of news media: 1. The growing demand for more universalistic information raised by new social groups against the kind of advocacy journalism of preexisting social system; 2. The process of professionalization leading to the development of journalistic autonomy; 3. The degree of universalism in national civil cultures which, in turn, are connected with rational-legal authorities.

In his comparative analysis of media systems in the US and France, Alexander suggests that the absence of a labor press in the United States explains the emergence of autonomous professionalism. He finds it "extremely significant that no labor papers tied

to working class parties emerged on a mass scale in the United States."[51] Following the tradition of differentiation theory which goes back to Emil Durkheim (1983) and the functional division of professions that characterizes modern societies, Alexander believes that what distinguishes modern societies is the degree of autonomy of their journalistic field. It is this separation from other social, political and economic systems that gives the media its significance and makes it more important. The more modern a society is, the more important its media, says Alexander. By adopting the concepts and theoretical framework of differentiation theory, Alexander's comparative analysis of media and politics cannot avoid the inclusion of normative elements, which led him to explicitly favor the liberal model and its American form in particular. The liberal model, from this perspective, is the most "modern" and the closest to the ideal form of differentiation between the media and the political system. Moving towards the liberal model means a higher degree of progress, more autonomy of the press, and more journalistic professionalization.

Drawing from the same differentiation theory, with more functionalist tendency, Niklas Luhmann distinguishes between three forms of social differentiation: 1) Segmentation, where the society is divided into equal subsystems. Equality here refers to the principles of self-selective system building. 2) Stratification, where the society is divided into unequal subsystems. Equality here becomes a norm for internal communication and inequality becomes a norm for communication with the environment. 3) Functional

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[51] Alexander, Jeffrey C. "The Mass News Media in Systemic, Historic and Comparative Perspective" in Katz, E. and Szecsko, T. (eds.) *Mass Media and Social Change*, (Beverly Hills: Sage 1981), p. 31

differentiation, which is the latest outcome of socio-cultural evolution.[52] Functions in a functionally differentiated society have to be unequal, but the access to them has to be equal. It is only in this kind of societies that new forms of system autonomy can be attained. In a highly differentiated society the relations between media and politics as two distinct and autonomous systems is arranged in a way that media operates with what Luhmann calls "attention rules" while politics operates with "decision rules". The media develop communication themes, discuss them publicly and bring them to the attention of the political system, which is responsible for making decisions. The media are "autonomous in the regulation of their own selectivity" of communication themes and function independently from the pressure of political institutions for which they prepare a thematic agenda to act upon.[53]

Although the number of comparative studies in the field of political communication has seen a substantial increase since Blumler and Gurevitch wrote *The Crisis of Public Communication* in 1975), the need to develop theoretical frameworks based on solid comparative data still hinders the ability of researchers to come up with firm conclusions about the relations between the domains of media and politics. The last comparative study to be considered in this review is Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini's *Comparing Media Systems* (2004). In this study, the authors propose another framework for comparing media systems in different political settings in Western Europe and North

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[52] Luhmann, Niklas. *Differentiation of Society* (Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie, Vol. 2, No. 1, Winter, 1977), p. 33-5
[53] Luhmann, Niklas. *The Reality of the Mass Media* (Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 23-4

America. They identify four major dimensions according to which the relations between media systems and political systems can be compared:

- The structure and development of media markets with a particular emphasis on the circulation of mass press.

- Political parallelism: the extent to which the media system reflects the major political divisions in society

- The development of journalistic professionalism

- The degree and nature of state intervention in the media system.

These four dimensions coincide with those defined by Blumler and Gurevitch, with very minor differences[54], but the importance of Hallin and Mancini's work lies in the authors' effort to build an analytical synthesis consisting of three theoretic models: 1) The Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model. 2) The North/Central European or democratic corporatist model. 3) The North Atlantic or liberal model.[55] Each of these three models exposes a distinct form of relationship between media and politics in a particular area.

- The Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model shows that, during the transition to democracy in the Mediterranean countries of Western Europe, the mass media were "intimately involved in the political conflicts that mark the history of this region, and there is a strong tradition of regarding them as means of ideological expression and

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[54] Blumler and Gurevitch set up four dimensions for comparative analyses of media-politics relations: 1. Degree of state control over mass media; 2. Degree of mass media partisanship; 3. Degree of media-political elite integration; 4. The nature of the legitimating creed of media organizations..

[55] Hallin, Daniel C. and Mancini, Paolo. *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 21

political mobilization."[56] The main characteristics of the polarized pluralist system are the tendency of the media to be dominated by the political sphere and the emergence of elite-oriented press with relatively small circulation.

- The democratic corporatist model applies to Northern and Central Europe. Media systems in this region share a number of common characteristics summarized by the authors in the following three "coexistences": a) a high degree of political partisanship coexisted with a strongly developed mass-circulation press. b) a high level of political parallelism coexisted with a high level of journalistic professionalism along with a strong commitment to press freedom and common public interest. c) a strong tradition of limits on state power coexisted with strong welfare state policies and other forms of active public-sector involvement in the media sphere.[57]

- The North Atlantic (Anglo-American) or liberal model applies to the US, Britain, Ireland and Canada. The common features of the media systems operating in these countries include: a) early development of commercial newspapers with relatively little state involvement. b) marginalization of party, trade union, religious and other kinds of non-commercial media. c) the emergence of an informational style of journalism with a strong tradition of political neutrality. d) political insulation of public broadcasters and regulatory authorities.[58]

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[56] Ibid. p. 90
[57] Ibid. pp. 144-5
[58] Ibid. pp. 198-9

In 2000 Richard Gunther and Anthony Mughan published *Democracy and the Media* where they combined macro and microanalysis in their study of the reciprocal relationship between media and politics. This combination of analytical approaches fills a long standing void in the research agenda of political communication traditionally dominated by two scholarly approaches: The macro-level perspective focusing on the structure of the media systems and how these systems affect politics, and the micro-level perspective, which restricts the study of political communication to investigating the individual level effects of the mass media, usually during the times of election campaigns.[59]

By comparatively examining the impact of politics on the media, and of the media on politics in ten different countries with varying political settings (Spain, Russia, Hungary, Chile, Italy, the United States, Japan, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Germany), Gunther and Mughan present us with a complex picture of the mutual influence and interaction between the media and the politics of democracy and democratization. Among the many conclusions of this study, two are of particular relevance to my research area: 1) The contradiction between the image of the media in a an authoritarian/totalitarian system as an all-powerful vehicles of manipulation that enable politicians to shape public attitudes and behaviors, and the "minimal effects" thesis that emerged from the individual-level studies of media impact.[60] 2) Although media liberalization is generally a necessary prerequisite for successful democratization, it is not always the case that the

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[59] Gunther, Richard and Mughan, Anthony. *Democracy and the Media: A Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 2
[60] Ibid. p. 402

freer the media from government regulation the stronger their contribution to the quality of democracy.[61]

The debate on the relationship between political communication and democratization takes a new turn in *Mediated Politics* by Lance Bennett and Robert Entman (2001). Informed by the radical transformations within the media environment and the shifting patterns of participation in contemporary democracy, this volume challenges much of our existing knowledge in the field of political communication. The emergence of an electronically networked society, the decline in the domination of traditional network news and daily newspapers in informing the public, the blurring lines between news and entertainment, the rising trends of consumerism including in the field of media products, are increasingly affecting our personal lives and reconstructing politics and relations among individuals and social groups.

As the role of new communication technologies in mediating the human political experience is growing, the authors of *Mediated Politics* identified three core issues facing democratic societies. These issues or tensions in the Editors' term are discussed at length in different sections of the book: 1) The tension between commonality (required for living together) and diversity emphasized by the ongoing process of segmentation/fragmentation of the public.[62] 2) The tension between the free information choice and the necessary citizen education (should the media give the audience what they

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[61] Ibid. p. 402

[62] Bennett, Lance W. and Entman, Robert M. *Mediated Politics: Communication and the Future of Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 16

want or rather should also give them what they need to be good citizens?) 3) The tension between treating people as consumers of media products or as citizens who need more political involvement and increased public engagement.[63] The book also presents a significant contribution to the debate on the public sphere, which will be discussed in the next section of this review.

The changing nature of the media-politics relationship and its implications on democracy is also discussed in John Street's Mass Media, Politics and Democracy, but from a different angle. Street's approach starts with emphasizing the notion of "power" in the relation between media and politics: The relationship between politics and the media is a power one.[64] Based on this premise he analyses the transformations that both politics and the media have undergone. The consequences of these transformations look very damaging to the content and character of political discourse, which he describes as "central concerns for democracy."[65] In this state of affairs, Street claims, political arguments are trivialized, appearances matter more than reality, personalities more than policies, the superficial more than the profound. The responsibility for this degradation in the function of politics and the media is shared between politician and their spin-doctors on the one hand, and the "supplicant media, which conspires in the erosion of democracy."[66]

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[63] Ibid. p. 19
[64] Street, John. *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy,* (Palgrave, 2001), p. 4
[65] Ibid. p. 185
[66] Ibid. p. 185

Much of the literature reviewed in this section shares the same perspective of the "communications" studies and reproduces in different versions the liberal systemic conception of the relations between media and politics. From this perspective, it is difficult to understand the current situation of the relationship between media and politics in other parts of world, especially in the Arab world where the media structure, practice, and ownership have gone through significant transformation during the last decade. These transformations have to be seen in the broader context of social and political dynamics in the region of which the current literature shows very little understanding.

The Arabic literature does not seem to offer a better understanding either. The general tendency of the Arabic debate on media and politics favors the same systemic approach that links the media to the political system in a mechanical way. It is an inconclusive debate that failed to develop a different theoretic framework to understand and explain the changing relationship between the Arab authoritarian political systems and the liberal or semi-liberal media operations that emerged in mid-1990s. In her study of the dynamics of democratic change in the Arab world (reprinted in 2004), Thana'a F. Abdullah includes a chapter on the democratizing role of the Arab media. Although she tried to distinguish between three Arab political systems to show how the media performs differently in each setting, her approach remains largely state-centric and could not spot the real differences. "The functions that the media should carry out have been grouped and concentrated in a way that they all, whether in shape or content, serve one single purpose: mobilization and propaganda in favor of the regimes in place and their political and ideological

orientations."[67] It is obvious here that the significant developments which changed the Arab media landscape and reshaped its relationship with governments since the coming of Al Jazeera have not been accounted for. Among these developments is the opening up of an Arab communicative space involving a growing number of people from across the social spectrum. Since its launch in 1996, Al Jazeera managed to engage Arab elites and ordinary citizens alike in uncensored public debates that remind us of Habermas's public sphere.

The Public Sphere and Democratization

The emergence of society from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has also changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms.

Hannah Arendt

- **The oeuvre of Habermas**

Since the publication of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in 1962 the concept of public sphere appeared in the writings of a number of authors, but Habermas's particular version remains the point of reference. This early work by one of the leading figures of the Frankfurt School's second generation theorists combines materials and methods from a variety of disciplines i.e. sociology, social cultural and social history, political science, economics, law. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has

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[67] Abdullah, Thana'a F. *Aliyyat Al-Taghyeer Al-Dimuqrati fil-Watan Al-'Arabi* (Markaz Dirasat Al-Wihda Al-Arabiya, 2007), p. 316

been discussed in many different fields and continues, almost four decades after its initial publication, to generate productive controversy and informed debate. The central question Habermas asks in this book is "What are the conditions for rational critical debate about public issues conducted by private individuals willing to let arguments not social statuses or traditions determine decisions?" His answer is an essential contribution to democratic theory and the role of the public sphere in conceptualizing, generating and maintaining a genuine democracy

Habermas's focus on the public sphere comes as part of his broader concern with democratization and particularly with political participation and representation as the core of a democratic society. As he states in the author's preface to the book, his investigation "presents a stylized picture of the liberal elements of the bourgeois public sphere and of their transformation in the social-welfare state."[68] Before going into detail with the analysis of the historical genesis of the bourgeois public sphere, the book presents us with a brief though very interesting account of the etymological origins of the term "public sphere". Notions concerning what is "public" and what is "private" can be traced much further back into the past, says Habermas, "we are dealing here with categories of Greek origin transmitted to us bearing a Roman stamp."[69]

- **The two phases in the development of the public sphere:**

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[68] Habermas, Jurgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (MIT Press, 1989), p. xix
[69] Ibid. p. 3

The two major themes of the book correspond with two structural transformative phases in the modern and contemporary history of Europe. The first theme accounts for the historical genesis of liberal bourgeois public sphere in the context of the monarchical feudal society. The second theme traces the structural transformations leading to the disintegration and decline of the bourgeois public sphere with the rise of the modern mass social welfare state.

The first transformative phase took place over almost one and a half-century, from the late seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century. Combined developments in social, political and philosophical fields, first in Britain and later in France followed by Germany, moved Europe from one social system to another; from a monarchical and feudal society, where no distinction between state and society, public and private is made, to a bourgeois liberal constitutional system that distinguishes between these areas. The bourgeois public sphere emerged within the private realm to accommodate rational-critical public debate over the general rules governing relations in the sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The bourgeois public sphere at this stage "may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public" and is characterized by the "people's public use of their reason."[70] It was in the tension-charged relations between state and society that the public sphere originated and assumed political functions. But, the training ground where the bourgeoisie learned the art of critical reasoning on political issues was provided by the literary public sphere that had already been operative in apolitical form in the salons, reading rooms, theaters, museums and

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[70] Ibid. p. 27

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concerts. The public sphere in 'the world of letters' embraced the wider strata of the middle class and made access to an unprecedented mixture of circles including craftsmen and shopkeepers. It is a significant shift in the social, economic and intellectual life of the bourgeois society where "the mind was no longer in the service of a patron and the opinion became emancipated from the bonds of economic dependence."[71] In these public spaces, a new form of communication and understanding between persons of diverse backgrounds begun to take shape transcending the barriers of social hierarchy. What makes these socially "unequal" persons come together is their "common quality as human beings, and nothing more than human beings" making use of their reason. Staring as a platform for apolitical debate completely removed from politics, the literary public space gradually developed into a sphere of criticism of public authority and became deeply involved in political discussion. As the influence of political discussions on the decisions of state authorities increased, a new form of public sphere came to existence: "A public sphere that functioned in the political realm arose first in Great Britain at the turn of the eighteenth century."[72] The first continental variant of politically-oriented public sphere developed nearly half a century later in France "In France too, although not before roughly the middle of the eighteenth century, arose a public that critically debated political issues."[73] This major shift occurred alongside the rise of early pre-industrial, mercantilist form of capitalism and the philosophical articulation of liberal ideas concerning politics (from Hobbes, Locke, and Montesquieu to Rousseau and, above all,

[71] Ibid. p. 33
[72] Ibid. p. 57
[73] Ibid. p. 67

Kant). Hegel's critique of Kant's problematic liberal philosophy and especially its classical doctrine of right laid the ground for the next phase.

The second phase marks the end of the public sphere in its liberal bourgeois form and the rise of state capitalism, mass society, culture industries, and the increasingly powerful role of corporations and big business in public life. This transition started around the mid-1800s and lasted until the twentieth century. It is in this "hundred years that followed the heyday of liberalism, during which capitalism became "organized", [that] the original relationship of public and private sphere in fact dissolved, the contours of the bourgeois public sphere eroded."[74] Developments during this period resulted in a new constellation of social, economic, cultural and political developments, which succeeded and replaced the earlier constellation that facilitated and accompanied the birth of the liberal bourgeois public sphere. Philosophically, this shift was clearly articulated in Marx's diagnosis of the inherent contradictions in the liberal constitutional social order. The modified liberalism of Mill and Tocqueville, with its ambivalent view of the public sphere was, according to Habermas, superior to the socialist critique and manifested these presuppositions common to both the classic model of the bourgeois public sphere and its dialectically projected counter-model."[75] Corresponding to this philosophical debate were major socio-economic transformations marked by an increasing re-integration and entwining of state and society. It was a two-way process where, on the one hand, "state intervention in the sphere of society found its counterpart in the transfer of public functions to private corporate bodies" and on the other hand, "the substitution of state authority by the power

[74] Ibid. p. 140
[75] Ibid. p. 130

of society was connected to the extension of public authority over sectors of the private realm."[76] Seen from the perspective of Frankfurt school critical theory, this historical transformation is grounded, in Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of the culture industry in which giant corporations take over the public sphere and transform it from a sphere of critical rational debate into one of manipulative consumption and passivity. "Along the path from a public critically reflect on its culture to one that merely consumes it"[77] even the literary public sphere, which first emerged separately from the political realm lost its specific character. As a result, "public opinion" shifts from rational consensus on matters of general concern to a manufactured opinion of polls or media experts, administered by a managed discussion and manipulated by the machination of advertising and political consulting agencies. With the arrival of the new mass media (radio, film, television), the form of communication has changed and, under the pressure of the "don't talk back" rule, the reaction of the public shrinks in a peculiar way. The new mass media, argues Habermas, "draw the eyes and ears of the public under their spell and place it under 'tutelage', which is to say they deprive it of the opportunity to say something and to disagree."[78] In short, they create a public sphere "in appearance only", a sphere that is primarily used as a platform for advertising.

- **The changing function of the media and its impact on the public sphere**

For Habermas, the mass media changed from being 'the public sphere's pre-eminent institution' facilitating rational critical debate and generating enlightened public opinion

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[76] Ibid. p. 142
[77] Ibid. p. 175
[78] Ibid. p. 171

into a vehicle which shapes tastes and preferences, manufactures public consensus, and restricts public discussions to themes validated and approved by advertising agencies, big business enterprises, and the industrial capitalist state apparatus. In this atmosphere arose what Habermas calls 'public rostrum', a distorted form of parliament which is no longer an 'assembly of wise men' chosen as individual personalities whose subsequent decisions reached by the majority through rational arguments in public discussion would be what was true and right for the national welfare. By transmitting these discussions through radio and television, the public participates passively in this 'expanded sphere of publicity' where "the transactions themselves are stylized into a show, and publicity loses its critical function in favor of a staged display; even arguments are transmuted into symbols to which again one cannot respond by arguing but only by identifying with them."[79] The changing function of the media affected the notion of citizenry, democracy and participation profoundly. Citizens become spectators of media presentations and mere consumers of a stylized discourse aimed at molding and managing public opinion. As consumers of commercialized mass culture, their status is reduced to objects of news, information, and public relations. In Habermas's terms: "Inasmuch as the mass media today strip away the literary husks from that kind of bourgeois self-interpretation and utilize them as marketable forms for the public services provided in a culture of consumers, the original meaning is reversed.[80]

- **The public sphere: an ongoing debate**

[79] Ibid. p. 206
[80] Ibid. p. 171

Since the publication of *Structural Transformation* the debate about the public sphere as a necessary condition for a genuine working democracy has been dominated by Haberma's theoretical framework. Habermas himself returned to issues of the public sphere and democratic theory in his later works and provided revisions and further commentary on the subject especially in his monumental works: *Between Facts and Norms* and *the Theory of Communicative Action*.

Habermas's presentation of the bourgeois public sphere as a universally accessible space of rational discussion and consensus has been sharply criticized by many commentators. Craig Calhoun remarks that "the early bourgeois public spheres were composed of narrow segments of the European population, mainly educated, propertied men, and they conducted a discourse not only exclusive of others but prejudicial to the interests of those excluded."[81] On the normative dimension of Habermas's concept of the public sphere, Douglas Kellner casts doubt on the extent to which norms of rationality or public opinion formed by rational debate contribute to democratic politics. In real terms, "politics throughout the modern era have been subject to the play of interests and power as well as discussion and debate."[82] From a feminist perspective, Mary Ryan sketches what she calls "a counter-narrative" to Habermas's portrayal of the historical decline of the bourgeois public sphere. She notes, "at approximately the same time and place where Habermas commences his story of the eviscerating transformation of the public sphere,

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[81] Calhoun, Craig. Habermas and the Public Sphere, (MIT Press, 1992), p. 3
[82] Kellner, Douglas. "Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention" in Lewis E. Hahn (eds.), *Perspectives on Habermas*, (Open Court Publishing Company, 2000), p. 267

feminist historians plot out the ascension of women into politics."[83] While Habermas seems to have neglected women's access to the public, Ryan stresses the idea that women's groups were extremely active not only in the political realm, but also in their own women's public sphere. She believes that Habermas's account of the decline of the bourgeois public sphere coincides with the moment when women were beginning to get political power and become influential as they increasingly "injected considerable feminist substance into public discourse" and articulated concerns which were vital to matters of public interest."[84] In his "*further reflections*" Habermas replies back: "the exclusion of women from this world dominated by men now looks different than it appeared to me at the time."[85] As with the idealization of the public sphere, he explains that his aim in *Structural Transformation* was "to derive the ideal type of the bourgeois public sphere from the historical context of British, French and German developments". Conceptualizing these complex social realities, he argues, required "stylizing to give prominence to its peculiar characteristics."[86] However, he realizes that his focus on the bourgeois public sphere led him to "underestimate" the significance of oppositional and non-bourgeois public spheres. He admits that "from the beginning, a dominant bourgeois public collides with a plebeian one."[87]

Not only does this lively debate indicate that Habermas's work remains topical, but it also pushes the boundaries of the discussion to new areas. Rather than conceiving of "one"

[83] Calhoun, Habermas and the Public Sphere, p. 262
[84] Ibid. p. 263
[85] Ibid. p. 430
[86] Ibid. p. 422
[87] Ibid. p. 430

public sphere (the bourgeois public sphere), it is more productive to theorize a multiplicity of public spheres, sometimes overlapping but also conflicting, comments Kellner.[88] Combining this "horizontal" genesis of the public sphere to its "historical" genesis provided by Habermas in *Structural Transformation* paved the way for new perspectives on the subject. In a chapter on the public sphere in the age of Internet, James Bohman provides a revision of the ideal type classical face-to-face public sphere. He argues that electronic and computer-mediated network communication is creating a transnational public sphere through the expansion of the scope of certain features of communicative interaction across space and time. This electronic variant of the public sphere is removed from that of Habermas, which "is too often taken to be a town meeting or perhaps a discussion in a salon, coffee shop or union hall, in which participants are physically present to each other in face-to-face interaction."[89] Applying these ideas onto the Muslim world, Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson find that new media are increasingly shaping beliefs, discourses and authority throughout Muslim-majority states and Muslim communities elsewhere. Their study focuses on the relationship between the rise of new forms of communication technologies including the unprecedented growth of satellite broadcasters and the formation of a global Muslim public sphere "situated outside formal state control and exists at the intersections of religious, political and social life."[90] Anchored in a very long and rich tradition of public dialogue between learned scholars and representatives of different schools of interpretation and jurisprudence, a

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[88] Kellner, *Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy*, p. 267
[89] Bohman, James. "Expanding Dialogue: The Internet, the Public Sphere and Prospects for Transnational Democracy" in Nick Crossley and John M. Roberts (eds.), *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere,* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 133
[90] Eickelman, Dale and Anderson, Jon. *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 1

religious public sphere existed and functioned often independently from the official sphere of rulers since the early Islamic centuries, remark Eickelman and Anderson. The new and increasingly accessible modes of communication reformulated this religious public space and reinforced its "discursive, performative and participative" characteristics. A key feature of the new public sphere highlighted by Eickelman and Anderson is what they call the "re-intellectualization" of Islamic discourse, which they define as "presenting Islamic doctrine and discourse in accessible and vernacular terms". On his part, Marc Lynch focuses his analysis on the Arab world. He contends that Al-Jazeera and other television stations in the region have transformed Arab politics and revolutionized the formation of public opinion over the last decade. By circumventing state control over information, encouraging open debate on vital political and social issues and giving a platform to long-muted and marginalized voices across the Arab world, these emerging media have created what Lynch calls "the new Arab public sphere" which he defines as follows: 1) What makes it "new" is the omnipresent political talk shows, which transform the satellite television stations into a genuinely unprecedented carrier of public argument. 2) What makes it "Arab" is a shared collective identity through which speakers and listeners conceive of themselves as participating in a single, common political project. 3) What makes it a "public sphere" is the existence of contentious debates oriented toward defining these shared interests.[91]

Literature on Al Jazeera

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[91] Lynch, Marc. *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today*
(Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 32

... The president looked up. "How'd Al-Jazeera play the story, Jerry?" he asked.

Paul Bremer, My Year in Iraq

The phenomenal arrival of Al Jazeera satellite channel in the Arab media scene in 1996 generated an unprecedented amount of public debate; unprecedented both in scope and quality. The huge interest in its content, reach and quality of journalism is reflected in the increasing number of publications either for the general public or in the academic sphere. Dozens of PhD theses have been written and many others are currently undertaken in universities across the world on this subject. In what follows I shall present a review of the main literature on Al Jazeera and the impact it has had on the media and politics of the Middle East and globally.

Literature on Al Jazeera covers a variety of facets of this "Arab giant" as Mohamed Zayani calls it in the sub-title of his last book on the Qatar-based news channel. Generally, what has been written on Al Jazeera so far can be broadly ordered into three distinct categories: The first and earliest category is more of an introduction of Al Jazeera as a new player in the media field. The second category comprises of a number of comparative works, mainly from a media studies perspective. The third is more politically driven and focuses on the regional and global impact of the network.

- **Introductory and descriptive literature**

Works belonging to the first category are by and large descriptive and provide a massively large amount of details, which sometimes weaken the analytical side. Hugh

Miles's *Al Jazeera* typifies this sort of literature. From the introduction through to the last chapter, we are presented with a detailed historical account of how the channel started as "a seed planted in the desert" and how it became the news channel that "made a splash in the Arab world". Al Jazeera, as introduced by Miles, built its unique brand and gained unparalleled popularity not only because it was "run, staffed and financed by Arabs and broadcast from an Arab country" which is an unprecedented development in the Arab media, but also, and more importantly, due to the quality of uncensored talk shows and live debates broadcast on a regular basis. "What made Al Jazeera's name in the Arab world first, long before it became famous in the West, was its talk shows" where "political, social, economic and religious topics are all regularly tackled."[92] What distinguishes Al Jazeera from the rest of its competitors, in addition to the talk shows, is its groundbreaking field reporting. The capacity of the channel to report from almost anywhere in the world enabled it to scoop other networks on major events. As early as 1998 Al Jazeera had its first international scoop when Britain and America launched their "operation Desert Fox" campaign against Iraq. During that military campaign "Al Jazeera was the only news network to bear witness to the successive waves of laser-guided bombs and cruise missiles as they landed in Bagdad… Fifteen minutes after the explosions appeared on Al Jazeera, they were on other networks all over the world, as the exclusive footage was sold."[93] Coverage of subsequent events expanded the reach and influence of the network that soon became an inevitable challenge to the status quo and a source nuisance for most of the Arab regimes. Al Jazeera's reporting of the second Palestinian uprising *(intifada)* in 2000 "had social and political consequences not just in

[92] Miles, Hugh. *Al-Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World*, (Abacus), p. 38
[93] Ibid. p. 50

Israel and the Occupied Territories but also in the rest of the Middle East."[94] The

network's coverage of the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing war in Afghanistan, the war in

Iraq and its aftermath, only added to the sweeping popularity of Al Jazeera which, in a

record time "had broken the hegemony of the Western networks and, for the first time in

hundreds of years, reversed the flow of information, historically from West to East."[95]

These and other similar events, which Al Jazeera covered during its first few years, were

the focus of another introductory work by Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar. *Al

Jazeera: the Story of the Network that is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern

Journalism* is also structured around events such as the war in Afghanistan, where "Al

Jazeera was the only network with correspondents reporting live from the besieged

Afghan capital, Kabul, and the city of Kandahar, the Taliban's religious center."[96] The

fact that no other network was present on the Afghan soil during the campaign made Al

Jazeera the sole provider of footage on what was going on. International news networks

around the world had to rely on the Arab station's reporting and "simply showed Al

Jazeera broadcasts live during their own programming."[97] With near complete monopoly

in covering the war in Afghanistan, and comprehensive but controversial coverage of

succeeding events in a number of hotspots, Al Jazeera's influence extended beyond the

Arab world and became a major player in the global media system. These successes

represented a major challenge to state-controlled media organizations across the region.

The other Arab TV news stations, remarks the authors, had to find either another niche

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[94] Ibid. p. 69
[95] Ibid. p. 279
[96] El-Nawawy, Mohammed and Iskandar, Adel. *Al Jazeera: The Story of the network that is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism* (Basic Books, 2003), p. 25
[97] Ibid. p. 22

market or compete with Al Jazeera, a challenge for which few are prepared.[98] After more than a decade though, it seems that even those few were not prepared enough for this tough competition. Besides its resounding success, Al Jazeera was criticized from different sides and for different reasons. The Authors of this volume dedicated a significant part of their study to account for these criticisms. Arab governments who govern predominantly by tribal and religious guidelines did not welcome the airing of programs open to all opinions especially those expressed by political opponents. Several governments, including Egypt and Jordan, stated that Al Jazeera's coverage "threatened the stability of their regimes and exposed them to criticism by their own people."[99] The West in general, and the US in particular were skeptic about the way the network covers events. Western politicians often describe it as the channel which "spreads inflammatory rhetoric and incites violence". The US army went to the extent of bombing Al Jazeera's broadcast centers in Kabul (2001) and Baghdad (2003).

Mohamed Zayani's *Al Jazeera Phenomenon* takes another angle in introducing the channel. The major events that the channel has covered still figure in the book (Afghanistan: chapter 8 and the Intifada: chapter 9). However, the contributors to this edited volume present a more complex image of Al Jazeera that just describing it. Zayani takes the criticism leveled against the network a step further. He questions the degree of the freedom of speech this channel enjoys, noting that "Al Jazeera is suspiciously silent on Qatar; it offers a sparing coverage of its host country and is careful not to criticize

[98] Ibid. p. 42
[99] Ibid. p. 56

it."[100] But the relationship between the channel and Qatar seems to be more complex than how Al Jazeera covers the country's affairs. Trying to reconcile the seemingly contradictory perceptions that, on the one hand Al Jazeera operates according to strictly journalistic standards independently from Qatar, and on the other hand, it is a subservient instrument of its foreign policy, Olivier Da Lage argues that "while in the long run Al Jazeera serves the diplomatic interests of Qatar well, in the short run the channel's freedom and jarring tone often complicate the task of diplomats of this small emirate."[101] This is an explanation that Mohammed El Oifi does not seem to agree with. He considers that seeing this relationship according to the classical categories of foreign policy analysis does not make much sense. Regardless of how Al Jazeera is related to its host country, what matters to El Oifi is its considerable impact on the Arab media landscape and public. That is the dimension he emphasizes to complement this image that the *Al Jazeera Phenomenon* tries to present. The major change that Al Jazeera made to the status of Arab media according to El Oifi, is the emergence of a media coverage of political events that is relatively free from government control. Al Jazeera channel, says El Oifi, has played a central role in liberalizing the Arab media discourse, creating and autonomous media narrative, and giving the nascent Arab public sphere a platform to develop.[102] Here we re-connect with Mark Lynch, who expanded on the Arab public sphere thesis in his book, which I reviewed in the "public sphere" section.

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[100] Zayani, Mohamed. *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media* (Paradigm Publishers, 2005), p. 10

[101] Da Lage, Olivier. "The Politics of Al Jazeera or the Diplomacy of Doha" in Mohamed Zayani (eds.), *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media* (Paradigm Publishers, 2005), p. 49

[102] El Oifi, Mohammed. "Influence Without Power: Al Jazeera and the Arab Public Sphere" in Mohamed Zayani (eds.), *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media* (Paradigm Publishers, 2005), p. 66

- **Comparative Works**

Besides these introductory and descriptive works, there is a number of studies that explored Al Jazeera phenomenon from a comparative perspective. The latest in this is Leon Barkho's *Strategies of Power in Multilingual Global Broadcasters: How the BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera Shape their Middle East News Discourse*. This study is critical of the current literature for underestimating "the significant role power holders, whether editorial or political, have in shaping the discourse of their institutions."[103] It is also critical of the commonly held views that global media institutions like BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera are "neutral", "objective" and operate freely from the strings of power which in most cases affect and determine their choice of content, angle and even terminology. While all three case studies show similar findings indicating that "journalists and editors have to respond to the needs, whether political or economic, of those to whom they owe their existence regardless of their 'ideational' assumptions",[104] historical, social and cultural contexts seem to have made a difference in favor of Al Jazeera which still lead the way in polls and ratings. It is arguably because the three networks operate in a region where culture, religion and history still play a pivotal role in driving the society that meeting international production standards is not enough for rivals "usually lacking Al Jazeera's warmth or cultural relevance."[105] In another comparative study, James Painter examines Al Jazeera and the Latin American network, Telesur. What unites Al Jazeera and Telesur is primarily their intention to challenge the BBC/CNN approach to world events. But, challenging the dominating Western style and relaying a counter-hegemonic

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[103] Barkho, Leon. *Strategies of Power in Multilingual Global Broadcasters: How the BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera Shape their Middle East News Discourse,* (Jonkoping University, 2008), p. 7
[104] Ibid. p. 18
[105] Ibid. p. 19

discourse cannot on its own foster a unified coherent alternative. The differences between channels adopting this perspective such as Al Jazeera, Telesur, Russia Today, Press TV cast a profound doubt as to whether they are capable of generating new contra-flows of information reversing the dominant flow of news from 'the West to the rest'[106] while sticking to the universally known journalistic values of balance, fairness and impartiality. Describing it as Chavez's public diplomacy tool, Painter observes that Telesur's style and programs formats are essentially copied from traditional Western channels but not the journalistic values. In the author's own terms, "Telesur is more in the Latin American tradition of state-funded channels acting as official megaphones than in the Western European tradition of public service channels aiming to offer impartiality, pluralism of view or a watchdog role holding sponsoring governments and powerful actors to account."[107] On the other hand, Al Jazeera is found to be "more balanced in its treatment of news", "stays on the side of non-partisan coverage" and "does not act as an unchallenged spokesperson for any government".

- **The Al Jazeera Effect phenomenon**

The third category of the literature on Al Jazeera addresses its social, cultural and political impact both at the regional and international levels. There is a general agreement among scholars who studied "Al Jazeera effect" that the network has contributed to the creation of an Arab public sphere. Some have even talked about political implications of this emerging public sphere. El Oifi notes that "Al Jazeera has triggered a profound shift

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[106] Painter, James. "Counter-Hegemonic News: A Case Study of Al Jazeera English and Telesur" in *Challenges* (Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism, 2008), p. 4
[107] Ibid. p. 68

on the way the Arab mediascape functions which may potentially contribute to the reconfiguration of the political systems in the Middle East region."[108] In a more assertive tone, and drawing upon a cross-national survey data collected in 2005 from six Arab countries, Erick Nisbet finds that higher exposure to Al-Jazeera's media agenda contributes to promoting political reform and advancing democracy. Compared to other media outlets which "may be employed by established elites to retard democratization as in the case of (its main competitor) Al Arabiya, Al Jazeera appears to be a positive force for developing a mass constituency for democracy in the Arab world by increasing the salience of democracy and political/civil liberties."[109] The impact of Al Jazeera and the new Arab public sphere on Arab and regional politics is not necessarily in favor of democracy remarks Marc Lynch, especially with the "structural weakness" of this emerging public sphere and the lack of institutionalized mechanisms to transform public opinion into concrete policies. However, the new Arab public sphere, says Lynch, "sets the agenda for public debate across Arab countries, an agenda dominated by issues defined as core shared Arab concerns. All Arab – Leaders and ordinary citizens alike – were forced to adapt to this agenda."[110] At the international level, Lynch suggests three ways in which the new Arab public sphere affects international politics: "by changing the strategic calculations of rational politicians, by shaping world views, and by transforming identities."[111] Pushing this analysis to its maximal extent, Philip Seib dedicated a whole book to "the Al Jazeera Effect". He borrows the title from "the CNN Effect" which, over

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[108] El Oifi, *Influence Without Power*, p. 66
[109] Nisbet, Erick C. *Media, Identity, and Issue Salience of Democracy in the Arab Public Sphere*. Paper presented to the American Political Science Association Conference (Chicago, September 2007), p. 27
[110] Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, p. 70
[111] Ibid. p. 69

a decade ago, developed a theory postulating that the development of the popular 24-hour international television news network (CNN) had a major impact on the conduct of states' foreign policy. Seib notes that Al Jazeera has taken that concept a significant step farther to encompass the use of new media as tools in every aspect of global affairs. In this respect, Al Jazeera has become "a paradigm of new media's influence". Its impact on international politics is unprecedented as it is making traditional borders irrelevant by unifying peoples scattered across the globe. In doing so, "this phenomenon - the Al Jazeera effect - is reshaping the world."[112] However, the power of the media has its limits when it comes to domestic political change. Media cannot force change says Seib, media can only inspire it and assist it since "media effects are just parts of a large political universe, the constituent of which must come into alignment if democratization is to take hold."[113]

For an Arab media network that has only been in operation for thirteen years, the amount of interest it has generated globally is by all means considerable. As a common characteristic, the literature on Al Jazeera generally overstates its role and exaggerates the impact it has had on media and politics in the Arab world. Needless to say that, against the backdrop of existing ideological, authoritarian and state-centric media systems, Al Jazeera has introduced a new communicative, interactive and pluralist paradigm. But, the nature and scope of its impact can only be assessed through a carefully conducted

[112] Seib, Philip. *The Al Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media Are Reshaping World Politics,* (Potomac Books, 2008), p. xii
[113] Ibid. p. 141

investigation that goes beyond the descriptive aspect of the current literature and reads

into the far-reaching political implications of this phenomenon.

Chapter 2:

Research Methodology

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes,

but in having new eyes.

Marcel Proust

In this research I chose a qualitative methodology because it is best suited to study, understand, and explain such a complex phenomenon like democratization in the Arab setting. I believe that the unique capacity of qualitative methodology does not only come from its disciplinary origins (social sciences whereas quantitative methodology originated from natural sciences), its philosophical and epistemological roots, or its inductive and flexible style in theory building, but also from enabling the researcher to see the multiple faces of reality through the subjects' eyes. That is, to better learn the social meanings that the subjects apply to the world they live in. Through in-depth interviews and observation one can share the interpretative lens those subjects/actors adopt and use to produce their own understanding of their social, political and cultural environment. By shifting from one subject/actor to another the researcher can understand and therefore identify the dominant powers and institutions that frame their views and tint their lenses. Contrary to quantitative methodology where researchers are distant outsider observers who treat people as silent objects, qualitative methodology avoids distance through participant observation and greater interaction between researchers and their subjects. Although such a close relation and identification between researchers and subjects often attracts

criticism regarding the reliability of collected data, protocols requiring researchers to provide full transcripts and records of interviews and group meetings reduce the effects of this apparent weakness. In addition, this method acknowledges the central role of the researcher and legitimizes his subjective interpretation rather than pretending objectivity and the ability of reaching scientific truth as positivists claim.

Qualitative methodology gained prominence in social sciences since the publication of ` L. Strauss's "*The Discovery of Grounded Theory*" in 1967. The theoretical frameworks, the systematic strategies and the practical guidelines offered by Grounded theory provided solid ground for qualitative research and set a growing trend in constructing abstract theoretical explanations of social processes. The usefulness and analytical power of Grounded theory stems particularly from its systematic refinement of the conceptual level of analysis while maintaining a strong foundation in data. The simultaneous involvement of researchers in data collection and analysis guarantees: conceptual density, durability over time, modifiability, and explanatory power of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Unlike the founders of Grounded theory who talk about discovering theory as emerging from data, Kathy Charmaz assumes that neither data nor theories are discovered. As researchers, we are in constant and evolving engagement with the data we collect and the world we study. Thus, we become part of that world about which "we *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices."[114] Any theoretical

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[114] Charmaz, Kathy. *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysi*s, (Sage Publications, 2009), p. 10

construction therefore, offers an interpretive depiction of the studied world, not an exact picture of it.

The interpretive approach is based on epistemological considerations with regard to human knowledge and the construction of social reality. Objective truth is not something that resides somewhere awaiting us to discover it. It is rather constructed by gathering the meanings of objects when we interact and engage with them. The prime means for gathering meanings is language through conversation and writing. We resort to language to understand, make sense and convey what we construct as reality. Reality, in other words, is how we interpret it.

As social reality is always complex due to the multiplicity of actors and the role of object/subject interplay in its formation, no single interpretation can convey the whole truth or capture the complete meaning. Different actors produce different meanings especially when other factors such as traditions, values, history, religion etc. are considered. In this case we are exposed to what Paul Ricœur calls "conflict of interpretations, or, to quote M. Crotty: "Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. Isn't this precisely what we find when we move from one culture to another?"[115]

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[115] Crotty, Michael. *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*, (Sage Publications, 1998), p. 8

Understanding is then, choosing between different and sometimes competing interpretations that enrich our knowledge with a plurality of meanings, opinions and views of the world around us. What distinguishes interpretivism is its ability to accommodate this plurality of meanings that are not inherent in the objects of our study. We import the meaning from "somewhere" as Crotty suggests, this somewhere may happen to be the objects themselves, traditions, values, religions etc. Interpretivism is by essence critical as it frees researchers from the shackles of one single authoritative approach and enables them to assess the existing narratives using their own perspective to develop their alternative account.

Explaining Arab democratization, the emergence of indigenous public sphere, the role of the media in creating new dynamics for social and political change in the Arab setting, is better achieved following the guidelines of Grounded theory and using an interpretive approach which contextualizes struggles, forces, discourses within the history, the culture, and the social fabrics of the region. In addition to the theoretical framework Grounded theory offered qualitative researchers, it also offered practical strategies in directing, managing, and streamlining data collection and analysis.

Data collection and analysis:

The phenomenal interest in Al Jazeera since its launch in 1996 generated a huge amount of data in different formats and of varying degrees of importance for academic research. Much of this data has been collected and analyzed, but a lot remains unprocessed especially from a political science perspective.

Considering the amount of literature on Al Jazeera and its leading role in revolutionizing the Arab media landscape, very little has been written on the political implications of these changes. The fact that most of those who studied Al Jazeera come from media related disciplines like communication, journalism, and media studies, partly explains this trend. Due to the language barrier, even the small number of writings that endeavored to address the channel's social and political effects in a scholarly manner remains highly theoretic. The weakness of the empirical side of these writings is apparent as direct access to the channel's programming, viewers' feedback and more importantly, the Arab street is very limited. Fortunately, this study will not be hindered by these difficulties and access to these sources is no problem.

My research data will be collected primarily through interviews. Considering that interviewing is historically, politically, and contextually bound, the data gathered through this commonly used tool is not objective and will not be treated as neutral or irrefutable scientific truth. Interviewing is not merely the neutral exchange of asking questions and getting answers. The interactive nature of this process in which two (or more) people are involved, leads to the creation of a collaborative effort called interview.[116] As interviewing includes a wide variety of forms and a multiplicity of techniques, I chose to use semi-structured interviews. This serves best the purpose of my research topic and fits well with the qualitative methodology, especially within the framework of grounded

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[116] Fontana, Andrea and Frey, James H. "The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement" in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (Sage Publications, 2008), p. 116

theory. The issue with structured interviews is that there is very limited room for flexibility in the way questions are asked or answered since all respondents are asked the same series of pre-established questions with a very limited set of response categories.[117] The qualitative nature of my inquiry needs rather a more in-depth data-gathering method. Semi-structured interviews allow for actors in different organizational positions and at varying levels of the decision making process to give their insights. In my case study I aim to interview members of senior management, editorial staff and journalists of Al Jazeera alike. A total of twenty in-depth interviews will be conducted with the following staff members:

- Mostefa Souag, director of news

- Ahmed Sheikh, former editor-in-chief

- Aref Hijjawi, director of programmes

- Jamil Azar, news presenter and member of editorial committee

- Mohamed Krichen, news and programme presenter

- Laila Chaieb, news and programme presenter

- Nasreddine Louati, news producer

- Mohamed Lamine, journalist and translator

- Moeed Ahmed, head of new media

- Ahmed Ashour, head of Al Jazeera Talk

- Jamal el-Shayal, field reporter (during the Egyptian revolution)

- Nabil Rihani, senior journalist, field reporter (during the Tunisian revolution)

- Ahmed Val Ouldeddine, journalist, field reporter during the Libyan revolution

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[117] Ibid. p. 116

- Ghassan Abuhsein, journalist, field reporter from Bahrain

- Samir Hijjawi, senior journalist, special coverage, Al Jazeera Mubasher (Live)

- Mohamed Dahou, presenter, Al Jazeera Mubasher (Live).

The above list of interviewees has been chosen randomly, it was carefully selected to cover the key positions in the news and programme production cycle within Al Jazeera. To get an insight into the channel's handling of the Arab spring, I interviewed field reporters from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Bahrain. These interviews provide a firsthand and extremely detailed account of the media coverage at its operational level.

From journalists and field reporters through to news and programme producers, up to the editorial and top management staff, these interviews will present us with a complete picture of Al Jazeera's own perception of its role in the Arab democratization processes. Building on my theoretical framework developed in the first three chapters of this research, my interpretation of these interviews contributes to building a fresh understanding of this perception.

As the format of the semi-structured interview is essentially one of question-and-discussion, I expect my encounters with Al Jazeera staff to be truly productive and insightful. The analysis of the data collected through interviews will be complemented and consolidated with data collected from a number of relevant programmes: *Al-Ittijah Al-mu'akis* (the opposite direction), *Al-Shari'a wal-'Hayat* (Sharia and life), *Lin-Nisaa' Faqat*" (For Women Only).

The knowledge I have gained about Al Jazeera as editor of the volume "*The Al Jazeera Decade*" (2007) prompted me to choose this widely influential network as a case study for my thesis. I have not picked Al Jazeera randomly among other similar networks; I chose it for the paradigmatic role it is playing in reshaping the relationship between media and politics in the Arab world. From this perspective, there is no better case, which could illustrate this changing relationship and explain how the media contributes to the process of Arab democratization than Al Jazeera. However, there remain a number of questions facing the single case study as a research strategy.

Although it is commonly used across a variety of disciplines like "psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, education, nursing, and community planning",[118] the reliability of the findings of case studies is often challenged. Critics of the case study method find it difficult to believe that the outcome of studying a limited number of cases can be generalizable or applicable to other cases. Others dismiss case study research as appropriate only for the exploratory phase of an investigation and cannot be used as an explanatory tool. Yet researchers continue to use the case study method with success in carefully planned and crafted qualitative analysis of real-life situations. The findings of case studies have undoubtedly contributed to our knowledge of complex social, political, and related phenomena. In my particular case study, generalizability is not a prime concern; understanding the role of Al Jazeera as a communicative tool, and explaining how this network contributes to the creation of a

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[118] Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, (Sage Publications, 2009), p. 4

pluralistic public sphere and the advancement of democracy in the Arab region is what drives this research agenda in the first place.

Chapter synopsis:

The first chapter begins with the research questions and provides and explanation of the rationale and significance of this study, followed by a literature review as explained below.

The successive waves of democratization that swept the world especially in the last quarter of the twentieth century generated a vast amount of literature describing, analyzing and investigating the prospects of this global phenomenon. Different theoretical approaches emerged at different times to explain to us the dynamics and processes of democratization in most parts of the world. The little attention given by scholars to the Arab region is reflected in the modest contribution of democratization theories to understand and explain the complex processes of Arab democratization.

In the first section I present a critical assessment of the major theories of democratization (modernization, structuralism, transition). The second section reviews the literature on the politics and media relationship with special emphasis on the changing aspects of this relationship in the Arab context after the arrival of Al Jazeera. Among the most visible phenomenon is the unprecedented communicative space created by Al Jazeera through the continuous flow of uncensored information and unprecedented live debates broadcast to millions of Arab viewers across the Middle East. The third section looks at the literature on the public sphere and engages with the debate on this topic which has come

to fore in the last few decades with the new waves of democratization. In the fourth and final section I turn to the literature on Al Jazeera, exploring the different angles, themes and methods used in these writings. My assessment of the literature on Al Jazeera comes in three sub-sections: Introductory and descriptive literature, comparative literature, and literature on the effect of Al Jazeera.

The second chapter presents the research methodology and explains how data is collected and analyzed. As argued above, qualitative methodology serves best the purpose of theory building and constructing social meaning through interpretation. In-depth interviews and close engagement with the case study allows the researcher to come up with a fresh understanding and develop an original narrative concerning Arab democratization and the role played by Al Jazeera in this regard.

Chapter three engages with the main democratization approaches and analyses their theoretical frameworks, their dominant narratives and their claim to universal applicability, especially when it comes to understanding the Arab dilemma.

Democracy has always been praised as the best form of organizing social and political disputes. With the waning of democratic institutions after the fall of the Greek city-state model, the discourse of democracy and political participation has, for centuries, lost its relevance. The gradual re-emergence of democracies since the beginning of the twentieth century renewed the interest in democracy and set democratic governance as a global trend. By the turn of the century, there were democratic states in every continent and in every region across the globe. More than a hundred polities in Europe, Latin America and parts of Asia and Africa transformed into democratic systems over three consecutive

"waves", in Huntington's term. This massive transition from authoritarianism to democracy expanded the debate over democratization and generated competing theories and explanatory models. In this chapter I will provide a critical assessment of the three leading approaches to democratization: modernization, transition, and structuralism.

Literature on democratization has generally been concerned with success stories. Transitions in Eastern Europe, Former Soviet republics, and Latin America attracted much of the literature whereas the Middle East, to a large extent, remained under-theorized. The remarkable failure of the Arab Middle East to democratize and fit into the theoretical frameworks of democratization theory has left the entire region with little understanding. Applying any of the above-mentioned approaches does not seem to help deconstruct the socio-cultural and political obstacles facing democratization in the Arab world.

Looking at these approaches from a critical perspective, this chapter intends to place the democratization problématique under different lights. Instead of searching for democracy by reading the political developments in the region through the prism of modernization and liberalization of systems, structures, ideologies and elites, my focus will be on the indigenous modes of deliberation over democracy. This means in practice, exploring the new social forces, alternative discourses, and emerging non-state actors. Satellite television and new communication technologies are paving the way for these forces to play an increasingly influential role in the Arab politics. In doing so, the media has become an integral part of democratization processes; this is what the following chapter is looking to unpack.

Chapter four looks at the new relationship between media and politics from an unconventional perspective. Since the publication of "Four Theories of the Press", the study of politics and its relationship with the media has been dominated by the systemic approach. The function and role of the media according to this approach can only be understood and explained by the political system within which they operate. With the phenomenal surge of new media technologies, enabling global media corporations to extend their influence beyond traditional boundaries of politics, culture, and geography, it has become hard for the systemic argument to hold together. Focusing on the case of Al Jazeera, this chapter develops what is called a 'non-systemic' perspective. While the political systems in the Arab world remain largely authoritarian, parts of the Arab media operate in a relatively independent atmosphere. Among other elements, I introduce here the geopolitics of the region and the inter-Arab relations as key explanatory factors to understand the function of Al Jazeera and the role it has played in changing both the media and the political scene towards building democratic societies. Central to these dynamics is the public sphere which is addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter five discusses the concept of the public sphere and looks at its social and political dimensions. As a zone of mediation between the state and the private individual, the concept of "public sphere" has always been central to the democratic life in the West. Yurgen Habermas' 'The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere' traces much of the long and complex genealogy of that concept. Although this early work of Habermas is primarily a historical-sociological account of the emergence, transformation, and disintegration of the liberal bourgeois public sphere, it still resonates with some of the urgent questions facing democratic theory.

Critics of Habermas who engaged with his project either with the aim of deepening its approach and extending its scope or with the consideration of other theoretical frameworks provide us with different ways of problematizing and exploring new dimensions of the public sphere.

This chapter engages with Habermas and his critics whose contributions remain largely limited to, and embedded in, the socio-political modern history of the West. The key issue this chapter tries to address is to what extent can we speak of the public sphere in a fundamentally different sociopolitical, economic and cultural setting? The emergence of the Arab public sphere and the democratizing effects of Al Jazeera's journalism will be examined in the course of the following three chapters (6, 7 and 8) which form the empirical part of this research.

Chapter six builds on the theoretical discussion of the public sphere and starts the analysis of the empirical data. It explains how the channel contributes to Arab democratization through the creation of an expanding and vibrant public sphere. As we learn from the interviews, the role of Al Jazeera in restructuring public discourse and publicizing political debates beyond their traditional enclaves is undisputed. The practical manifestation of this role is what this chapter is trying to demonstrate. Interviewees from various positions within the network share the same perception that Al Jazeera has been instrumental in the process of creating an Arab public sphere. It has offered Arab publics crucial platforms to interact and communicate directly and immediately through multiple

spaces. The empirical data explains this process and answers three key questions pertaining to the formation of the new Arab public sphere and its democratizing effects:

1. How can we identify the role of Al Jazeera in the emergence of the Arab public sphere?

2. What are the main features and characteristics of the new Arab public sphere?

3. What are the political implications of this emerging public sphere and how is it contributing to the processes of Arab democratization?

Under the title 'Al Jazeera's democratization effect', chapter seven extends the analysis of the data beyond the issue of the public sphere to cover other aspects of Al Jazeera's democratization effects. Starting with the profound changes the channel brought into the Arab media landscape since the mid-1990s, this chapter dives into what seemed to be a common perception among the interviewees regarding the socio-political meaning of such changes. The analysis finds that changes in the media sphere cannot be separated from those in the political sphere. The advent of Al Jazeera as a new media paradigm explains much of the current changes in the region. The available data provides us with a full picture of this paradigm; how it functions and what are its key components. In this respect, Al Jazeera's contribution to Arab democratization is channeled through the creative interplay of a number of elements including: breaking the information monopoly, bringing in the opinion and the other opinion, and integrating old and new media to maximize the level of engagement among the Arab publics.

To reconstruct the social meaning of Al Jazeera's role as derived from the interviews and further substantiate these ideas with more concrete examples, chapter eight takes the Arab spring as the focal point of analysis. While the protesters were taking to the streets in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya, the media were competing not only to cover these events but also to construct their own narratives about what was happening. The focus here will be on Al Jazeera's narrative of the Arab spring which it has covered in an exceptional way. The data analysis will provide us with an insight into the channel's portrayal of this major political event and tell us how its coverage fits into the ongoing Arab democratization process. To understand the political impact of Al Jazeera's engagement with the revolutions, particular attention will be first given to its journalistic practice in terms of editorial decisions, field reporting and the upsurge of citizen reporting. As the empirical data show, Aljazeera's extensive coverage of the Arab spring was unmatched and its live reporting attracted millions of viewers in the Arab world and across the globe. However, paradoxically, this success brought with it serious questions regarding the channel's professionalism and the political agenda driving its coverage.

Chapter nine tries to provide answers to these questions and reflect on the theoretical part of the research as well as on the empirical analysis from a critical perspective. In this discussion chapter, there will also be a critical assessment of Al Jazeera's role in the Arab democratization process and its handling of the Arab spring in particular. While televising the Arab revolutions showed the overwhelming power of the media over many other traditional socio-political actors, it also showed the lack of consistency in this coverage and the prominence of particular political agendas over journalistic norms, especially when we look at how Al Jazeera reported the different revolutions from a

comparative perspective. In this respect, I will examine the channel's coverage of Bahrain and Libya and compare it to that of the rest of the Arab revolutions. The chapter also discusses the impact of the Arab spring on Al Jazeera's journalistic performance especially with regard to the space given to 'the other opinion' during the revolutions, which seems to have been shrinking considerably. This discussion also reconsiders what has been said about the Arab public sphere in the previous chapters and analyses the transformations it has undergone.

The conclusion recapitulates the main research findings and summarizes the key theoretical articulations regarding Arab democratization and the role of the media. It ends with recommendations on which direction should Al Jazeera take to consolidate its position within the new, post-revolution environment and suggests avenues for future studies to take the research agenda of this thesis further.

Chapter 3:

Democratization: The frameworks, the narratives and the Arab

Dilemma

Democratization has been a global political phenomenon especially during the last quarter of the twentieth century. In the course of less than three decades, the international scene has gone through spectacular transformations marked by what has become known as "the third wave" of democratization.[119] The fall of the remaining authoritarian regimes in Southern Europe (Portugal, Greece and Spain) in the mid-1970s, followed by the breakdown of military rule in Latin America, the regime openings in East and South East Asia, and to a lesser degree, in sub-Saharan Africa, and then most spectacularly the transition of former communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe, plunged the world into the largest democratic experience it has ever seen.

On the theoretic side, there has been an upsurge of literature on democratization trying to make sense of these changes and explain what happened in a systemic way. Competing theories emerged in the academic sphere to conceptualize patterns of democratization and compare various paths and processes of democratic transition. The editors of *Democratization*[120] distinguish between three major approaches: the modernization approach, the transition approach, and the structural approach. Regardless of the extent to

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[119] Huntington, Samuel. *The Third Wave, Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).
[120] Potter, David., Goldblatt, David., Kiloh, Margaret. And Lewis, Paul. *Democratization* (Polity Press and the Open University, 2005).

which these approaches are distinct or overlapped[121], they all revolve around the traditional structure/agency debate.

The modernization and the structure approaches have much in common in terms of their philosophical background, basic assumptions, and core arguments. The starting point is that society is a structure with interrelated parts that function towards maintaining social stability and order. Social change happens only through long-term processes and structural transformation. The primacy in analyzing social phenomena is always given to the systemic structure whether at the social, political or economic level. Democratization from this perspective comes into being as a result of structural changes not through elites' initiatives, rational choices and short term negotiations. On the contrary, the transition approach focuses on the dynamics of regime change and the role of different agents in bringing down authoritarian rule. Combined, these approaches provide a multi-perspective framework for understanding the successive waves of democratization in most parts of the world. Taken separately, they all fail to generate a satisfactory explanation of this global phenomenon. The downside of these theoretic frameworks and their analytical deficiency become more apparent when we try to apply them onto the Arab Setting to understand the potentialities and processes of Arab democratization. In this chapter, I will provide a brief and concise assessment of these approaches followed by what I think is the missing link in the literature on Arab democratization. Based on my critical assessment, the different pieces of this missing link will be brought together by following three lines of inquiry: First, I will employ a bottom-up analysis to explore the

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[121] In addition to Potter, Goldblatt, Kiloh and Lewis, we also find this tripartite categorization in Grugel's *Democratization: a Critical Introduction (2002)*, and Gil's *The Dynamic of Democratization* (2000).

democratic forces and discourses at the societal level against the backdrop of the dominating narratives and their state-centric views. Second, I will engage with the current debate on political culture to show the inconsistencies in the use of this explanation and demonstrate the limitations of what has become known as the Arab "exceptionalism" argument. Third, I will conclude this chapter with bringing the international factor back in, not only as facilitator and promoter of democracy as was the case in certain countries, but also and more importantly as an additional obstacle that complicates the journey of Arab democratization and obscures further its prospects.

1. Inadequacies of the dominating democratization theory

"Whenever a theory appears to you as the only possible one, take this as a sign that you have neither understood the theory nor the problem which it was intended to solve."

Karl Popper

The modernization approach to democratization emphasizes a number of social and economic factors as necessary requisites for democratic change. Although other variables are also considered, the level of socioeconomic development remains central to the modernization approach. Seymour Martin Lipset's essay "*Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy*" published in 1959 represents the starting point for this trend of analysis. Lipset's assumption that modernization generates democratization is supported by a comparative study of the European countries, the English speaking countries in North America and Australasia,

and the Latin American countries. After comparing these countries in terms of their level of industrialization, degree of urbanization, as well as their wealth and education, he found that the more democratic countries are those in which the socioeconomic indices scored higher. Lipset's well-known statement "the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy"[122] was seen by his critics as linear, over-deterministic and lacks enough empirical evidence. From the same perspective, but in less affirmative terms, Larry Diamond sums up the modernization approach as "the well-to-do the people of a country, on average, the more likely they will favor, achieve, and maintain a democratic system for their country".[123]

On the contrary, it is hardly conceivable that democracy will take place in pre-modern societies, or in countries where the socioeconomic indices did not reach the required level. This explains in part why comparative studies on democratization did not concern themselves much with the Arab world. Addressing a phenomenon that does not exist contradicts the basic conventions of social science methodology and therefore asks the wrong questions. Surprisingly, this methodological restraint recedes when it comes to dealing with the culture factor.

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[122] Lipset, Seymour M. *Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy* (The American Political Science Review, Vol. 53 No. 1, March 1959), p.75
[123] Diamond, Larry. *Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered* (American Behavioral Scientist, Vol.35, No. 4/5, 1992), p.468

Although socioeconomic development remains the driving force behind democratization[124], a number of theorists pushed the modernization approach to another direction and developed their own analytical agenda stressing the importance of culture in bringing about democratic change. The high level of economic development achieved in modern societies brings with it a high level of education and spreads out a particular culture that favors democratic values such as tolerance, moderation, pluralism, diversity and rationality.[125] Whether democratic culture precedes the democratic process and paves the way for change, or comes as a result of it, is still an unsettled question. What looks more problematic though is the use of culture to explain the absence of democracy in the Middle Eastern context and the Arab world in particular. The importance of engaging with the political culture approach stems primarily from the fact that, whenever Arab democratization is invoked, the cultural argument always comes to the fore. A close examination of political culture and the dangers of reading the deficiency of democracy in the Arab setting through the prism of culture will follow in the next section.

The structure approach emphasizes the long-term processes of historical change and looks primarily at the changing structures of power. Different power structures operate differently in different social, economic and political settings. In certain cases structural

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[124] On modernization and democratization, see also Walt Rostow who defines four stages which traditional societies have to traverse to modernize and then democratize. These stages are: 1) pre-take-off, 2) take-off, 3) maturing, to become 4) mass consumption societies where democracy prevails. (Rostow, 1960). See also Adrian Leftwich whose modernist approach implies that economic development leads necessarily to democratization. Based on this thesis, he recommends that the West support those committed to economic development if they are not democratic elites. For the growth they achieve would lead to democratic change. "*Two Cheers for Democracy*" (Political Quarterly, Vol. 67, Issue 4, 1996) , pp. 334 - 339

[125] As early as 1963 Abraham Almond and Sidney Verba wrote "*The Civic Culture*". Their basic argument is that a democratic form of participatory political system requires a particular political culture consistent with it. Also see Pye and Verba in "*Political culture and political development*" (1965).

changes lead to liberal democracy, in others they lead to completely the opposite. Barrington Moore is a classic example of those who theorized the relationship between democracy and dictatorship on the one hand and their social origins on the other hand. In his 1966 "*Social Origins of Dictatorship and Dictatorship*",[126] he tried to find the link between the changing patterns of power structures and the varied political systems that emerged in eight countries (England, France, the USA, Japan, Germany, Russia, China and India). As structures of power change gradually and normally take time to translate into a defined political form, Moore's comparative study spanned a time frame of three and a half centuries that is, from the seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth century. He found out that a common pattern of changing relationship between four power structures (peasants, lords, the bourgeoisie and the state) led to liberal democracy in England, France and the USA. Other patterns of relationship between these same structures resulted in fascism in the case of Germany and Japan, while Russia and China moved towards communism. Here again, democratization and capitalism go hand in hand in the most advanced industrialized countries as we have seen in the modernization approach. Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Stephens and John Stephens expanded Moore's structural approach to cover a broader range of countries but focused their analysis on the dynamics of class struggle. According to Rueschemeyer et al. the defining factor in the democratization process is "the struggle between the dominant and the subordinate classes over their right to rule."[127] Among the five conflicting classes: landlords, peasantry, bourgeoisie, middle class, and urban working class, only the working class has

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[126] Moore, Barrington. *Origins of Dictatorship and Dictatorship*: *Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, (Beacon Press, 1966).
[127] Rueschemeyer, Dietrich., Stephens, Evelyne H. and Stephens, John D. *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Polity Press, 1992), p.74

always been in favor of advancing democratic rights. However, various class alliances may arise in different contexts and change the prospects for democracy depending on the level of capitalist development. The authors' comparative history analysis included counties from the advanced capitalist world as well as from the developing world but, not surprisingly, no Middle Eastern or Arab countries were considered in their study.

The difficulties that arise when trying to understand Arab democratization through the lens of the modernization/structure approach remain largely there even if we change the perspective and look at the dynamics of the region through the transition approach. Although the literature on democratic transition shifted the focus away from the structure and placed it on the short term process of regime change and the dynamics of elite interaction during transition periods. The building block of this approach is the agency of political elites as the main actors in initiating the process of political change. Although the time frame for democratic transition is generally limited, the process has to go through a number of phases. Dankwart Rustow distinguishes between four transitional phases before a democratic regime is firmly established.[128] First, there has to be a *background condition* for national unity and political identity to be established and consolidated. Second, political elites and groups rise to prominence through "a prolonged and inconclusive political struggle."[129] This leads to the third phase where elites come to value and accept that the diversity of views is inevitable, so they seek to institutionalize it and channel differences among groups and their political orientations in what Rustow

[128] See Rustow, Dankwart. *Transitions to Democracy. Toward a Dynamic Model* (Comparative Politics 2,3 April 1970), pp. 337-363.
[129] Ibid. p. 352

calls "some crucial aspect of democratic procedure."[130] Following this *decision* phase, comes *habituation*. It is the last and concluding stage characterized by the adoption of democratic rules as necessary rather than desirable. Gradually, these rules become the norm, and trickle down the whole social and political organization.

Subsequent transition studies altered partially Rustow's four-phased process but kept the same theoretic framework in which political elites play a central role in establishing democratic rule. This is clear from the seminal transitologist work of Schmitter O'Donnell, and Whitehead, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* and the many studies that followed.[131] O'Donnell and his colleagues distinguish in the democratization process between the initial *transition* from authoritarian rule marked by preliminary liberalization, but also uncertainty, and the *consolidation* phase where democracy becomes "the only game in town" in Linz and Stepan's terms.[132]

The upsurge of transitology literature, especially since the publication of *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule,* has been crucial in shaping our understanding of democratization. The rich comparative analysis it provided covers a large number of countries across the globe but, like the modernization and structural approaches, stops short of exploring and

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[130] Ibid. p. 355
[131] See for example Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: South Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe,* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). Share and Mainwaring*, Transitions Through Transaction: Democratization in Brazil and Spain*, in Wayne Selcher (eds.), *Political Liberalization in Brazil. Dynamics, Dilemmas and Future Prospects,* (Westview Press, 1985). Mainwaring, O'Donnell, and Valenzuela, *Issues in Democratic Consolidation*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). Pridham and Agh, *Prospects for Democratic Consolidation in East-Central Europe*, (Manchester University Press, 2001).
[132] Linz, Juan and Stepan, Alfred *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: South Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe,* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) p. 5

explaining aspects of Arab democratization. If the modernization and structural approaches both failed to account for Arab democratization for obvious reasons,[133] transition theorists have little excuse for ignoring the dynamics of political change in this region. It is true that full transition to democracy has not happened in any of the Arab countries, but considering the whole democratization process as set out in the transition literature, a number of those countries have gone through certain phases at certain times yet failed to move to subsequent phases and establish democratic regimes.[134] Here, we are confronted with one of the key questions when dealing with democratization in the Arab context: the predicament of progress and retreat. The following sections try to offer elements of understanding of this uncertain and meandrous process which does not seem to fit into the orthodoxy of democratization theory and its analytical agenda.

2. The struggle for Arab democratization: Forces, discourses and the indigenous voices

"So long as the people do not care to exercise their freedom, those who wish to tyrannize will do so; for tyrants are active and ardent, and will devote themselves in the name of any number of gods, religious and otherwise, to put shackles upon sleeping men."

Voltaire

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[133] The level of socioeconomic development and the ensuing indices in the Arab world score well below the required standard from the modernization/structural perspective. This leaves all Arab countries out of the question until a historic structural change happens and transforms the region into modern capitalist societies.

[134] During the 1980s, we have seen political openings, partial liberalization, and relatively free elections taking place in Egypt, Tunisia, Jordon, Algeria etc. but transition to democracy failed in all of these countries.

From what we have seen in the above introduction of democratization theory, it is clear that Arab democratization is not high on the agenda of the dominant narratives. The leading thread uniting the different approaches explains in part why those narratives failed to observe the real dynamics behind the facade of stalled or inexistent Arab democracy. The Western context in which all these narratives were developed, the ethnocentric view they all share and communicate through their theoretic approaches, and above all, the top-down perspective they adopt in looking at issues of social and political change, make it difficult for students of Arab democratization to see the reality on the ground as it unfolds.[135] Changing the lens and using a bottom-up approach seem inevitable to present a closer examination and better understanding of the processes and potential prospects for Arab democratization. Focusing on the state apparatus and related social powers, structures and institutions is not the best starting point for this line of inquiry. For, it will only strengthen the thesis of presumed Arab "exceptionalism" and fail to observe any significance in the complex struggle of many Arabs for democracy.[136] My focus would be rather placed on the multifaceted struggle for democracy at non-state levels. This includes social, political and religious groups (established and emerging), popular movements (protests and uprisings), and symbolic systems and discourses (traditional and modern).

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[135] An extended informed discussion of these issues and the dangers of borrowing Western theoretical frameworks to understand the peculiarities of democratization in the Arab setting is provided in chapter I of Larbi Sadiki's "*Rethinking Arab Democratization*" (Oxford University Press, 209).

[136] While questioning the so-called Arab "exceptionalism", Ghassan Salamé maintains that "calls for democracy have remained too muted, too superficial, too dispersed to convince any observer that a push towards political participation is really sought in these societies." See Ghassan Salamé, *Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World* (Tauris, 1994) P. 2

The struggle for democracy and political participation in the Arab world is one of the longest and most complex processes. The so-called Arab Renaissance (*al-nahda*), which began in the late 19th century, was but a cultural instance in that process. Pioneered by Rifa'a Rafi' el-Tahtawi (1801-1873), who comes from the religious establishment (*al-Azhar*), *al-nahda* initiated a multi-dimensional process of intellectual, religious, and institutional reforms in a number of Arab and Islamic countries. El-Tahtawi's views of the West, its social modes of organization, its political forms of government, and its modern educational systems were deeply influenced by his readings and insightful observations during his early trip to Paris.[137] In section IV of *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz* he writes: "I read (…) two volumes of a book called *The Spirit of Laws*. His author, Montesquieu, is famous among the French. (…) They call him the French Ibn Khaldun as they call Ibn Khaldun Montesquieu of the East. In this regard, I have also read a great book called *The Social Contract* authored by Rousseau."[138]

Upon his return to Egypt, el-Tahtawi became a fierce advocate of parliamentarism, the rights of citizens to political participation, and the rights of women to education. The association between Montesquieu and Ibn Khaldun in the above quote is very significant. It shows the spirit with which a whole generation of *al-nahda* pioneers (*ruwad*) faced the challenges of bridging the widening gap between a rising West and a declining East. Establishing analogies between ideas, values, symbols and institutions from both worlds

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[137] El-Tahtawi was sent to Paris in 1826 by Muhammad Ali of Egypt to study Western sciences and educational systems. His trip is summarized in his well-known book "*Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz",* sometimes translated into English as *"The Quintessence of Paris ".*
[138] El-Tahtawi, Rifa'a Rafi'. *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz* (The Library of Abdulaziz Tawfiq Jaweed) Section IV, Chapter V, pp. 310-11.

was necessary to justify and legitimate the approach of "borrowing" from the West.[139]

Like el-Tahtawi, Khairuddin al-Tunsi wrote his famous "*Aqwam al-Masalik*" after touring a number of European countries. In one of his statements about parliamentarian governance we read under the title "Public Liberties": There is no doubt that, by choosing its representatives who act on its behalf (…), the nation (*ummah*) will have its freedom established and all its affairs will be successful. It is vital to have people from the upper class as well as ordinary citizens, engage in all matters, care more, and hold the executives of their government to account."[140]

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897) is another emblematic figure of that period. Although his efforts concentrated on religious reform, which gave Islam a modernist reinterpretation, he also favored the replacement of authoritarian monarchies with representative rule. At the theoretic level, "*Tabai' al-Istibdad*" (The natures of despotism) of Abdul-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1854–1902) remains unrivaled.[141] Al-Kawakibi is best known for his spirited critique of tyranny in all its myriad forms: political, intellectual, economic, spiritual, and racial. "The worst forms of despotic rule, he says, is the government of absolute single ruler who inherits the throne, commands the army, and enjoys religious authority."[142] Conversely, The fewer authorities a ruler has, the less

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[139] Famous for using the term "borrowing" is Khairuddin al-Tunsi, another leading figure of *al-nahda*, in his well-known book "*Aqwam al-Masalik*". Al-Tunsi's reformist project can be summarized in the following four elements: 1) borrowing all that is not in contradiction with the "*sharia*", 2) implementing administrative and political reforms (*tanzimat*), 3) justice was crucial in achieving progress in the West, 4) injustice and despotism lead to catastrophic ends.

[140] Al-Tunsi, Khairuddin *Aqwam al-Masalik fi Ma'rifat Ah'wal al-Mamalik* (First edition, state press, Tunis), p. 209

[141] El-Kawakibi, Abdul-Rahaman. *Tabai' al-Istibdad wa Masari' al-Isti'bad* translated as "The natures of despotism and the destruction of subjugation", (Dar al-Sharq al-Arabi, 5th edition, 2003).

[142] Ibid. p. 24

despotic he becomes, until we reach a stage where we have an elected ruler for a limited period of time. Any form of government, observes al-Kawakibi, is despotic to a certain extent unless it is placed under proper control and is routinely hold to account."[143]

This was the historical and intellectual context within which various administrative, constitutional, political and economic reforms took place. In Turkey, the reformation movement introduced in 1839 a multi-faceted policy to reorganize state institutions and modernize the Ottoman Empire in an attempt to rescue it from an inevitable decline. These measures, known as *tanzimat*, included educational, financial and legal reforms, but most important of all, was the establishment in 1876 of the first Ottoman Parliament to balance and check the wide-ranging powers of the Sultan. In Tunisia the reforms peaked in 1861 with the promulgation of the first written constitution in the Arab world. In Egypt the effects of the reformation movement were relatively more visible, especially with the help of the printing press, which Muhammad Ali introduced since 1921. Modern printing techniques spread rapidly and gave birth to a modern liberal intelligentsia whose impact depended so much on the circulation of printed materials.[144] Transferring the reformist ideas and trends of *al-Nahda* to the wider population was not very successful though, since access to books, periodicals and newspapers remained to a large extent confined to intellectuals and segments of an emerging middle class.

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[143] Ibid. p. 25

[144] The Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram* for example, dates from 1875, and before the end of the nineteenth century, Beirut alone saw the emergence of more than fifty new publications between newspapers and periodicals. For more details on the emergence and development of Arab press see Philip De Tarrazi, "*Tarikh Al-Sahafa Al-Arabiya*" (The History of Arab Press), published by al-Matba'a al-Adabiya, (Beirut, 1913).

This explains in part, why the first Arab reformist movement did not reach its full capacity and ended without translating its constitutional reforms and political liberalization into a successful democratic transition. Another element of explanation is to be found in the external factor. It is worth mentioning that, by the end of the 1800s, the Arab world was almost entirely under direct Western occupation.[145] Fighting external occupation and liberating the land, it seems, took precedence over democratization on the agenda of many reformists. Instead of continuing their internal political struggle against their local tyrants, modern and traditional elites alike, had to re-order their priorities and engage in what will be known as the national liberation movements in many parts of the Arab world. The third element of explanation is also linked to the colonial legacy and its implication for the political development in the region. The subordination of political and constitutional structures in occupied countries (parties and parliaments) and the apparent failure of indigenous elites, who led or took part in those structures, to meet the aspirations of their people for freedom and independence, resulted in "discrediting the parliamentary systems established by the Europeans."[146]

Democratization was not a priority in the state-building process after independence either. As Roger Owen notes, the new elites focused their efforts on consolidating the emerging state apparatus, securing administrative control at every level, and expanding state bureaucracy, the size of the army and the police forces. These processes resulted in

[145] With the exception of Saudi Arabia, all Arab countries were under Franco-British occupation, Libya was under Italian rule.
[146] Pratt, Nicola. *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Arab World* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007) p.56

"a huge expansion in the power and pervasiveness of the state apparatus."[147] Control over so large an apparatus led to the formation of authoritarian regimes across the region. Authoritarian system as defined by Owen, is "one in which power is highly centralized, pluralism is suspect, and where the regime seeks to exercise a monopoly over all legitimate political activity."[148] When it comes to dealing with social or political groups, which are not part the state monopoly "the ideal strategy for an authoritarian regime is to destroy those that it cannot control, and to re-make, and re-order those that it can."[149] Whether "personalist, military, single-party, or amalgams of the pure types"[150] the common feature of post-colonial state in the Arab world has been the domination a generalized authoritarian system. The difference between family rule (Gulf countries, Jordan, Morocco), military rule (Egypt and Syria during the 1950s-60s), single-party or personalist rule (Tunisia, Algeria) is too superficial.

However, the picture has changed slightly especially in the last two decades of the twentieth century with political openings happening in countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Kuwait and Yemen. Elections, with varying degrees of transparency have taken place in all these countries and political parties were allowed to compete for provincial and parliamentary elections. It must be noted though, that the upsurge of "Arab electoralism", defined by Larbi Sadiki as "the occurrence of elections

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[147] Owen, Roger. *State, Power, & Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Routledge, 1992) p. 32

[148] Ibid. p. 38

[149] Ibid. p. 38

[150] Geddes, Barbara. *What do we Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?* (Annual Review of Political Science, Vol. 2, 1999), p. 121.
See also Axel Hadenius and Jan Teorell in *Pathways from Authoritarianism* where they add to Geddes's classification two more authoritarian regime types: monarchies and limited multiparty systems. (Journal of Democracy, Jan 2007, Vol. 18, No 1), pp. 143-156

with regular frequency but with limited substantive democratic dividends", remains cosmetic and operates only at the façade level."[151] By introducing degrees of political openings, controlled liberalization and relatively competitive but not truly free elections, Arab regimes "erect the façade of democracy but not the building behind it", says Marina Ottaway to whom, only a "political paradigm shift" can lead to real democratization.[152] Paradoxically, Arab elections have always been a sign of authoritarianism and redeployment of state power than of democratic change. No political alteration in real terms has ever happened through election in any Arab country, and political authority is everywhere personified and only delegated to members of the ruling families or their inner circles of trust. Looking at the situation from this perspective does not provide us with enough visibility to understand the dynamics of Arab democratization, which operate fundamentally at the societal level. As a response to the failure of postcolonial state to achieve its national goals and pursue what they promised in terms of modernization, economic development, and liberation of Palestine,[153] various forms of resistance and opposition to the regimes in place emerged in much of the Arab world. It is in these forms of political opposition, social pretests, and intellectual debates that the dynamics and discourses of Arab democratization emerged and continue to develop.

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[151] Sadiki, Larbi. *Rethinking Arab Democratization: Elections Without Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 60
[152] Ottaway, Marina and Choucair-Vizoso, Julia. *Beyond the Façade: Political Reform in the Arab World* (Carnegie Endowment for Peace, 2008), p. 7
[153] Liberating occupied Palestine has been the focal point in the Arab nationalist discourse. The joint defeat of three Arab armies (Egypt, Syria, Jordan) at the hands of Israel in 1967 was not only at the military level; it was also political and ideological. The 1967 defeat affected the dominance and credibility of the pan-Arabist ideology as well as the political discourse of the regimes that espoused it.

Arab intellectuals' responses to the failure of the Arab state on almost all fronts varied according to their ideological backgrounds and political affiliations, but a general tendency favoring democracy and supporting democratic change could be traced across the spectrum. Voices from the Arab left pointed out to the bourgeois nature of the political elites, which have no confidence in the lower classes of society. Their failure, as explained by the author of *al-Hazeema wal-Ideologia al-Mahzuma* (The Defeat and the Defeated Ideology), "led to the betrayal of the Arab masses who should take the responsibility of leading the nation."[154] Similar ideas were expressed earlier by Salama Musa, a leading Arab socialist, whose works inspired a generation of Western-minded elite. Holding that democracy in Europe was the product of the rise of the middle class, he recommends: "we need to help this man, the man of the middle class to implant the tree of democracy in our land."[155]

Among the issues highlighted by liberal intellectuals with regard to the lack of democracy and the widening gap between Arab regimes and the people is the crisis of legitimacy. Combining democracy, rationality and legitimacy, Ahmed Baha'a el-Din wrote: "If events had taught us the importance of democracy and rationality, it was high time for us to be aware that the greatest importance is for legitimacy (…) because in the final analysis, it is legitimacy which brings about the harmony between the rulers and the ruled."[156] Harmony in this sense can only be achieved within a strong but flexible political and social framework, adds Baha'a el-Din, where democracy and the freedom

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[154] Al-Hafiz, Yasin. *Al-Hazeema wal-Ideologia al-Mahzuma* (Beirut, 1978), p. 144
[155] Musa, Salama. *Ma Hiya al-Nahdha?* (What is Renaissance?) (Dar al-Jeel Publication, 1935) p. 120
[156] Baha'a el-Din, Ahmed. *Shari'yat Al-Sulta fi Al-A'lam Al-A'rabi* (Legitimate Authority in the Arab World) (Dar Al-Shuruq, 1984), p. 14

expression come first.[157] The primacy of democracy is also clear in Burhan Ghalioun's writings. *In Al-Masa'lah Al-Tai'fiyah wa Mushkilat Al-Aqalliyat* (The Sectarian Question and the Problem of Minorities), he notes that the debate among contemporary Arab intellectuals shifted from secularity, which is "a false problématique imported from the West", to "the real issue, which is democracy".[158] His "Manifesto" is a significant contribution to that debate. He believes that the Arab discourse on democracy should move from being used as a slogan to a stage where it represents an effective framework for social and political consensus.[159]

Intellectuals with Islamist background criticized the ruling governments for being detached from the culture of the people. According to many Islamists, abandoning religious guidance is at the roots of not only military defeat, but also authoritarianism and social injustice. "Islam and democracy are originally in agreement, says Rashid Ghannouchi, a leading Islamist scholar from Tunisia, the democratic procedures developed by the West are great achievements; they transformed consultation (*shura*) from being just a principle and value into a complete system allowing the community (*ummah*) to express its will and hold its rulers to account."[160] On his part, Fahmy Howeidy from Egypt emphasizes the supremacy of democracy over all other competing political systems. He argues that, "what democracy stands for, in terms of values and guarantees, represents the best system allowing for political participation and the

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[157] Ibid. p 69

[158] Ghalioun, Burhan. *Al-Masa'lah Al-Tai'fiyah wa Mushkilat Al-Aqalliyat* (The Sectarian Question and the Problem of Minorities) (Dar Al-Talia'h, Beirut, 1979) p. 82, Footnote 2.

[159] Ghalioun, Burhan. *Bayan Min Ajl Al-Dimoqratiyah* (A Manifesto for Democracy) (Al-Markaz Al-Thaqafi Al-Arabi, 2006) p. 219

[160] Ghannouchi, Rashid. *Muqarabat fi al-Ilmaniyah wal-Mujtama' al-Madani* (*Approaches to Secularity and Civil Society)* (Maghreb Centre For Research and Translation, 1999) p. 156

protection of freedoms. Regardless of any defects or disadvantages it might have, democracy remains by far superior to other government systems and political models."[161] Hasan al-Turabi offers a more synthetic view. Western democracy, he holds, is the product of three combined origins: First, the contract of allegiance between the community and the ruler in the Islamic tradition; second, the Greek democratic experience where the people governed itself; and third, humanism philosophy as the basis for rights and fundamental freedoms.[162] Describing the political regimes in the Arab-Islamic world, al-Turabi appears very critical. "Most of those who rule in the lands of Islam are tyrants, he says. They do not care about the will of the people and do not respond to its needs. (…) They are afraid of political Islam and its call for freedom, equality, consultation, and the right of the people to choose its rulers, hold them to account, and depose them.[163] The Islamist discourse on democracy, it should be noted, is of particular importance especially with regard to the growing constituency it represents. In fact, in almost every single election held in the Arab world during the last three decades, the Islamist parties proved to be the most powerful political opposition.[164] Nazih Ayubi's explicit concern that "it is impossible to know whether they [Islamists] would relinquish power voluntarily once they had achieved it" seems to be exaggerated. His

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[161] Howeidy, Fahmy. *Al-Islam wa al-Dimuqratiya* (Islam and Democracy) (Ahram Centre for Translation and Publication, 1993) p. 102

[162] Al-Turabi, Hasan. *As-Siyasah wal-'Hukm: al-Nuzum as-Sultaniyah baynal Usul wa Sunan al-Waqi'i* (Politics and Governance: Sultanic Systems between Origins and the Laws of Reality) (Dar al-Saqi, 2003), p. 34

[163] Ibid. p. 48

[164] This is true in the following instances: In Tunisia, the Islamist *Nahda* (renaissance) movement won 17% of the vote in 1989 elections. In Algeria, the Islamic Salvation Front swept the 1990 elections winning more than 50%. In Jordan, the Islamic Front won 36 of the 80 parliament seats in the 1989 elections. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood enjoys the largest opposition representation in the parliament.

statement that "many of these groups are openly anti-democratic" is definitely inaccurate."[165]

As a final note on the democratic discourse of Arab intellectuals, Mohamed Abid al-Jabiri reminds us of the Rabat conference organized in November 1980 on "the issue of democracy in the Arab world". The final statement of conference, which gathered intellectuals from various backgrounds and different Arab countries, stresses the importance of democracy in all regards. In this statement we read: "The participants unanimously agreed on the centrality of democracy and its crucial position in the struggle towards achieving the goals of the Arab nation. (…) The participants have also refused to sacrifice democracy under the pretext of the requirements of economic development."[166] However, so long as the Arab intellectual's discourse on democracy remained targeted at the ruling elites and predominantly focused on the demand for direct political participation, the regimes in place perceived it as a challenge to their authority and a threat to their social and political status.[167] Failing to have a real impact on the political and institutional level, the democratizing discourse of Arab intellectuals managed to gain access to certain social milieus. The student movement which championed political activism and street protests in the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century, is probably the best example showing how the demand and struggle for democracy extended beyond the closed circles of Arab elites.

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[165] Ayubi, Nazih. *Overstating the Arab State* (I.B. Tauris, 2008), p. 399

[166] Al-Jabiri, Mohamed Abid. *Al-Khitab Al-Arabi Al-Mu'asir: Dirasah Tah'liliyah Naqdiyah* (Modern Arab Discourse: A Critical Analytical study), (Markaz Dirasat Al-Wihda Al-Arabiya, 1992) pp. 96-97

[167] Kazziha, Walid. *The Fantasy of Arab Democracy Without a Constituency* in Nathan J. Brown and Emad el-Din Shahin (eds.), *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East: Regional Politics and External Policies* (Routledge, 2010) p. 50

Throughout the Arab world, students have played a significant role in national political developments. As Nicola Pratt remarks, "university campuses have provided important "incubators" for civil society, as former student activists graduate and go on to participate in other forms of civil activism."[168] Ideas of political reform originating in the circles of Arab intellectuals, coupled with the widespread sentiment of discontent post-1967 defeat transformed the student movement in many Arab countries into a remarkable social and political protest movement. Student demonstrations on and off campus took place at various times in Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco during the 1970s and 1980s. The 1968 events in France showed the world how students could be a leading force for change. Critical theory literature, especially the writings of Herbert Marcuse and his colleagues from the Frankfurt school, were widely read especially among students of Marxist tendencies. In his "Essay on Liberation", dedicated to the French student movement, Marcuse tried to conceptualize the events of May 1968 by extending the Marxist analysis to incorporate students, as a new social force, in the liberating process. "The student opposition, he writes, is growing more and more, as much in the old socialist nations as in the capitalist countries. In France, for the first time, this movement challenged a regime which deployed against it, all its power."[169] Unlike the traditional working class, which has become "shackled in the infrastructure of those societies and therefore opposed to change", the student movement, or "the young intelligentsia" as Marcuse calls it, started to play a significant political role. This development, which will

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[168] Pratt, *Democracy and Authoritarianism*, p. 69
[169] Marcuse, Herbert. *Vers la Libération: Au-delà de l'Homme Unidimensionnel* (Les Editions de Minuit, 1969), p. 8

probably mark a turn in the evolution of contemporary societies, he maintains, "requires critical theory to incorporate this new dimension in its conceptual system and to study its implications with regard to the building of a free society."[170] A renowned scholar of "social movements", Alain Touraine offers another explanation of the 1960s student protests with clear emphasis on its political function. According to Touraine, the French student movement protested in May 1968 in order to take over control of social change. The objectives and meanings of those events, he stresses, "are political and must be understood not in terms of the consciousness of the participants nor of the crisis in the university organization, but in terms of the conflicts and contradictions of society and its social and political system."[171]

Before the turn of the 1970s, another political event reverberated loudly in the Arab universities and gave students of the Islamist tendency, this time, a concrete example of change on religious grounds. The Iranian revolution in 1979 sent to the opposition groups, especially in the neighboring Arab world, a clear message that Islam could become a catalyst for change.[172] Those two events (1968 and 1979) albeit different in many regards, framed and informed the intellectual and political debate in the Arab universities which revolved essentially around issues of political change. Although democracy and political participation has always been at the center of these debates,

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[170] Ibid. p. 37

[171] Touraine, Alain. *The Post-Industrial Society; Tomorrow's Social History: Classes, Conflicts and Culture in the Programmed society* (Random House, 1971), p. 91

[172] On the response to the Iranian revolution, see Bernard Lewis who compares it to the responses to the French and Russian revolutions: "Like the French and Russian Revolutions, the Iranian revolution evoked a powerful response in the world with which it shares a common universe of discourse – that is, the world of Islam." in *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (Phoenix, 1999), p. 137

which feed into other social groups where students belong before or after graduation, governments' responses remained limited.

The arrival of satellite television in the 1990s and the upsurge of live and uncensored debate on Al Jazeera in particular, gave the democratic forces a unique platform to engage with an unprecedented number of people across the Arab world. With regular talk shows discussing matters of public interest involving both government officials and opposition figures, intellectuals from different backgrounds, women, youth and other previously marginalized groups, Al Jazeera shifted some tabooed issues from the basement of oblivion into the public arena. In doing so, the Arab media, or part of it, has become an important player in relaying the democratic discourse to millions of people, thus is contributing to the making of a new political culture based on diversity, pluralism and mutual recognition. This is one of the obvious missing links in the existing literature on Arab democratization, which this study seeks to address in the following section and, in more details in the coming chapters.

3. Political Culture: Why does it matter?

"The best type of Jihad [struggle] is speaking truth before a tyrannical ruler."

Riyadh us-Saleheen Volume 1:195

He who has been a ruler over ten people will be brought shackled on the Day of

Resurrection, until the justice (by which he ruled) loosens his chains or tyranny brings

him to destruction.

Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 1037

Since the publication of "The Civic Culture" in 1963 the concept of political culture has been a recurring source of debate and academic research on democratization. Compared to the remarkably little attention the main approaches of democratization theory devoted to the complex processes of Arab democracy,[173] there has been a frequent resort to culture as an explanatory variable. Controversies surrounding the political culture approach, which developed initially as part of the dominant modernization paradigm in the 1960s, remained integral part of the ongoing debate on the of culture in the democratic process. Departing from broadly defined conceptions of culture as the product of political institutions or social conditions, Almond and Verba define political culture as "the particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of a nation."[174] They distinguish between three types of political cultures: *parochial, subject, and participant. Parochial* political culture is characterized by the absence of expectations of change from the political system. This type of culture is generally, congruent with a traditional political structure, notably the African tribal societies. In the *subject* political culture, there is a high frequency of orientations toward the output but not the input aspects of the system. This type of culture generally corresponds with centralized authoritarian political structures. The *participant* culture is

[173] As accurately noted by the editors of *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World*, this is clear from the two most influential research projects on the subject. O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead's 4 volume comparative analysis of *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (1986) failed to consider one single Arab country. On their part, Diamond, Linz, and Lipset avoided much of the Middle East even though, the focus of their massive comparative study, as the title indicates, is *Democracy in Developing Countries (1988)*.
[174] Almond, Gabriel and Verba, Sidney. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Sage Publications, 1989), p. 13

the one in which the members of the society tend to be actively involved in both the input and output aspects of the political system. This type of culture is compatible with a democratic political structure. These theoretical generalizations, it should be noted, tried to conceptualize the findings of a comparative study of five countries; none of them is from the Arab world or the Middle East where the debate on democracy and political culture is more intense.[175]

Moving the discussion beyond the limits of Almond and Verba's typology, Brynen, Korany and Noble identify three major trends with three distinct positions vis-à-vis the culture argument. The first trend suggests that Arab/Islamic culture is generally incompatible with the fundamental principles of democracy. The second trend adopts a more composite approach in which Arab/Islamic political culture is characterized with diversity and constant change. This position suggests that the dichotomy between authoritarian and participatory culture, for instance, is superficial when it comes to the Arab/Islamic context, as both strands co-exist and overlap considerably. The third trend is critical of the two previous positions. The cultural variable according to advocates of this view is not a critical factor in explaining democratization, as democratic culture and attitudes not only influence political realities but are also influenced by these changing realities.[176] In what follows I suggest a different categorization from that of Brynen, Korany, and Noble. Instead of the three above mentioned positions I propose two major trends. There are those who reject any causal connection between culture and

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[175] The comparative analysis of Almond and Verba included: the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Mexico.
[176] Brynen, Rex., Korany, Bahgat and Noble, Paul. *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World, Vol.1 Theoretical Perspectives* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), pp. 6-7

democratization, and those who believe that culture plays a decisive role in the democratization process.

Advocates of the first trend agree that explaining democratization by the culture factor has always been arbitrary and no solid evidence supports it. Transition theorists generally tend to ignore the culture effect. Democratization for transitologists results from rational choices, mutual compromises, and elites' political negotiations. What drives political change is the common interest, not pro-democratic culture, beliefs, or shared values. As for structuralists, democratic culture is more likely to result from democratization than to cause it. Democratization comes as a result of structural changes at social, political and economic levels, not of cultural reasons. In her critique of the political culture approach, Liza Anderson underlines a number of analytical problems in what she calls "frequent resort to cultural explanations". Besides the normative bias of this sociological trend, there is the lack of survey research through which the impact of political culture on politics could be established. Anderson believes that, "most analysts who use political culture to explain the absence of democracy in the Arab world "either draw their data from general (and usually unsystematic) observations of political behavior, or extrapolate from other realms of belief and behavior – notably religion- to ascertain values and habits that might bear on politics."[177] Alternatively, Anderson prefers the use of "objective conditions" to analyze democratization in the Arab world. By objective conditions she

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[177] Anderson, Lisa. "Critique of the Political Culture Approach" in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble (eds.), *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World: Vol.1, Theoretical Perspectives*, (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), p. 79

means "the economic organizations and levels of development that seem to be most propitious for development of democratic government."[178]

The second major trend is composed of two contrasting positions both advocating the use of culture as an explanatory variable. The common ground bringing together theorists belonging to the first position is the theoretical framework of Orientalism with its key characteristic, as defined by Edward Said, "the absolute demarcation between East and West."[179] This is not to say, however, that all those who justify the absence of democracy in the Arab world in cultural terms are orientalists or agree on every detail of the argument. Different, inconsistent, and sometimes even contradictory arguments come from the same theorist, as is the case of Bernard Lewis who justifies the difference in his accounts on the relationship between Islam and democracy by the difference between two perspectives: "From a historical perspective, he says, it would seem that of all the non-Western civilizations in the world, Islam offers the best prospects for Western-style democracy."[180] According to Lewis, the history of Arab and Islamic civilization provides us with strong supporting evidence. He argues that "the Arabs united in a single society two formerly conflicting cultures- the millennial and diversified Mediterranean tradition of Greece, Rome, Israel and the ancient Near East, and the rich civilization of Iran (…). Of the cohabitation of many peoples, faiths, and cultures within the confines of the Islamic society a new civilization was born, diverse in its origins, and its creators (…).

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[178] Ibid. p. 78
[179] Said, Edward W. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Penguin Books, 1995), p. 39
[180] Lewis, Bernard. *Islam and Liberal Democracy* (Atlantic Monthly 271, No. 2 Feb. 1993), pp. 89-98

From this diversity of Islamic society arises a second feature, particularly striking to the European observer – its comparative tolerance."[181]

However, the political experience of Arabs and Muslims throughout their extended history appears to Lewis in contradiction with the above historical evidence. From a political perspective, he retracts, "Islam seems to offer the worst prospects for liberal democracy."[182] From the early days of Islam until the introduction of modern political institutions in the Islamic world, Lewis fails to find any "equivalent among the Muslim peoples of the Athenian boule, the Roman Senate, (…) or of any of the innumerable parliaments, councils, synods, diets, chambers, and assemblies of every kind that flourished all over Christendom."[183] In short, the two worlds (Islam and the West) developed two entirely distinct political systems. While in Islam there was "no principle of representation or any procedure for choosing representatives", in the West, on the contrary, "the conduct of elections and the definition and extension of the franchise" are central issues.[184]

Samuel Huntington is another strong supporter of cultural analysis. He clearly believes that "Islamic culture explains in large part the failure of democracy in much of the Muslim world."[185] In his essay *Will More Countries Become Democratic?* Samuel Huntington argues unequivocally that, "Islam has not been hospitable to democracy"

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[181] Lewis, Bernard. *The Arabs in History* (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 151-2
[182] Lewis, Bernard. *Islam and Liberal Democracy* (Atlantic Monthly 271, No. 2 Feb. 1993), p. 89
[183] Ibid. pp. 89-98
[184] Ibid. pp. 89-98
[185] Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon & Schuster, 1998), p. 29

because "in Islam, no distinction exists between religion and politics or between the spiritual and the secular, and political participation was historically an alien concept."[186] In *The Third Wave* though, his position appears more cautious. It is unclear he says, "whether Islamic democracy is a contradiction in term", especially since "egalitarianism and voluntarism are central themes in Islam."[187] On the one hand he holds that "Islamic concepts of politics differ from and contradict the premises of democratic politics."[188] On the other hand, he believes that "Islamic doctrine contains elements that may be both congenial and uncongenial to democracy."[189] With Elie Kedourie, we arrive to the extreme end of this view. He leaves no doubt that Islam and democracy are completely irreconcilable. "Arabs and Muslims more generally, he firmly argues, have nothing in their own political culture that is compatible with Western notions of democracy or, more accurately, constitutional and representative government." Replicating Huntington's above expression, he finds that "the idea of democracy is quite alien to the mind-set of Islam.[190]

Conversely, the second position rejects the idea of characterizing the political culture of the region as anti-democratic. They believe that Islam, which played and continues to play a critical role in shaping the political culture of Arab and Muslim societies, has many facets and tendencies. They refuse to present this rich and multifaceted experience

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[186] Huntington, Samuel P. *Will More Countries Become Democratic?* (Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 99, No. 2, Summer, 1984), p. 208
[187] Huntington, Samuel P. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), p. 307
[188] Ibid. p. 307
[189] Ibid. p. 307
[190] Kedourie, Elie. *Democracy and Arab Political Culture* (Frank Cass, 1994), pp. 1-5

in a one-dimensional depiction.[191] Among the founding principles used to demonstrate to pluralistic character of Islam is the saying of the Prophet: "difference of opinion within my community is a sign of God's mercy."[192] This saying (*hadith*) has been widely interpreted as a call for mutual recognition based on the original state of diversity of opinions, and that diversity is something to be welcomed, not to be suppressed. This attitude is typified in history by the emergence and acceptance by Sunni Muslims in particular, of four different schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, Hanbali*). The type of culture that allows for flexibility of understanding and institutionalizing various interpretations of law must be one which accepts diversity, respects difference of opinions, and celebrates mutual tolerance. John Esposito and James Piscatori hold that, "Muslim interpretations of democracy build on the well-established Quranic concept of *shura* (consultation). They refer to one school of thought to argue that "Islam is inherently democratic not only because of the principle of consultation, but also because of the concepts of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), and *ijma'* (consensus)."[193] Translating these concepts into political terms, Esposito and Piscatori put it this way: "Just as Islamic law is rescued from the charge of inflexibility by the right of jurists in certain circumstances to employ independent judgment and to secure agreement among themselves, Islamic political thought is rescued from the charge of autocracy by the need of rulers to consult widely and to govern on the basis of consensus."[194]

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[191] Halliday, Fred. *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (Tauris, 1995), p. 116
[192] Cited in Al-Qurtubi , *Al-Jami' Li Ah'kam Al-Qura'an* (part 4, p. 151)
[193] Esposito, John L. and Piscatori, James P. *Democratization and Islam* (Middle East Journal Vol. 45, No. 3, Summer, 1991), p. 434
[194] Ibid. p 434

On his part, Tim Niblock sees these values and concepts in practical terms. He considers that many of the different interpretations competing within the Islamic framework, "have no problem in accommodating liberal parliamentary institutions; some Islamic countries have succeeded in establishing democratic systems (e.g. Malaysia and Turkey); and some elements in Islam are specifically favorable to democratic values (e.g. the emphasis placed on extending full participation in the sacred community to all."[195] While adopting a broadly similar approach to culture and democratization, Michael Hudson supports the idea of bringing the concept of political culture back-in, but "carefully" as he insists.[196] Instead of focusing his analysis on Arab authoritarianism, following the tradition of economistic and institutional studies,[197] Hudson shifts his lens to what he calls new liberalism in Arab politics, which cannot be "adequately explained *without* invoking political culture."[198] In his effort to present an approach, which can seize the complexities of culture in the Arab and Islamic setting, and avoids at the same time the shortfalls of both "reductionist" and "empiricist" interpretations, he suggests a "more sophisticated, less biased formulations of political culture(s)"[199] that include values, beliefs, ideology, and legitimacy.

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[195] Niblock, Tim. *Democratization: A Theoretical and Practical Debate* (British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 25, No. 2, Nov, 1998), p. 223

[196] Hudson, Michael. "The Political Culture Approach to Arab Democratization: The Case for Bringing It Back-In, Carefully", in Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany and Paul Noble (eds.), *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World: Vol.1, Theoretical Perspectives* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), p. 62

[197] Political economy explanations of authoritarianism focus on the dependency of the developing "peripheral" societies (notably Arab societies) on the developed "center" (the West), while statism, stresses the primacy of state with its overdeveloped mechanisms of control and unnecessarily expanded bureaucracy.

[198] Ibid. p. 62

[199] Ibid. p. 62

Mark Tessler's comparative study on the impact of religious orientations on attitudes toward democracy is among a very few survey research on the topic. The findings of this comparative study conducted in four Arab countries: Egypt, Palestine, Morocco and Algeria, suggest that support for democracy is not necessarily lower among individuals with the strongest Islamic beliefs. On the contrary, "it provides support for those who challenge the thesis that Islam discourages the emergence of political attitudes conducive to democracy."[200]

The debate over culture and democracy in the Arab world generated a large amount of literature and contributed to the development of competing discourses on Arab democratization. However, most of those who employed the political culture factor, either in a positive way or to argue against it, have generally treated the subject with simplistic generalizations. The complex nature of culture in general and its political function and relationship to democracy in particular requires a close examination of a number of unsettled issues that the debate over culture and democracy in the Arab world did not seem to have addressed in-depth. Following are just few examples highlighting these issues.

While we are easily tempted to speak of "one" Arab culture, there is a need to understand the intricacies and complexities of such a diverse and composite notion. Different elements contributed to the formation of what we call Arab/Islamic culture in different countries and in different historical contexts. Patterns of peoples' attitudes toward

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[200] Tessler, Mark. "The Impact of Religious Orientations on Attitudes toward Democracy in Four Arab Countries", *Comparative Politics* (Vol. 34, No. 3, Apr, 2002), p. 348

political systems cannot be explained by simply categorizing their cultures as compatible vs. incompatible with democracy. As David Latin notes, people with strongly opposed views can share a culture, while people from different cultures can have similar views."[201]

Examples of the widespread simplistic generalizations about Arab political culture are to be found in the frequent resort to religion and tribalism. Neither Islam nor tribalism can fully explain the different attitudes of Arab and Muslim societies toward democracy. Blaming the democratic deficit on tribalism, David Pryce-Jones explains Arab political culture by what he calls the legacy of tribal society which survived down the centuries, and caused "the power-challenge dialectic to perpetuate absolute and despotic rule everywhere, preventing the evolution of those pluralist institution that alone allow people to participate in the processes of the state."[202] Considering tribalism as the sole source for absolutism in Arab politics is unquestionably a reductionist analysis. On the one hand, it might be surprising to the holders of this view that the most competitive elections in the Arab world took place in countries where the tribal system is still more influential than any other social or political structure. Examples include Yemen, Mauritania and Kuwait. On the other hand, not all Arab societies are tribal. In countries like Tunisia, where modernization and social engineering deeply affected the social structures, tribalism disappeared since the early days of independence; the political system however, is purely authoritarian. In the absence of the "many well entrenched interests and intermediate

[201] Laitin, David. "Political Culture and Political Preferences", *American Political Science Review* (82, 2 June 1988), p. 591
[202] Pryce-Jones, David. *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs* (Ivan R. Dee, 2002), p. 26

powers which imposed effective limits on the ability of the state to control its subjects"[203] as was the case in traditional Islamic societies, the modern Middle Eastern state has become more interventionist and more authoritarian.

Azmi Beshara highlights another dimension of tribalism. He disagrees with Price-Jones' analysis and suggests to look at the tribal traditions within their social and historical context, He believes that tribal system acts as a social restraint "preventing the society from plunging into a sort of violence similar to that of Europe immediately after the start of the modernization process, like Nazism, Fascism, and Stalinism."[204] Partly, this preventive power originates from what Khaldun Al-Naqib calls "organizing principle" that defines the general framework for membership to the group according to a particular organizational hierarchy.[205] Al-Naqib prefers to use the term "political tribalism" as an analytical concept rather than tribalism in its ethnographic sense. Political tribalism, he holds, characterizes better the dynamics of Arab politics. Modern structures such as political parties can be formed along tribal or sectarian lines like what happens in Lebanon. Similarly, tribal leadership can be officially recognized and given political representation, as is the case in Yemen where democratically elected politicians obtain their legitimacy primarily from the tribal order.[206] Interestingly, in Yemen the tribal system has been more active and more able to generate wider political participation than the party system in all three consecutive parliamentary elections (1993, 1997, 2003).

[203] Lewis, Bernard. *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (Phoenix, 1999), p. 100
[204] Beshara, Azmi. *Fil-Masa'lah Al-Arabiya: Muqaddima li-Bayan Dimoqrati* Arabi (on the Democratic Question: Prelude to an Arab Democratic Manifesto (Markaz Dirasat Al-Wihda Al-Arabiya, 2007), p. 95
[205] Al-Naqib, Khaldoun. *Sira'a al-Qabila wal-Dimoqratiya: 'Halat al-Kuwait* (The Conflict Between Tribe and Democracy) (Dar Al-Saqi, 1996), P.9
[206] Ibid. p. 20

More than half the seats of the 1997 parliament went to tribal leaders and their allies according to Samir Abdali.[207]

As for the religious factor, the situation is no less intricate. Islam has certainly been crucial in shaping the culture of all Muslim societies, but how to explain why a number of countries sharing the same religion moved to democracy while others have not? Islam has always been open to different readings and interpretations, and there is no single or official interpretation on many issues, nor even a consensus on who speaks for Islam, to borrow John Esposito's title. With no clear text in the Quran, and no central religious authority, observes Esposito, the legal opinions (*fatwas*) that experts (*muftis*) give "can differ substantially depending on how conservative or reform-minded and how politicized or apolitical they are as individuals."[208]

On the hand, this character of Islam poses a serious difficulty to the democratic ideal, as the influence of religion depends to a very considerable extent on how and by whom it is interpreted. But, on the other hand, it sits comfortably with democratic principles such as pluralism, diversity and the accommodation of different opinions. In this regard, Muslim participate in what Esposito calls "a fee market of religious thought", a perception that Azmi Beshra shares and puts in the current debate over Arab democratization.

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[207] See Abdali, Samir. *Thaqafat Al-Dimoqratiya fil-Hayat Al-Siyasiya li-Qabai'l Al-Yaman* (Democratic Culture in the Political Life of the Yemeni Tribes) (Markaz Dirasat Al-Wihda Al-Arabiya, 2007).
[208] Esposito, John L. and Mogahed, Dalia. *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (Gallup Press, 2007), p. 54

Beshara makes a significant distinction between Islamic and Arab Culture. He argues that "serious empirical investigation confirms that there is no Islamic exceptionalism with regard to democratization, but there is an Arab exceptionalism."[209] This distinction between Islam and Arabism answers in part why a number of non-Arab Muslim countries democratized or are in the process of democratization (Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia), while Arab countries still lag behind. According to Beshara's analysis, the Arab democratic exceptionalism can only be explained by what he calls "the Arab Question". Three elements constitute the "Arab Question" and mutually contribute to the impediment of democratic change: the rentier economic system, the weakness of democratic culture, and the tribal structure of society. None of these components is of particular significance, or is specific to the Arab world, if taken separately. It is their combination that gives the Arab political culture its specificity and explains the absence of democracy in the Arab world.[210] By placing the problématique of Arab democratization in its social, economic and cultural context, Beshara's analysis contributes significantly to our understanding of the real challenges facing democratic change in the Arab world. Nevertheless limiting these challenges to the internal factors and neglecting or ignoring the role of the international dimension, especially in an increasingly globalized world, is a serious shortfall. The following section of this chapter highlights the role of external powers in helping or hindering transition to democracy in the Arab world.

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[209] Beshara, *Fil-Masa'la Al-Arabiya*, p. 9
[210] Beshara analyses the three main components of what he calls the Arab question (the rentier economy, the political culture, and the tribal structure) in three consecutive chapters: 2,3,4 of "*Fil-Masa'la Al-Arabiya*"

4. Bringing the international factor back-in

"The spirit of democracy cannot be imposed from without. It has to come from within."

Mahatma Gandhi

On September 29, 1991 the democratically elected President of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was overthrown in a violent military coup that brought General Raoul Cédras to power. On October 2, the Organization of the American States (OAS) unanimously recommended that its member states "take action to bring about the diplomatic isolation of those who hold power illegally in Haiti" and impose economic sanctions through the suspension of their economic, financial and commercial ties with the new regime until "full restoration of the rule of law and of constitutional order and the immediate reinstatement of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the exercise of his legitimate authority" is achieved.[211] A week later, the United Nations General Assembly adopted, unanimously without vote, a resolution demanding the return of Aristide to office and full application of the Haitian constitution.[212] The military regime remained in power until September 1994 when the pressures of the international community increased and the Generals were forced to step down. The UN Security Council resolution 940 authorizing member states "to use all necessary means to facilitate the departure from Haiti of the military leadership" and "the prompt return of the legitimately elected President",[213] paved the way for the US forces to lead an invasion of Haiti under what was known as

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[211] See *Support to the Democratic Government of Haiti*, OEA/Ser.f/V.1/MRE/RES.1/91, (Oct 2, 1991).
[212] See UN Doc. A/46/L.8/Rev.1 (Oct 11, 1991)
[213] See UN Security Council 940 adopted on July 31, 1994.

"Operation Uphold Democracy"[214]. The reaction of the international community, represented here by the United Nations and the Organization of the American States, to the overthrow of the democratically elected Haitian President highlights the crucial role the external factor could play in supporting and maintaining democracy. In the Arab world however, the role of the external factor looks quite different. The following example shows how the reaction of the international community, to a similar coup d'état, failed one of the potential democratic transitions in the Arab world.

On January 11, 1992, not long after the Haitian coup, the Algerian army staged a similar coup d'état, overthrowing President Chadli Bendjedid and canceling the runoff elections, which was supposed to take place one month later. In the first round, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) had already secured more than 47% of the total vote, and seemed virtually certain to obtain an absolute majority in the second round. Ironically, instead of negotiating a peaceful and legitimate accession to power, the leadership of the winning party and thousands of their supporters found themselves locked up in jails and the country plunged into a ten-year period of brutality and violence.

Although there are no significant differences between the Haitian and the Algerian coups, as both violent acts came to depose a democratically elected government or subvert an ongoing democratic process, the international reaction was unmistakably different. Describing the Western positions regarding the Algerian coup, Peter Rodman remarks, "in the case of Algeria, they are in a state of total intellectual confusion about what

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[214] "Operation Uphold Democracy" came as an execution of the UN Security Council Resolution 940. It lasted from September 1994 to March 1995

democracy really means and how to ensure it."[215] This confusion is manifest in the speech of Assistant Secretary of State Edward Djerejian at Meridian House International on June 2, 1992 when he reaffirmed the United States unequivocal support for "those who seek to broaden political participation in the Middle East."[216] But, when political participation was likely to bring to power an Islamist party like in the case of Algeria, the tone changes and the policy on the ground moves to the opposite: "we do not support one person, one vote, one time."[217]

Reflecting back on the same policy, Secretary of State James Baker explains in a critical tone, "When I was at the Department [of State], we pursued a policy of excluding the radical fundamentalists in Algeria, even as we recognized that this was somewhat at odds with our support of democracy."[218] This was also at adds with the US policy on dealing with what he calls "Islamic fundamentalism". Saudi Arabia for instance, "is an Islamic fundamentalist state, but it is a friend of the United States and very important to the United States."[219]

Such a confusion is not confined to politicians or policy makers, it is also to be found in scholarly literature such as that of Laurence Whitehead who finds it difficult to establish with confidence "whether Algeria's thwarted process of democratization was that alone,

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[215] Rodman, Peter W. "Don't Destabilize Algiers", *Middle East Quarterly*, (Vol. 3, No. 4, Dec. 1996).
[216] Djerejian, Edward. *The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World*; Address at Meridian House International, June 2, 1992, in U.S. Department of State Dispatch, June 8, 1992.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Baker, James A. "Looking Back on the Middle East" *Middle East Quarterly,* (Vol. 1, No. 3, Sep. 1994).
[219] Ibid.

or also and equally an aborted process or Islamicization."[220] More explicitly, Samuel Huntington blames the West for easily assuming that democratically elected governments are generally cooperative and pro-Western. This assumption, he says, "need not hold true in non-Western societies where electoral competition can bring anti-Western nationalists and fundamentalists to power."[221] This explains in part why "the West was relieved when the Algerian military intervened in 1992 and cancelled the election which the fundamentalist FIS clearly was going to win."[222]

By drawing parallels between these two military coups and comparing the role of the external factors in supporting or impeding the democratic processes in Haiti and Algeria I do not mean to over-emphasize the international dimension of democracy. There is definitely a broad range of internal political factors without which no political change can be achieved, no matter how significant the external ones might be. The case of Algeria though, remains a good example typifying what many Arabs describe as Western hypocrisy, and discredits, to a large extent, the efforts of promoting democracy in the region.

Democracy promotion initiatives have been around in the Arab world for more than two decades. They generally take the form of aid programmes aiming to promote small-scale projects such as good governance, accountability, efficiency of legislatures, strengthening civil society organizations, and the rule of law. In addition to the above mentioned crisis

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[220] Whitehead, *Democratization*, p. 33
[221] Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 198
[222] Ibid. p. 198

of credibility, much of these initiatives are "quite technical, rather than political, in nature" as correctly remarked Nathan Brown and Amy Hawthorne.[223] They do not address the real issues as they are generally introduced and executed with prior governmental approval which strips them from any substantial role. Furthermore, instead of contextualizing democracy promotion programmes and strategies to meet the requirements of the region and address the specific needs of each country, most initiatives tend to implement ready-made templates that have been used in different contexts, notably in democratizing countries like in Eastern/Central Europe and Latin America. Such templates may have been useful in pushing forward democratization processes in those regions, but they certainly needed other supporting mechanisms to operate properly. Laurence Whitehead suggests three mechanisms to analyze the role and effect of the international factor: Contagion, control, and consent.[224] None of these mechanisms seem to work in the Arab setting. Although, as Larbi Sadiki remarks, contagion as a trend-setting process is not unknown to the Arab Middle East[225], it is hard to think of any contagion effect either from without or from within the region due to "the absence of indigenous democratic models.[226] Ironically, the consent factor works perfectly well as an explanatory variable in the Arab world, but in the opposite direction. Instead of contributing to the democratization of the region, the consent factor plays a crucial role in

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[223] Brown, Nathan J. and Hawthorne, Amy. "New Wine in Old Bottles? American Efforts to Promote Democracy in the Arab World". in Nathan J. Brown and Emad El-Din Shahin, *The Struggle Over Democracy in the Middle East. Regional Politics and External Policies* (Routledge, 2010), p. 19
[224] Whitehead, Laurence. "Three International Dimensions of Democratization" in Lawrence Whitehead (eds.), *The International Dimensions of Democratization* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 5-16
[225] Larbi Sadiki cites Nasser military revolution of 1952 and the subsequent coups of Algeria, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, and North Yemen that took the AME away from democratization. See his chapter on "The Greater Middle East Initiative" in *Rethinking Arab Democratization: Elections Without Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 157
[226] Ibid. p. 149

supporting and consolidating the current authoritarian systems. While in other contexts,

the international dimension contributed to generate domestic consent favorable to

democratic change, the policies of Western powers towards the Arab world prioritized

"cozy relationships with authoritarian regimes"[227] which can only generate the type of

consent that favors the maintenance of the non-democratic status-quo. This approach,

however has been subject to mounting criticism from both within and without policy

making circles, especially since after September 11, 2001. In 2003, Richard Haass, then

director of policy planning staff at the State Department, suggested a re-orientation of the

US policy towards the Muslim world in term of democracy promotion. Admitting that,

"at various times, the United States has avoided scrutinizing the internal workings of

countries in the interests of ensuring a steady flow of oil; containing Soviet, Iraqi, and

Iranian expansionism", Hass stresses that the US "failed to help foster gradual paths to

democratization in numerous important U.S. relationships—yielding to what might be

called a "democratic exception" in parts of the Muslim world." He then concludes,

"continuing to make this exception is not in U.S. interests."[228]

While the US administration is still searching for ways to make its democracy promotion

initiatives deliver, it seems that what Sadiki calls "declaratory policy", in his critique of

the Greater Middle East Initiative, is still the rule.

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[227] Brown and Amy, *"New Wine in Old Bottles"*, p. 20
[228] Haass, Richard N. *"Toward Greater Democracy in the Muslim World"*, *The Washington Quarterly*, (Vol. 26, No 3, Summer 2003), p. 142

Chapter 4:

Beyond the systemic approach

Al Jazeera reshapes the media - politics relationship

A free press can of course be good or bad, but, most certainly, without freedom it will never be anything but bad

Albert Camus

The study of political communication has been dominated by the systemic approach since the publication of "*Four Theories of the Press*" in 1956. In their comparative analysis of the relationship between politics and communication in various political settings Siebert, Peterson and Schramm came up with four distinct theories; each corresponding with a particular system of political organization. *Four Theories of the Press* set out the ground for a number of subsequent studies, adopting the same approach linking systemically between media and politics. Along these lines we find the works of Blumler and Gurevitch (1995), Jeffery Alexander (1981), Luhmann (1977, 2000), Hallin and Mancini (2004), some of which will be analysed in the course of first section of this chapter.

Theoretically, systemization is an act or process which reflects a tendency to explain differences and put things in order according to a predefined system or rationale. The basic assumption of the systemic approach is that there are always some forms of organizing political principles according to which all kinds of media operate and can be understood. In the last analysis, the differences between media systems can be reduced to two broad social and political systems: liberal and authoritarian.

This chapter outlines the main arguments of the systemic approach and explores other approaches to the relationship between media and politics, especially in the context of an increasingly globalised world and the pervasive presence of new information and communication technologies. These local and global developments resulted in significant transformations that affected both the media and the political systems and shifted the debate away from the traditional paradigm. The Al Jazeera phenomenon, as Mohamed Zayani puts it,[1] will be looked at from this new perspective and treated as a non-systemic media.

1. Defining and contextualizing the systemic approach

In an attempt to explain why the media takes different forms and serves different purposes in different countries, the authors of *Four Theories of the Press* developed an explanatory framework with a set of arguments to support their fundamental thesis that the media "always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates.[2] The traditional divide between the liberal West and the authoritarian East during the Cold War is clearly manifest in this founding work. This can be seen at the philosophical level, at the socio-political level, and at the media level.

Philosophically, the two systems line up almost completely contradictory throughout history. While the libertarian doctrine is grounded in centuries of enlightened political thought of the likes of Milton, Locke and Mill, the roots of the authoritarian tradition

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[1] Zayani, Mohamed. *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media* (Pluto Press, 2005).
[2] Siebert Fred, S, *Four Theories of the Press (University of Illinois Press, 1984)*, Introduction, p. 1

goes back as far as Plato and Machiavelli, to culminate in the nineteenth century with Marxist materialist determinism.[3]

Politically, the contrast between the two systems is more apparent. The libertarian political system's ultimate goal is to provide the individual with a milieu in which he can realize his own potentialities, or change it in case of failure. For, the government is simply the trustee to which the people delegate authority and from which they could withdraw it.[4] Authoritarianism on the other hand, is regarded as a system of absolute submission; the mass must submit to the dictatorship of the party, so the party must submit to the dictatorship of its central bureaucracy and leaders. In such a setting, no competing power structures or substantial ideological differences are allowed.[5]

Based on this philosophical and political divide, the media systems in both environments differ significantly. The media in the libertarian system is an essential source of information and guidance. It should be independent and free from state control or domination to function properly and check on government. In the authoritarian system, the media is used as instruments of social and political control. It is either owned by the state, or tightly controlled and censored by its various agencies to turn it into mere propaganda.

It is within this broad context (East/West divide) that the systemic approach has developed its analytical framework of the relationship between media politics. The following four comparative studies tried, in slightly different ways, to systemize this relationship.

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[3] Ibid., p. 6

[4] Siebert Fred, S. "The Authoritarian Theory of the Press" in *Four Theories of the Press (University of Illinois Press, 1984)*, p. 42

[5] Schramm, Wilbur. "The Soviet Communist Theory of the Press" in *Four Theories of the Press (University of Illinois Press, 1984),* p. 118

In *Four Theories of the Press*, Fred, S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm present us with four media systems; each of them corresponds with, and fits into a distinct political system. First, there is the authoritarian media system which has been omnipresent both historically and geographically. For almost two centuries after the spread of the printing press, the authoritarian system has been furnishing the basis for media conceptions and practices in many modern societies, even where governments theoretically embrace libertarian principles. As defined by Siebert, the authoritarian theory of the media "is a theory under which the press, as an institution, is controlled in its functions and operation by organized society through another institution, the governments."[6] Theories of authoritarian political systems within which this type of media operates started, according to Siebert, as early as Plato who advocates rigorous control of opinion and discussion. In the *Republic*, he states: "we shall send him away to another city", he who does not obey the rigid rules prescribed for the artist and philosopher and the poet.[7] Subsequent political philosophers who accepted and supported explicitly or implicitly, authoritarian principles include Machiavelli, Hobbes, Hegel, and even Rousseau and Carlyle.

The most obvious representation of authoritarianism in the form of political systems in modern Europe was undoubtedly Fascism and Nazism. Both systems exemplify the idea of the "corporate state" which was based on a theory of interventionism in both economic and cultural affairs. The supremacy of the state over the economic and social groups within the nation requires that the functions of these groups fit, directly or indirectly into the policies of the state as perceived and defined by the government in power. The result says Siebert "was a system for organizing society under which

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[6] Siebert, Fred, S. "The Authoritarian Theory of the Press" in *Four Theories of the Press (University of Illinois Press, 1984),* p. 10
[7] Plato, *The Republic*, (KayeDreams, 2009), p. 174

the mass media were assigned a specific role and were subjected to controls in order not to interfere with the achievements of ultimate ends through the state."[8] In authoritarian political systems, the state exerts complete monopoly over the status and function of various types of mass media. The operation and programming of radio and television rest with government agencies whose responsibility is to ensure that the government objectives and policies are implemented.

The second media system that stands almost in contrast with the authoritarian one is the libertarian system. Liberalism, as a philosophy and socio-political system is the intellectual and organizational framework within which the various institutions including that of mass media operate. According to the libertarian principles, the underlying purpose of the media is to help discover the truth and assist in the process of exposing social and political problems. To carry out its function properly, the media should present such problems along with a variety of evidences and opinions as the basis for informed decisions. The basic characteristic of the media in a libertarian system is therefore, to operate freely from the shackles of governmental controls or domination. Unlike in the authoritarian setting, the government and its officials in the libertarian system should not have the advantage of exclusive access to the public through the use of mass media. They should not, as well, interfere with the presentation of arguments from political parties or social groups, as governments often become a party involved in public disputes. Assuming that, out of a multiplicity of voices carried by various media outlets, certain information would be false and certain voices would be unwelcome. Nevertheless, the state has no right to censor or restrict what it deems unacceptable. The general public is the only body entrusted to

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[8] Siebert, Fred, S. "The Authoritarian Theory of the Press" in *Four Theories of the Press (University of Illinois Press, 1984),* p. 17

"digest the whole, to discard that not in the public interest and to accept that which served the needs of the individual and the society of which he is a part."[9] Such conception of the status and function of the media in the libertarian framework enables them to check on government and keep it from overstepping its bounds. Each institution acknowledges the limits of its own power and uses it within the designated areas.

The third media system is based on the social responsibility theory; it is a development and modification of the libertarian system. The basic principle characterizing the social responsibility theory is that freedom always carries with it concomitant obligations. The privileged position enjoyed by media operating in contemporary free societies requires them to be "responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication."[10] This responsibility should be recognized by media organizations and put to practice as their basis of operational policies. Generally, the social responsibility theory of the media adopts the libertarian principles but modifies them to avoid some of the criticism directed at the way these principles were implemented. For instance, it recognizes the role of the press in servicing the existing political and economic system, but rejects the idea that such a role would take precedence over other tasks such as maintaining and promoting democracy, or telling the truth and enlightening the public.

The fourth and final system in this approach is the Soviet communist mass communication theory. Similar to the relationship between the social responsibility and the libertarian systems, the Soviet theory is a development and modification of

[9] [9] Siebert, Fred, S. "The Authoritarian Theory of the Press" in *Four Theories of the Press (University of Illinois Press, 1984),* p. 51
[10] Peterson, Theodore. "The Social Responsibility Theory of the Press" in *Four Theories of the Press (University of Illinois Press, 1984),* p. 74

the authoritarian doctrine. It has grown out of the Marxist ideology and then developed on the ground under Lenin and Stalin. The combination of Marxist outlook of dialectic social change and materialistic determinism on the one hand, and the practical experience of Leninism and Stalinism on the other hand, produced a unique socio-political system perceived by the West as "one of the most complete dictatorships in modern history."[11]

Mass media under such a closely controlled system are used instrumentally. They are integrated in the functioning of the state machinery along with other instruments of state power and party influence. Their role is limited to preserving and sustaining unity within the state and the party. They have to follow clear and straightforward guidance from the political leadership and operate under strict control. As such, they are almost used as instruments of pure propaganda. This type of media and its relationship to the political system was not confined to the Soviet Union; it extended during the Cold War to most communist countries in Eastern Europe and elsewhere.

The systemic approach to the relationship between media and politics is also illustrated by Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini in their comparative study: *Comparing Media Systems*. Unlike Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, Hallin and Mancini propose a framework for three models of the relationship between media and political systems: The Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model, the North/Central European or democratic corporatist model, and the North Atlantic or liberal model. Each of these three models developed within a particular political context.

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[11] Schramm, Wilbur. "The Soviet Communist Theory of the Press" in *Four Theories of the Press (University of Illinois Press, 1984),* p. 114

The Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model is marked by a number of characteristics among which are: elite-oriented with relatively limited circulation; strong focus on internal political life vs. external pluralism; instrumentalization by the government, political groups, as well as industrialists with political interests; relatively weak professional journalistic practice; the state largely owns, regulates and funds this type of media which exists in large part in Southern European countries.[12]

The North/Central European or democratic corporatist model is characterized by an early development of press freedom along with wide circulation of newspapers including those owned and run by political parties. This model is known for its high journalistic professionalism and solid organizational structures. Both commercial media industries and politically oriented press coexisted in the democratic corporatist model.

Similar to the democratic corporatist model, the North Atlantic or liberal model has also developed early press freedom as well as mass circulation. But the commercially driven press dominated over the political oriented media. Although the liberal model enjoys a high degree of journalistic professionalism, it lacks the type of formal organization widely known in the democratic model. In the United States in particular, the role of state in owning and running media organizations is limited.

The main differences between these three models can be summarized as follows: "In the Liberal countries the media are closer to the world of business, and further from the world of politics. In the Polarized Pluralist system they are relatively strongly

[12] Hallin C. Daniel and Mancini, Paolo, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 73

integrated into the political world, while in Democratic Corporatist countries the media have held strong connections to both the political and economic worlds."[13]

The third framework for a systemic relationship between media and politics is proposed by Niklas Luhmann who draws on the functionalist approach to distinguish between three forms of social organization or differentiation. The first mode of social organization is segmentation in which society is divided into equal subsystems. Equality here refers to the principles of self-selective system-building. The second mode of social organization is stratification, in which society is divided into unequal subsystems. Equality here becomes a norm for internal communication and inequality becomes a norm for communication with the outside environment.[14] The last form of social organization is the functional differentiation, which is regarded as the latest outcome of social, economic and cultural evolution.[15] In such societies new forms of system autonomy is attained. Analysing the system of the mass media therefore is similar to analysing the economic system, the legal system or the political system. The relations between the media system and the political system is set in a way that media operates with "attention rules" while politics operates with "decision rules" in which The media develop communication themes, discuss them publicly and bring them to the attention of the political system which is responsible for making decisions. The media select their discussion topics and communication themes autonomously and function independently from the pressure of political institutions.[16]

2. Rethinking the systemic approach

[13] Hallin C. Daniel and Mancini, Paolo, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 76
[14] Luhmann, Niklas. *Differentiation of Society* (The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers Canadiens de Sociologie, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Winter, 1977), p. 33.
[15] Ibid., p. 35
[16] Luhmann, Niklas. *The Reality of the Mass Media* (Polity Press, 2007), p. 24

As an explanatory tool, the systemic approach remains largely valid, and provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between media and politics in many parts of the world. However, the transformations we have seen in both the media and politics spheres raise a number of concerns as of the universal applicability of systematization.

In general terms, systemization is a practice of superimposing predesigned theoretical frames and structures onto a more complex social reality. Attempts to compartmentalize human behaviour can sometimes obscure the reality and produce inaccurate results. Adopting such an outlook, especially to explain changing phenomena like media or politics or more importantly, their mutual relationship, may lead us into the dangers of conditioning our interpretation and hinder our efforts to arrive at authentic and genuine reconstruction of facts and processes.

The second issue facing the systemic approach when applied to media and politics is its capability to explain and account for social and political change. If the media are systematically and sometimes organically linked to the political system within which they operate, it would be hard to conceive of real or potential change they might foster. Authoritarian media form an integral part of their corresponding political system, which they strive to maintain and uphold. Similarly, the libertarian media function along the lines of liberalism and endeavour to preserve its principles and socio-political setting. Attempts by the media to challenge the existing system from within are usually aimed at maximizing its functionality and enhancing its performance.

The third and most significant challenge facing the systemic approach is globalization and its processes that deeply affected both politics and the media and reshaped the

relationship between them. It is true that the impact of globalization has been different in different areas and varied from one country to another, but no single country seems to have escaped this sweeping phenomenon. The question is no longer whether the globalization effect is real, but to what extent it has changed the course of domestic and international politics. Without going into details about the different interpretations of globalization and the various arguments regarding the nature and scope of its consequences, it may be useful at this point to just think how political authority and mechanisms of governance are being articulated and rearticulated.[17] The idea of national security remains essential in defining the modern statehood, but other key components of the state, such as the traditional concept of sovereignty, have undergone profound changes. Sovereignty, defined by Krasner as "an institutional arrangement associated with a particular bundle of characteristics – recognition, territory, exclusive authority and effective internal and trans-border regulation or control"[18], has been affected in many respects and the ability of states to regulate and exercise effective control over the flow of people, goods, capital and information is clearly reduced. It is an on-going process where the different components of state sovereignty as described above by Krasner are increasingly being relocated onto supranational, nongovernmental, or private institutions. Associated with this process is the strengthening of alternative actors in international relations and politics.[19]

One aspect of this increasingly globalized world is the blurring of boundaries between domestic matters and global affairs in a way that "the impact of distant events is

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[17] In *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton distinguish between three broad schools of thought in the debate about globalization: the hyper-globalizers, the skeptics, and the transformationalists. (Polity Press, 2000), p. 2-10

[18] Krasner, Stephen D. *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 226

[19] Sassen, Saskia. *Globalization and its Discontents* (The New Press, 1998), p. 92

magnified while even the most local developments may come to have enormous global consequences."[20] In this context, connections across frontiers are no longer random or occasional; they have become an integral part of an intensifying process of global interaction which transcends in many ways the conventional geographical state borders. In such an environment, the status, function and role of the media, like those of other social and political institutions, have to be seen in different light. The traditional framework that links the media in a systemic way to the political system may not grasp the significance of these global changes, especially when combined with the unprecedented surge of information and communication technologies. This is not to say, however, that the relations between media and politics have completely changed and that the nation-state is no longer capable of controlling communications policy. Admittedly, state control of the media has in many ways weakened, but national governments still exercise some forms of authority, including licensing the right to broadcast within their territory, defining the frameworks of media law that regulates content, and subsidizing the media organizations which they deem worthy of governmental support. But, on the ground, the sweeping effects of media globalization outweigh these practices.

Historically, it could be argued that the first trends of media globalization occurred in the first half of the twentieth century, with the rise of American film industry and the global expansion of American music through records and radio. But, the subsequent period, as James Curran notes, witnessed a dramatic shift back towards the restabilization of national media systems after television's defeat of cinema. Most popular television, radio and press media in Western European countries originate

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[20] Held, David. Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt, and Jonathan Perraton *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Polity Press, 2000), p. 15

most of their content and are owned by national rather than global organizations.[21]

But, for a number of reasons, the role played by public service television has been reduced significantly. Elihu Katz's following statement summarizes some of the key reasons: "The governments of Europe – once proud of their public broadcasting systems – are bowing to the combined constraints of the new media technology, the new liberal mood, the economic and political burden of public broadcasting, and the seductions of multinational corporations."[22]

These developments plunged the public service media into a deep crisis causing them to suffer a major drawback at various levels, "from a loss of legitimacy, underfunding, declining audiences, and a less clear sense of purpose."[23] Contrary to this declining trend, there was the rising trend of commercial and community media which, through satellite broadcasting and the use of other new information and communication technologies, witnessed an unparalleled growth, mostly at the expense of national broadcasters. Not only has the shrinking of the presence and influence of public service media affected their own status and function, but has also altered the way they relate to the political system within which they operate. State control, whether direct or indirect becomes obsolete and irrelevant if audiences are increasingly migrating to new media such as transnational satellite television and the internet. As John Street observes, the emergence of transnational conglomerates, empires built upon the exploitation of new technology, appears to create power bases which exist above the realm of any one nation state.[24]

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[21] Curran, James. *Media and Power* (Routledge, 2002), p. 194
[22] Katz, Elihu. "And Deliver Us from Segmentation", in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 546 (1996) p. 22
[23] Curran, James. *Media and Power* (Routledge, 2002), p. 191
[24] Street, John. *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy* (Palgrave, 2001), p. 115

The marginalization of state power and the weakening of its control over the media resulted in the emergence of new forms of political communities, whose presence and activities are no more confined within the traditional boundaries of nation states. With the help of new and transnational media, "imagined communities", to borrow Benedict Anderson's term, mushroomed across the world. Different communities created along different lines: political, religious, linguistic, sectarian, etc. All these formations use the media in a way that undermines and sometimes contradicts the principles upon which conventional national identity has been built. If the novel and the newspaper, as Anderson suggests, once "provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation"[25], satellite television and the internet today provide the technical means and platform for creating supranational and sub-national imagined communities.

This way, the role of the media, or at least some of them, has fundamentally changed, and the logic behind the systemic approach to the relationship between politics and the media no longer holds together. The rise of new political communities like the virtual *Ummah* (nation) with its global membership, its common and unifying issues and its transnational media networks presents the systemic approach with a range of challenges which it has never faced before. The virtual *Ummah* as Olivier Roy observes, "no longer has anything to do with a territorial entity. It has to be thought of in abstract or imaginary terms."[26] Roy's argument is supported by the realities of new media and the unprecedented level of access to these media, particularly satellite television and the Internet. While satellite television is by nature trans-territorial, the internet, as Philip Seib notes, may be considered as "supra-territorial because national

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[25] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 2000), p. 25
[26] Roy, Olivier. *Globalized Islam: The search for a New Ummah* (Columbia University Press), p. 19

boundaries within and among states are not merely inconsequential, they need not, in the cyber-world, be acknowledged at all."[27] In this emerging new media environment it has become hard to uphold the old explanations of how the media relate to politics. Regulating media operations and controlling its content is now beyond the capabilities of single nation states. These are challenges which regional groupings and international bodies are struggling to face up, not only at the legal and organizational level, but also at the conceptual level. Among the media organizations that are hard to understand within the traditional approach of the relationship between media systems and political systems is Al Jazeera. The following section tries to highlight the characteristics of this organisation and explain how this new media paradigm cannot fit into the framework provided by the systemic approach.

3. Beyond the systemic approach: Al Jazeera, a non-systemic phenomenon

If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, (…) If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.

(John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, (52:16).

Since the launch of Al Jazeera in November 1996, questions about its relationship to the political system within which it operates has never come to an end. Mostly, these questions reflect a perplexity concerning the establishment and running of an independent and free media in a political setting that has never been regarded as free

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[27] Seib, Philip. *The Al Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media are Reshaping Global Politics* (Potomac Books, 2008), p. 80

or liberal. Some have gone as far as to cast doubts over Qatar's ownership of the channel, suggesting that it was "created by the American administration to contain the hostility of people in the Middle East against American hegemony and to legitimize the setting of American troops in the Gulf."[28] We had to wait until February 2004 to see the American answer to this sort of questions when the Bush administration launched its government-funded *Al-Hurra* (the free one) to "cut through the barriers of hateful propaganda" by Arabic television stations, according to President George W. Bush in his 2004 State of the Union address.[29]

Qatar, where Al Jazeera is based, is part of an Arab world, which by all standards hosts the most conservative and authoritarian regimes of our era. While the world is massively embracing democratic principles and moving towards more open and pluralist political systems, the Arab regimes do not seem to be going anywhere. It has become typical to ask with Daniel Brumberg: Where does the Arab world stand vis-à-vis such a global trend of democratization? "Clearly outside it", comes his straightforward and unambiguous answer.[30] Whether living under so-called progressive republican regimes or conservative family systems, Arab societies at large suffer what Salwa Ismail called "non-representativeness" and "non-accountability" authoritarian style of rule, and repressive practices are key characteristics of Arab governments that indicate their undemocratic nature.[31]

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[28] El Oifi, Mohammed. "Influence without Power: Al Jazeera and the Arab Public Sphere in *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media* edited by Mohamed Zayani (Pluto Press, 2005), p. 86
[29] Cochrane, Paul. "Is Al-Hurra Doomed?", worldpress.org, June 11. 2004, http://www.worldpress.org/Mideast/1872.cfm
[30] Brumberg, Daniel. "Authoritarian Legacies and Reform Strategies in the Arab World" in *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World* eds. Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany & Paul Noble (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), p. 229
[31] Ismail, Salwa. "Democracy in Contemporary Arab Intellectual Discourse" in *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World* eds. Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany & Paul Noble (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), p. 98

Besides, Qatar also belongs to the Gulf region, known for its high levels of economic resources which, to some scholars, represent an additional obstacle to democracy and liberalism. As major oil producers, the Gulf countries developed what has come to be known as the "rentier" economy. It is a political economic model where "state decision-makers are much less constrained by the interests of domestic actors"[32] because state revenues are almost completely dependent on the international market. Under this sort of regimes, political values such as freedom and liberties are not given a position of supremacy in society. The absence of institutions supporting and representing these values is a scarcity, if they exited at all. Elections and power sharing modalities are uncommon practices due to the availability of substantial financial resources that support the coercive apparatus of the rentier state. Such availability also sustains large government programmes of social welfare and "fuels powerful neo-patrimonial networks based on family, tribe, and proximity to the ruling elite."[33]

From a systemic perspective, this setting is only suitable for authoritarian media systems as we have seen in the first section of this chapter. Admittedly, if we consider the Arab media scene where censorship and restrictive policies are largely the norm in almost every single country, the systemic approach still applies. But if we look at the case of Al Jazeera and a number of other emerging media outlets in the region, the need of an alternative theoretical perspective becomes unavoidable.

The starting point of this alternative perspective is to shift the focus from the nature and character of political system to the geopolitics engulfing the system itself. This

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[32] Brynen, Rex, Korany, Bahgat. and Noble, Paul. "Theoretical Perspectives on Arab Liberalization and Democratization" in *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World* eds. Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany & Paul Noble (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), p. 15
[33] Ibid., p. 15

shift requires first and foremost considering the domestic, regional and international context of the politics of country where the media organization in question is based. Without contextualizing that, it would be difficult to understand the so called "ambiguous" relationship between the Qatari political system and Al Jazeera, as it developed on the ground rather than through a superimposed predesigned theoretical lens.

On the domestic level, the year 1995 brought to power in Qatar a new ruling Emir known for his liberal ideas. Among the first decisions aimed at restructuring the government was the abolition of the Ministry of Information. These measures towards liberating the media from the tutelage of the government and promoting non-censored media in the region were taken a few months before the launch of Al Jazeera. The launch of an all-news satellite television in those circumstances did not go unquestioned. While ordinary Arabs and intellectuals received Al Jazeera as "a gift" since it provided them with access to uncensored news broadcast in Arabic, by Arabs, and for Arabs[34], the governments in most Arab countries reacted with visible hostility towards the network as well as the government of Qatar. This brings us to the second element of this analysis, the regional context.

To understand inter-Arab relations, scholars employed a number of analytical tools most of which present Arab states lining up in two opposed camps. Malcolm H. Kerr summarized a decade of inter-Arab relations in his book: *The Arab Cold War* where he analysed the conflicting ideologies and political orientations of Nasser and his rivals during the sixties of the twentieth century. The two camps have also been portrayed in terms of oil-rich vs. oil-poor countries, progressive vs. conservative

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[34] El Oifi, "Influence without Power, p. 68

regimes, core states vs. marginal states etc. Qatar's regional politics could well fit in the last analytical framework.

Considering its size, whether in geography or in demography, Qatar is by all means a tiny state. Bordering the much larger Saudi Arabia to the south and surrounded by the turbulent Persian/Arabian Gulf from the west, the north and the east, this oil and gas-rich peninsula of 11,437 sq. km and a population of less than 1.5 million, has gone through a number of regional disputes in its short history since independence in 1971. Border disputes involved both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, but what is more significant for such a small and powerless state in terms of geopolitics is its proximity to another emerging, but extremely controversial regional power, which is Iran. This explains in part, why Qatar has resorted to the power of United States whose Central Command has been stationed near Doha for more than a decade. Whether the consolidation of the American military presence in the region is seen by neighbouring countries as a stabilizing or destabilizing factor, this remains unclear.

Al Jazeera emerged in this problematic and uncertain geopolitical context, and understating its mission, vision and role has to take these considerations into account.

Adding to its media scene another state-run and controlled television would have not benefitted Qatar in any way. Its national broadcaster, Qatar TV, like in any other Arab country, plays the role that any public service television would play in embellishing the official discourse/propaganda and channelling it through to its domestic audiences. To be able to transcend this type of media and play an effective regional and global role, Al Jazeera has to be treated in a completely different way. Like everywhere else in the world, the success of media organizations is largely due to the margin of freedom they enjoy. Obviously, freedom is not the only condition for

success, as many other factors are also required among which is the financial support. But, without free operation in news gathering, processing and dissemination hardly any success could be achieved.

Understandably, the Qatari officials were well aware of this reality when they ventured to launch a 24 hour news operation from the heart of a long standing authoritarian political setting. The editorial autonomy of the media narrative and its relative independence vis-à-vis what is considered the official truth, as El Oifi correctly observes, are enhanced by the pre-eminence of the non-official reading of news against which the truthfulness of the official version of news is measured. The first noticeable success Al Jazeera has achieved in this regard, since its early days, was that "Arab governments lost the power to impose on their subjects a particular reading of events or explanations concerning internal matters and foreign policies."[35] This significant development regarding the demise of the official truth resulted from an explicit targeted strategy that Al Jazeera followed from day one, which is addressing directly the Arab people and stirring them up against their own governments. In doing so, the nascent channel started forming its own constituency across the Arab world, providing it with unfettered news broadcast and engaging its members in a continuous open and live debate over issues considered by national service television as taboos. Arab intellectuals too, see that Al Jazeera along with other emerging satellite television stations "have done probably for the Arab world more than any organized critical movement could have done, in opening up the public space, in giving Arab citizens a newly found opportunity to assert themselves."[36] Similar remarks came from Fahmy Howeidy who wrote in 2006, "Before the

[35] Ibid., p. 66-67
[36] Sa'ad Eddin Ibrahim (2004), quoted by Marc Lynch in *Voices of the new Arab Public: Iraq, Al Jazeera, and Middle East Politics today* (Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 29

emergence of Al Jazeera, I only watched entertainment programmes or football matches on Arab TV channels (...) I researched important events or ideas through chasing news bulletins, reports and discussion programmes broadcast on Western television channels, particularly British and American ones. I never thought that I would find 'food' of that nature on any Arab channel."[37]

Such resounding success did not seem to be expected even from the Qatari officials when they decided to launch Al Jazeera. In his address on the occasion of the channel's 10th anniversary, Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al-Thani, chairman of the board acknowledged that, "at the beginning, no one expected Al Jazeera to go as far as this, and achieve this level of success which exceeded our own expectations."[38] That was probably the reason why Qatar resisted the enormous pressures that came from the Arab states as well as some Western powers to shut down the station. This explains in part, how success could sometimes become a defining element in making or consolidating political decisions.

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[37] Howeidy Fahmy. "Setting the News Agenda in the Arab World" in *The Al Jazeera Decade: 1996-2006*" (Al Waraqoon, 2007), p. 129
[38] Address by Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al-Thani, chairman of the board of Al Jazeera on November 1st, 2006.

Chapter 5:

The Arab public sphere in the context of the current debate

The privation of privacy lies in the absence of others; as far as they are concerned, private man does not appear, and therefore it is as though he did not exist. Whatever he does remains without significance and consequence to others, and what matters to him is without interest to other people.

Hannah Arendt

The new Arab media landscape and its changing relationship with politics have been the subject of an increasing academic interest, especially with regard to the political implications on the ground. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the newly reshaped media-politics relationship offered unprecedented opportunities for Arab societies to democratize. One of the key elements in the process of Arab democratization is the emergence of a lively and performing public sphere. This chapter lays the theoretical ground for the possibility to speak of a genuine Arab public sphere in practical terms.

In his *'Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?'* Emmanuel Kant observes that "the public use of one's reason must always be free and that, only can bring about enlightening among men."[1]An enlightened nation is a nation whose citizens can reason publicly and freely to deliver it "from personal despotism and tyrannical oppression. "The link, which Kant establishes between the existence of a public space

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[1] Kant, Emmanuel. "Answer to the Question: What is 'Enlightenment'?" (1784) in *The Age of Enlightenment: An Anthropology of Eighteen-Century texts.* Simon Eliot and Beverly Stern (eds.), Vol. 2, (The Open University, 1979), pp. 249-255

where people come together and discuss matters of general interest, and the rise of a participatory democratic polity, is seen as the starting point in the course of formulating the concept of the public sphere and its political function."[2] Although Kant tends to limit the sphere of public deliberation to the educated elite (the men of letters)[3], his text continues to inform students of democratization theory and provide the concept of public sphere with an historical and philosophical context.

If the concept of the public sphere originated with Kant, it was Yürgen Habermas who brought it to prominence and placed it at the heart of the debate on democratization and participatory politics. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*[4], first published in 1962, Habermas offers the fullest articulation of the concept of the public sphere and traces its historical genesis. Although history shows us that, in many instances, human society developed a wide range of categories of publicness, the eighteenth-century bourgeois public sphere remains unique in many respects, and any attempt of abstraction, generalization or transferability has to be thought of very carefully. For, it is strongly tied to and profoundly grounded in the developmental history of that particular civil society originating in parts of Europe in the high middle ages.[5]

The enlightenment category of public sphere is different from that of Athens some five centuries BC, and is by no means identical to the contemporary forms of

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[2] Dacheux, Eric. "L'Espace Public: Un Concept Clef de la Democracy" in *L'Espace Public* (Les Essentiels d'Hermes, CNRS Editions, Paris 2008) p. 9

[3] Kant's understanding of the public use of one's reason is that "which everyone *as a man of letters* makes of it in the eyes of the whole reading world." (Answer to the Question: What is 'Enlightenment'?", p. 251

[4] Habermas, Yürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (MIT Press, 1989).

[5] In his preface to the first edition of *Structural Transformation* Habermas states that his first aim was to derive the ideal type of the bourgeois public sphere from the historical context of British, French and German developments in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

publicness, which manifest themselves differently in different societies. Ancient Greek made a clear separation between the private and the public realms. While the *agora*, served as an open forum for citizens to gather and discuss publicly and freely issues of general interest, the *oikos* was the private sphere where the master of the household had to deal with issues of necessity. As it developed throughout history, many aspects of the public sphere have undergone structural transformations. Among the core characteristics that remained unchanged though is the separation between the private and the public realms.

1. The bourgeois public sphere: social structures and political functions

The separation between the private and the public realms and the rise of the bourgeois public sphere developed as an integral part the sociopolitical and economic transformations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Following is an attempt to show how these transformations took place in four distinct but overlapping areas: economic, political, social and institutional.

Economically, the expansion of the capitalist system went hand in hand with the rise of print media and had a profound impact on the social and political structures. Long distance trade as noted by Habermas meant that traffic in news was almost required as immediately as traffic in commodities. For, merchants needed to know prices, demand and exact information about distant events in the emerging markets. The great trade cities and economic centers became at same time centers for the traffic in news.[6] Print media that carried this news supplied along with it other sorts of information that helped create a widespread literacy and contributed to "publicize" information. During the mercantilism era, the growing trade relations between those economic

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[6] Habermas, *Structural Transformation,* p.16

centers linked them up and transformed them into national territories. To administer these territories, the modern state grew up and developed its own bureaucratic institutions as agents of permanent administration, thus creating a new sphere of "public" authority.

At the political level, the rise of the modern state allowed for the emergence of a public domain categorically different from that of the middle ages, when the notion of publicness itself was an attribute of the ruler as a person. The King represented the state and the state existed only to reflect his unlimited and unquestionable authority. Publicness in its modern sense existed only once the state apparatus developed into an autonomous and impersonal entity and distinguished itself from the personalized characteristic of political authority. Alongside this emerging public authority rose a genuine domain of private autonomy that "came into existence as the corollary of a depersonalized state authority."[7] It was in the context of this modern political environment that became possible for a private sphere of society to take on public relevance by selecting sets of issues, discussing them and bringing them forward to the public authority as issues of public interest. Gradually, this process produced a political environment in which the new public sphere of private individuals played the role of a counterbalance vis-à-vis the state and stood opposed to its public authority. The public sphere in this sense originated primarily in the private realm including the family and is constituted of autonomous individuals whose prime goal is to keep this sphere free from the dominance of the state.

At the social level, it was the Aristocracy of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century who played a leading role in the formation of the bourgeois public sphere.

[7]Ibid. p19.

What made Habermas call it bourgeois is not however, the class composition of its members, but because the society itself was bourgeois. Joining in the public debates in coffee houses and *solons* were "noble as well as bourgeois, sons of princes and counts associated with sons of watchmakers and shopkeepers."[8] The bourgeois was then able to transcend the barriers of social hierarchy and meet with members belonging to different social classes. The only common ground that united them was "their common quality as human beings and nothing more than human beings", says Habermas. As autonomous private people who "come together as a public", the members of the bourgeois public sphere unite to engage in rational discussion through the public use of their critical judgment. In such a context of "social intercourse" that disregarded status altogether, it is the best rational argument and not the identity of the speaker that is the sole arbiter of any issue. The rational critical discourse produced through these debates focused primarily on "the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor."[9] In addition, the debate addressed a range of other issues which until then had not been questioned. Among those areas of common concern was the complete monopoly that church and absolutist state authorities had over interpretation" not only from the pulpit, but in philosophy, literature and art."[10] Liberating these areas from the shackles of political and religious authorities and their imposed interpretations led to an early formation of what Habermas calls "public opinion".

Intrinsic to this enlightened public opinion was the power of the rationality born of the better argument that strove to discover what was at once just and right. A power that

[8] Ibid. p. 33
[9] Ibid. p. 27
[10] Ibid. p. 36

enabled the rising public opinion to play an increasing role in defining the framework for morality and setting up the legal system for the social sphere, at the expense of the two traditionally dominating institutions (church and state). Here, Habermas joins Locke and Montesquieu who respectively, tied the promulgated public law to "a common consent" and "*la raison humaine*". According to Habermas, public opinion, equipped with the political consciousness that developed in the public sphere, "articulated the concept of and demand for general and abstract laws"[11] and ultimately became the only legitimate source of these laws.

At the institutional level, the literary public sphere in England, France and Germany, contributed to the political public sphere through the development of organizational bases such as parliaments, clubs, literary salons, public assemblies, pubs and coffee houses, meeting halls, and other public spaces where socio-political discussion took place. Debates were communicated to the wider public through journals, newspapers and other kinds of webs of social relationships. By the first decade of the eighteenth century, London alone had some 3000 coffee houses "each with a core group of regulars"[12] Open access to the coffee houses made social integration easier and facilitated the interaction between the nobility and the bourgeois as well as the wider strata of the middle class including craftsmen and shopkeepers. In France, the *salons*[13] played a crucial role in this process of social intercourse by bringing together "intellectuals" with the aristocracy who, for different reasons, was excluded from leadership in state and church altogether. In Germany, the learned *Tischgesellschaften* (table societies) were less active than the coffee houses and the *salons*, but played a

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[11]Ibid. p. 54
[12] Ibid, p. 32
[13] Contrary to the London men-only coffee houses, where women were excluded and accordingly, struggled against this emerging institution, the French *salons* were essentially shaped by women (fashionable ladies).

similar role as institutions of the bourgeois public sphere. They recruited their members from "the private people engaged in productive work from the dignitaries of the principalities' capitals, with a strong preponderance of middle-class academics.[14] By giving equal access to private members from different social classes, the main purpose of the German public sphere was to bring about a form of communicative equality and association among persons of unequal social status.

The economic origins, the social structures, the political functions and the institutional bases are the key components of Habermas's concept of the bourgeois public sphere. Coupled with the communicative dimension, this concept gained more public relevance and played a major role in expanding political participation among the members of the bourgeois society.

Although Habermas's philosophical thought took a number of significant twists and turns since the publication of *Structural Transformation*, the concept of the public sphere and its importance in fostering genuine participatory politics remains a central theme in his later woks, especially *Between Facts and Norms* where he further developed the idea of deliberative democracy.

2. The public sphere: the rise and decline of democratic politics

Habermas's focus on democratization goes hand in hand with his emphasis on political participation as the core of a democratic society. One of the key functions of the bourgeois public sphere is to facilitate rational debate over issues of general concern and secure maximum public participation. This in turn sustains the process of democratization and promotes the values and practices of democratic politics. The

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[14] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 34

principles of the public sphere as articulated by Habermas in *Structural Transformation* presuppose freedom of speech and assembly, a free press, and the right to openly engage in public debate leading to political participation and informed decision-making. Discursive argumentation through the public use of reason was thus employed to determine general interests and pursue the establishment of democratic politics.

With the transition from market capitalism and liberal democracy in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to the advanced state capitalism and the rise of the welfare state liberalism in the twentieth century, the public sphere began to degenerate and went through structural transformation from an open space of rational discussion and consensus to a realm of mass cultural consumption and manipulation by powerful corporations and dominant elites. This socioeconomic and political process led to a gradual fusion between the economic and political spheres on the one hand and the public and private spheres on the other hand, which consequently resulted in the formation of a mass culture industry and the emergence of an administered society. In Habermas's term, this process of "re-feudalization" of the public sphere started taking place in the late nineteenth century as private (vs. public) interests assumed direct political functions, and giant corporations came to control the media and state at once. As the bourgeois public sphere declined, so did democracy and political participation. Citizens became passive consumers, dedicating themselves more to private interests than to issues of common concern. Public opinion in turn, shifted from being the product of critical rational debate to a one based on polls designed by media experts and advertising agencies, and tailored for the most part to suit particular private interests. In the course of this transformation, "publicity loses its critical function in

favor of a staged display; even arguments are transmuted into symbols to which again one cannot respond by arguing but only by identifying with them."[15]

The decline of the eighteenth century liberal democracy in Europe and the transformation of the bourgeois public sphere that facilitated its emergence were caused to some extent by the changing function of the media. As noted by Habermas, the role of the media has changed from mediating rational debate to shaping the public discourse and defining its themes according to a predesigned agenda validated and approved by influential media corporations.

To revitalize the public sphere that collapsed under the social-welfare state and re-democratize the political life, Habermas suggests to "set in motion a *critical* process of public communication through the very organizations that mediatize it."[16] This process is required to counter-balance the growing state monopoly over the public sphere and redress the waning status of civil society and its institutions. Habermas's suggestion that "a critical publicity brought to life within intra-organizational public spheres" might revive democracy and drive the process of democratization does not seem to be sufficient to some of his critics. As Douglas Kellner observes, "he did not provide concrete examples, propose any strategies, or sketch out the features of an oppositional or post-bourgeois public sphere.[17]. This is true if we keep our understanding of the Habermasian public sphere within the framework of *Structural Transformation*. However, if we consider his later writings we find that Habermas provides new philosophical grounds for critical theory as well as democratization theory.

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[15] Ibid, p. 206
[16] Ibid, p. 232
[17] Kellner, Douglas. "Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention" in Lewis Edwin Hahn (eds.), *Perspectives on Habermas* (Open Court Publishing Company, 2000) p. 266

Before analyzing the new conception of the public sphere as articulated in his post *Structural Transformation* writings, I shall point to the main arguments of Habermas's critics regarding his account of the emergence and disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

3. Habermas's conception of the public sphere: a critical assessment

Habermas's conception of the public sphere has been subjected to intense and continuing critical debate that led to major revisions on both sides; Habermas and his critics. Not only has this debate pushed the boundaries of discussion beyond the theoretical framework set by Habermas, but also stimulated a whole corpus of related studies and paved the way for more research agendas to develop and enrich our understanding of this intricate concept. Critics from various backgrounds and different academic fields raised a number of theoretical as well as practical issues surrounding Habermas's account and suggested alternative approaches to the analysis of the public sphere and its relationship to democratization theory. The following section outlines the main arguments characterizing this debate, with particular emphasis on the ones that are more relevant to my research topic: 1. The need for a more pluralistic and open approach to conceptualizing the public sphere; 2. the role of social movements in developing alternative public discourses and spheres; 3. the role of the media in facilitating the emergence of the public sphere.

1. The first among these critical arguments concerns Habermas's failure to distinguish clearly enough between the ideal-type and the actuality of the liberal bourgeois public sphere. His idealization of the liberal type of the bourgeois public sphere made him fail to examine other non-liberal and non-bourgeois public spheres. Or, to borrow Nancy Frazer's term, it is precisely because he fails to examine these other public

spheres that he ends up idealizing the liberal public sphere.[18] The importance of this critical argument of Habermas's conceptualization of the ideal type public sphere lies in fact that it breaks with the idea that only one single public sphere existed. The bourgeois public sphere derived from the historical context specific to certain European bourgeois societies was but one model among many others. The historical experience, as states Alan McKee, shows that "there have been distinct public spheres organized around different political beliefs and geographical locations; and public spheres for other identity groups (such as Black, Spanish, and Jewish people) have existed in Western countries at least since the nineteenth century."[19] Elizabeth Breese insists on using the term ''public spheres'' rather than ''the public sphere'' to reflect the multiplicity of publics and to reflect the range of institutions, groups, and media that form public spheres of discourse, action, representation, and criticism.[20] Hanna Arendt on her part, and in contrast to Habermas's conception, believes that the historic public sphere was characterized by the plurality, rather than unity, of participants and their convictions and an emphasis on action over discourse. In Arendt's terms, the public sphere emerges whenever 'men act together in concert' and wherever 'freedom could appear'. In this respect, small sites of common action coordinated through discussion and persuasion can become public spaces as they become sites of power. In very simple terms "a field or a forest can also become public space if it is the object and location of an action in concert, of a demonstration to stop the construction of a highway or a military air base."[21]

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[18] Frazer, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" in Craig Calhoun (eds.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992) p. 115
[19] McKee, Alan. *The Public Sphere: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) p. 142
[20] Breese, Elizabeth B. "Mapping the Variety of Public Spheres" in *Communication Theory,* Vol. 21 (2011) pp. 130–149
[21] Benhabib, Seyla. "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas" in Calhoun (eds.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992) p. 78

Several attempts to apply the concept of the public sphere onto non-European contexts proved to be problematic and raised serious issues as to the universality and generalizability of this ideal-type model. In the American experience for instance, the rational-critical character of the public sphere explains very little the nature and quality of political participation. Analyzing segments of the social and political history of American society in the nineteenth and twentieth century, Michael Schudson argues that the extent and quality of political participation cannot be explained by the Habermasian model of the public sphere. Politics, he observes, "was more a communal ritual than an act of individual or group involvement in rational-critical discussion."[22] If we consider that the more people participate in political affairs, the closer they are to the ideal of a public sphere then mid-nineteenth century America would best qualify for that criterion. For, the voting rates and turnout were higher than the following history of American politics. The question that Schudson rightly puts is whether those high turnout figures meant that political participation was carried out through rational and critical discourse as entails the concept of the public sphere. Schudson contends that, despite what looks as wide-ranging political involvement and participation, mid-nineteenth century American politics was more characterized by "political confessionalism" than by individual or group interest in discussing general affairs. People tended to live in what he calls "island communities" surrounded by other like-minded persons and were driven to participate in politics by the ideological content of political parties rather than publicly held rational-critical discussions.

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[22] Schudson, Michael. "Was There Ever a Public Sphere? If So, When? Reflections on the American Case" in Calhoun (eds.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992) p. 159

As the debate over this issue increasingly tends to emphasize the notion of multiple and in some cases, overlapping or competing public spheres, it might be useful to shed some light on other types of public spheres. The most cited example by critics is probably the plebeian sphere which developed alongside and in opposition to the bourgeois public sphere. This sphere, remarks Nicholas Garnham, was "build upon different institutional forms, e.g., trade unions, and with different values, e.g., solidarity rather than competitive individualism."[23]

Besides the plebeian public sphere, it is argued that Habermas failed to pay enough attention to the gendered nature of the public sphere. His obvious neglect for the women's public sphere has also attracted a large amount of criticism. Feminist studies addressed this issue extensively emphasizing the historic fact that women were excluded from the bourgeois public sphere and constrained to the realm of the private. As Nancy Fraser notes, women of all classes and ethnicities were denied access to the official liberal male-only public sphere. Consequently, they were excluded from all sorts of political participation on the basis of gender status. To use Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, 'exclusion' existed even among the male constituents of the public sphere since the capability of rational-critical debate is a kind of linguistic capital' not equally available to all participants in a discursive field. Speakers without the legitimate competence, explains Bourdieu, "are *de facto* excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required."[24]

While exclusion of many social categories from the bourgeois public domain was the norm in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the situation in late-

[23] Garnham, Nicholas. "The Media and the Public Sphere" in Calhoun (eds.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992) p. 359
[24] Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power* (Polity Press, 2008) p. 55

twentieth century America followed a completely different course of action. U.S feminist subaltern counter-public, stresses Frazer, was known for its "variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs, conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places."[25] Benefitting from this wealth of institutional networks and active communication environment, the feminist public sphere produced its own oppositional feminist discourse through which women managed to recast their needs and identities, and therefore reduced the extent of their exclusion and disadvantage in the official public sphere.

Mary Ryan sketches a counter-narrative to Habermas's depiction of the decline of the eighteenth century public sphere. She argues that, approximately at the same time and place where Habermas started tracing the degeneration of the bourgeois public sphere and the waning of its political function, women showed substantial ascension into politics. This manifest ascension into the political life brought with it undeniable changes to the structure of the public sphere. The new women's movement, remarks Ryan, "injected considerable feminist substance into public discourse, articulating concerns once buried in the privacy of one sex as vital matters of public interest."[26]

The term "counter-public" is also used by Rita Felski also who provides us with a more complex picture of a marginal public sphere in her discussion of the feminist public sphere. She characterizes the counter-public spheres as "coalitions of overlapping sub-communities, which share common interest in combating gender oppression but which are differentiated not only by class and race positions but often

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[25] Frazer, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" in Calhoun (eds.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992) p. 123
[26] Ryan, Mary P. "Gender and Public access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth -Century America" in Calhoun (eds.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992) p. 263

by institutional locations."[27] Like Fraser, Felski describes the feminist public sphere in relation to the dominant, patriarchal public sphere, but her definition extends far beyond the notion of multiple public spheres to address the issue of the internal diversity within a particular public sphere.

The feminist scholarship on the public sphere developed its own critical literature trying to break away from the Habermasian legacy. It is argued that the feminist analyses have too often had the parochial quality which characterizes most public sphere theory. Most feminist theorists depart from the Habermasian framework without being able to independently investigate the characteristics of the feminist public sphere. To this end, Lisa McLaughlin remarks that "the feminist public sphere theory remained too focused on categorical distinctions embedded in Western modernism and on forms of discursive interactions that prevail within Western societies."[28]

Addressing the women's role in Arab democratization, Larbi Sadiki challenges the Western narrative and lays the ground for a counter-discourse to the dominating orientalist depiction of Arab and Muslim women. Contrary to the orientalist account, Sadiki shows that Arab women are powerful agents of change, increasingly involved in intellectual, social, and political life. Through interviews with a range of Arab women, he finds that "women in many parts of the Arab world are engaged in debating and deconstructing democracy, a system they recognize as important for

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[27] Felski, Rita. *Beyond feminist aesthetics: Feminist literature and social change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). P 171
[28] McLaughlin, Lisa "Feminism and the Political Economy of Transnational Public Space" in Nick Crossly and John M. Roberts (eds.), *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p.161

their own struggles for gender equality as well as for the overall struggle against authoritarian rule."[29]

2. The second line of criticism of Habermas's account concerns his neglect of social movements and their role in constructing public discourse and influencing democratic politics. As Craig Calhoun points out, social movements are crucial to reorienting the agenda of public discourse, bringing new issues to the fore. The absence of social movements from Habermas's account reflects his "inattention to agency, to the struggles by which the both public sphere and its participants are actively made and remade", explains Calhoun[30] The relevance of social movements in the current debate over the public sphere lies not only in the fact that they contain the ideal possibility of constructing a relatively autonomous space for public discourse, but in their ability to respond to questions about legitimacy and accountability of governments, and it turn, raise them, as Gemma Edwards points correctly.[31] In their ongoing struggle over lifestyle, identity and needs, social movements contribute to defining the agenda of public debate and generate a genuine public sphere.

The importance of incorporating social movements in the theory of public sphere and democratization stems from the new realities of social and political organization in modern societies. The real power capable of stimulating social change has shifted from the old labor movement and political parties to the new social movements of youth, students, women, environment groups etc. For, the old labor movements and traditional political parties ceased to be the source for change because they have become integrated into the existing political system and its extended bureaucracy.

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[29] Sadiki, Larbi. The *Search for Arab Democracy* (Columbia University Press, 2004) p. 307
[30] Calhoun, Craig. *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992) p. 37
[31] Gemma, Edwards. "Habermas and Social Movements: What's 'New'?" in Crossly and Roberts (eds.), *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004) p. 113

To ease relations among different social groups and movements, and facilitate cross-border communication between competing public spheres, the media plays an instrumental role in speaking to different publics at the same time. Reaching out to men and women formally and informally educated, young and elderly, white and black citizens, the mass media are able to piece together what appears to some as fragmented publics.

3. The impact of the media on social relations, modes of thought and the formation of public opinion had been significant since its early stages of print media. The liberal bourgeois public sphere in particular always had close links to the printing business which flourished in capitalist Europe in the eighteenth century. In addition to literature and artworks, the printed press circulating in coffee shops, literary salons and among educated persons publicized the triumphs of experimental sciences achieved in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In advertising the successive accomplishments of science, the press created what David Zaret called "public forums" in which the scientific experimental findings were produced, discussed and validated. "The printed revolution, he observes, created the experimental laboratory of a public sphere."[32]

Before broadcasting, distinct public spheres were spatially separated arenas. Barriers separated the white male liberal bourgeois public sphere from those of working-class, women or people of color spaces. "If you wanted to listen to women's after-dinner conversations, you would have to go into the room with them."[33] It was difficult to cross between public cultures. Broadcast media blurred the boundaries between

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[32] Zaret, David. "Religion, Science, and Printing in the Public Spheres in Seventeenth-Century England in Calhoun (eds.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992) p. 228
[33] McKee, Alan. *The Public Sphere: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) p. 143

different social groups and public cultures since they are circulated for widely domestic consumption. Mass media, especially satellite television, transformed the way these social groups and sub-systems interact with one another. Nowadays, no matter which social group you belong to, or which public culture you personally feel comfortable with, you do not have to change location or physically move from geographic area to another. From the comfort of your sitting room you can flip through, select and watch on your TV screen, programs aimed at women "only", drama shows produced by and directed to Black or working-class audiences, or talk shows in which only highly-educated persons can take part and lead public "critical-rational" debate.

4. After *The Structural Transformation*, Habermas re-conceptualizes the public sphere

Responding to his critics, Habermas wrote an article under the title "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere" where he made significant changes to his original thesis in *Structural Transformation*. In this article, he justifies the revisions he made by the changes that occurred in "the extra-scientific context that shapes the horizon of experience from which social-scientific research drives its perspective."[34] Consequently, he refers to his original text as "exhibiting a number of weaknesses."

Regarding the criticism directed at his "unjustified" idealization and generalization of an ideal-type public sphere from the historical context of a limited number of European societies (British, French and German), Habermas admits that "it is wrong to speak of

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[34] Habermas, Yurgen. "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere" in Calhoun (eds.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, 1992) p. 422

one single public sphere."[35] On the contrary, history shows that there was a co-existence of multiple and competing public spheres with various processes of communication that are excluded from the dominant bourgeois public sphere. The "plebeian" public sphere is just an example of those which Habermas neglected from his analysis or did not consider at all.

The major shift in Habermas's approach to critical theory in general and the public sphere in particular is to be found in his later writings. In an attempt to overcome the theoretical impasses that Frankfurt School and its rational critical tradition seemed to have become trapped in, Habermas extends the boundaries of his intellectual enterprise beyond the socio-historical analysis. He turns to the domain of language and communication to renew critical theory and re-establish it on stronger analytical foundations. It is through the rational employment of linguistic and communicative arguments that the above mentioned *critical* process could be "set in motion" and social critique and political democratization become possible.

Habermas's 'linguistic turn' as it has become known, is more relevant to the current debate over the public sphere than his earlier formulation. It brings into the debate new elements and keeps the process of democratization open-ended rather than limited and conditioned by a particular type of society. The decline of democracy caused by the degeneration of the bourgeois public sphere cannot be historically separated from the decline of the eighteenth and nineteenth century bourgeois society within which it rose. Instead of grounding the process of democratization in the historical reality of that particular society, Habermas looked for alternative mechanisms to unlock the potential of social critique and keep the prospects for democratic change open. Language and

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[35] Ibid, p. 425

communication appear to be to right vehicles to re-launch this process and regain the critical power of free speech and discussion.

In *Between Facts and Norms* Habermas's argues that the communicative aspect of language enables it to become the prime medium capable of criticizing domination systems at the social, political and cultural levels. The language "communicative action" resides in the unparalleled capacity of people to understand the speech of one another, to submit to the power of rationally articulated arguments, and to finally reach mutual agreements and consensuses among various communicators. To characterize this process of collective opinion and will-formation, Habermas developed the concept of "deliberative democracy."

This concept of 'deliberative democracy' is based on his critique of the state-centric understanding of politics and what he considers as an unrealistic assumption of citizenry as a collective actor capable of collective action. Alternatively, he calls for a decentered society in which individual citizens function as dependent variable in power structures and processes. This conception requires the existence of a dynamic 'higher-level inter-subjectivity' of processes leading to a common understanding which is best achieved through the communicative network of public spheres. The success of deliberative politics thus depends not on citizenry acting collectively, but rather on the institutionalization of the procedures of communicative structures as well as on "the interplay of institutionalized deliberative processes with informally developed public opinions."[36] The image of the above-mentioned decentered society go together with the notion of procedural popular sovereignty and the type of political system that works

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[36] Habermas, Yürgen. *Between Facts and Norms* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996) p. 298

closely with the peripheral networks of political public sphere.

Inherent in the communicative function of language, this collective rationality could generate norms and procedures to criticize different forms of societal domination and uncover various strategies of manipulation and distortions. Gradually, this critical communicative action translates into practices of rational discursive opinion-and will-formation and consequently drives the process of institutionalization of democratic politics. The regular flow of communication between public opinion-formation on the one hand and the institutionalized procedures of elections and legislative decisions on the other hand guarantees that "influence and communicative power are transformed through legislation to administrative power."[37]

Once established and institutionalized, administrative power turns into a network of interconnected systems maintaining and consolidating existing modes of social and political life. This networked systemic reality which inherently tends to maximize power and control, contradicts what Habermas calls human "lifeworld" of which language and communication are a central feature. Against this background of conflicting 'system' and 'lifeworld' which undermines the critical power of traditional social and political structures, language and communication remain the only powerful tools resisting systemic social control. There is no need for specific types of language or specialized communicative structure as "ordinary language is the medium of communicative action through which the lifeworld reproduces itself."[38] In fact, what enables ordinary language to occupy such a central position and play such a key role in the communicative action

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[37] Ibid, p. 299
[38] Ibid, p. 354

theory is precisely its multifunctional character and lack of specialization. It is through the 'shared code' of ordinary language as is called in Habermas's terms that the different components of the lifeworld interpenetrate and maintain functional relations to its totality and its core private public spheres.

In his post *Structural Transformation* works, Habermas conceives of the public sphere as a 'communication structure' grounded in the lifeword through civil society and its associational networks. Based on its communicative character, the public sphere serves as a bridge between the lifeworld in which it is rooted, and the political system, the arena in which problems are processed and solved. In this way, the public sphere has two functions: the 'signal' function and the 'problematisation' function. With regard to its 'signal' function, it works as a warning system with sensors throughout the entire society. In its capacity of problematisation, the public sphere not only detects and identifies problems, but also and more importantly, "convincingly and influentially thematise them, furnish them with possible solutions, and dramatize them in such a way that they are taken up and dealt with by parliamentary complexes."[39]

Communication is what entrenches the public sphere into the lifeword on the one hand and channels its pressure and influence on the political system on the other hand. It is in itself a network for communicating information and points of view. Communicative structures and institutions process the streams of information, filter them and synthesize them in order to make them available for decision-making instances in the form of bundles of thematically ordered 'public opinions'. Like the lifeword, the public sphere is also reproduced through communicative action of which natural language is a central

[39] Ibid, p. 359

feature.

To better characterize this linguistically constituted public sphere, Habermas developed what he called an "ideal speech situation" in which persons acting communicatively encounter each other in concrete locales where an audience is physically gathered. But, with the help of communication structures and mass media, the informational content articulated in these physically constructed locales is generalized beyond the thick contexts of direct interaction of specific persons. The more these specific communicators detach themselves from the constraints of physical presence and extend their communicative action to the virtual space of "scattered readers, listeners or viewers linked by public media, the clearer becomes the abstraction that enters when the spatial structure of simple interactions is expanded into public sphere."[40]

This instrumental role of language and communication in producing and reproducing the public sphere and represents a remarkable shift from the perspective of *Structural Transformation* where Habermas defined an entire set of procedures and institutions that could transform all realms of social and political life. The universal and transcendental character of language makes the rise of public sphere, at least theoretically, free from the shackles of specific socio-historical conditions. The rise and decline of a particular type of society in a particular historic period does not necessary entail the rise and fall of the public sphere, which is more a product of the communicative action of language than of social or economic factors. In this context, mass media and related communication technologies become the real platform for the public sphere to operate and democratize the established political system.

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[40] Ibid, p. 361

Together with Habermas's revisions, the three major critical issues highlighted above, lay the ground for further theoretical debate on the public sphere. The following section explores the conditions of possibility of the rise of an Arab public sphere. What is the socio-historical context of such a concept? To what extent has new media and Al Jazeera in particular, played a role in its emergence? And how is it contributing to the advancement of Arab democratization process? These are the key questions that I will address in the remaining part of this chapter.

5. Al Jazeera, new media and the rise of Arab public sphere

My earlier discussion of Habermas and his critics provides a number of theoretical bases for a possible examination of the public sphere in a different context from that of Western societies. The concept 'Arab public sphere' is relatively new to the Arab political discourse, however it has gained prominence in the last few years with the changing landscape of the Arab media. This explains in part, why most scholars who wrote about the Arab public sphere link its emergence to the information and communication revolution and its impact on the Arab world since the early 1990s.

In one way or another, attempts to apply the concept of the public sphere to the Arab social and political setting have not yet departed from the classical Habermasian theoretical framework in which, the media are indispensable independent fourth-estate players in democratic societies. The historic experience of Arab and Muslim societies provides us with remarkable analytical elements for a better understanding of what might be called an indigenous Arab public sphere.

To use Habermas's terminology, pre-Islamic Arabia knew what could be called a literary public sphere, attended by leading poets and public speakers from across the Arabian Peninsula and surrounding areas. Situated between Tae'f and Mecca, the *'Ukaz* marketplace (*Souq 'Ukaz*), represented the hub for economic and social activities. Public announcements regarding inter-tribal treaties, legal arrangements new tribal chiefs, war alliances etc., were made there. The term *'Ukaz* itself originated from the root verb "*'akaza*", which means arguing and debating.[41] That's why *'Ukaz* was best known throughout Arab history for its literary function than its economic or social activities. Mastering language was the key element that gives competing poets and public speakers access to the *'Ukaz* stage regardless of their tribal belonging or social status. The best poems and speeches were displayed on the market wall to maximize circulation and publicity. Given the reign of tribal system in pre-Islam Arabia, it is difficult to talk about political function of this "literary public sphere". The Habermasian positioning of the public sphere vis-à-vis the state and its public authority is not applicable to this case.

During the early Islamic era, *'Ukaz* marketplace maintained its literary and communicative function as an Arab forum for public debate, but with more religious-oriented content. Prophet Muhammad attended the place for ten consecutive years to communicate his message to tribal leaders and their followers. A few years later, *'Ukaz* started to disintegrate and gradually lost its strategic importance as the main trade routes moved north towards Baghdad, Basra and Damascus. The major political development that affected the status of *'Ukaz* and caused its influence to fade down, was the rise of the

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[41] Explaining why this particular marketplace was given the name of *'Ukaz*, the leading Arab linguist Al-Khalil Ibn Ahmad says: "Arabs were used to gathering in this marketplace every year so they compete in presenting the best argumentation and articulation of pride." The same explanation is found in "*Lisan al-Arab*" of Ibn Manzour.

Islamic state, a new political phenomenon in Arabia that had domestic, regional and international impact.

Public debate has taken various forms throughout the Arab-Islamic history and culture. The continuous perfection of these debates culminated in the emergence of specific art of discussion and rational argumentation during the Abbasid era called "*al-Munazarah*" (intellectual disputation). It is a well-defined form of public debate between two persons or parties of different and mostly opposed views. The two sides are required to follow certain sets of strict rules and procedures leading to what could be termed as "ideal speech situation". This type of public debates spread almost all over the Arab-Islamic world and covered various fields of knowledge i.e. Language, logic, philosophy, theology, jurisprudence etc.

Following are the common rules contestants or participants in *al-Munazarah* should adhere to[42]:

- Clearly identify the discussion topic.

- Concentrate on the debate and refrain from turning to those who want to divert the contestants' attention

- When you construct your arguments, consider seeking the truth as your ultimate goal.

- Do not use claims as evidences

- Do not give yourself the right to interpret scripts according to your school of thought (*madhhab*) without giving the other contestant the same right.

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[42] For a complete list of rules see *Mu'hadharaat al-U'dabaa' wa Mu'hawaraat as-Shu'araa' wal-Bulaghaa'* of al-Raghib al-Asfahani; see also *Fann al-Jadal* of Ibn A'qeel; *Ihyaa' 'Uloum ad-Din* of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali; and *al-Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldoun.

- Listen carefully to your counterpart and do not interrupt him.

- Do not deny truth if found in any part of your adversary's presentation

- Do not respond to your adversary until you make sure you have understood his
  point perfectly; if you need him to repeat what he has said, do not hesitate to ask
  him to do so.

Being the medieval Arab-Islamic forum for public debate, *al-munazarah* is seen by
Larbi Saki as symbolizing "Muslim enlightenment", since it provides an open platform
for "logicians, grammarians, philosophers, theologians, jurists and "lovers of wisdom" to
debate one another on all sorts of controversies and disputed matters."[43] Other aspects of
these forum for public discussion are highlighted by Muhammad Ayish who, stressing
the importance of these debates in the Arab-Islamic historical experiences, notes that
"debates need to be based on reasoning, adherence to Islamic beliefs, and the
safeguarding of individual's decency and reputation as well as protecting community
interests on the basis of established facts rather than rumors or unverifiable
statements."[44]

Along the same lines, Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson believe that public dialogue
has long held a special place in the Muslim world. They take as an example the religious
domain where "a religious public sphere of learned scholars, schools of jurisprudence,
and their supporters was often autonomous from the official sphere of rulers in the early
Islamic centuries."[45] They remind us of the precedent of inquisition (*mi'hna*) towards the
mid-ninth century in which leading scholars ('ulama) refused to submit to the orders of

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[43] Sadiki, Larbi. The *Search for Arab Democracy* (Columbia University Press, 2004) p. 379
[44] Ayish, Muhammad. *The New Arab Public Sphere* (Frank & Timme, 2008) p. 50
[45] Eickelman, Dale and Anderson, Jon. *New Media in the Muslim World: the Emerging Public Sphere*
(Indiana University Press, 2003) p. 2

four successive Caliphs to issue a religious ruling (*fatwa*) decreeing that Muslims had to believe that the Quran was created. Had the scholars agreed to issue the *fatwa*, they would have ruled against the strongly supported popular belief that the Quran always existed. The *mi'hna* lasted for fifteen years and ended with the caliphs abandoning their demand. This result was to "strengthen the role of the men of learning (*'ulama*) in the public sphere from the third Islamic century through the modern era."[46]

In more recent times, especially since the end of the colonial rule and the emergence of independent Arab states, public debate took significantly new shapes and new structures of autonomous public communication appeared in different parts of the Arab world under different names. In Kuwait, ordinary people alongside prominent personalities gather in the *diwaniyah* to discuss political issues and matters of general interest. *Diwaniyah* gatherings are commonly attended by politicians like Ministers, members of parliament and other social notables and public figures, who often transfer these discussions to the political system.[47] There are signs of further expansion of the *diwaniyah*'s social and political function as a platform for public deliberation as "Kuwaiti women are initiating their own diwaniyat (plural of diwaiyah).[48] In other Gulf countries i.e. Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the *majlis* (council) plays quite a similar role, but council debates revolve more around religious and intellectual issues than political affairs. In Yemen, the *qat*-chewing meetings are more spread and some of them are attended by women only. As Lisa Wedeen describes, *qat* chew gatherings occur daily in public or semi-public places, in which *qat* is chewed in the context of structured and

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[46] Ibid., p. 2
[47] See *al-Diwaniyah al-Kuwaytiyah: dawruha al-Ijtima'i wal-Siyasi* (Kuwaiti Diwaniyah: its Social and Political Role) by Kandari, Yaqub Yusuf (al-Kandari, Kuwait, 2002)
[48] Sadiki, Larbi. *Rethinking Arab Democratization: Elections Without Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 46

lengthy conversations. In these gatherings "as many as several dozen people, some of whom are strangers to one another, meet to debate literary matters, political life, and social problems."[49]. In some parts of Sudan, especially in Darfur, similar meetings of public discussions take place in what is called *rakuba*. The "literary salons", another version of these gatherings emerged in a number of other countries albeit with a more elitist tendency. In Egypt as well as in Syria, these salons usually take the name of their host or initiator like the famous salon of Abbas Mahmoud al-'Aqqad.[50] Female literary salons flourished in both countries and were an important aspect of public life during the first half of the twentieth century. Among the earliest and most influential salons in Egypt was that of the Lebanese poet and writer May Zyadeh, which lasted for twenty successive years (1911-1931) and hosted top intellectuals and political figures such as Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayyid, Mostafa Lotfi al-Manfalouti, Taha Hussein, and Abbas Mahmoud al-'Aqqad. Other female salons include those of Nazli Fadil, Huda Sha'arawi, and Zeinab Fawaz. In Syria, the salons of Meryana Mrash and Mary Ajami played a leading role in connecting the Syrian elites and structuring the public debate along common literary, social and political issues, independently from the ruling authorities.[51]

The structural transformation of Arab media landscape since the advent of satellite television in the 1990s changed the way public discourse is channeled and created new modes of deliberation. In Anderson's terms, with Al Jazeera talk shows, there has been a

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[49] Wedeen, Lisa. *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (University of Chicago Press, 2008) p. 104
[50] Anis Mansour documented parts of the debates that took place in al-'Aqqad's salon in his book "*In al-'Aqqad's Salon, We had Days*" (Dar al-Shuruq, Cairo, 1983).
[51] Larbi Sadiki's forthcoming book on "Salon Democracy" provides a comparative analysis of the indigenous ways for learning democracy, as opposed to democratization, in the Arab World.

"migration of debate-and-discussion formats from salons to the air."[52]

In addition to satellite television, the rapidly expanding usage of communication technologies among Arabs of different contributed significantly to the emergence of what Marc Lynch calls "new Arab public". At the center of these developments stands Al Jazeera as leader and trend setter. The next chapter discusses in practical terms, how Al Jazeera is contributing to the advancement of the process of Arab democratization through the creation of a lively and politically engaged new Arab public sphere.

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[52] Anderson, Jon W. *Technology, Media, and the Next Generation in the Middle East*, paper delivered at a the Middle East Institute, Columbia University, Sept. 28, 1999.
(http://www.mafhoum.com/press3/104T45.htm)

Chapter 6:

Al Jazeera: Democratizing through the public sphere

The conviction that news influences human action undergirds nearly all studies of news. Just how or to what extent news affects us, however, is a matter of controversy and uncertainty

Michael Schudson

This chapter builds on the earlier theoretical discussions aiming to give an empirical dimension to the new Arab public sphere. As has been shown, the role of the media in restructuring public discourse and publicizing debates beyond their traditional enclaves is evident, the practical manifestation of this role is what this chapter is trying to demonstrate. My analysis of Al Jazeera's contribution to the reshaping of the new Arab public is supported by data gathered through interviews with selected staff members of Al Jazeera. First, I will be looking at the reasons why Al Jazeera in particular, was able to play such a crucial role. Second, I will identify the key characteristics of the new Arab public sphere. Third, I will explore the political implications of this emerging public sphere with special emphasis on its democratizing effects.

Al Jazeera was not the first Arab satellite TV to broadcast live news and programmes to an Arab public eager to break away from the boring world of government run and controlled TV stations. The Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) was the first entrant to the Arab satellite realms, to borrow Naomi Sakr's expression, broadcasting

news, films, drama and music.[1] With the arrival of Arab Radio and Television (ART) in 1993 and Orbit in 1994, these satellites TV channels competed to win the hearts and minds of Arab viewers and managed to create niche markets in which an Arab public started to build up around entertainment-oriented contents away from government contours. While these channels established the technical means for the emergence of a potential Arab public sphere simply by enabling people from across the Arab world to communicate directly and immediately through the same space, it is hard to speak of a genuine public sphere. For, as Mark Lynch notes it takes an orientation to public argument to make a public sphere. According to Lynch, "only when Al Jazeera refocused the satellites away from entertainment and toward politics – more precisely, toward political argument about Arab issues defined by an Arab identity – did it become a public sphere."[2] But, how has Al Jazeera contributed to the making of this public sphere? Next is an assessment of Al Jazeera's role in the emergence of the new Arab public sphere followed by an analysis of its main characteristics and its political implications.

1. Al Jazeera's role in the emergence of the Arab public sphere

The emergence of the new Arab public sphere is certainly not limited to satellite television, let alone to Al Jazeera per se. Communication technology has undeniably played an increasingly crucial role in helping quite a number of Arab media outlets develop into public forums for relatively free discussion of issues of general concern. However, the role of Al Jazeera remains unparalleled for a number of reasons:

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[1] Sakr, Naomi. *Satellite Realms: Transnational Television, Globalization & the Middle East* (I. B. Tauris, 2001) p. 18

[2] Lynch, Marc. Voices *of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 33

First: "The channel of choice": Al Jazeera, the Arab media "phenomenon" as some prefer to call it[3], has become the default channel for the majority of Arab viewers across the Arab world with a considerable reach and power. This Arab media phenomenon is now the channel of choice, says J. A., a former member of Al Jazeera's editorial committee:

> If we say we have acquired only one stream of the Arab public or a certain class, we are not doing justice to Al Jazeera, which became the channel of choice for all sections of society. you'll find educated, you find the professionals, normal people, housewives, students, and so on among the followers of Al Jazeera, they all find something to satisfy their needs.[4]

Fahmy Howeidy, deputy chief-editor and columnist of *Al-Ahram* newspaper, expressed in his own way, how Al Jazeera satisfied the needs of Arab citizens: "Before the emergence of Al Jazeera, I only watched entertainment programmes or football matches on Arab TV channels, only stopping at the latter during times of relaxation, laziness or boredom. I researched important events and ideas through chasing news bulletins, reports and discussion programmes broadcast on Western television channels, particularly British and American ones. I never thought I would find "food" of that nature on any Arab channel."[5]

In 2007-2008, the Knowledge World Center for Polls in Jordan conducted an opinion poll in 19 Arab countries covering 1225 (almost 50%) of university teachers of media

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[3] Mohamed Zayani edited a book titled *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media* (Pluto Press, 2005).
[4] Researcher's interview with Jamil Azar, April 2011.
[5] Howeidy, Fahmi. "Setting the News Agenda in the Arab World" in *The Al Jazeera Decade: 1996-2006* (Al Waraqoon, 2007) p. 139

and political science. The study found that 98.4% of the respondents consider Al Jazeera as their preferred channel, watching it at a daily average of 3.2 hours. It also showed that they watch a variety of more than 20 programs aired by the channel. The viewership rate of Al Jazeera is three times higher than the rates given to the news channel that came second with less than 18% of viewers' share.[6] In 2009, Nielsen Company conducted an opinion poll and found that 140 millions of Arabs (nearly 50% of the total population of Arab countries) consider Al Jazeera as their go-to channel. The surveyed sample included 27000 respondents from 14 Arab countries and involved various social groups and categories.[7]

Politicians often show serious concerns over the growing power of Al Jazeera and its capability to influence and mobilize large segments of the Arab public. In his diaries of the Iraq war between 2003 and 2004, Ambassador Paul Bremer recounts President Bush's first reaction to the capture of Saddam Hussein and his worry about the potential role Al Jazeera could play through its coverage of this incident. During an emergency meeting of the National Security Council to discuss the implications of this big development, "the president looked up, relates Bremer, and asked: "How'd Al-Jazeera play the story, Jerry?"[8] In the Arab world, government attempts to circumvent or, at least minimize the influence of Al Jazeera are countless. In one remarkable instance, the Algerian authorities cut power to the capital city of Algiers to prevent citizens from watching one episode of a particular talk show programme. However, the "Al Jazeera

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[6] The findings of this study were published in a book called *Polling Media and Political Science Professors on Al-Jazeera Channel's Professionalism*" (Al Jazeera Centre for Studies. 2008). The 19 Arab countries in which the study was conducted are: Jordan, Emirates, Bahrain, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Yemen, Tunisia, Syria, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Lebanon, Libya, Egypt, and Mauritania.
[7] Here, I refer to an unpublished study by Nielsen, the international research company specializing in viewer conduct and TV rating.
[8] Bremer, Paul. *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (Simon & Schuster, 2006) p. 264

effect" phenomenon is becoming more significant as the number of regional satellite television stations grows, along with the proliferation of other new communications technologies such as the Internet and cell phones."[9]

Second: Innovative formats, engaging content: The nature of newscasts and programmes broadcast on Al Jazeera changed the face of Arab media and reshaped the media-politics relationship. Soon after its launch in 1996, it turned into the leading regional media outlet and dominated Arab public discourse. Al Jazeera brought to the Arab media landscape a new type of programming aimed at creating a vibrant and engaged public.

Besides the non-stop news flow that runs throughout the day with one newscast every hour, and two extended bulletins of two hours each: *Nashrrat al-muntasaf* and *Hasad Al-Yawm* (midday newscast and harvest of the day), the channel broadcasts several live-debate talk shows. *Al-Ittijah Al-mu'akis* (the opposite direction), *Akthar min Ra'y* (more than one opinion), *'Hiwar Maftou'h* (open dialogue), *Bila 'Houdoud* (without borders), and *As-Shari'a wal-Hayat* (Sharia and Life) are broadcast regularly on a weekly basis, ach lasts for one hour. Reflecting on the impact of his own talk show, Faisal Al-Kasim, host of *Al-Ittijah Al-Mu'akis*[10], says: "Debate programs and live talks on satellite broadcasting are watched avidly by millions of Arabs and are contributing a great deal to the formation of pan-Arab public opinion over many issues. Arab viewers can now share

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[9] Seib, Philip. "New Media and Prospects for Democratization" in Philip Seib (eds.), *New Media and the New Middle East* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) p. 1

[10] Modeled on CNN's *Crossfire*, *Al-Ittijah Al-Mu'akis* hosts two guests of fundamentally opposed views on extremely controversial issues and allows members of the public to call in, with no time delay, and voice their opinions. This live interaction between the guests on the one hand, and between them and members of the public on the other hand, forms an essential ingredient of the new political discourse in the Arab world.

each other's problems, issues and concerns."[11]

Al-Kasim's view is shared by Lynch whose study of the new Arab public indicates that Al Jazeera's talk shows were a key factor in the emergence of the Arab public sphere. Besides its leading position in the Arab media in terms of news coverage, "its talk shows often set the agenda for local arguments and debates, as well as reflecting the issues considered important among the Arab intellectual elite."[12] Lynch's point does not seem to convince Oliver Hahn who, on the contrary, believes that television talk shows such as *Al-Ittijah Al-Mu'akis* have often been characterized more by emotion and lack of rationality. Where interactive television disputes dominate the schedules they indicate tendencies towards extreme politicization, polarization, personalization, and emotionalization."[13] Critics of Al Jazeera tend to generalize this picture and extend it over the channel's coverage of news stories. Al Jazeera's former editor in-chief, A. Sh., responds to such claims by suggesting that:

> Al Jazeera has been passionate rather than emotional. We are siding with people in hardship, those who cannot find food in the Atlas mountains, who cannot even protect themselves against cold and who lose their fingers, if I go there and try to make them talk you accuse me of being emotional. No, this is a human passion this is not emotional. I'm reporting with human passion the sad side of the story. When we go to those in Bangladesh and try to reflect their suffering, you tell me this emotional, no this is not emotional, we were just showing the hardship.[14]

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[11] Al-Kasim, Faisal. "The Opposite Direction: A Program which Changed the Face of Arab Television" in Zayani (ed.), *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media* (Pluto Press, 2005), p. 103
[12] Lynch, Voices *of the New Arab Public,* p. 76
[13] Hahn, Oliver. "Cultures of TV News Journalism and Prospects for a Transcultural Public Sphere" in Naomi Sakr (eds.), *Arab Media and Political Renewal: Community, Legitimacy, and Public Life* (I.B. Tauris, 2009) p. 25
[14] Researcher's interview with Ahmed. Sheukh, April 2011.

In addition to the talk shows, Al Jazeera airs a weekly programme called *Minbar Al Jazeera* (the Al Jazeera platform) in which the host moderates a live and direct debate with viewers over selected hot issues. The programme main title comes with a subtitle in the form of a widely circulated Arabic slogan: "the platform for those who have no platform." It accommodates a wide ranging spectrum of callers without any sort of exclusion. As Laila Chaieb, the main host of the show explains:

> You don't choose your guests; they choose our show by taking the initiative of dialing the number and calling in to express their views. You don't select those who should take part. You can't say this is academic I'll pick him; this is from the general public I don't pick him. This is Islamist I'll pick him; this is secularist I don't pick him. We don't have this kind of classification… I personally cannot allow this to happen. Otherwise how could we call it the platform of those who have no platform?[15]

In addition to allowing everyone free access to the show, the discussion topics are jointly selected by the viewers and the production team. Before Al Jazeera, the Arab public had limited or no rights to choose what to watch let alone participate or select the discussion topics. As Chaieb underlines, the Arab viewer-citizen has had enough of being treated as minor, always accused by the authorities of being irresponsible, immature, emotional and at times even unpatriotic. The long list of blames goes on to include ridiculous characterizations of the masses as "making a lot of noise without presenting an alternative, unable to prioritize on the personal and public levels, politically naïve and overly critical, uncivilized and chaotic, unable to demonstrate peacefully.[16]

What can a public with such characteristics offer? asks Chaieb, or to put it differently,

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[15] Researcher's interview with Laila Chaieb, March 2011.
[16] Chaieb, Leila. "The Age of the Masses" in *The Al Jazeera Decade: 1996-2006* (Al Waraqoon, 2007) p. 71

what had Al Jazeera offered this public in order to help him change its negative image and status? The point of departure has been, according to the host of *Minbar Al Jazeera*, to challenge the existing perception of the Arab public as "minor". To use Kant's term, Al Jazeera has played an 'enlightening' role in liberating Arab viewers and relieving them from the constraints of the age of 'minority'. "Nonage or minority, says Kant, is the inability of making use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another."[17] Enlightening means quitting the status of minority and having courage to make use of their own understanding: Courage on the side of the public to express their views without fear of being persecuted or harassed by autocratic governments, and courage on the side of the media to publicize those views and make them available for public discussion without bias or censorship. That is the enlightening role Al Jazeera has played over the last fifteen years and has certainly succeeded in painting a completely different image of the Arab public, contrary to that described above by the host of *Minbar Al Jazeera*.

The second aspect of Al Jazeera's contribution to the creation of an Arab public sphere after changing the perception of Arab viewers is to identify the needs of those viewers and treat them as they deserve. Since they are capable of using their 'own understanding' in Kant's terms, the Arab audiences need to get involved in the discussion of public issues and more importantly, to 'participate' as clearly mentioned by Chaieb. "The content of the messages we receive convinced me that the need for 'participation' for many is far more profound than what we may imagine. They really believe in participating through views and words first, then through action when the opportunity

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[17] Kant, Emmanuel. "Answer to the Question: What is 'Enlightenment'?" (1784) in *The Age of Enlightenment: An Anthropology of Eighteen-Century texts.* Simon Eliot and Beverly Stern (ed.), Vol. 2, (The Open University, 1979), p. 250

arises, anticipating the desired change, and each with their own vision and project."[18]

The need to "participate" has been translated into an Al Jazeera initiative called "*Sharek*" (Participate). It is an interactive tool empowering ordinary people to actively participate and enrich the television news content. Along the lines of the CNN "iReport", "*Sharek*" receives pictures and video clips from eyewitnesses and allow people with limited resources and modest technical experience to share their stories and discuss their ideas with a widening network of viewers, readers and interconnected audiences around the world. The *Sharek* service was set up jointly by Editor-in-Chief, A. Sh. and the Al Jazeera new media section in 2007. As the founders of this initiative explain, *Sharek* allows the channel to have field reporters in every single city or even village. It has also introduced new tools of newsgathering and strengthened Al Jazeera's relationship with ordinary people on the ground. By using this service, the audiences are no longer just recipients of the story that television stations broadcast to them, they have become part of the story themselves. They have become even sort of broadcasters who do not need to wait for the regular TV news bulletin to bring them stories they already know about.

The *Sharek* service is more than just a platform for free expression and exchange of materials among interconnected like-minded news gatherers. As the head of Al Jazeera's new media states, it plays an increasing role in enriching the content of the Al Jazeera news channel as well as speeding up the process of building and interactive Arab public. Defining its role and describing the way it functions, M. A. says:

> *Sharek* is like a contribution from essentially anybody who has an internet connection to come and upload a video that comes in and gets checked within the Al Jazeera

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[18] Chaieb, L. "The Age of the Masses" in *The Al Jazeera Decade*, p. 72

newsroom. So, people can upload something like a video by a mobile, an audio file, an image or some text if they want to share. It comes and it goes through a filtration process then through a verification process, and those videos become available to our newsroom. So, if they [at the newsroom] want to tell a story relating to a subject that corresponds to videos which are available in *Sharek*, they would use that. In many times they get story ideas from *Sharek* as well, it is like a repository.[19]

With the recent political developments in the Arab region known as the Arab spring, *Sharek* seems to have gained more relevance to both the young Arab public and the Al Jazeera network. Traditionally, the voice of the young public has been neglected by the mainstream media whether print media or radio and television. These generations are generally excluded mainly because the mainstream media are usually monopolized by politicians, intellectuals and different types of elites from the social and cultural domains. The dynamics of the Arab revolutions reshaped many aspects of the regional landscape including that of the media and changed the way these media interact with their publics, especially the younger generations whose main source of communication used to be limited to the social media networks. Since the eruption of the Tunisian revolution, the traditional media and the new media have become close partners and the new Arab public played a defining role in creating this partnership and benefiting from it at the same time. The amount of materials uploaded onto the Al Jazeera servers through *Sharek*[20] during this period demonstrates that not only the new Arab public found a new voice on the traditional media, but also that the traditional media started to rely heavily on the content generated by its public.

This mutual beneficial relationship empowers both sides, says M. A. as it enriches the television screen and makes it more interactive. On the other hand, users of these new tools

[19] Researcher's interview with Moeed Ahmed, April 2011.

[20] According to M. Ahmed, the quantity of videos received by Al Jazeera through *sharek* since the start of the Arab revolutions amounted to 1000 videos per day and sometimes 2000 videos on Fridays. Prior to that, they only received 50 to 100 videos per day.

understand that eventually they can make their voice heard on traditional television, which in turn amplifies their voices so many folds. Regardless of how communication technologies change and how social habits of young generations change consequently, the mass of the people will still watch television be it in cafeterias, in their homes through satellite dishes or on their computer screens through internet. Making that special connection "between the younger generations who are well connected and those who are not or less connected was manifest in Tunisia in particular", confirms M. A.[21]

For many years, *Minbar Al Jazeera* has been a call-in only programme whereby callers from around the world are invited to comment on the topic, ask questions, and suggest topics for future discussions. In late 2009, the channel announced it had added new features to *Minbar Al Jazeera*, to make it more interactive. These improvements meant "allowing the public to have a greater ability to express their views by engaging through social media such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*."[22]Employing new communication technologies to complement the traditional work of television, not only has it empowered Arab viewers by offering them new tools to counter governmental strategies and circumvent the ongoing attempts to minimize the Al Jazeera effect, but it has also expanded the reach of the network exponentially and made its engaging content available to a growing number of people.

Third: Unparalleled reach: The Al Jazeera groundbreaking and engaging content is disseminated to viewers across the world through an expanding network of bureaus, reporters and channels, making Al Jazeera the largest Arab TV station and one of the largest TV networks in the world. With 80 external bureaus and more than 200 reporters

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[21] Researcher's interview with M. Ahmed, April, 2011.
[22] "*Al Jazeera Channel Launches a 'New Look' and New Programmes on its Thirteenth Anniversary*" (Press Release by Al Jazeera, October 30, 2009).

stationed in almost every country, Al Jazeera's international presence makes its coverage of global events unequaled. It brings to Arab audiences in the Arab world and elsewhere in their diasporas the same live coverage of the same unfolding events by the same news anchors and commentators.

When news stories about events of particular significance to Arabs in different parts of the world (i.e. the Palestinian Intifada, the invasion of Iraq, the war on Gaza, the Arab revolutions) are communicated to them in Arabic and from an Arab perspective, this brings them together, across the difference of their geographical locations, to form one transnational public. What unites this extended public in the first place, and keep together the constituting elements of its shared identity are the common language and the common news agenda. In other words, the new Arab public sphere is actually composed of multiple, overlapping publics that should be defined not territorially but by reference to a shared identity and a common set of political arguments and concerns.[23]

Throughout the years, Al Jazeera continued to expand its operations beyond the barriers of language, culture and geography. Starting in 1996 with one Arabic news channel broadcasting six hours per day (Al Jazeera Satellite Channel), Al Jazeera has grown dramatically into a media conglomerate consisting of over twenty channels broadcasting news and programmes in Arabic and English. To further expand its reach, the network is launching, before the end of 2011, two more channels, one in Turkish and one in Bosnian languages. A third channel in Swahili is in preparation and will go on air next year. Those who are unable to watch Al Jazeera on their television screens can access its content online. Al Jazeera net is among the most visited news websites in the Arab

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[23] Lynch, Voices *of the New Arab Public,* p. 22

world. It provides its visitors with a non-stop live broadcast of Al Jazeera news and programmes. Subscribers to the Al Jazeera Mobile service can also stay connected to the news flow and follow the latest developments on their mobile phones. As communication technologies continues to proliferate and provide the media with new means to expand their reach, Al Jazeera remains one of the largest global media networks using the latest technologies with the help of its new media section.

Fourth: Diversity of delivery platforms: The continuing diversification of platforms that Al Jazeera provides for public discussion is increasingly widening the scope of the public sphere as it opens the doors for more individuals and social groups to freely interact and share their views with others. To accommodate different publics and respond to various needs, the network had to diversify the means through which it delivers its content. Besides the main news channel that targets the general public, Al Jazeera keeps developing delivery platforms to reach out to specific publics with specific content. As a result, one can assume that the general Arab public is indeed composed of a number of specific public spheres revolving around specific contents and specific delivery platforms. The youth, the women, and the religious publics spheres are just examples in this respect.

Concerted efforts to accommodate the Arab youth on these platforms could be clearly noticed when we look at the "Al Jazeera Talk" website. Although not being officially part of Al Jazeera's online operations, this voluntarily run youth forum is growing spectacularly. With over 320 correspondents actively operating in all 22 Arab countries, Al Jazeera Talk occupies a leading position as an online youth forum. The enormous amount of visits this site receives every day reflects its role in bringing together this

special kind of social group (Arab youth) that has long been marginalized and excluded from official and non-official public debates. With a regular flow of online traffic exceeding the 100,000 visits per day, this unique platform contributes to the formation of an exceptional category of Arab public. According to Ahmed Ashour, founder and director of Al Jazeera Talk, the site receives 120,000 to 200,000 visits per day.

Al Jazeera talk was established in 2006 to enable Arab youth to communicate through their geographical and cultural differences and create their own interactive sphere. According to A. A., this growing network is comprised of:

> 320 to 350 correspondents, all young people, males and females, writing from their corresponding countries and regions such as America, Australia, Malaysia, Asia, Africa, almost everywhere in the world… These correspondents first start writing with us through our forum which is an open space, then they become part of our media community. What is available to public from Al Jazeera Talk is just about 40% of the actual size of the site; the bigger part of our network is offline. While other media organizations look for professional journalists, we look for young talented people aspiring to become journalists and we train them. We believe that once they have the ambition and the initiative, they can achieve whatever they wish to achieve.[24]

As for its geographical presence across the Arab world, Al Jazeera Talk is operating in every single Arab country but it operates differently in different countries. Although its correspondents cover the entire region, A. A. states that the network had to consider the varying political situations and the degree of press freedom in each country. The composition and size of their presence also depends, to a large extent, on these factors. Al Jazeera Talk has quite a large team of correspondents in Morocco, but a relatively smaller team in Tunisia which was only established after the revolution and after the ban on the site has

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[24] Researcher's interview with Ahmed Ashour, March 2011.

been lifted. In Saudi Arabia it is difficult to operate freely, says A. A. mentioning that his management in Doha tried many times to set up a team of young correspondents, but because the operation is banned inside the Kingdom, they cannot communicate properly with their group over there. But, "in Gaza, the West Bank and the 1948 Palestinian territories, as well as in Jordon and Egypt we have substantial teams".[25]

Al Jazeera Talk has recently stepped up their operation by setting up units of video production. These units receive technical assistance and regular training from the network management and produce online video content. This content is first circulated among the community members and then posted over to the rest of the general online public. This emerging Arab youth public sphere is not only operated from above, from the central management in Doha. It is rather extending horizontally in the form of autonomous and interconnected cells of actively engaged young Arab journalists.

The similarities in the Arab social and political environment and the common language used by Arab youth to express their views, share their stories, and discuss the various topics posted on this particular platform seems to have created a genuine rapprochement and formed a common understanding between these users of. The managers of Al Jazeera Talk believe that they managed to bring together hundreds of thousands of Arab youth and build a special kind of an extremely dynamic community. Outlining the main issues of general concern to the Arab youth, A Ashour says:

> There is an agreement among Arab youth over a wide range of issues. When we talk, for instance, about the borders separating the Arab countries, everyone agrees that these borders should be removed. Everyone believes that we line in a new era. Everyone agree

[25] Ibid.

that Palestine belongs to the Palestinians. There is a number of common issues that everyone agrees upon regardless of our differences of religions and opinions. We can now talk of a well-defined public opinion among the Arab youth.[26]

The significance of this specific category of public sphere should not be underestimated, not only because of the remarkably high percentage of youth population in the Arab region, but also and more importantly because of the key role this social group played and is playing in the Arab revolutions. The development of such a lively and dynamic public in this particular political context should be considered as a turning point in the history of Arab people as well as in the study of the public sphere. In addition to dedicating an online youth platform for this type of public to raise issues, discuss them and generate its own discourse, Al Jazeera continues to diversify and expand its platforms to accommodate larger sectors of Arab youth.

In May 2011, the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies brought together around 100 young people from 18 countries to participate in what was called "Forum of Youth and Change in the Arab World". Over two days, participants discussed, in a completely open atmosphere, a wide range of issues.[27] The closing session announced the launch of "the youth initiative for communication and cooperation". As a youth platform, this initiative would allow participants to further interact and communicate between each other and encourage more "young people from the Arab world who share the same ideals and values to join in."[28] According to Islam Lutfi, who announced the "youth initiative for

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[26] Ibid.
[27] According to a report by Al Jazeera Center for Studies, the forum, which took place in Doha on 28-29 May 2011, "discussed issues pertaining to political change and democratization in the Arab world in light of the current wave of revolutions and popular protests. The Forum aimed at offering participants the opportunity to meet with each other and build means of cooperation, exchanging experiences and bolstering understanding and integration amongst them."
[28] Ibid.

communication and cooperation", the participants expect their meeting to the first step towards creating a youth public sphere in which participants continue the debate initiated in Doha and explore new avenues for this rising social movement to engage politically and play a leading role in building a democratic future for their respective countries.

The emergence of an Arab youth public sphere is of particular importance especially when we consider the recent political developments in the region. It would be difficult to understand what has happened in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and what is happening in Yemen, Syria and other troubled countries without a proper understanding of the role played by the new generations in organizing and mobilizing the masses. The youth revolutions, as they have become known, highlight the need to analyze the Arab youth public sphere and define its characterizing qualities in terms of interconnectedness, communication modes, and the discourse it produces consumes and promotes.

Besides the youth as a specific public and one of the many constituents of the larger Arab public sphere, Al Jazeera dedicated one of its weekly shows to another segment of Arab society, the women. The idea of "*Lin-Nisaa' Faqat*" (For Women Only) was to address the issue of Arab women whose voice has long been silenced or unheard for various reasons. The programme lasted for three and a half years and has been hosted by leading Al Jazeera female presenters including Khadija Benguenna, Laila Chaieb, Muntaha al-Ramahi and Luna Chebel.

Dedicating airtime for women in Arab television is not unprecedented. Almost every single channel has their own women show but they all fit in one single framework portraying the woman as only concerned with such particular types of shows as cooking,

fashion, and music. Al Jazeera's women's show, although not ignoring these issues, added new dimensions and refocused its lenses more on political, social and cultural issues. The analysis of the 162 episodes of the programme shows that all the topics discussed over three and a half years[29] could be classified into nine major categories as displayed in the table below:

Categorization of topics discussed in Al Jazeera's "*Lin-Nisaa' Faqat*" show

	Topics	Number	Percentage
1.	Social issues	64	39.5%
2.	Political issues	27	16.66%
3.	Cultural issues	20	12.34%
4.	Human Rights issues	12	7.4%
5.	Economic issues	12	7.4%
6.	Health issues	10	6.17%
7.	Religious issues	8	4.93%
8.	Educational issues	5	3.08%
9.	Feminism	4	2.46%
Total		**162**	**100%**

As the figures in the table show, nearly 70% of the total number of the episodes focused

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[29] Overall, Al Jazeera aired 162 episodes of "For Women Only". The first episode was aired on January 7th, 2002 and the last one on June 13th, 2005.

on social, political and cultural issues. These are the main topics around which the new women's discourse revolved and has been structured. Contrary to similar shows on other Arab television stations where these common issues are rarely addressed, "For Women Only" gained an unparalleled popularity among Arab women who found their general concerns displayed and discussed freely.

The guests of Benguenna and her colleagues ranged from female politicians and civil society activists to academics and professionals from various backgrounds. The topics discussed openly over the years in these TV shows created an unprecedented level of interest and engagement among women from all around the Arab world.

Not only did these interactive shows bring to light previously untold stories and gave a voice to a large sector of Arab society, but they also brought Arab women closer to one another. The diverse and wide-ranging discussion agendas emphasized the common ground and highlighted the general issues that unite Arab women through their social, political and cultural differences. It is a unique platform through which Arab women created their own public sphere and made their voice heard.

Apart from the women and the youth oriented platforms, Al Jazeera has provided its viewers with another specific platform around which a third type of public sphere emerged, a religious one. *Al-Shari'a wal-'Hayat* (Sharia and life) is one of two shows that started since Al Jazeera has gone on air in November 1996 and is still being broadcast to millions of viewers, not only in the Arab world but also across the Muslim

world.[30] As religion plays a central role in the daily life of many people in the region, the show, hosted by the leading scholar Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, enjoys an unparalleled popularity.

It is not the purely religious aspect of the show that makes it appeal to a vast majority of viewers, but the innovative and engaging way of linking the religious content, presented by one of the highest authorities in the Muslin Sunni world[31], with the current issues of politics and society. This particular community of viewers, that extends literally across the world, follows this show not only for educational purposes or to seek answers to their individual questions, which they can find easily elsewhere, but to hear al-Qaradawi's interpretations of the current affairs and understand what happens around them through his religious lens. A close examination of the topics discussed by *al-Shari'a wal-'Hayat* explains the reason why the show managed to attract such a wide range of viewers and form what could be considered as a religiously oriented public sphere.

Surprisingly, and contrary to the widely held perception that the programme deals only with purely religious issues as opposed to other talk shows designed to discuss political, cultural or social matters, the analysis of 489 episodes aired over ten years (2001 to 2010) indicates that the religious topics that al-Qaradawi discussed during this period

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[30] In addition to its groundbreaking news reporting, Al Jazeera has been known for its numerous programmes of live debates and talk shows, including *al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis* (the Opposite Direction)*, Akthar min Ra'ay* (More the One Opinion), *al-Shari'a wal-'Hayat* (Sharia and Life), *Dhaif wa Qadhya* (A Guest and an Issue), *'Hiwar Maftou'h* (Open Debate), *Bila 'Hudoud* (Without Borders). *Ma wara al-Khabar* (Beyond the News), *Minbar al-Jazeera* (The Al Jazeera Platform) etc. Out of all these programmes, only *Al-Shari'a wal-'Hayat* has and *al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis* have been running regularly for fifteen years without stop.

[31] Besides the innovative content of the show and the availability of Al Jazeera almost anywhere in the world, the host of *al-Shari'a wal-'Hayat* enjoys a unique status in the Arab-Muslim world. Yusuf al-Qaradawi is the co-founder and president of the International Union for Muslim Scholars; chairman of the European Council for Fatwa and Research; until recently he was chairman of the widely visited website (islamonline.com). In 2008, al-Qaradawi was voted the 3rd most intellectual person in the world on the list of Top 100 Public Intellectuals by Prospect Magazine and Foreign Policy.

represent less than 25% of the total number of shows. Almost two thirds of these episodes addressed political, cultural, social and economic issues. What makes the discussion of these issues by an ordinary professional television presenter different from discussing them by the host of *al-Shari'a wal-'Hayat* is the religious aspect and the spiritual depth with which al-Qaradawi addresses his topics.

From this perspective, political events taking place in different historical circumstances and different geographical areas such as the Palestinian Intifada in 2000-01, the war in Afghanistan in 2001, the Iraq war 2003, the Israeli-Hizbollah war in 2006, the Gaza war in 2008-09, are not separate events.[32] They are just different manifestations of a global conflict between the right and the wrong, the believers and the non-believers, the occupied and the occupiers, the Muslim *Ummah* and its enemies. This is clearly displayed in the discourse of *al-Shari'a wal-'Hayat* which tries to piece these events together and find a common thread linking them to one another. In so doing, the programme also links the religious community together by addressing what they perceive as common issues with which they all identify and feel concerned.

Categorization of topics discussed in Al Jazzera's *"al-Shari'a wal-'Hayat"* show

	Topics	Number	Percentage
1.	political issues	146	29.85%
2.	cultural issues	112	22.9%
3.	religious issues	101	20.65%

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[32] All these events happened in these ten years and this is probably why we find that political issues ranked very high in the table above.

4.	social issues	41	8.38%
5.	moral issues	27	5.52%
6.	economic issues	21	4.29%
7.	Fatwas	17	3.47%
8.	educational issues	8	1.63%
9.	general issues	16	3.27%
Total		**489**	**100%**

This open forum which has been broadcasting for over fifteen years to millions of people worldwide has undoubtedly contributed a great deal to the shaping of a new religious awareness in which politics, society and culture are central issues. It is this kind of awareness that transformed individual viewers from different countries into one extended community of likeminded interlinked public meeting regularly and freely discussing common issues. Over the years, *al-Shari'a wal-'Hayat* as a platform and al-Qaradawi as a host and a leading religious figure in the Arab and Muslim world created a religious public sphere where religion is no longer confined within the traditional spiritual and moral frames, but deeply involved in the "worldly" concerns of people.

2. Characteristics and defining features of the new Arab public sphere

Al Jazeera has undoubtedly played a leading role in the creation of the new Arab public sphere and giving it its defining characteristics. However, it would be wrong to claim

that this rapidly expanding universe of Arabs, actively engaged in public arguments about political issues, is generated by one single media outlet. Competing satellite television channels, independently operated newspapers, community gatherings, and other forms of public discourse, all contributed to varying degrees to the emergence of the Arab public sphere. The unprecedented proliferation of new communication technologies and social media networks further extended the reach and influence of satellite television and added new dimensions to this emerging Arab public sphere. Following are the key characteristics and defining features of this emerging communicative space.

1. Keeping in line with the Habermasian tradition, most of those who wrote about the Arab public sphere characterize it as an arena of unfettered, critical and rational debates of issues of interest to Arab communities around the world.[33] This character also reminds us of the Kantian conception of enlightenment, which entails first and foremost the free public use of reason. Using our reason to critically discuss social and political issues is a practice that can only bring about enlightening among nations, says Kant. An enlightened nation is a nation whose citizens have the right to reason freely, critically and publically to deliver it from despotism and oppression. Here, the Kantian notion of enlightenment establishes a clear rapport between the existence of a vibrant public sphere and the rise of a democratic society. The emergence of an Arab public sphere consisting of an expanding number of autonomous platforms for free and open discussion is having visible political implications. The exposure of large segments of Arab societies to almost daily talk shows, in which growing numbers of elites, political activists and ordinary people take part, resulted in the formation of

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[33] See Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson (1999-2003), Mark Lynch (2004), Emma Murphy (2009)

protest movements sweeping several Arab countries. The democratizing effects of these social movements will undoubtedly be more visible as the new Arab public sphere institutionalizes and assumes clearer political functions.

2. The fast expanding social media infrastructure offers alternative communicative frameworks for the new Arab public to connect, communicate and generate its oppositional counter-discourse away from the confinement of formal institutions linked to, or recognized by the state and its public authorities. With the growing capacity to use new media and communication technologies, share boundless amounts of uncensored information, and actively engage in discussion of public affairs, the new Arab public sphere should be understood as being open, discursive, participative and above all, communication-based sphere. It is no longer necessary for public debates and discussions of issues of public import to occur face-to-face or take place in physically pre-defined locations. Access to these debates is now unrestricted and widely open to anyone with a TV set, a personal computer with internet access, or even a smart mobile phone. Former barriers and traditional restrictive factors such as class, gender, language, nationality, formal education etc. are now things of the past. This is not to suggest in any way that the new modes of satellite and online interconnectedness are removed from the real world or operate independently from the compulsions of social, political and economic realities. The recent political developments in the Arab world show clearly how the divide between the so called "virtual" and "real" worlds is superficial and has become completely obsolete.

3. Stretching from Morocco in Northwestern Africa to Iraq in Western Asia, the Arab public consists of more than quarter a billion speakers of one single language albeit with

different accents and variations. Looking at this public from a mass media perspective, the Arab region contains "one of the largest single-language audiences in the world."[34] Among the early media ventures that targeted the Arab public and reached across national borders, bringing Arab audiences together was *Sawt al-'Arab* radio station (the voice of the Arabs) broadcasting from Cairo in the 1950s and 1960s. The radio, as Laura James remarks, "deliberately created a sense of national identity that had previously existed in, at most, a latent form."[35] Apart from the fact that *Sawt al-'Arab* was primarily used as a political tool to promote the Nasserist version of Arab nationalism, it succeeded in creating a particular form of Arab public and pulling the rug from underneath local media outlets. In more recent times, the Arab public has been brought together again by satellite television and new media technologies with increased importance and significance. This explains, in part, the ongoing global struggle for the "hearts and minds of Arabs", exemplified by the proliferation of international broadcasters from different countries with competing agendas. What unites them all is the language in which they address the Arab publics. This linguistic dimension is omnipresent in the minds of Al Jazeera's executives whose target audience is clearly identified as "one" Arab public rather than a multitudes of publics dispersed in twenty two separate countries. Explaining the linguistic factor in the formation of the new pan-Arab public, chief language monitor, J. A. stresses the unifying function of using standard Arabic:

By avoiding the use of dialects spoken in different Arab countries and using the official

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[34] Kraidy, Marwan M. "From Activity to Interactivity: The Arab Audience" in Kai Hafez (eds.), *Arab Media: Power and Weakness* (Continuum, 2008) p. 96
[35] James, Laura M. "Whose Voice? Nasser, the Arabs, and *'Sawt al-Arab'* Radio" in *Transnational Broadcasting Studies (TBS)* Journal, (published by the Adham Center for Electronic Journalism, the American University in Cairo and the Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, University of Oxford) issue 16, 2006.

Arabic language, we avoided criticism such as why don't you use Egyptian dialect or Syrian or Iraqi or Moroccan dialects etc. It's all about influence, when we use the official Arabic language; Arab audiences from the Ocean to the Gulf understand one language away from these dialects. When people in the whole Arab world listen to, and hear the same language and understand every word of it, this is a unifying factor, psychologically even, not only culturally. And that has an impact which cannot be ignored by sociologists who would look at this aspect.[36]

The unifying function of using one language to communicate with one audience is obviously not enough to build a united Arab public. To clarify this point, J. A. gives the example of the BBC Arabic service, whose identity is British although its speaks the Arabic language. With language comes the unified perspective from which Al Jazeera presents and discusses the range of issues it covers. Because we talk a language which can be understood by everyone, and we deal with issues which are common to all these peoples, that we can speak of the Al Jazeera's role in creating a pan-Arabic role, says J. A. Discussing common issues from the same perspective affects people' lives, builds a shared identity amongst them, and highlights their historical interconnectedness. Issues such as the Palestinian cause, the occupation of Iraq, the split of Sudan into two separate states, the Algerian-Moroccan conflict over the Western Sahara, are just a few examples of numerous complex issues of common interest to an Arab public communicating in one unifying language.

4. Besides the unifying factors that justify, to some extent, the use of the term pan-Arab public, there is another aspect to this analysis. As I have demonstrated above, the broad Arab public sphere is in reality composed of multiple Arab public spheres. We can distinguish between three sub-publics or key components of this general Arab public

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[36] Researcher's interview with J. Azar, April 2011.

sphere. There is a youth public sphere in which the discussion topics are largely focused on issues of general concerns to the younger generations. The members of this specific sphere communicate to each other through the use of new media and the latest communication technologies. There is a women public sphere, where Arab women deliberate, through television platforms such as "For Women Only", in engaging social, political and cultural debates, away from their traditional confines of cooking, fashion and interior décor. And there is a religious public sphere, connecting people with an innovative approach to religion. Politics is found to be the core subject discussed in this public sphere, and religion is no longer a matter of individual or spiritual concern only. It is rather, a unifying force which links people together and shapes their vision regarding political, social and cultural issues. After highlighting these three public spheres, it is worth mentioning that they are by no means distinct or completely separate from each other. Overlaps exist between them in terms of discussion topics, communication tools as well as the components of each of them.

5. Being part of the larger Islamic world, and building on the historic tradition of the religious-oriented public discourse, the new Arab public sphere extends in some ways beyond its Arab context. The sense of belonging to one Arab communicative and geopolitical space has always overlapped and sometimes competed with the sense of belonging to the wider Islamic space. This wider circle of likeminded publics sharing the same concerns and often debating the same issues across languages, cultures and national identities constitutes another dimension of the emerging Arab public sphere. Thus, the communicatively constructed identity of Arab publics, symbolized by the term "Arabness" should be understood within the framework of the wider "*Ummah*" and the additional values that come with it. The successful democratic experiences in some non-

Arab Islamic countries such as Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, have always stimulated intense debate among Arabs as to the compatibility of Islam and democracy. The Turkish model in particular is frequently invoked in these public debates, especially after the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions which seek to secure successful transition towards democracy. Contributing to this debate at a conceptual level, Ayish prefers using the term "'Islamocracy' or Islamic democracy as a defining political concept for the development of a genuine Arab public sphere that draws on cherished moral Arab-Islamic values and contemporary political traditions."[37]

6. Constructed in the process of open debate and rational argumentation, and continuously exposed to pluralistic views, the new Arab public sphere can only be an effective tool for democratic change. Public discourse generated through the use of internet and other new media is likely to change the way people in region see themselves and evaluate their political role. For, these tools are intrinsically democratic, and if wisely used by informed publics, they can exert pressure and foster the intellectual enfranchisement that opens the way for political participation. As Jon Alterman observes, among the obvious consequences of more diversified views being more widely communicated is the increased political involvement of those who receive and interact with such competing views. According to Alterman, "For most in the Arab world, technological change means that they are exposed to a broader variety of views than has ever been true before. As literacy and bandwidth both expand dramatically, publics are exposed to a broad, often unregulated, spectrum of views that range from secular to religious, from nationalist to global, and from material to

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[37] Ayish, Muhammad. *The New Arab Public Sphere* (Frank & Timme, 2008) p. 57

spiritual."[38] This wide variety of perspectives is likely to drive modernization of political values, attitudes and the whole fabric of Arab political culture as notes Kai Hafez. Despite the limited effect of Arab mass media on the concrete political decisions of those in power, "it is surely possible that they might have far-reaching influence on the political agenda of public opinion and on the framing of political discourse that is related to the political opinions, values, attitudes and political cultures of Arab populations."[39] In this way, the new Arab public sphere should be understood in the context of the ongoing dynamics of democratic change in the region. Democratizing public discourse and diversifying its producers, consumers and mediating channels is certainly a positive aspect of this public sphere. However, it should be noted that there is another dimension to exposing this emerging public to a constant flow of a wide variety of conflicting views and competing arguments: fragmentation.

Within Al Jazeera, not everyone agrees to this. News producer N. L., wants to be very cautious when talking about an Arab public sphere. Not only because concepts are culture specific and trying to apply them onto other cultural and social settings has always proved to be problematic, but also because no serious theoretical attempts has been made to adapt the concept of the public sphere to the Arab society. Although the concept itself is so attractive says N. L., there is a need to make a clear distinction between the different epistemological contexts in which concepts emerge and develop. How can we move concepts from one particular setting to another he asks:

[38] Alterman, Jon B. "The Information Revolution and the Middle East" in Nora Bensahel and Daniel L. Byman (eds.), *The Future Security Environment in the Middle East: Conflict, Stability, and Political Change* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003) p. 243

[39] Hafez, Kai. *Arab Media: Power and Weakness* (The Continuum, 2008) p. 5

We know that concepts are conditioned by their cultural, social and political environments and using concepts out of their particular environments is not possible without one crucial epistemological condition: the conceptual function of a particular concept within a particular discourse. In the absence of that condition, the discourse becomes detached and removed from its social reality. It looks at, and perceives this reality through the lens of another theoretical framework that has initially been developed to account for the mood and mindset of a European society, a specific society in Europe.[40]

The normative aspect of the concept of the public sphere which makes it appeal to theorists of democracy and advocates of political change, is confronted with additional difficulties in the Arab context. As N. L. remarks, we do not have one single "Arab society", we have a multiplicity of Arab societies and there are considerable differences between them in terms of internal mutual recognition and the available spaces of public deliberation. Lebanon is different from Bahrain or Saudi Arabia, and Syria is nothing like Morocco or Egypt. Any discussion of the public sphere has to take these differences into account. Even the term "Arab media" needs to be treated very cautiously according to N. L. especially when we talk about national television which plays different and sometimes contradictory roles in different countries. Al Jazeera tried over the years to provide a platform for the emergence of an Arab public sphere but its effect remains limited. Only social media networks have the real potential to build an Arab public sphere thinks N. L. He insists on distinguishing between blogs which are intended to express personal views and to which public access is restricted, and social media networks such as *Facebook*, which could be truly regarded as a public sphere, even though at the virtual level only. The formalities users have to run through when using these networks such as choosing your list of friends and engage with them in unrestricted discussions over an unlimited number of issues, indicate that they

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[40] Researcher's interview with news producer Nasreddine Louati., May 2011.

all belong to one interactive open space. There are sets of common moral rules among friends of the same list remarks Louati. and "there are also recurrent practices and behaviors such as "like", "share", each of which has an argumentative value.[41]

To conclude, I shall reinstate that, as a byproduct of the interaction between satellite television and social media networks on the one hand, and the general public of viewers and users on other hand, the new Arab public sphere is an arena of free, unregulated critical rational debates. Although it is vastly participative, open-to-all and transnational in scope the democratizing effects of the new Arab public sphere should not be overestimated. As noted by Louati, we should look at these effects more carefully and consider all the competing discourses within its contours.

Under the surface of what looks a unified, sharing the same identity, and united by the same narrative, there lies a polarized and divided space. Far from being uniform and homogeneous, this pan-Arab public space is indeed composed of rival sub-spaces "deeply riven with intense disagreements, with discourse seemingly tending toward greater radicalism."[42]

Divides occurring along various social, ethic, cultural and ideological lines are often represented and sometimes magnified online and through television screens. I addition to the three sub-publics highlighted above (youth, women. religion), the Arab public sphere is also composed of three or four competing ideological tendencies which can be clearly seen on Al Jazeera, as Mohammed El Oifi remarks. The analysis of the ideological tendencies "and editorial line of Al Jazeera in light of the programs it offers, the subjects it emphasizes and the allegiances its leading figures have, reveals a subtle balance

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Lynch, Voices *of the New Arab Public,* p. 35

between three trends: the Arabist, the Islamic and the liberal."[43] To these three ideological and political trends I would also add a fourth one, the left, which represents another distinct ideological trend with a political presence in much of the Arab world. These divides are especially heightened in critical social and political circumstances during which members of deliberating groups predictably tend to move towards more extreme views. This worrying aspect of Arab public sphere raises serious questions about the limits of the democratizing effects of Al Jazeera, especially in light of the extraordinary proliferation of communication technologies. However, the emergence of a new Arab public sphere, regardless of the controversy it brings with it, remains one aspect of the democratization process in the region. Other aspects of this process will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[43] El Oifi, Mohammed. "Influence without Power, p. 73

Chapter 7:

Al Jazeera's democratization effect

Al Jazeera may turn out to be the pioneer of experimental, risk-taking and audience-driven programming that drives a range of changes within and between Arab states.

Jon B. Alterman (2005)

The power of the media continues to grow dramatically and influence policy processes at different levels. The advent of the popular 24-hour international television news channel known as Cable News Network, or CNN had a major impact on the way U.S. foreign policy is conducted. On the military field, television's instantly transmitted images from the battle grounds have also altered the way strategic level decisions are made.[1] The omnipresence of cameras waiting at every corner to cover unfolding events and broadcast them live makes policymakers and warfighters alike, plan carefully every move beforehand and watch out for their political and military behavior. To conceptualize these developments and demarcate the dynamics of the changing the relations between the media and power-holders, scholars came up with the term "CNN effect".

The "CNN effect" is a catchall phrase that has been used to describe a whole complex phenomena produced by the exponentially increase of the media power and influence. Perhaps the best definition is the one used by Steven Livingston, who defines it as a loss of policy control on the part of policy makers because of the power of the media,

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[1] CNN has risen to global prominence especially because of its unparalleled comprehensive coverage of the first Gulf war.

a power that they can do nothing about. According to Livingston, the "CNN effect" could be seen as functioning at three different ways: it is a policy agenda-setting agent; an impediment to the achievement of desired policy goals, and thirdly an accelerant to policy decision-making.[2]

The phenomenal advances in satellite and communication technologies and the proliferation of the CNN-type news networks extended the media effect even further and increased its influence to cover almost all sides of social and political life. The phenomenal emergence of Al Jazeera in the mid-1990s pushed the boundaries of the CNN effect and brought into the debate a broader range of issues. As mentioned by Cassara and Lengel, comparing "Al Jazeera effect" to the "CNN effect" is not uncommon. Whenever international news coverage is invoked, one regularly encounters the comment "what the 1991 Gulf War did for CNN, the 2003 Gulf War has done for Al Jazeera."[3] Or, to use Ralph Berenger's terms, "the CNN effect has become the Al Jazeera effect."[4] But, unlike the debate over the CNN effect, which focused primarily on the US foreign policy and the military-media relations, the Al Jazeera effect[5] is more about changing the Arab media and influencing domestic and regional politics. In societies where autocratic rule is the norm, like in the Arab setting, changing the media and changing politics should be seen as two interrelated and inseparable processes.

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[2] Livingston, Steven. "Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention, *The Joan Shorenstein Center*, *Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government* (1997).

[3] Cassara, C. and Lengel L. "Move over CNN: Al Jazeera's View of the World Takes On the West" *Transnational Broadcasting Studies Journal -TBS* (Spring - Summer 2004).

[4] Berenger, Ralph D. "International Middle East Media Challenge Cultural Imperialism Thesis" *Global Media Journal, Arabian Edition* (Summer/Fall 2011),Vol.1, No.2) p. 100

[5] In 2008, Philip Seib of the University of South California, wrote "*The Al Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media are Reshaping World Politics*" (Potomac Books Inc. 2008).

In this regard, the powerful role played by Al Jazeera in reshaping the Arab media landscape has undoubtedly influenced, to varying degrees, the internal politics in a number of countries and affected inter-state relations in the Arab world as a whole. Assisted with the growing power of new media and communication technologies, the "Al Jazeera effect" attracted much attention over the last fifteen years and it does not seem to fade away any time soon. The heated debate over democratic change that has accompanied the recent political developments sweeping the region makes the Al Jazeera effect a continued topical issue and a recurring subject in the political discourse.

Based on the data collected from interviews with selected members of the network staff, this chapter analyses the Al Jazeera effect and its role in the democratization process in the Arab world. Regardless of whether it is a direct or indirect effect, the traditional theoretical paradigms, as discussed in earlier chapters, do not seem to fully explain the role of the media in democratization. In this respect, the old structure vs. agency debate is certainly unable to inform us if Al Jazeera is a political agent operating freely from the constraints of existing social structures, or is profoundly structured within the wider historical, cultural, political, and social institutions of the Arab setting. The findings of this study suggest that the concepts of structure and agency that always stood in opposition need to be reconsidered and reviewed in the light of the new communicative environment. Structure and agency should no longer be seen as separate entities from each other; they are at all times engaged in a constant dynamic interplay.

Being part of this ongoing dynamic process, Al Jazeera, like any other influential media, owes its success, partly to an early self-awareness of its capability to have a

real impact on Arab politics,[6] and partly to the fact that it is deeply anchored in the socio-political and cultural fabric of the region where it belongs.

Building on the previous chapter on the emergence of an Arab public sphere and its manifest implications on the process of political change, Al Jazeera's democratizing effect will be analyzed along the following four lines of enquiry: 1. Changing the media landscape and its impact on changes in the political field 2. Breaking the information monopoly as an indication of the weakness and retreat of autocratic regimes 3. The opinion and the other opinion and the introduction of a pluralistic political culture 4. Old and new media: from competition to complementarity.

1. Towards Arab democratization: changing the media landscape

As discussed in chapter III on the media-politics relationship, changing the media often leads to fundamental changes in the political field and reshapes power relations in non-democratic societies. The existence of free and independent media is, to a large extent, a pre-condition for enabling the general public to exercise freedom of expression, which in turn, constitutes one of the essential foundations of pluralistic and democratic societies. As Fadl al-Ameri remarks, "free and independent media are key tools for democratic change and consolidation of democracy. Moreover, the right to free media is an integral part of human rights; it is a fundamental right for individuals and groups alike to express their views, opinions and beliefs. Reforming

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[6] Since the launch of Al Jazeera, there has been a long debate about its identity and the role it should play to positively influence its sociopolitical environment. This collective debate culminated in 2004 by drafting what has been called "Mission and Vision", where we read: "While promoting public awareness of local and global issues, Al Jazeera aspires to be a bridge between cultures, to support people's right to knowledge, and to strengthen the values of democracy and the respect of liberties and human rights".

the media is therefore an essential stage in the process of political democracy."[7]

Students of Arab media and their role in political change always refer to Al Jazeera as the leading institution, not only in reforming the media, but in revolutionizing them and enabling citizens to exert more pressure towards political change. As Kai Hafez remarks, "many observers assume that Arab media are the vanguard of a democratic revolution and that they, especially their icon Al-Jazeera, are 'rattling' authoritarian governments."[8]

Inside Al Jazeera, the editorial staff seems to be fully aware of the role of free media in building democracy. We cannot imagine a democratic society without guaranteeing the right of the citizens to free media, says news producer Louati:

> When Al Jazeera talks about democracy, it talks about the fundamental right of its viewers to be informed with accurate information about what happens around them. Their right to free media which do not distort reality or embellish it, but present what goes on in their local and regional environment as well as in the context of the world we live in. We need the media to help us develop a vision according which we can deal with issues that face us in our daily life.[9]

Before Al Jazeera, Arab media were largely dominated by governments, as part of their tightened control over political and social life. Across the Arab world, television channels, radio stations and print press were either owned, financed and run by the state or belonged to individuals and agencies connected to governments directly or indirectly. In Cassara and Lengel's terms, Al Jazeera "has challenged the tradition of

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[7] Al-Ameri, Fadl T. *'Hurriyaul I'ilam fil-Watan al-'Arabi* (Freedom of the Media in the Arab World) (Hala Publishing, 2011) p. 40
[8] Hafez, Kai. " The Role of Media in the Arab World's Transformation Process" in C. Hanelt, A. Möller (eds.), *Bound to Cooperate: Europe and the Middle East II* (Gütersloh & Berlin, 2008) p. 322
[9] Researcher's interview with N. Louati, May 2011.

state-controlled television in the Arab world and, in the process, threatened government interpretations of news in the region."[10]

Although Al Jazeera is owned by the state of Qatar and its budget comes from the Qatari government, its editorial policy and news agenda are set independently by its management and editorial staff. The distance between those who fund and those who set the editorial line has given the network a unique status and guaranteed its autonomy since the beginning. J. A., one of the founding figures of Al Jazeera believes that this exceptional relationship with the government is very unique. Although the channel broadcasts from Qatar, it does not speak for the Qatari government as does the country's national television. He insists on the fact that the founding team knew and realized from the start, "before even we went on air, we were given that sort of status that we are not a Qatari channel in the sense of speaking for of the Qatari government.[11]

This status not only allowed Al Jazeera to speak for the wider Arab public but Also to become the preferred and most trusted platform for the ordinary "men of street". They use this platform to address their concerns, raise issues of public interest and more importantly question power holders regardless of their position within the state hierarchy. Unlike national television stations which always echo the official line and speaks for their respective governments, Al Jazeera represented, for many Arabs, an alternative voice reaching out to political authorities and decision-makers wherever they are. In the absence of professional and credible local media, ordinary citizens in remote areas of Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Iraq or Mauritania, pick up the phone, come on Al Jazeera screen, and question their officials and government ministers. As J. A., observes, this behavior has become a common practice among viewers of Al Jazeera.

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[10] Cassara, Catherine and Lengel, Laura. "Move over CNN: Al Jazeera's View of the World Takes On the West" *Transnational Broadcasting Studies Journal -TBS* (Spring - Summer 2004).
[11] Researcher's interview with J. Azar, April 2011.

"We have people who get hold of the telephone and say hello I want to speak, I want to question or challenge the Minister, the head of government, the Prime Minister or the President", he says.[12] What makes this practice even more influential is the fact that whatever is said on the phone goes live on air, not only because of Al Jazeera's anti-censorship policy but also because technically the channel does not use the mechanism of time delay that allows it to filter phone calls.

In this way, Al Jazeera not only represents an alternative media channel conveying people's concerns, and mediating between them and their governments, but has also played, to varying degrees, the role of political representation. In Mohamed Zayani's terms, the channel filled not only a media void but also a political void. In the absence of political pluralism in the Arab world, he observes, "Al Jazeera plays a *de facto* pan-Arab opposition and a forum for resistance. It provides a voice for Arab opposing views and a high-profile platform for political dissidents."[13] In playing this remarkably active role, "Arab media almost seem like a replacement for political parties", notes Kai Hafez.[14] The failure of the so called Arab parliaments or *shura* (consultation) councils in representing their citizens and holding the executive power to account produced a sense of frustration and generalized the lack of confidence in political institutions in much of the region.

This remarkable status that enabled Al Jazeera to gain the trust of Arab audiences and represent their views and aspirations is one of the obvious results of the "reputation it has won for independent reporting that sharply contrasts with the commonly known

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Zayani, Mohamed. "Al Jazeera and the Vicissitudes of the New Arab Mediascape" in Mohamed Zayani (eds.) *The Al Jazeera Phenomenon: Critical Perspectives on New Arab Media* (Pluto Press, 2005), p. 2

[14] Hafez, Kai. Arab Satellite Broadcasting: Democracy without Political Parties", *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* Vol. 15, 2006. (www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall05/Hafez.html).

state-sponsored news coming from other media outlets in the Arab world"[15] as rightly points Maha Bashri. The growing political influence exerted by Al Jazeera over Arab publics may, in certain circumstances, translate into action and end up with 'activating' the people to take the street for political demonstrations. This has become possible, says Jon Alterman, "as control of public opinion increasingly slips away from governments' grasp. Those who can organize and mobilize will find a far more receptive environment than any time in the recent past."[16]

The relationship between the emergence of free and independent media and building democratic societies is obvious to many of Al Jazeera's employees. Almost all those who have been interviewed in the course of this research hold the same opinion regarding this issue. Director of news, Mostefa Souag, confirms this clearly:

> Freedom of the media is one of the biggest contributions to promoting democracy and human rights… Al Jazeera is a leading institution in defending and promoting freedom of the media in every way including in its own practice. Second, when you have a free media institution like Al Jazeera, this means you are giving platform to all kinds of views about society, politics, economic, culture, religion etc… By giving people a platform to express their different opinions, attitudes, analyses and understandings, you are creating an environment in which they become aware of the real issues that face society and therefore face the building of democracy.[17]

Liberating the media from the grips of autocratic regimes and making them accessible to different groups and individuals regardless of their political and ideological affiliations was therefore a remarkable change in the Arab media. This perception is shared with news anchor and programme presenter Mohamed Krichen, who believes

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[15] Bashri, Maha. *The Opinion and the Other Opinion: Al Jazeera's Agenda Setting Function in the Arab Islamic World* (VDM Verlag, Germany 2008) p. 6
[16] Alterman, Jon. "Information Revolution and the Middle East", *The Future Security Environment in the Middle East: Conflict, Stability, and Political Chance*, (Rand Report, 2004), p. 244
[17] Researcher's interview with Mostefa Souag, April 2011.

that Al Jazeera started its mission of liberating the Arab media space by breaking the old system of unequal access to state media:

> Al Jazeera gave voice to Arab dissidents living in exile, or those who lived within the Arab world but were deprived from speaking their minds. The first step in this mission was just to give the opportunity to speak to people who did not have this opportunity. This in itself was a revolution since most of the political leaders and opposition figures in the Arab world were, to varying degrees, either imprisoned, exiled or facing media blockade.[18]

Enabling dissidents and giving them access to the media was then conceived by Al Jazeera as the first milestone in the process of changing the practices of Arab media. Besides, the channel made a significant cultural contribution by raising the people's awareness of human rights through "diffusing and widely circulating statements and reports of human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Reporters Without Borders" as remarks Krichen. The third and most important aspect of Al Jazeera's contribution to changing the Arab media landscape was the introduction of controversial issues into the public debate. The discussion of such issues says Krichen was restricted and open only to closed circles of trust; others were excluded. On the contrary, Al Jazeera's talk shows like *Al-Ittijah Al-mu'akis* (the opposite direction) or *Akthar min Ra'y* (more than one opinion) try to be as inclusive as possible. Even at the terminology level we can see the change he adds, "the terms 'opposite direction' and 'more than one opinion' are of great significance in the Arab political context. because we were only used to hearing 'one opinion' which is almost sacred and irrevocable."[19] In doing so, Al Jazeera has built a new culture of diversity and multiplicity of opinions, which goes completely against the existing culture of 'the one' opinion that state television always try to embellish and impose on viewers.

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[18] Researcher's interview with Mohamed Krichen, April 2011.
[19] Ibid.

Airing different views and giving different political and social actors equal access to the mass media is particularly important in societies where the government monopolizes the public sphere and controls the flow of information at its different levels. Not only did Al Jazeera bring into the Arab media scene a new model that is pluralistic diversified and largely free from the shackles of the political power, it also managed to engage politicians and policy makers publicly and question their power in its newscasts and programmes. It has inspired a culture of accountability where "leading figures and policy-makers have suddenly become accountable and answerable to their public."[20]

In the absence of free and independent media there would be hardly any real prospect for democratization or political change in the proper sense. Al Jazeera has undoubtedly been instrumental in resetting the agenda of Arab media and reshaping its relationship to the political sphere as points M. Souag:

> When we bring a foreign Minister, a prime Minister, a President, a General etc. for an interview on Al Jazeera's screen, we are free to discuss with them any issue and ask them any question. This means that people will understand and see them as they are, without the myth that is built around them in their own countries ruled by dictatorship. If you take any Arab country where the system is dictatorial, you will find that the media try to make the President into a mythical figure, so far away from realty.[21]

In this way, Al Jazeera unpacks and demystifies the political world in the eyes of ordinary citizens by showing them the real side of their leaders. It is an ongoing practice that has had a clear effect on both the role of the media as well as people's perception of politics and political change. While undoing what state media has done in terms of mythicizing political leaders and turning them into a sort of imagined

[20] Zayani, "Al Jazeera and the Vicissitudes of the New Arab Mediascape", p. 2
[21] Researcher's interview with M. Souag, April 2011.

beings, Al Jazeera is building a new political culture in the region. Exposing government officials and state leaders in such an interactive communicative environment, not only contributes to raising people's awareness of the limitation of their leaders, but also engages them politically and creates among them the desire for change and to look for alternative leadership.

It is true that the Al Jazeera effect did not completely reshape all Arab media, and that national television stations in most of the Arab world still function in almost the same way, except for the introduction of talk shows and debate programmes in privately owned stations in certain countries.[22] However, the Arab media landscape is now much different from that in the 1990s and the process of change is ongoing on two major tracks. First, the proliferation of Arab-speaking satellite television stations such as Deutsche Welle (2002), Al-Hurra (2004), France 24 (2006), Russia Today (2007), BBC Arabic (2008), Euronews (2010). The most recent channel is Sky News Arabia that launched in May 2012. Second, the proliferation of new media and communication technologies and the extraordinarily rapid increase in the numbers of users.

The implications of these technologies are not confined to individual users but also to traditional media outlets which seem to be using them extensively and effectively to extend their reach and influence. The combined effect of old and new media, especially in the form of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, is profound and multidimensional. Empowering people through giving them open access to uncensored and unrestricted information is just one aspect of these changes.

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[22] Egypt in particular has seen an upsurge of this style of programming especially on "Dream", "Al-Mehwar TVs. The Moroccan French speaking "2M" also features interesting debates in many of its programmes. Responding to local political realities, a number of Lebanese television channels, host lively political talk shows.

2. Breaking the information monopoly

These profound changes in the media sphere meant in the first place that government control over information is no longer possible. Partly, because the leading role played by Al Jazeera in changing the Arab media and reshaping its relationship with politics and power holders created a "journalistic field" to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's term. Among the most apparent implications of the emergence of a journalistic field is to reverse the tide of influence that autocratic regimes generally exert over the media through monopolizing the process and circulation of information, especially government information. This monopoly, notes Bourdieu, "provides government authorities with weapons for manipulating the news or those in charge of transmitting it."[23]

The emergence of an Arab autonomous journalistic field, capable of setting its own agenda away from governmental and commercial pressures, made it possible for media institutions and satellite television in particular, to bring the government monopoly of information to an end. Moreover, through this emerging journalistic field, the media started to "profoundly modify power relationships within other fields"[24] and exert an increasing influence over politicians who, quite often find themselves forced to adapt their actions, appearances and sometimes discourses to fit the journalistic agenda, not the other way round. The increasing power that the mass media have acquired is not limited to the amount of information distributed through various and sometimes uncontrollable channels, and which deeply affected the role of autocratic governments to manage information in their favor. It is also about re-presenting politics to the publics and the ability of these media to set the conditions

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[23] Bourdieu, Pierre. *On Television and Journalism* (Pluto Press, 1998) p. 69.
[24] Ibid., p. 68.

for politicians to appear on their platforms. It is about framing politics or 'packaging' it, to use John Street's term, through to use of images, interviews, sound-bites and other appearance techniques in reporting and telling political stories.[25]

This profoundly transformed media-politics relationship made it extremely delicate and sometimes tantalizing for politicians to access the journalistic field and get their messages through. Prior to the arrival of Al Jazeera, journalists and media outlets used to go through a fierce competition to gain access to politicians or their information officers, and quite often access is given after substantial concessions on the side of journalists and the media in general. Now, on the contrary, the competition is among politicians to secure appearances through the media, particularly on Al Jazeera's screen. To gain access to millions of viewers nationally and across the region, politicians no longer have the luxury to say whatever they wish to say without being questioned or challenged. They have to accept that their message is conveyed to its recipients 'packaged' and accompanied with a whole set of other competing messages. They know that they are no longer the unique source of information, including official or government related information, and that journalists on their part, tap into a variety of alternative sources which enable them to face politicians with the right questions. In such circumstances politicians have no choice but to 'tell the truth' and provide the publics with as much and as accurate information as they could. This is a new era, in which governments' ability to monopolize information or manipulate news has become impossible or very limited.

The role played by Al Jazeera in bringing about these profound changes and facilitating access to unfettered information for the wider public is perceived by the of

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[25] See Chapter 2 "Telling Tales: the Reporting of Politics" in Jon Street, *Mass Media and Democracy* (Palgrave, 2001) p. 36-59.

the channel's editorial management as a process of 'empowerment' of the Arab public through knowledge. Director of news, M. Souag. is clear about the impact of truth-based knowledge on politics and political attitudes when he emphasizes that knowledge is power:

> I know it has become a cliché to say knowledge is power (…), but when you give your audience the truth as it is and let them know what is going on, when you give them the whole truth and nothing but the truth, you are empowering them because they are gaining knowledge. Gaining knowledge about their own living conditions, about the situation of their politicians and power holders etc. means you are empowering them.[26]

Once the public is empowered with knowledge based on true information they are well placed to judge their own politicians and make informed decisions on who to choose as their rulers. Al Jazeera's mission is not to tell people how to vote or who to choose, says M. S., but to present the public with the necessary information to help them make the right decision. People are intelligent enough to make their own decisions, all they need is knowledge an true information upon which they can decide. They do not need guidance or instructions as to whom they should vote for. This has nothing to do with professional journalism, "just bring politicians on screen, let them show their agendas and people will make their choices.[27]

Learning to make informed decisions about political choice is certainly a major step in the process of democratization. Al Jazeera's contribution to this process by opening access to information and widening the scope of politically engaged public at the regional level is obvious. Its international contribution towards engaging more people is also undeniable, especially after the introduction of additional languages to deliver

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[26] Researcher's interview with M. Souag., April 2011.
[27] Ibid.

its content. However, the impact of its global presence did not wait until the launch of its English online service in 2003 or Al Jazeera English in 2006.

In fact, Al Jazeera has risen to prominence in the global arena as early as 2001. Its exclusive coverage of the war in Afghanistan attracted the attention of global audiences after all the international media failed to remain on the ground and report the events independently from the Pentagon's lens. As Hugh Miles mentions, Al Jazeera was "the only foreign television broadcaster in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan at the start of bombing and had the only uplink facility, with which it could do live two-way communication with the channel's headquarters in Doha."[28] This unrivalled position, in which Al Jazeera found itself, caused the number of viewers to multiply exponentially; the rest of international news networks had no option but to rely on Al Jazeera's coverage. Its exclusive pictures and videos were retransmitted and widely circulated beyond its traditional Arab audience, through the screens of other networks such CNN, BBC, SKY News etc. If the coverage of the Afghanistan war propelled Al Jazeera to the top of the world's most watched television stations, its comprehensive coverage of the 2003 Iraq war consolidated this position and turned it from a regional news channel into one of the leading global media networks. In doing so, it has established itself as the first channel to contest the monopoly of Western-dominated global TV news journalism, as noted by H. Wessler and M. Adolphsen.[29]

The impact of Al Jazeera's journalistic practice at the regional level is coupled with another significant impact at the global level. As it has broken state monopoly over

[28] Miles, Hugh. *Al-Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World*, (Abacus, 2006) p. 142
[29] Wessler, H. and Adolphsen M. "Contra-flow from the Arab World? How Arab Television Coverage of the 2003 Iraq War was Used and Framed on Western International News Channels " *Journal of Media, Culture and Society,* (2008, Vol. 30) p. 439

information in the Arab world, it has equally challenged the monopoly of information internationally. In Miles's terms, "it had broken hegemony of the Western networks, and for the first time in hundreds of years, reversed the flow of information, historically from West to East."[30] In many cases, Al Jazeera has become the main and sometimes the only news network reporting from certain areas. By serving as an "alternative source of information" says Daya Thussu, the channel constitutes a textbook example of contra-flow in global media, as it weakens "Anglo-American domination of news and current affairs in one of the world's most geo-politically sensitive areas".[31]

3. The opinion and the other opinion

Giving platform to different views to discuss issues of public concern might seem a commonplace practice in much of the Western media and the media operating in democratic societies. But, in the Arab media, this was an exception until the arrival of Al Jazeera.[32] Prior to that, media outlets were organically linked to the state apparatus either directly or through various government agencies and circles of trust. It is not surprising in such an environment to find that the only voice aired on these media is the voice of the government and its officials. Political opposition figures and civil society activists were generally muted and denied access to their own national media. Those who are fortunate enough to leave their countries are occasionally given the opportunity to appear on foreign, especially European news services to express their opinions. With the launch of Al Jazeera in 1996, Arab dissidents started, for the first time, to turn to an Arab country to speak their minds and regularly appear in news

[30] Miles, *Al-Jazeera* (Abacus, 2006) p. 279
[31] Thussu, Daya K. "Mapping Global Media Flow and Contra-flow" in Daya Thussu (eds.) *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra-flow* (Routledge, 2007) p. 23
[32] Seib, Philip. "Hegemonic No More: Western Media, the Rise of Al Jazeera, and the Influence of Diverse Voices" *International Studies Review* (2005, Vol. 7), p. 601

bulletins and participate in talk shows. The contrast between the quality of journalism it has introduced to the Arab world and the dominating model was unmistakably clear since it went on air. As Sherry Ricchiardi points out, "when Al Jazeera burst onto the highly controlled and censored Arab media landscape fifteen years ago, the network boldly defined itself as "the free press."[33]

Freedom of the press is what Arab citizens needed most when state media served only as tools of propaganda promoting government discourse and viewpoint. The channel's content, whether in the form of news or programmes came as a response to the audience need or 'hunger' as Noureddine Miladi calls it: "it appeals to a hunger within Arab audiences for democracy and freedom of expression, suppressed by decades of state control on all media outlets in most Arab countries."[34]

The Al Jazeera motto "the opinion and the other opinion"[35] will be regarded as a landmark in this turning point in the history of Arab media. Showing different views and dealing with news stories from different angles not only changed the nature of the media coverage, but also created a new, radically different environment in which viewers perceive and interact with the content they receive. Described by media and political communication scholars as revolutionary[36], the role played by Al Jazeera in bringing in "the other opinions" cannot be separated from its success story. The mastermind behind this simple but influential motto explains the philosophy behind what he called "our contract with the audience":

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[33] Ricchiardi, Sherry. "The Al Jazeera Effect", *American Journalism Review*, March/April 2011.
[34] Miladi, Noureddine. "Satellite TV News and the Arab Diaspora in Britain: Comparing Al-Jazeera, the BBC and CNN", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 6, August 2006, p. 952
[35] This is a literal translation from Arabic. This motto might be seen as the equivalent of the English journalism axiom "getting both sides of the story".
[36] See El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002; Miles, 2005; Seib, 2008. See also Ayish Mohammad.. "Political Communication on Arab World Television: Evolving Patterns" in *Political Communication*, Vol. 19, 2002; and Tausch, Arno. "On the Global Political and Economic Environment of the Current Al Jazeera Revolution", *Middle East Studies Online Journal*, Issue 5, Vol. 2, 2011

This motto was actually one of three propositions that came up during our discussion when we were trying to define our identity as a new channel back in 1996. 'The opinion and the other opinion', I felt, has more substance and is not just a claim. Once it started to appear repeatedly on our screen, we cannot deviate from it. We feel that we have the obligation to implement it in our daily practice. It is committing us like a contract and it was the reason why Al Jazeera became famous in a very short time.[37]

Presenting the opinion and the other opinion and giving access to all sides of the story is one of the main characteristics of democratic media. It has become a daily practice in which a new social reality with a different political culture is emerging. By involving multiple actors (state and non-state actors) and facilitating constant interaction between them, Al Jazeera is gradually fostering a pluralistic political culture and redefining the political scene accordingly.

The first actor in this process of fostering cultural and political change in favor of democracy is the journalistic corps itself. It is the arena where information is gathered, processed and then transmitted to the wider audience. To an Arab journalist, whose experience in state-run media is limited to talking to state officials and promoting one particular discourse, "the opinion and the other opinion" means a significant cultural change. To accommodate this change, Al Jazeera had to train generations of journalists who joined the station from various Arab countries, but with similar attitudes when it comes to dealing with different opinions. J. A., one of the founders and a leading member of the team who defined Al Jazeera's editorial policy, tells us how the management handled this significant change in the channel's organizational culture. When they were training the first generation of journalists, they were asking them to include in their reports both points of view, the view of the opposition along with that of governments. Because this was unprecedented to most of them, "they were asking

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[37] Researcher's interview with J. Azar, April 2011.

questions like: are you serious?"[38] This was the case argues J. A., because previously, no Arab journalist dares to speak about the opposition let alone bring them on air and give them a platform.

To institutionalize this process and have more impact on Arab media, the network established a professional training center "to train the next generation" says Roger Gafke. Since its launch in 2004, thousands of media professionals from different Arab media organizations received training courses along the lines of Al Jazeera's journalistic style. Many of those trainees "come from the home channel and others from as far away as Tunisia and South Africa. About 11% of its workshops have been delivered outside Qatar."[39]

The second actor in this changing media and political environment is the audience. Prior to Al Jazeera and the subsequent satellite news channels that started to populate the Arab media world since mid-1990s, newscasts across the region were almost monolithic in their format, content and running order. Audiences would normally expect political news on their national television to be structured in a way that leadership speeches, official visits and protocol activities always top the news bulletins lineups. With the advent of Al Jazeera, viewers started to see new faces and hear previously unheard discourses. The introduction of proper journalism which includes a set of distinctive professional values and practices means that news, whether governmental or non-governmental; occupy their position in the running order first and foremost according to their newsworthiness not according to external political agenda. It also means that news stories are covered from different angles and that the public is no longer presented with one opinion which is the 'official' narrative.

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[38] Researcher's interview with J. Azar, April 2011.
[39] Gafke, Roger "Training the Next Generation" in *The Al Jazeera Decade: 1996-2006* (Al Waraqoon, 2007) p. 205

News and programmes on Al Jazeera and other similar stations have become an open forum for competing narratives where discourses and counter-discourses reach the audiences on an equal footing.

This exercise, according to Souag, reflects the new dynamics characterizing the relationship between politicians and their publics. It aims at bringing both sides closer through the mediation of television so that mutual understanding could be fostered. In doing so, the media extends its influence beyond its traditional territories of informing the public and reporting news stories. Engaging television audiences with politicians, intellectuals and activists and presenting them with a multitude of different opinions in open debates raises the level of political awareness among people. It also contributes to transforming an increasingly large segment of society from passive recipients of media content into active participants in their public life. Knowledge empowers people and knowledge of the political field including the different interacting players is essential for the creation of a lively and vibrant political life. When Al Jazeera brings together the opinion and the other opinion to discuss political, religious, cultural or social issues, "this means we are allowing our audiences to see who is saying what, and why this or that side says what they have to say," observes M. S.[40]

It is a long educational process through which, the audiences not only get enlightened with the amount of information they receive, but also get to know their politicians closely and familiarize themselves with political deliberations and competing arguments that might affect their lives in one way or another.

The third actor involved in this dynamic process of developing a new political culture, besides the journalistic corps and the audiences, is the political opposition and civil

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[40] Researcher's interview with M. Souag, April 2011.

society activists. Previously banned from appearing on public broadcasters, these non-state actors are now regular guests on newscasts and talk shows. They take part in uncensored debates and express their opinions on all sorts of political, social, economic and religious issues.

The Al Jazeera policy of airing "the opinion and the other opinion" has radically altered the relationship between Arab media and opposition groups, and created a new journalistic environment different from that described by Mohammed Ayish in which "opposition groups had virtually no access to government monopolized television, nor did large segments of the population living beyond urban centers."[41] Opening up the media for different views and opinions to be heard without restriction or manipulation is an essential part of any democratic change. For, as Kenneth Newton observes, "democratization requires airing all opinions, including those which are unpopular, eccentric, or supported only by small minorities."[42]

What Newton says about media in general applies to Al Jazeera in particular. News and programme presenter Laila Chaieb believes that broadcasting all opinions is an indication of professionalism and fair reporting rather than a sign of adopting a particular political agenda. Democratization comes as a natural effect of this ongoing policy of impartiality whereby all opinions and viewpoints are aired regardless of whether they are acceptable or unacceptable, privileged or marginalized. This, according to L. Ch. "what makes us think that Al Jazeera supports democracy and promotes political awareness in the Arab world."[43]

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[41] Ayish, M. I. "Political Communication on Arab World Television: Evolving Patterns" in *Political Communication*, Vol. 19, 2002, p. 138

[42] Newton, Kenneth. "Media Bias" in Robert E. Goodin and Andrew Reeve (eds.), *Liberal Neutrality* (Routledge, 1989) p. 132

[43] Researcher's interview with L. Chaieb, April 2011.

In the age of new media and the ongoing upsurge of communication technologies, the Al Jazeera's democratization effect is becoming more visible. The rapid expansion in the use of social media networks among the younger generations in particular, is having a profound impact, not only on the way information is gathered, distributed and received, but also on people's perception of how powerful they have become in the age of free flow of information. The more traditional media and social media work together to diversify their platforms and maximize their outreach, the more their influence and political impact grow further. The following section analyses the interplay between old and new media in the Al Jazeera journalistic practice and looks at the implications of this changing relationship on the democratization process.

4. Old and new media.. From competition to complementarity

Contrary to what many had initially thought about the relationship between old and new media, and that the latter would replace the former or at least take over much of its functions, it has been clear that the non-stop proliferation of alternative news sources and the phenomenal surge of communication technologies is reinforcing the old media and providing them with additional power not only to survive but also to expand both their reach and influence. The phenomenal success of Al Jazeera in becoming the main and most trusted source of news for millions of Arab viewers, which in turn, brought the government monopoly of information to an end, is partly due an effective strategy of integrating new media into its broadcasting system. According to former chief editor Ahmed Sheikh, the relationship between traditional media and social media in generating content and diversifying and widening the scope of dissemination of information is one of 'complementarity'. It is a dual carriage way, he says:

When you use social media, you have what we call crowd-sourcing where the whole crowd becomes your source. So, your means of getting information intensify. The problem is that you must be able to verify the authenticity of this wide range of information sources. Social media provide traditional media with information and on the other hand, traditional media take this information, in the form of video, picture etc. to a much wider audience.[44]

This mutual relationship between traditional and social media seems to be working reasonably well to complement each other and unravel the existing unequal access to these media among Arab users. As A. Sh. explains, access to internet and social media networks in the region is considerably low not only compared to Europe where 28.57% of the population, for instance, use Facebook and North America where the population penetration is even higher (42.12%), but also compared to access to television which remains, by far, the most popular news provider. While almost every Arab household has a regular and open access to satellite television, the internet is mainly used by the young generations and those with middle and higher income. A Gallup study published in April 2011 shows that only 22% of young Arabs have Internet access at home.[45] The number of those who use social media networks among them is even lower as Facebook Statistics below show. With the exception of Syria and Sudan which are not included in these statistics, the overall number of Arabs using Facebook in the first quarter of 2012 is just below 50 million users out of about 300 million people. This brings the average population penetration in 18 Arab countries to only 13.76%.[46]

Facebook country penetration

[44] Researcher's interview with A. Sheikh, April 2011.

[45] See http://www.gallup.com/poll/147035/Young-Arabs-Connected-2010.aspx (information retrieved from Gallup website in April 2012).

[46]The table above provides detailed figures on population penetration in individual Arab countries (the information included in this table was retrieved in May 2012 from *Facebook Statistics* website: http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics.

#	Country	Population/million	Users	Population Penetration
1.	Egypt	82,637	10,669,020	13.26%
2.	Saudi Arabia	27,897	5,334,080	20.73%
3.	Morocco	32,273	4,297,920	13.59%
4.	Algeria	35,980	3,386,800	09.79%
5.	United Arab Emirates	7,891	3,191,420	64.14%
6.	Tunisia	10,676	2,974,940	28.09%
7.	Jordan	6,632	2,184,880	34.10%
8.	Iraq	32,665	1,645,640	05.55%
9.	Lebanon	4,264	1,419,060	34.40%
10.	Kuwait	2,818	961,980	34.49%
11.	Palestine	4,164	905,060	35.99%
12.	Qatar	1,732	537,400	63.91%
13.	Yemen	23,833	512,080	02.18%
14.	Libya	6,422	498,820	07.56%
15.	Oman	2,997	463,400	15.61%
16.	Bahrain	1,336	348,100	47.17%
17.	Mauritania	3,541	872,200	02.72%
18.	Somalia	9,926	779,800	0.77%
	Total	**297,684**	**40,982,600**	**13.76%**

The competing strategies of old and new media, and the unequal access to different media among different users should not necessarily considered as a negative development. Beyond this apparent competition lies a profound need of all media to work together and complement each other. From his perspective as a leading figure in Al Jazeera's editorial management, Ahmed Sheikh explicitly confirms this reciprocated need: "traditional media need social media to get information, and social media need traditional media to widen their scope of coverage."[47] At the practical level, and to translate this mutually beneficial relationship into a working model, Al Jazeera satellite television has been working closely with the network's new media section launched in 2004. To explore the perspective of the new media team on this relationship, I interviewed their head, Moeed Ahmed, who explained how important for both sides to work together and complement each other:

> As was the case with traditional media, this is just journalism. Before you have to go on the street and put the microphone at some people's face and ask them questions, now they are able to come to you and tell you what is happening or to voice their opinion from their home. So, it is just the form that has changed but what is actually happening is the same. It is also a lot cheaper than before because previously, you have to fly somebody there or to drive or send a cameraman and a reporter. Now, we do the same job but more effectively and probably at a wider scale.[48]

So, both old and new media are doing the same job in terms of informing as many people as possible of what happens around them while providing them with a platform to voice their opinions. Working together within an integrated free media environment, albeit with different means and in different forms, can only maximize the reach and consequently the effect of the media as whole. For, the wider the media succeed in circulating free information and continue to reach out to, and engage new

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[47] Researcher's interview with A. Sheikh, April, 2011.
[48] Researcher's interview with M. Ahmed, April 2011.

publics, the more political change becomes possible. In practical terms, traditional and new media can complement each other in different ways. They can strengthen and assist each other to overcome their limitations in terms of technical, logistical, financial as well as human capacity. As explained by M. A. regarding the limitations surrounding the work of traditional media organizations, television stations may have, at one point in time, one hundred or two hundred reporters, but no company would have a thousand reporters covering events around the world. With the advent of new media, every person on the street is potentially a reporter who can enrich and extend traditional media coverage exponentially. What remains for news companies to do "is obviously the filtration and verification of contacts, which is as important, and maybe more important than before.[49] The problem for television channels to use citizen journalists as regular news gatherers is that they have to deal with so much information coming out of all these different sources.

Using new media on a large scale and integrating different mechanisms in the process of gathering, processing and distributing information has certainly helped Al Jazeera reach out to additional audiences beyond its capacity as a traditional broadcaster. The latest achievement in this ongoing expansion was the re-launch of its four-year old "*sharek*" service in five languages[50]: English, Arabic, Serbo-Croat, Turkish, Swahili. This remarkable online expansion was announced in a press release in which the head of new media, Moeed Ahmad says: "Al Jazeera is committed to fostering a culture of citizen reporting in communities across the region and worldwide. That is why visitors to *Sharek* are able to watch footage that doesn't necessarily make it onto our screens."[51]

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[49] Ibid.
[50] More details on the Al Jazeera *Sharek* (Arabic for share) service were provided in the previous chapter (chapter 5).
[51] This announcement was made in a press release issued in Doha, Qatar on May 06, 2012.

The emergence of active citizen reporting on a large scale and the constructive interchange between new and old media provided the media with additional power and increased their effect on public life. This newly fostered participatory culture is quickly spreading despite the multiplication of mechanisms of censorship applied by political authorities. We are witnessing a new social reality in the making where the physical barriers aiming at restricting or deviating the free flow of information are becoming more and more futile.

By all means, this is a new phase in the long process of political development in the Arab world. It is an unprecedented form of "democratization from below"[52], which involves not only the elites but also the grassroots who believe that these media represent a unique source of empowerment and an effective means to challenge autocratic political systems. The current revolutionary wave sweeping the Arab world will be examined in the following chapter as an example illustrating the role of the media in the current phase of Arab democratization.

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[52] Larbi Sadiki has written extensively to lay the ground for a new understanding of Arab democratization from a bottom-up perspective. See his two volumes: *The Search for Arab Democracy: Discourses and Counter-Discourses*, (Columbia University Press, 2004), and *Rethinking Arab Democratization: Elections Without Democracy*, (Oxford University Press, 2009). See also: Orayb Aref Najjar "New Palestinian Media and Democratization from Below" in Philip Seib (eds.) *New Media and the New Middle East* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) pp. 191-212

Chapter 8:

Televising the Arab spring: real-time democratization?

"esse est percipi" or "to be is to be perceived"

Bishop George Berkeley, (Principles of Human Knowledge)

"All this trouble comes from this matchbox!"

Hosni Mubarak (2001)

In March 2007, Fred Halliday visited the Al Jazeera headquarters in Doha and wrote an article titled "Al Jazeera: the matchbox that roared",[1] echoing Hosni Mubarak's famous remark when he, too visited the station in 2001. Accompanied with his Information Minister, Safwat el-Sherif, the President asked: "All this trouble comes from this matchbox!", pointing to the tiny newsroom he was shown by his host, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. Now, after the fall of the Mubarak's autocratic regime in the context of what has become known as the Arab spring, the debate over the democratizing role of Al Jazeera is back in. As the four countries where revolutions took place are still undergoing transition phases, it is hard to determine how long it would take for stable democratic systems to be established.

At the discourse level, the term "Arab spring" seems to have acquired a normative dimension as more governments tried to associate themselves with this historic change whether in the Arab region or elsewhere. President Omar Basheer of Sudan claimed his country preceded the Arab Spring countries and had its own spring twenty

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[1] Halliday, Fred. "Al Jazeera: The Matchbox that Roared", *Political Journeys: The Open Democracy Essays* (Saqi Books, 2011), pp. 116-121

three years ago. Those who expect it in Khartoum, he said, will have to wait for so long.[2] Responding to the mounting pressure on the government to introduce substantial political reforms, the Algerian authorities used the national television to promote the idea of "Algeria's spring: orderly change vs. revolution" during the June 2012 election campaign.[3] On her part, the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Hina Rabbani, told her audience during her speech at the Doha Forum on 31st May 2012: "My country's spring was in 2007, when the Pakistani people successfully brought down the military dictatorship of General Pervez Musharraf and replaced it with a working democratic system".

It is true that the social demands were at the roots of the Arab spring, since the first protests in Tunisia started on social grounds and were initially led by local trade unions. However, the political aspect of the revolution soon surfaced with clear demands to topple the regime. The main slogan of the Arab spring (The people want to topple the regime) was formulated at a very early stage of the Tunisian revolution and quickly spread to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and then Syria. Tunisians who first raised this slogan in the streets of Sidi Bouzid, Gafsa, Kasserine etc. had to tap into their collective memory and refer to the literature of national resistance against the French colonizer to easily re-discover the famous verse of great poet Aboul-Qacem el-Chebbi: "if the people one day *will* to live.. then fate will have to answer their call". It was this key phrase, "the will of the people", that mobilized the masses from all around the country and made them take the streets demanding the fall of Ben Ali's autocratic regime while chanting with one voice "Dégage" (leave).

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[2] *Al Hayat*, 4 January 2012.
[3] *Reuters*, 15 April 2012 (http://ara.reuters.com/article/topNews/idARACAE83E0IJ20120415)

This voice may have been muted and the pictures of the expanding protest movement could have been distorted if the media were not there and failed to bring the unfolding story into their visual field. Journalist Mohamed Lemine believes that the presence of Al Aljazeera was instrumental not only in reporting the story, but also and more importantly in keeping it alive:

> The most important thing, regardless of the nature and quality of its coverage, is that Al Jazeera, from the first moments of the Arab revolutions, especially in Tunisia, was able to capture that symbolic moment of Bouazizi setting himself on fire and opened up the skies on it. If that story died, I believe the Arab revolutions would have died consequently.[4]

Seen by many as a real opportunity for the region to move into a democratic era, the Arab revolutions cannot be separated from the comprehensive yet detailed daily media coverage provided by Al Jazeera in particular.

This chapter explores the details of this coverage and analyses its political significance through the eyes of those who performed it. The data collected from my interviewees draws a clear picture of the ways in which news is gathered, processed and disseminated to millions of viewers across the region. Besides editors, producers and journalists who covered the revolutions from inside the newsroom at the channel's Doha headquarters, I interviewed a number of field reporters especially those who were on the ground during the events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya as well as Bahrain. These interviews provide us, not only with an insight into the way Al Jazeera conducted its coverage of the Arab spring, but also contextualize the Arab spring and explain the editorial policies and how media coverage engages public participation.

1. The Arab spring: the context and the processes

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[4] Researcher's interview with Mohamed Lemine, May 2011.

As we shall see in what follows, there is a general agreement among the interviewees that the Arab spring, as a sociopolitical event, should be understood in the context of the changing media landscape that has been taking place in the Arab world since Al Jazeera started broadcasting in 1996. Bringing politics and political debates into the visual space was one of the building blocks of what the channel's former Chief Editor calls "a new political awareness"[5]. Televising debates about issues and events close to the hearts and minds of Arabs and publicizing them beyond the confines of elitists agendas meant that elites are no longer capable of monopolizing the public sphere. It is a new era where independent media has become instrumental in the education and formation of public opinion. This educational process is carried out along different axes. News and programme presenter Mohamed Krichen explains how the channel educates people about their rights:

> Reports of human rights organizations started to be shown on a widely viewed network such as Al Jazeera. On our screen, people are given the chance to know what organizations like Amnesty International, Human rights watch, Reporters Sans Frontiers etc. say about their rights. This service was essential in equipping people with new knowledge and raising their awareness of various sorts of violations in the Arab world.[6]

It is within the context of the new dynamics which Al Jazeera brought into the media and politics spheres that this awareness has been shaped. To characterize this new atmosphere, former Director General, Wadah Khanfar coined the term "Al Jazeera spirit". On the occasion of its tenth anniversary, the network published a volume with the title "the Al Jazeera Spirit".[7] Terms such as these circulated widely among the staff and formed what could be called a new organizational culture. It was "the Al

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[5] Researcher's interview with A Sheikh, April 2011.
[6] Researcher's interview with M Krichen. April 2011.
[7] The title of the English version was changed to "*The Al Jazeera Decade*", (eds.) Ezzeddine Abdelmoula (2007).

Jazeera spirit, which appeared in the Arab world in the last fifteen years that shaped the theoretical framework within which the current state of public awareness was fostered"[8], says Mohamed Val Ould Eddine. He believes his channel played a pivotal role in the massive politicization of Arab publics throughout the years, and no real change could have happened without the contribution of Al Jazeera.

The same understanding is shared by former Chief Editor Ahmed Sheikh who also thinks that Al Jazeera's contribution towards raising people's political awareness and empowering them to challenge their autocratic regimes and aspire for alternative democratic systems has been so significant. He argues that, not only did his channel reshape the Arab media landscape and created a new political awareness in the region, but has also accelerated history:

> Hadn't Al Jazeera been in the scene since 1996, the present upheaval in the Arab world would have been delayed until, say fifteen years from now. Al Jazeera created a sort of public awareness all these people now share the same principles, the same goals, the same understanding. So, Al Jazeera expedited the cycle of change in the Arab world.[9]

The same opinion is expressed by Senior Producer Samir Hijjawy, albeit in different terms. To him, Al Jazeera plays a dual role when it covers political developments in the region; it reports them and it shapes them. The Arab spring is certainly not a byproduct of Al Jazeera; however it is difficult to explain it without reference to the sea changes in the media landscape for the last fifteen years. The steady buildup of discontent and frustration created by the media coverage between 1996 and 2010 is at the roots of the Arab revolutions, emphasizes Hijjawy:

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[8] Researcher's interview with field reporter, Mohamed Val Ould Eddine, May 2011.
[9] Researcher's interview with A. Sheikh, April 2011.

Al Jazeera offered the Arab publics the freedom to express their views on issues such as corruption, poverty, inequality etc. Moreover, it humanized the media coverage by placing the human being at the center of its reporting. By doing so, the channel raised the public awareness and created some sort of self-esteem among its viewers. Its contribution towards shaping a new self-perception of Arab identity was immense. With Al Jazeera, the Arab viewer started to re-affirm his identity by saying: I exist, I want my right; so, I will revolt."[10]

It is clear from these testimonies that the role of Al Jazeera goes far beyond news-reporting. It has been paving the way for change through raising awareness and shaping public opinion. Change has become a salient demand through increased media exposure of such issues as mentioned by Hijjawy. This is the result of a continuous media coverage that spans over fifteen years and includes reporting of events close to the hearts and minds of Arabs across the region.

The strategic location of Al Jazeera at the heart of the Middle East, a continuously troubled region, enabled the channel to cover most of the hotspots from a relatively close proximity. This advantage gave it primacy over its competitors and made of it the preferred, and in a number of cases, the only broadcaster to refer to. This has become visible since 1998 with its live coverage of Operation Desert Fox[11] in Iraq. Following Operation Desert Fox, the region witnessed a series of successive events that consolidated the channel's position and gradually built its reputation as a leading global broadcaster: the Palestinian *intifada* (2000), the war in Afghanistan (2001), the war in Iraq (2003), the Israel-Hezbollah war (2006), the Gaza war (2008-2009).

Televising the Palestinian *intifada*, which began in late September 2000 and lasted for over five years, was the longest regional event Al Jazeera had covered since it was

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[10] Researcher's interview with Senior Producer and responsible for special coverage, Samir Hijjawy, May 2011.
[11] Operation Desert Fox is the code-name for the four-day series of air strikes on Iraqi targets initiated by the US and UK on December 16, 1998.

launched in 1996. Uncovered events, regardless of how important they might be, cannot acquire the same weight or significance as those which get covered. If we are to contextualize George Berkley's principle about visual perception "to be is to be perceived" in the current debate, we would rather say "to be is to be seen on television". In fact, the Palestinians did rise up against the Israeli occupation from December 1987 through to 1993, in what was known as the first *intifada*, but in the absence of extensive media coverage, little has been known about it to the outside world. The term *intifada* itself became commonplace thanks to the monotonous usage and the wide circulation of it by the media.

Having established itself as the main source of news in the Arab world after the Palestinian *intifada*, Al Jazeera continued its groundbreaking coverage of regional events throughout the years to consolidate its position at the global stage. With its wide network of correspondents and field reporters, Al Jazeera was able to televise events taking place almost everywhere in the Arab world and the Middle East.

What characterized Al-Jazeera's coverage of this series of events from Operation Desert Fox in 1998 through to Operation Cast Lead in 2008-9[12], not only the amount of pictures and information it delivered to viewers, but also its ability to capture the mood of mounting anger in the Arab world during and following each of these events. Add to this, the deteriorating social conditions, the widespread of corruption and human rights abuses, and the absence of freedom of expression in most of the Arab countries. Combined together, these factors contributed to the increased demands for change and caused the frustration in the Arab street to build up and gradually turn into

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[12] Operation Cast Lead is the code-name for the three-week armed conflict in Gaza during the winter of 2008–2009. The conflict started on December 27, when Israeli forces launched a major air attack on Hamas political and military targets. Al Jazeera was the only international network reporting events on the ground after the Israeli authorities decided to block the besieged strip in front of the foreign media.

a political opposition. This is the context in which the Arab spring materialized. It came as a condensation and culmination of a long process of anger and resentment among Arab masses that are constantly exposed to the media and to Al Jazeera in particular. As was mentioned above, Al Jazeera did not only report those events because of their newsworthiness, it also acted as an agent for change. The editorial policy through which clear connections are made between 'foreign occupation' (Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq), recurrent 'aggression' (Israel-Hezbollah war, Gaza war) and internal conditions (dictatorship, injustice, humiliation etc.) provided a convenient recipe for revolution. Revolutions happen when people are prepared for them, says Souag:

> They happen as a result of certain historical experiences usually marked with injustice, suffering and humiliation. When people go through that kind of experience and succeed in constructing a particular narrative that favors change, then the conditions for the revolution are there.[13]

Here, it was Al Jazeera that helped construct the narrative by linking together separate events and giving them meaning and orientation. While angry protestors were taking the streets in Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco and a number of other Arab countries, this narrative was being shaped on the screens of Al Jazeera which provided its viewers with the historical background, the political context and the analytical framework. In the absence of this narrative which has constantly stressed the need for change, it would be hard to understand and explain the processes leading to the Arab spring.

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[13] Researcher's interview with M. Souag, April, 2011.

The following section tries to unpack Al Jazeera's narrative of the Arab spring and understand how, editorially, this turning point in modern Arab history was framed and reported.

2. Framing the Arab spring: the vision and the editorial policy

As was developed in the theoretical part of this research regarding the relationship between media and politics (chapter 4), the Arab spring presents us with a unique empirical case where the dynamics of this relationship are displayed markedly. The role played by Al Jazeera in framing and reporting this political development could be clearly noticed. The relatively long and rich experience the channel has gained from covering regional and global events throughout the last fifteen years made it stand out of its many competitors and position itself as one of the leading news channels in the world. Covering a story as big and complex as the Arab spring required the management to be more careful in shaping their editorial strategy as the Arab spring unfolds and moves on from one country to another. Head of news M. Souag, explains how editorial decisions were made inside the newsroom to frame and present this event to the outside world:

> First of all, we have to evaluate the situation in each country. For many years we have been covering protests all over the Arab world, why didn't we call them revolutions? In Tunisia for example, we started by talking about 'protests', then we moved into calling it 'uprising' and then 'revolution'. Each phase has its own characteristics and we have to ensure that we do not impose our own views onto the situation.[14]

This gradual progress in qualifying the events may seem unbiased and reflects a professionally neutral stance in covering the Arab spring as a news story. However, as M. O. Lemine., reminds us, Al Jazeera has always sided with the people against the

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[14] Researcher's interview with M. Souag, April 2011.

dictatorial regimes and its coverage of the Arab revolutions should be seen in this light. What he calls 'traditional professionalism' and 'formal objectivity' are not always in line with the ethical obligation which Al Jazeera has been advocating since it came on air. Siding with the people and presenting the alternative account sometimes entails "twisting the neck of traditional professionalism to open up new possibilities for a different coverage that is able to grasp the complexities of the reality."[15]

To cope with the complexities of the developing story in the streets of the revolting countries, the editorial decision inside the newsroom needs also to be complex, but flexible and responsive to changes. As demonstrations on the ground increased and reached a new turning point to become full-scale revolutions, the channel had also reached a decision to drop its regular scheduling and opted for an open news cycle. There was no room left for 'ordinary news' which have become insignificant compared to the 'big news' of the revolution, says Souag, explaining the degree to which his channel was responsive to the demands of the viewers. To him, the decision to open up the screen for a nonstop reporting was justified by the fact that the people in the streets were asking for a radical change and that viewers were no longer interested in regular programming. The demands for a radical change in politics would then be reflected in a radical change on the screen and in the running order of news. Here, we are not talking about how the media frames news stories according to a preset agenda as we learn in framing theory, but how news stories set the agenda of the media in an interactive way. It is true, says Mohamed Dahou that:

> Al Jazeera paved the way for change through the empowerment of the people. It provided them with revolutionary contentment and revolutionized their culture. The Arab scene too, with the dynamics of change it showed and the resistance in the face

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[15] Researcher's interview with M. Lemine, May 2011.

of dictatorships, gave Al Jazeera and other media outlets the opportunity to present their audiences with a different and unique content.[16]

It is no longer a one way exercise; it is rather a dual framing game. The editorial decision to restructure the channel's programming in response to the demands from the audiences and the developing stories on the ground reflects this dynamically generated duality. But, how can a channel, known best for its popular talk shows, drop its programmes for months and rely only on live news reporting? This move was necessary, thinks Ahmed Val Ould Eddine[17]. Al Jazeera's flagship programmes disappeared and the channel provided 24 hour coverage of the Arab spring revolutions, he says. It was never easy to go that way: "if a channel chooses to devote its screen for continuous news coverage of one particular event for a whole year, this means that, it has automatically become part of the scene, an essential part of that scene."[18]

Continuous live reporting of protests demanding regime change in several countries created new dynamics similar to the 'domino effect'. Protestors in the streets of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen discovered, through the chants and slogans they raised, more unifying factors than they ever thought. The political divides separating Arab countries at the state level, seemed insignificant at the popular level. The "Arab spring", a term umbrella under which the coverage of individual revolutions was carried out, reflects this collective feeling and provides Arab masses with additional meaning for their "Arabness". Reviving the sense of belonging to one "Arab *ummah* (nation) has been one of the pillars of Al Jazeera's discourse in which the Arab world started to see itself through a different lens. Amidst a wide range of competing

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[16] Researcher's interview with Mohamed Dahou, May 2011.
[17] Ahmed Val Ould Eddine, field reporter. He covered the Libyan revolution before he was captured for a month by Gaddafi's forces.
[18] Researcher's interview with Ahmed Val Ould Eddine, May 2011.

narratives about the Arabs and their position in history and in this changing world, Al Jazeera has been providing a platform for different elements of this narrative to come together and project a new image and construct a new social reality.

The image Al Jazeera has been painting of Arab societies and their unfavorable reality relied on a particular interpretation of Arab history, culture and identity. It is an image-remaking exercise that unleashed a revival process through which Arabs re-discovered themselves and started comparing their sociopolitical conditions to those of other peoples and nations. Decades after independence, there is no reason why their *umma* should be still lagging behind the rest of the world in almost every regard. They cannot justify why free elections are taking place, not only in Europe and America, but also in Latin America, Africa and Asia while the majority of their political systems are still confined to family rule and military dictatorships. Under these types of rule, it is hard to imagine that peoples' conditions would improve or the gap between their existing reality and their imagined future would narrow down. With the amount of information Al Jazeera has been providing and the ability to openly discuss and criticize those conditions, changing the political systems has become inevitable to changing the overall situation in the region. This sweeping change is "the season of the harvest" says Laila Chaieb. She believes that:

> Among the chief factors leading to the Arab revolutions was the emergence of an informed public opinion. People have become aware of their condition and they are no longer prepared to accept it as it is. They want to change it and move from the position of subjects to that of active players.[19]

The Arab spring demonstrated that this move has happened and that the Arab societies ceased to be passive subjects of political authorities. They turned into active

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[19] Researcher's interview with L. Chaieb, March 2011.

players leading change in a number of countries. Since the first revolution erupted in Tunisia and shortly followed by the Egyptian revolution the scope of this regional movement started to unfold. It is an Arab movement that clearly goes beyond the limits of regime change in one small country in North Africa. Through its live, continuous and simultaneous coverage of protests in different cities, Al Jazeera succeeded not only in bringing together revolutionaries of the same country, but also in connecting revolutions in all five countries (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria). Presenting these different revolutions as parts of one encompassing event that is the Arab spring, cannot be understood away from Al Jazeera's vision and editorial policy. It is a policy that always tends to understand developments in individual Arab countries from an overall Arab perspective. The discourse and political analysis provided by guest commentators focusing on shared elements and drawing parallels between revolutions lay the ground for this understanding and frame the message Al Jazeera delivers to its viewers. Based on interviews with field reporters who covered the Arab spring, the following section explains how this editorial policy was implemented in the coverage of each of the revolting countries.

3. Covering the Arab spring: differences and similarities

In Tunisia, as events erupted unexpectedly and spread so quickly from one place to another, new media took the lead over traditional media in initiating the coverage of what has become known as the first revolution of the Arab spring. The images of Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire, inciting demonstrations throughout the country, were first circulated through social media networks, but only captured the attention of the wider public after they have been televised and repeatedly shown on Al Jazeera. Bouazizi's act and the effect of these

pictures became a catalyst for a series of mass demonstrations that eventually led President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to step down after 23 years in power.

The significant role Al Jazeera has played in preparing the ground for change before the Arab spring has not diminished during the revolutions. In each case, the media proved to be a prime condition for success. If change in the Arab world was inevitable, Al Jazeera was the facilitator says Nabil Raihani, news producer and field reporter who covered the Tunisian revolution. He explains this function with reference to the Marxist concept of determinism:

> Let me borrow Marx's concept of determinism when he was asked about the role of human being in history. He said history is like a pregnant woman who has to give birth anyhow, but the presence of a midwife helps her. Human beings act like a midwife who facilitates birth through revolutionary means. Similarly, the Arab world had the potential of a radical, profound and revolutionary change. There are always factors which impede change and others which facilitate it. Al Jazeera and the media in general were the factors that facilitated and accelerated change.[20]

If this was the case for the media and the Arab spring in general, what characterizes Al Jazeera's coverage of the Tunisian revolution in particular? Contrary to the rest of the Arab world, Tunisia was the only country where Al Jazeera has been banned from reporting until the fall of the regime. According to Raihani, who himself is Tunisian; the first Al Jazeera reporters entered Tunisia on January 15th, 2011. That was the day after Ben Ali left the country. Even though the channel did not manage to cover the revolution from within, viewers still followed its news bulletins to find out about what was happening in their country. In the absence of independent, credible local media, which people could rely on to keep abreast with the daily developments of the revolution, Al Jazeera remained the main source of information. With all the technical

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[20] Researcher's interview with Nabil Raihani, May 2011.

difficulties it was facing, it succeeded in showing pictures and videos of demonstrations taking place in remote cities and villages. Through the connections it had established at a very early stage with a wide network of activists and 'citizen journalists', the channel kept the news of the revolution pouring into the newsroom from across the country. To understand this operation and how the coverage was handled by editors, Raihani puts us in the newsroom atmosphere:

> At the beginning of the revolution, when we receive materials, we check the time and place and contact the source for verification reasons. We then talk to our trusted sources to make sure of the credibility of the news. When we put them on air, and to be on the safe side, we usually mention to our viewers that these materials could not be verified from independent sources. At a later stage, the same news started to come from different sources, which means no more verification was needed.[21]

Back in Tunisia, where protests were gaining ground and spreading from one city into another, there emerged an unprecedented news-making phenomenon. As Lemine explains, activists in different parts of the country got together and organized themselves into groups with well-defined tasks for each member. "Some were assigned the task of taking pictures and videos with their cellphones, others had to write up and edit the news while other members contacted news networks to get their stories out."[22]

It was this non-stop flow of information coming from ordinary activists reporting events from various locations across the country that helped the channel cover the Tunisian revolution. In the absence of its professional crew, which then still had no access, cellphones and personal cameras replaced professional equipment and were capable of conveying the real picture of what was happening. This means, not only Al

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[21] Researcher's interview with N. Raihani. May 2011.
[22] Researcher's interview with M. Lemine, May 2011.

Jazeera did succeed in reaching out to these activists to use their materials, they too succeeded in reaching out to Al Jazeera and made their stories heard. It is a two- way operation where new media meet and complement traditional media in order to present us with a coordinated coverage.

In addition to helping Al Jazeera overcome the problems of access during the three weeks of the Tunisian revolution, this interactive process of news-making, also made the editors in the newsroom change their assessment of the situation. Raihani recalls his personal experience with this editorial change:

> Personally, when I was producing my reports I thought this event was no more than just a limited uprising that would push the regime to make some concessions. But, day after day, the materials we were receiving from activists via their cellphones, websites and facebook pages, convinced us that this time, things were different. This time people in the street were not drawing back and the authorities looked weaker.[23]

As mass demonstrations expanded all over the country and involved more political and social groups, the balance of power in the street started to change radically, especially after the army refused orders to fire on demonstrators. At the media level, while Al Jazeera and social media networks continued to cover these protests and inform the outside world of an event of an unprecedented magnitude, the state television continued to ignore the facts and described this mass movement as "separate violent incidents and "insignificant riots". The more the days go by the more the people discover their strength and the regime discover its weakness until the situation reached the point of no return, remarks Raihani. Al Jazeera on its part discovered how important and influential it was and decided to upgrade its coverage. It was no longer a matter of ordinary coverage, he says; "we had to give it more time

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[23] Researcher's interview with N. Raihani, May 2011.

and focus." At that stage, the Tunisian news extended beyond the limits of the traditional "Maghreb bulletin"[24] with accompanying interviews and analyses throughout the day.

The coverage of the Egyptian revolution was more extensive and different from that of Tunisia for various reasons. Al Jazeera had its reporters deployed on the ground even before the first demonstration took place. Unlike in the Tunisian case, the channel was covering Egypt with quite a large number of reporters forming one of the network's largest bureaus in the region. In addition to Al Jazeera news channel, there was also Al Jazeera English and A Jazeera Mubasher (live)[25], which provided a non-stop coverage of events especially in the Tahrir Square.

With demonstrations flooding the streets of Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and many other cities in a country as big as Egypt, it was almost impossible for any news network to provide its viewers with the full picture of what was happening. However, Al Jazeera not only did it mobilize the relatively large number of its reporters already existing in Egypt, but also reinforced its presence in the country with more journalists and support staff from its headquarters in Doha. In doing so, Al Jazeera was the largest international broadcaster to cover the Egyptian revolution. Besides its ability to cover simultaneously events taking place over extended geographical areas, the network also succeeded in keeping with its policy of assigning coverage to local reporters rather than sending foreigners with little or no experience and knowledge. The

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[24] The Maghreb bulletin *known as "Annashrah Al-Magharibiyah* is a daily news bulletin of 30 minutes long. It covers the news of the six Maghreb countries and follows the main evening news *"Hasad Al-Yawm"* (harvest of the day).

[25] "Al Jazeera Mubasher" is one of components of the Al Jazeera network, dedicated to broadcasting events as they unfold without editorial interference. This unique service in the Arab media was launched in 2005 and operates 24 hours a day.

network relied in its coverage of the Egyptian revolution on Egyptian reporters only. Jamal Shayyal, who was part of the team, explains the significance of this policy:

> The core thing in our work is local knowledge, understanding and language. I myself am Egyptian. I knew the significance of this street, of this building, of that person. I could compare how things were that day compared to a couple of months ago, because I also covered the parliamentary elections under Mubarak in November. That local knowledge obviously helped a lot in our coverage.[26]

This policy was implemented across the network. Al Jazeera English too, covered the Egyptian revolution with local reporters. In addition to Jamal Shayyal, there were Ayman Mohyeddine (Egyptian), Rawyah Rageh (Egyptian), Shireen Tadros (Egyptian) etc. Reporters from other companies who didn't know the language had to rely on translators who are not necessarily journalists, notes Shayyal.

Having said this, a comprehensive and detailed coverage of the Egyptian revolution remains far beyond the capabilities of any traditional broadcaster. Regardless of the number of reporters Al Jazeera deployed in Cairo and other cities, the scope of its coverage would have been much more limited without the help of new media.

Like in Tunisia, we have seen a coordinated work between professional television reporting and citizen journalism. However, in the case of Egypt this coordination was carried out in a more organized way. For, contrary to Tunisia where events started almost spontaneously and took everyone by surprise, the preparations for the Cairo January 25th demonstration took place in advance. Activist groups like "We are all Khalid Said", "the April 6th Youth Movement", "the Kefaya Movement", in addition to the supporters of Mohamed El-Baradei coordinated their action online using social networks before taking to the streets. Operating in the same field, and reporting events

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[26] Researcher's interview with senior producer and field reporter, Jamal Shayyal, who covered the Egyptian revolution. May 2011.

side-by-side, the coordination between Al Jazeera and social network operatives was constant. When the Egyptian authorities decided on January 28 to cut off all mobile and internet connections in a desperate move to prevent demonstrators from communicating, Al Jazeera offices became the destination for dozens of activists who rushed in with materials covering protests in various squares. From the Cairo bureau, those materials find their way to the channel's headquarters in Doha where they get checked, processed and transmitted.

When, on the other hand, the Egyptian Ministry of Information decided, on January 30th to take the channel's signal off the NileSat, suspending its field operations and withdrawing accreditation from all its staff members, the news spread so quickly on mobile devices through SMS and other new media tools. Messages that circulated among thousands of users informed recipients of the new frequencies Al Jazeera was broadcasting on, especially on ArabSat and HotBird satellites. Equally, during this short interruption, social media networks such as Facebook and Youtube were distributing selections of the channel's materials that were inaccessible to Egyptian viewers via satellite television. In fact, there was another significant reason why the government decision to shut down Al Jazeera's broadcasting was ineffective. To circumvent this decision and counter its effects, a number of Arab satellite broadcasters in the region replaced their own programming with Al Jazeera's feed. This move foiled the regime's efforts to prevent Egyptians from watching the channel and instead, gave them more alternatives to continue following its coverage.[27]

The way Al Jazeera reacted to the Egyptian authorities' decision confirms what the channel has set in its mission and vision statement since 2004 regarding its

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[27] These channels include: Al-Aqsa channel (Lebanon), Al-Mustaqillah (London), Al-Hiwar (London), Al-Jadeed TV (Lebanon), Adan (Yemen), NBN (Lebanon), OTV (Lebanon), Suhail (Yemen).

commitment to and support for democratic change. In a challenging statement issued in Doha the day after the closure of its Cairo office and the revocation of its staff licenses, we read: "clearly, there are powers that do not want our important images pushing for democracy and reform to be seen by the public."[28]

At the practical level, the channel did not submit to the decision and refused to withdraw its reporters. Instead, it chose to change its coverage strategies in different ways. Technically, we have seen the introduction of handy and small flip camcorders that replaced portable professional cameras which usually require authorization and are easily traceable. Logistically, Al Jazeera's reporters were equipped with small transmission systems the size of a laptop each, through which they can send their materials over to the newsroom. These systems were used instead of OB vans (outside broadcasting) carrying huge satellite dishes. Editorially, the channel opted for alternative sources and diversified its methods of newsgathering. As reporter Ghassan Abuhsein observes "sticking to the rigid professional standards of only relying on commonly trusted sources was no longer an option. Eyewitnesses and citizen journalists started to become an essential part of our newsgathering processes."[29] Changing those processes lead to another change at the output level. On the screen, restrictions on the quality of pictures and videos loosened and low resolution materials have become acceptable.

Here again, the Arab spring teaches us that the content which the media delivers to the public is not always what the editors pre-plan in the newsroom according to a pre-set news agenda. It is the final product of an ongoing interactive dialectical relationship

[28] Al Jazeera statement, 1st February 2011.
[29] Researcher's interview with Ghassan Abuhsein, field reporter and former bureau chief of Al Jazeera's Bahrain office. May 2011.

between the newsroom and the developing story on the ground. The dual framing game that I have mentioned above is clearly at play.

This mutually produced content kept Al Jazeera close to the hearts and minds of the Arab public and distinguished its coverage from the rest of the broadcasters. Through this extraordinary coverage of the Egyptian revolution in which the public informally took part in the process of news production process, Al Jazeera was shaping events rather than just reporting them. For, those who spend days and nights protesting in the Tahrir square and at the same time see their mass movement recorded and transmitted live to millions of viewers across the globe are likely to keep protesting. Not only do they believe in the rightfulness of their action, but also know that the more their movement gets exposed to the outside world, the more impact it would have. Those among them, who take pictures, shoot videos, compose text messages and send them over to the media, actively participate in maximizing this impact. For the duration of the Egyptian revolution, Al Jazeera has been the default news channel people go to in order to post their materials and contribute to this collectively produced coverage.

This close relationship between Al Jazeera and its audiences was manifest in different ways during this period. The most significant example was seen in the Cairo Tahrir Square when protestors installed huge screens and started broadcasting Al Jazeera's content continuously. In Alexandria, where Jamal Shayyal was stationed, "there were banners in all the protests with the new frequencies of the channel showing on placards to help people find the signal."[30] The popular support for Al Jazeera and the undeniable appreciation of its coverage is also confirmed by Abuhsein, who firmly believes that "there was a consensus among Egyptians about our coverage. We have

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[30] Researcher's interview with J. Shayyal, May 2011.

repeatedly heard revolutionaries in the square saying: in the absence of Al Jazeera, the revolution would have failed. It would have gone unnoticed."[31] According to this analysis, it would be difficult to understand the real effect of Al Jazeera's coverage and the role it played in the Egyptian revolution without unpacking the special relationship it has built with its audiences over the years.

The coverage of the Libyan revolution was different from that of Egypt and Tunisia. The course of events in Gaddafi's Libya required the channel to change its strategies and take extra precautions especially after the peaceful protests turned into an armed struggle. However, the price was high and the network lost one of its cameramen in Benghazi. Four other reporters were arrested for weeks before they were released. Among them was Ahmed Val Ould Eddine, who spent thirty days "*In the hands of the Katayeb*"[32] (Gaddafi's Brigades) when he tried to enter Libya with his colleagues through the Tunisian borders.

The need for Al Jazeera's coverage was probably more obvious in the Libyan revolution than it was in the Tunisian and Egyptian cases. Three factors may explain why satellite television was crucial in the Libyan context. First, the markedly reduced role played by cyber activists prior to and during the protest movements. Second, the absence of political parties and the weakness of civil society organizations that could connect, mobilize and organize people. Third, the state of the Libyan media, which was completely dominated and controlled either directly by the government or by Seif Al Islam, (Gaddafi's son) who was trying to paint an image of himself as liberal future leader for Libya. These three factors made it essential for the international media to provide an alternative platform for the revolution. Ould Eddine thinks that:

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[31] Researcher's interview with Gh. Abuhseinm May 2011
[32] *In the hands of the Katayeb* is the title of a book he wrote to tell the story of his capture.

> Not only did the Libyans need Al Jazeera, they also believed that their action was incomplete if Al Jazeera was not part of it. Whenever they want to plan for a press conference they always come to us to check if Al Jazeera was coming to cover it. If not, the conference would be cancelled. For, they know for sure their action would be futile without having the chance of being shown on television.[33]

The need to be televised as expressed here by the masses in the streets of Libya is simply a popular translation of George Berkeley's statement on visualization (to be is to be perceived). When the reporter whose prime job is to provide the means for these masses to be perceived, turns himself into a story that needs exposure, the media coverage that he offers acquires an extra dimension: the human dimension. This is what happened to Al Jazeera's reporter who was sent to cover the Libyan revolution but ended up locked in jail. Based on his personal experience, Ould Eddine tells us how vital it is for the media to be on your side. When he was in prison, "thrown somewhere inside a dark room, my only dream was to find someone who knows where I was and that I was still alive so he could bring my story out to the media", he recalls. This human dimension made him, as a journalist, understands better "the psychology of revolutionaries and the secret behind their deep appreciation of the media."

The shooting of cameraman Ali Hasan Al Jabir in Benghazi on March 12th, 2011 strengthened the relationship between the revolutionaries and Al Jazeera. After this incident, Al Jazeera for the Libyans has become more than just a television station reporting events as they happen. Its commitment to the success of the revolution went far beyond its traditional function as a balanced media organization to become more involved in the political game. This involvement could be clearly noticed from the discourse it was transmitting as well as from what could be described as "embedded

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[33] Researcher's interview with A. V. Ould Eddine, May 2011.

journalism" it has introduced. This change, which provoked controversy over Al Jazeera's editorial line during the Arab spring revolutions, will be discussed later in the next chapter along with other editorial policies.

Having sad this, the central role played by Al Jazeera in the Arab spring remains undisputable. Its unparalleled coverage of the Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan and Yemeni revolutions made it difficult for many to perceive what happened distinctly from the lens of this pan-Arab news network. Some media scholars have gone so far as to call it 'the Al Jazeera revolution', suggesting that the Arab Spring cannot be understood separately from the concerted efforts by this channel, which advocated and promoted change since it was launched in the mid-1990s. But, is it really Al Jazeera's revolution? How does the channel itself assess the nature and scope of its role in this historic regional change?

4. Al Jazeera's revolution?

It is not hard to notice a common understanding among Al Jazeera's staff about the nature of the role played by their channel in the Arab spring. They all distinguish between its long term effects through raising political awareness among the Arab publics, which eventually translated into popularizing the demand for change. And the immediate effect through its exceptional coverage of the Arab revolutions. As was demonstrated earlier in this chapter, the political awareness Al Jazeera has been building for almost fifteen years created a new generation full of anger, frustration and refusal of their social and political conditions. It may not be Al Jazeera's

revolution, says Abuhsein, "but the generation which led revolution is certainly the Al Jazeera generation."[34]

Does this mean that in the absence of Al Jazeera, there would be no Arab spring? Former Director General Wadah Khanfar categorically opposes this view and presents the role of the channel in a more realistic term: "Al Jazeera is not a tool of revolution, we do not create revolutions. However, when something of that magnitude happened, we were at the center of the events."[35] Khanfar's view is also shared by Head of News M. Souag who thinks that, Although Al Jazeera played a leading role in the media coverage of the Arab spring through its comprehensive reporting of events, it did not make the revolution, it never called for revolution and that is not part of its mission:

> Al Jazeera did not incite the revolution in a direct manner or pushed people to revolt. Those who try to claim the credit for these revolutions are in fact trying to rob the real people who revolted of their own glory, and that is not fair. So, it is not Al Jazeera or anybody else that made the revolution, it is the people themselves.[36]

However, the channel's "comprehensive, accurate and in-depth coverage" of the revolutions made people feel that their voice was being heard across the world and gave them the courage to carry on their protests until the change happened.

Similarly, for Krichen, Al Jazeera cannot claim the credit for the instigation of the Arab revolutions, but its coverage contributed immensely to their success. When the masses take to the street and realize that their action gets covered, this creates a sort of psychological effect among them. This effect is explained in krichen's terms as follows:

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[34] Researcher's interview with Gh. Abusein, May 2011.
[35] Wadah Khanfar's address at TED2011, March, 2011.
(http://www.ted.com/talks/wadah_khanfar_a_historic_moment_in_the_arab_world.html).
[36] Researcher's interview with M. Souag, April 2011.

They feel that what they did was so important that Al Jazeera reported it. Those who participated in the protests and saw themselves on television would certainly go back to the street. Those who did not participate but saw others participate would ask themselves: why not us?[37]

The Arab spring has been and will be remembered for so long as the event in which the media played a central role. By changing the Arab media landscape Al Jazeera has certainly contributed to the current political changes. Its coverage should be seen as one of the main factors of success of the Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan and Yemeni revolutions. Any democratic advancement in the Arab region that results from these revolutions is partly owed to the involvement of the media at various levels.

If we look at Al Jazeera's contribution from a critical perspective, we find that the picture is slightly different. For, the Arab spring effect is not limited to the political sphere; it has also shaken the media and raised a number of issues that should be considered. The following chapter presents us with a critical assessment of Al Jazeera's democratizing role in general and questions its editorial line in a number of particular cases.

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[37] Researcher's interview with M. Krichen, April 2011.

Chapter 9:

Al Jazeera's democratizing effect:

a critical assessment of a success story

Since Al Jazeera came on air in 1966, the Arab media landscape has undergone profound changes that affected the politics of the region in different noticeable ways. The channel's unparalleled coverage of major events in the last fifteen years made of it the number one regional broadcaster and one of the most influential brands at the global level.[1] When the Arab spring started in Tunisia in December 2010, viewers across the region turned to Al Jazeera to see what was happening. Its open and non-stop coverage of simultaneous protest movements taking place in various cities of the revolting countries was seen an extremely successful experience that further consolidated its position as a leading news network in the world media.

The remarkable effect it has had in shaping events leading up to regime change in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen made it look to many observers as an agent for political change rather than just a powerful media channel covering events and reporting them regardless of their outcome. As a result, Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab spring was appreciated and widely hailed not only by ordinary people, but also by activists, scholars, and even politicians who, until very recently had been fiercely criticizing the channel and the quality of its journalism.

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[1] In the 2004 Brandchannel.com ranking, Al Jazeera was voted as the fifth most influential global brand behind Apple, Google, Ikea and Starbucks. In the media category, Al Jazeera was number 1 while BBC came 27th. See: http://www.brandchannel.com/boty_results/global_2004.html (information retrieved on 24 May 2011).

Reporting on the quality of the channel's coverage of the Arab spring and the impact it has had since these phenomenal developments started, The New York Times observed that the protests sweeping the Arab world "have one thread uniting them: Al Jazeera, the Qatar-based satellite channel whose aggressive coverage helped propel insurgent emotions from one capital to the next"[2]. This uniting yet mobilizing role proved to be so important to the extent that it has radically changed the position of high profile Western politicians with regard to its journalism. Speaking before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on March 2, 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton enthusiastically stated that Al Jazeera is "changing peoples' minds and attitudes. Like it or hate it, it is really effective. In fact, viewership of Al-Jazeera is going up in the United States because it is real news."[3]

It is real news, probably because of its proximity to the reality it is reporting on, unlike other international news networks headquartered outside the region. Or, maybe because of its active contribution to the making of a new Arab reality, through the construction of a specific narrative different from the existing ones. In many ways, say Robert Worth and David Kirkpatrick, "it is Al Jazeera's moment — not only because of the role it has played, but also because the channel has helped to shape a narrative of popular rage against oppressive American-backed Arab governments."[4]

Referring to the background of this success, Philip Seib wrote: "in January 2009, it was Al Jazeera that fueled public anger throughout the region about Arab governments' failure to respond to the war in Gaza. People took to the streets in places

[2] Worth, Robert F. and Kirkpatrick David D. "Seizing a Moment, Al Jazeera Galvanizes Arab Frustration", *The New York Times*, 27 January 2011.
[3] Kirit, Radia. "Sec. of State Hillary Clinton: Al Jazeera is 'Real News', U.S. Losing 'Information War", *ABC News*, (March 2, 2011), information retrieved on 12/06/12 (http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/03/sec-of-state-hillary-clinton-al-jazeera-is-real-news-us-losing-information-war)
[4] Worth, and Kirkpatrick, "Seizing a Moment", *The New York Times*, 27 January 2011.

like Dubai, where political demonstrations – other than those sanctioned by government – were rare. The target of the protests was not Israel but rather the leaders of Egypt and other Arab states."[5] Characterized by Olfa Lamloum as a 'rebellious' mirror of the Arab world, Al Jazeera has, since the beginning, "given a voice to the popular rejection of repressive policies adopted by the powers in place, as well as to the confiscated democratic demand. In doing so, it has offered even to the younger generations, in a region famous for drawn-out authoritarian regimes, access to spaces of freedom of speech, reflection and public contestation."[6]

Other media scholars like Lawrence Pintak, who did not hesitate to call the Arab spring "the Al Jazeera revolution", argues that "change was Al Jazeera's raison d'être from the day, fifteen years ago, when the upstart ruler of the tiny emirate of Qatar founded the channel."[7] He then points out to the special link between what happened in the concerned four countries and the channel that grabbed the message away from the plain propaganda of Arab dictators. Arno Tausch too, thinks that "the 2011 Arab revolutions should be called "the Al Jazeera revolution" in view of the enormous and still growing importance of the TV channel for the current, evolving events."[8]

In the face of this prevalent commendation and appreciative discourse that fits well and goes along with Al Jazeera's own narrative, it is not easy to provide a different account. Indeed, it is hard to argue otherwise, while the channel is at the peak of its success, giving the world a fantastic coverage of "the biggest story the channel has ever covered, the story of the birth of a new era in the Arab world", as thinks former

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[5] Seib, Philip. "Conclusion: AJE in the World" in Philip Seib (eds.) *Al Jazeera English: Global News in a Changing World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 189
[6] Lamloum, Olfa. *A Jazeera: A Rebellious and Ambiguous Mirror of the Arab World*" (La Découverte, 2004), p. 11
[7] Pintak, Lawrence. "The Al Jazeera Revolution", *Foreign Policy*, February 2, 2011.
[8] Tausch, Arno. "On the global political and economic environment of the current Al Jazeera revolution" *Middle East Studies Online Journal*, (Vol. 2, No5, 2011).

director general Wadah Khanfar.[9] However, in what follows, I will try to unpack this dominating narrative of success and look at the Al Jazeera story from a critical perspective. I will start with questioning what some see as inconsistent coverage of the Arab spring with a special emphasis on the Bahrain case. Secondly, I will critically assess the credibility of the channel's motto: "the opinion and the other opinion" when it comes to covering revolutions. Finally, I will conclude with the structural transformation of the Arab public sphere and its implications on the Al Jazeera democratizing effect.

1. Why has Al Jazeera covered Bahrain differently?

As we have learned earlier in the previous chapter, the media coverage does not operate in vacuum. What we see on television as a final news product does not necessarily reflect the editors' agenda as pre-planned in the newsroom, especially in live coverage environments. The dialectical relationship between the luxury of the newsroom and the toughness of changing reality in the field provide us with a more refined news product. In news production, there is always an interactive process where the effect between the newsmakers and the story they report on is mutual. In the context of the Arab spring, this mutual effect is probably more visible than it has been in any previous experience of media coverage.

Most of the literature about the media coverage of the Arab spring focuses on the media effect, which is undeniable. As I demonstrated in chapter 8, the media was heavily involved in the Arab revolutions and played a crucial role in their success. What has been ignored or marginalized in this literature is the Arab spring effect on the media. What might explain this gap is the over emphasis on the political

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[9] Wadah Khanfar's address at TED2011, March, 2011,

implications of these popular uprisings which succeeded in toppling a number of authoritarian regimes and promised to replace them with democratic systems. For media scholars though, the implications of the Arab spring on the media require more attention. If the media effect was generally seen as a positive one, the Arab spring effect, on the contrary, is so far negative. The following section presents a critical assessment of Al Jazeera's coverage of Bahrain, where this negative effect can be clearly argued.

The Arab spring "has shaken Arab TV's credibility" says Ali Hashem, a former Al Jazeera correspondent.[10] The commitment Arab media showed towards presenting the people's story versus the official line in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria simmered when it came to Bahrain, for instance. While Al Jazeera dropped its regular scheduling to provide its viewers with live coverage of events from the streets of Tunis, Cairo, Benghazi, Sana'a and many other cities of the Arab spring countries, Bahrain received a very thin coverage under the pretext of sectarian arguments.

During the duration of 9 months (13/09/2011 to 12/06/2012), the Al Jazeera most popular talk show *al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis* (the opposite direction) aired only one episode on the situation in Bahrain, while 19 episodes were dedicated to the Syrian revolution for the same period. There are different ways in which we can justify this unequal coverage of the two cases. The most obvious argument that the channel uses repeatedly is that Bahrain is not undergoing a revolution; it is an internal political struggle or an uprising at its best. Al Jazeera's reporter in Bahrain, Ghassan Abuhsein,

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[10] Ali Hashem, "The Arab spring has shaken Arab TV's credibility", *The Guardian*, 3 April 2012.

was clear in explaining this: "What happens in Bahrain is not a revelation. The opposition there tries to benefit from this historic moment."[11]

The perplexity and confusion in finding the right name for what happens in Bahrain is reflected in the title of the one and single episode of *al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis* on Bahrain.[12] The confusion about Syria is rather between Al Jazeera Arabic and Al Jazeera English. While the Arabic channel calls it revolution, its English sister seems more hesitant and presents its viewers with coverage under the label "Syria: the war within". The table below shows in detail this unequal coverage.

Al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis (the opposite direction): discussion of Syria and Bahrain

(from 13/09/2011 to 12/06/2012)

Date	Syria	Bahrain
13/09/2011	The myth of the armed groups	
20/09/2011	Is the Syrian regime still fit to rule?	
11/10/2011	The Syrian National Council	
25/10/2011		Bahrain: a popular uprising or a political struggle?

[11] Researcher's interview with Gh. Abuhsein, May 2011.
[12] As the table shows, Al Jazeera's *al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis* aired discussed the Bahrain situation in one episode aired on 25 October 2011. The title was: "Bahrain: a popular uprising or a political struggle?"

08/11/2011	Lebanon and the Syrian revolution	
15/11/2011	The Arab League and Syria	
10/01/2012	Arab in observers in Syria: a witness who saw nothing	
31/01/2012	The future of the Syrian regime	
07/02/2012	Russia's interest comes before that of the Syrian people	
14/02/2012	The Syrian Army: a national army or an army of occupation?	
21/02/2012	The Syrian constitution: a real change or a joke?	
28/02/2012	Has foreign intervention in Syria become necessary?	
13/03/2012	The Syrian revolution: one year on	
20/03/2012	Arming the Syrian rebels	

27/03/2012	The Arab split over the Syrian crisis	
10/04/2012	Who trusts the Syrian media?	
17/04/2012	Why does the Iraqi regime conspire against Syria?	
15/05/2012	Does the Syrian regime really want reform?	
29/05/2012	Who stands behind the explosions in Syria?	
12/06/2012	Who are the mercenaries: the rebels or the "shabbih'a?	

Source: Al Jazeera programme archives: www.aljazeera.net/programsarchive/

The second argument, which is to some extent an extension of the first one, is the sectarian argument. Given the demographic structure of Bahrain and the widening divide between the Shi'a (mostly on the opposition side) and the Sunnis (mostly on the government side), Al Jazeera's coverage was kept to the minimum. The fact that, since the beginning of the uprising in mid-February 2011, protests have been exclusively organized by Shi'a and failed to involve Sunnis at any level, reinforced the sectarian aspect and made it more difficult for the media to play a more substantial role. In order not to be seen as fueling a sectarian conflict or siding with one particular

party against another on a sectarian basis, the channel chose to reduce its coverage to a handful of reports and keep a distance from all sides, especially after it has been ordered to leave the country.[13] The sectarian argument is undeniably valid, particularly in a region fraught with sectarian conflicts. However, this should not go unchallenged if we know that Syria is in quite a similar situation but receives a non-stop coverage. The increasingly visible divide between the Alawites (mostly in power) and the Sunnis (mostly in the opposition) may not be as apparent as in the case of Bahrain, but it is deeply affecting the course of events both at the political and operational levels. Covering Syria without being perceived as unbiased means to treat both sides on an equal footing, and stop showing unqualified support for the revolutionaries as we see on Al Jazeera and many other Arab media. Supporting the revolution, on the other hand, means "twisting the rules of traditional professionalism" to keep in line with the channel's editorial policy: being with the people and challenging power holders. Unlike in the case of Bahrain, there is a silence about the sectarian element in the coverage of Syria. The relationship between this silence and the fact that the revolutionaries belong to the majority Sunnis, remains unclear.

This quick comparison between the Syrian and Bahraini cases shows that the sectarian argument cannot in itself explain the unequal coverage of both cases. What might explain the exceptionally little attention given to the uprising in Bahrain on the media level comparing to rest of the Arab spring countries is probably the much attention given to the country at the geopolitical level. On March 13, 2011, armed forces from the GCC Peninsula Shield arrived in Bahrain to help authorities maintain security and

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[13] On Sunday 7 August 2011 the Bahraini authorities decided to ban Al Jazeera staff from entering the country accusing the channel of violating the rules of professionalism and providing a biased coverage of the events in Bahrain.

order after unprecedented violence erupted between protesters and government forces. This intervention comes one month after the start of what was thought as the Arab spring in Bahrain. It also comes in the context of implementing the principle of "unity of fate and security interdependence among GCC states, it is the joint responsibility of the GCC in maintaining security and stability."[14]

Compared to Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, only Bahrain has been subject to an Arab military intervention. Based on purely geopolitical considerations, the Gulf Cooperation Council states decided to take this joint move and help the royal family in Manama remain in power. They realized Bahrain stability was under serious threat and that its forces were unable to resist the increasing protest movement and restore security on their own. The destabilization of Bahrain, which could ultimately bring the Al Khalifa reign to an end and therefore lead to a strategic change in the region, was a disturbing scenario that should be aborted before transforming into a reality. The Peninsula Shield forces intervened not only to keep regional order from collapsing, but also to maintain internal stability in other GCC countries, especially those with sizable Shi'ite minorities such as Saudi Arabia (over 15%) and Kuwait (over 25%).

As was demonstrated earlier, the role of the media has been so influential in the shaping the events of Arab spring and cannot be dissociated from the unfolding story of this historic turning point. For the Bahraini authorities, changing the course of events meant, to some extent, changing or limiting the role of the media. Various

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[14] The deployment of the Peninsula Shield Force into Bahraini territories on Sunday 13 March 2011 following a request from Manama was based on the GCC Joint Defense Agreement.

measures to crack down on local and international media were taken[15] and many of the reporters were forced to leave the country and leave the Bahraini protesters "shouting in the dark".[16]

But, the fact that Al Jazeera's reporters were not allowed to continue reporting events from within the country cannot in itself explain this noticeably minimal coverage. During the three weeks of the Tunisian revolution, the channel was covering the protests from its headquarters in Doha relying primarily on materials posted by social media activists. When the Egyptian authorities interrupted its signal and closed its office in Cairo, the channel did not stop its operation in Egypt. Both cases were framed as 'revolutions' so the editorial decision was to continue coverage despite the technical and operational difficulties. What happened in the case of Bahrain was a different framing of the protest movement based on a different assessment of its nature and magnitude. Many factors inform the decision making process in any news coverage and therefore determine the way stories get framed. The facts on the ground cannot on their own set the rules for this complex framing game. Other elements come into play, especially in cases where the media become an important player affecting sensitive regional settings. Bahrain seems to fall within this category where the media have to take into consideration, in addition to the controversy surrounding the facts on the ground, the geopolitics of the country. Framing the events as an 'uprising' or just a 'protest movement' as opposed to 'revolution' is therefore not accidental. When the coverage of Bahrain differs in tone, scale and perspective from

[15] *Reporters Without Borders* reported that correspondents from a number of foreign media were denied visa to enter the country. The list includes: the BBC, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Christian Science Monitor, NHK. (see press release, 10 Feb. 2012).
[16] "Shouting in the Dark" is the title of May Ying Welsh's documentary film produced for and aired by Al Jazeera English. The film, which caused diplomatic tensions between Doha and Manama, tells the story of "the Arab revolution that was abandoned by the Arabs, forsaken by the West and forgotten by the world", as described by the producer. The film won many international awards the latest of which was the a golden nymph at the Monte Carlo TV festival in June 2012.

that of the rest of the Arab spring countries, we understand that what Shawn Powers calls "geopolitics of the news" is at play.[17]

The geopolitical argument which I used in the third chapter to explain the emergence of Al Jazeera as a "non-systemic approach", explains by the same token the channel's approach to the Bahraini case although in a different way. The conditions that facilitated the rise of Al Jazeera in the mid-1990s as a soft power in the emerging Qatari public diplomacy may have changed but the role of the channel in setting the news agenda and influencing regional politics remains active. Reduced coverage in the case of Bahrain does not necessarily mean that the media has played a less significant role. On the contrary, by reducing the airtime and minimizing the space where the Bahrain story could be seen or 'perceived', to refer to Berkeley's metaphor, the media are certainly playing a major role in determining its fate. In this regard, the political stance of the GCC countries, which translated into moving the Peninsula Shield forces into the Bahraini capital, and the way the media covered the story should be understood from the same geopolitical perspective.

The geopolitics of news may explain why Al Jazeera has covered Bahrain in this particular way, but it cannot justify what might be considered as inconsistency that characterized its coverage of the Arab spring in general. In Libya, another aspect of this inconsistency can be outlined: the use of "embedded journalism".

2. Covering Libya: the danger in using embedded journalism

Although embedded journalism could be applied to many historical cases where news reporters were attached to military forces, the term first came to be used in the media

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[17] See: Powers, Shawn. "Chapter 6: Qatar and the Geopolitics of the News", *The Geopolitics of the News: the Case of Al Jazeera Network*, PhD thesis, Faculty of the USC Graduate School, University of South California, 2009.

coverage of the Iraq war in 2003. As reports Bonnie Azab Powell, at the start of the war, "as many as 775 reporters and photographers were traveling as "embedded journalists" with U.S. forces."[18] Although Al Jazeera agreed at a certain point in time to embed a couple of its journalists, the official line was critical of embedded journalism on ethical grounds. Those who opposed the idea argued that this practice contradicts the long established tradition of balanced and impartial news reporting. Although in conflict situations, accompanying armies is sometimes the only way to find out what they are doing, embedded journalism remains a controversial practice. It has been harshly criticized by journalists themselves as being part of propaganda campaigns for the dominant party. News reporters who drive around in tanks and armored personnel carriers," said journalist Gay Talese, "are spoon-fed what the military gives them and they become mascots for the military."[19]

In most cases, embedded journalists have to cover the story from the military forces' angle and therefore lose their independent perspective on events. The danger in this practice is that the story they get us from the army is not necessarily how things are happening in the field, but how the army think they are happening. Trying to escape this danger, Al Jazeera deployed a large number of reporters in different positions across the Iraqi territories. As many comparative studies showed, the channel's coverage of the Iraq war was considerably different from that of the western media,

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[18] See Bonnie Azab Powell, "Reporters, commentators visit Berkeley to conduct in-depth postmortem of Iraq war coverage", *UCBerkeleyNews*.
http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2004/03/15_mediatwar.shtml (information retrieved on 27 May 2012).
[19] Gay Talese's interview with WikiNews about the state of journalism, October 27, 2007.
http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Gay_Talese_on_the_state_of_journalism%2C_Iraq_and_his_life
(information retrieved on 27 May 2012)

which relied heavily on American sources.[20] Al Jazeera's independent coverage clashed with the American forces' policy and did not please the Pentagon which saw in it a serious challenge to its military operations.[21] But, on the other hand, it won the channel respect and credibility and provided audiences with a reliable alternative source of information.

During the Libyan revolution however, we have seen Al Jazeera's changing its position vis-à-vis embedded journalism. A number of its reporters were embedded with the opposition fighters so they can gain access to the latest information and report from the frontline. They followed and accompanied the rebel forces along the war zone extending from Al Bayda in the East through Benghazi, Ajdabiya, Brega, Ras Lanuf and Misratah, all the way to Tripoli in the West. The coverage viewers have been receiving from the battlefield reflected one side of the story and gave the opposition perspective only. The other side was almost absent for obvious reasons. Among these reasons was the hostility with which Gaddafi's regime treated the network which they see as "conspiring against Libya".[22] The tension between the Libyan authorities and the channel reached its highest level with the assassination of cameraman Ali Hassan Al Jaber, who was killed after a reporting team was ambushed by government forces near Benghazi. Prior to that, when the revolution has just started, the government placed all accredited journalists in one hotel and only allowed

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[20] See for example: Aday, Sean. Livingston Steven and Hebert, Maeve. "Embedding the Truth: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Objectivity and Television Coverage of the Iraq War", *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 2005; 10; 3.
See also: Cherkaoui, Tarek. *Orientalism, Pan-Arabism, and military-media warfare: a comparison between CNN and Aljazeera coverage of the Iraq war*, a PhD thesis, AUT University, New Zealand, 2010.
[21] In a press conference at the Pentagon on 15 April 2004, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld expressed his anger with the channel's coverage of the war saying: "what Al Jazeera is doing is vicious, inaccurate and inexcusable".
[22] Among the Libyan officials who repeatedly attacked Al Jazeera was Gaddafi's son Seiful Islam. See for example his telephone interview with Al Sharq Alawsat, 3 March 2011. See also his speech on the Libyan national television station on 20 February 2011.

them to convey the official line. After refusing to comply with this policy, it has become almost impossible for Al Jazeera to get the Libyan authorities' opinion on what was happening, which eventually resulted in imbalanced coverage.

However, even with embedding journalists with one side of the conflict, the channel could have overcome this editorial issue by balancing its studio coverage. Instead of rallying opposition figures in reports, newscasts and interviews, the editors could have diversified their guests by giving platform to government supporters whether in the studio or over the phone.

This obvious bias in media coverage cannot be separated from the political bias and the clear agenda the channel is promoting. Since the Tunisian revolution erupted in December 2010, it was clear that Al Jazeera is supporting these popular uprisings which have become known as the Arab spring. The remarkable success in covering this unprecedented event brought with it a number of challenges to some of Al Jazeera's strengths, including its policy of bringing "the opinion and other opinion".

3. A shrinking space for 'the opinion and the other opinion'

Until before the start of the Arab spring, 'the opinion and the opinion' policy of Al Jazeera has not been seriously challenged, even during the most difficult times when the channel's war correspondents were under fire. The Arab spring however, proved to be more challenging and led observers to question this long celebrated motto. It may not always be possible to show all sides of the story, especially when the other opinion is inaccessible or refuse, for whatever reason, to be shown. But, when the editorial policy deliberately chooses to take side in covering certain events, showing one side of the story becomes the norm not the exception. This seems to be the case in

much of Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab revolutions and goes in line with its commitment to 'siding with the people'. To be on the people's side when reporting a popular uprising raises questions not only about how far the media could go in pursuing a particular political agenda without compromising their professional standards, but also about the danger of losing credibility when they fail to bring in the other opinion and account for the other side of the story.

A close examination of Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab spring shows that the 'other opinion' has been almost inexistent, especially during the Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan revolutions. The following examples try to bring to light some aspects of this coverage and illustrate what could be considered as an editorial shift:

The first example concerns the 'open coverage' policy that the channel opt for whenever it chooses to give maximum exposure to a particular news story. Although this policy has been adopted before the Arab spring, and was used during other major events such as the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006 and the Gaza war in 2008-9, there was always room for different opinions to be expressed. Suspending the regular scheduling and opening the screen for continuous live reporting from the streets and squares restricts coverage to demonstrations and only gives voice to the revolutionary discourse. Protestors, eyewitnesses, analysts, studio and video-linked commentators, all speak the same language and collectively contribute to the formation of one narrative, that is the revolution narrative. The counter-discourse is rarely aired, not only because of the channel's bias towards the "people", but also because of the normative dimension to the revolutionary discourse that makes it extremely difficult for anti-revolution discourses to express themselves.

The suspension of talk shows, which are mostly known as the Al Jazeera platform that regularly feature 'the opinion and the other opinion', contributed a great deal to the shaping of this narrative. While the channel dedicated one episode of the 'opposite direction' to discuss the Tunisian revolution[23], during the Libyan and Yemeni revolutions in particular, the other opinion disappeared almost completely since none of the talk shows or the debate programmes was running for over six months.[24] Instead, we have seen the emergence of a new form of news reports which, to a large extent, consolidate the same narrative by promoting the one opinion that goes with channel's editorial line.

The introduction of a new style of news reports is the second example illustrating this editorial shift. Contrary to the long established journalistic tradition of separating the news and the reporter's opinion, these new Al Jazeera reports combine the two elements within their structure. In these reports which I prefer to call 'opinion-news reports', journalists not only report facts but also incorporate those facts into their own personal interpretation. The way these reports are structured has nothing to do with framing techniques or hidden bias, they are overtly politicized and show unqualified support for the protest movements while criticizing governments unreservedly. The content analysis of these reports clearly confirms this tendency and shows the degree of bias they incorporate.

When Hosni Mubarak decided on 11 February 2011 to step down under the mounting popular pressure in the Tahrir Square, Al Jazeera aired a report by Fawzi Bushra

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[23] This episode was aired on 11 January 2011 and featured the pro-government Borhan Bsaies and the Algerian opposition figure Mohamed Larbi Zitout.
[24] From the last week of February 2011 to the first week of September 2011 Al Jazeera stopped running all these programmes (the opposite direction, open dialogue, without borders, behind the news, in-depth) due the open coverage policy which relied on live reporting from the streets where the uprisings were taking place.

starting with a very symbolic Quranic verse about the drowned Faro of Egypt: "today we will save you in body that you may be to those who succeed you a sign"[25]. The report goes on to remind viewers of the tragic fall of Ben Ali of Tunisia the previous month who also managed to 'save his body' by fleeing the country. Against this similar linear fate of dictators, the report emphasizes the fact that the peoples are "stronger and more enduring than their oppressors". To show that Al Jazeera is the voice of the people, Bushra's report tries to express their views and speak on their behalf:

The example of Mubarak in his relationship with the Egyptian people is similar to that of Ben Ali when the Tunisians asked him to initiate reform he refused to be among the reformers; then away with Mubarak and away with Zin el-Abidin, said the two revolting peoples.[26]

Other examples of these opinion-news reports are produced by Majed Abdulhadi. On the first anniversary of the Syrian revolution that erupted mid-March 2011, Abdulhadi tried to rewrite the story in his own way. His reports starts with pictures of demonstrators calling for 'freedom for Syria' before he moves on with a quick flashback to a small incident that took place on 17 March 2011. In this incident, to which the authorities responded very aggressively, school children wrote on the wall of their school slogans calling for the fall of Assad's regime. Trying to contextualize the protest movement that spread over much of the Syrian territories, Abdulhadi's report links the different events to the government overreaction to that school incident:

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[25] Quran, 10:92.
[26] News report by Fawzi Bushra, aired on Al Jazeera satellite channel on 11 February 2011 and was replayed repeatedly during the following days.

As soon as the news reached the ruling Generals, they lost their temper. They arrested, tortured and harassed all those who have connections with that incident. One of them, the President Bashar Al Assad's nephew, and director of political security, Atef Najib, did not hesitate to insult the notables of the area with the worst of words when they requested him to release their sons who have been incarcerated for twenty five days or they will take action.[27]

The report presents the different facts in the form of an interconnected chain of reactions. As the warning of the notables expired without any response from the government, "the spark of the revolution started on 18 March". Starting as a limited protest movement in the southern city of Daraa, the "revolution now extends to farthest point in the north, the city of Idlib, after it has travelled through Banias, Rasten, Talbisa, Homs, Hama, Deir Alzor, Duma, Zabadani, Damascus and Aleppo". Choosing to deliberately mention the names of individual cities across Syria is part of the message that the report tries to convey and therefore justify the reason why the channel opted for the open coverage policy: it is a revolution because the whole country is rising.

The airing of these controversial opinionated reports provoked a heated debate among media professionals, casting doubt over the degree of professionalism in combining news and opinion in news reporting, and therefore questioning the objectivity of Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab spring.

4. The Arab spring and the transformation of the Arab public sphere

The Arab revolutions that succeeded in toppling five regimes and setting in motion what looks a genuine democratic transition processes in a number of countries, have also had a profound impact on social relations, modes of communications, public

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[27] News report by Majed Abdulhadi, aired on Al Jazeera on 17 March 2012.

spaces and their cultural, social and political significance. In this context, the Arab public sphere which has emerged in close relationship with the new media environment seems to be undergoing a structural transformation. This section looks at the different aspects of this transformation with special emphasis on the role of Al Jazeera as a leading media outlet that provided the nascent public sphere with an open space for free discussion and gave it much of its key characteristics.

Unlike the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere that emerged with the rise of the aristocracy of the European seventeenth century and started to disintegrate with the decline of the eighteenth century bourgeois society, the new Arab public sphere's relationship with the social and political structures is superficial and its fate will only be determined by the factors which facilitated its emergence in the first place. It emerged predominantly in the virtual space and remains to a large extent subject to transformations occurring within that space. The second line of disagreement with Habermas's account of the decline of the public sphere is the role of the media in this transformational process. If the liberal media played a negative role towards the mid-nineteenth century and contributed to the decline of the bourgeois public sphere[28], the Arab media and Al Jazeera in particular, played an entirely different role especially in the absence of sociopolitical structures favorable for the emergence of the public sphere. But, as the Arab spring has shaken the media and revealed a number of weaknesses in their coverage, it has also showed how vulnerable the Arab public sphere was. Following are the main aspects of this vulnerability followed by a discussion of how the whole concept of an Arab public sphere is undergoing a structural transformation.

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[28] According to Habermas, there was a significant shift in the role of the media which changed from mediating rational public discussion to shaping the public discourse and defining its main themes according to preset agendas validated by big media corporations.

The virtual aspect of the Arab public sphere and its detachment from the real society makes it difficult for the virtual spaces created by the media throughout the last decade to sustain the wave of profound transformations the Arab societies are confronted with. The coverage of Bahrain showed that the media, even the most liberal among them, can shy away from covering certain events for geopolitical considerations which leads in turn to restricting the previously open spaces for public deliberation. Choosing to take the side of the people in their struggle against dictatorship and openly adopt their narrative in the absence of 'the other opinion' has also lead to narrowing down the scope of debate and limiting the range of diversity of opinions which has been one of the key characteristics of the new Arab public sphere since it has emerged. The disappearance of the talk shows, the main platform for public discussion, and the reliance instead on live reporting backed with commentaries that mostly embrace and support the revolutionary line has significantly reduced the vivacity and dynamism of the public sphere. It is not erroneous therefore to assert that, as the media played a central role in the creation of the Arab public sphere, they have also played an equally important role in the current transformation it is going through.

The second aspect of the vulnerability of the new Arab public sphere is the growing overlap between the private and public realms. Al though not confined to the Arab setting, the blurred boundaries between what the Greeks called *'idion'* and *'koinon'* does not seem to be the case in our increasingly interconnected society. The role the media and social media networks play in bringing together the two realms has almost eroded any degree of distinction between them. Unlike the clear separation that Hannah Arendt describes regarding life in the Greek city-state: "every citizen belongs

to two orders of existence; and there is a sharp distinction in his life between what is his own and what is communal"[29], the citizen in the age of new media incorporates both types of existence in his daily life. There is no opposition in the virtual city between the sphere of 'home, family and intimate friends' and the sphere of the 'public use of reason, the critique of public authority and the collective action for the common good'. What gives the role of new media even more prominence in the current transformation process of the Arab public sphere is the Arab social fabric itself where the private and the public are often inseparable.

The third aspect of this transformation concerns the pan-Arab discourse that Al Jazeera has been promoting and constitutes one of the main themes of the Arab public sphere. Although the Arab spring has been accompanied by a strong feeling that united all Arabs in different Arab countries and revived among them the sense of belonging to one *ummah*, the aftermath of the revolutions seems to have shifted the public debate towards more national (vs. pan-Arab) issues. Tunisians have become more concerned with their own affairs debating the various issues facing the democratic transition and the establishing of a new political system in their country. All types of Tunisian media (state owned radio and television, private outlets, social media networks) are continuously discussing domestic politics, giving little space for Arab and international affairs. The focus of public debates in Egypt, Yemen and Libya is also predominantly on domestic issues, not only in the media but also in the squares and public spaces such as cafes civil gatherings and university courts. The most significant indication that domestic issues have taken precedence over pan-Arab issues in the post-revolution public discourse is the re-positioning of the Palestinian 'cause' within this discourse. Prior to the Arab spring the Arab-Israeli conflict was the

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[29] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition* (The University of Chicago Press, 1998) p. 24

center around which all other issues revolve. After the revolutions, this issue is no longer at the heart of the public debates which deeply affects one of the core characteristics of the Arab public sphere.

The last aspect of the structural transformation of the Arab public sphere is linked to both the changing role of the media and the emergence of new social and political structures within the Arab societies after the revolutions. As the relevance of the pan-Arab issues is diminishing so too is the relevance of the virtual dimension of the public sphere. The increasing focus on local and domestic issues in the public debate is not only related to the rise of free media in the Arab spring countries, but also because new structures have emerged as part of the changing political system. As those structures gain more ground and become more inclusive of various groups of the society, the public debate will shift gradually from the virtual spaces to the real ones. The freedom that enabled Al Jazeera to become the main and sometimes the only platform available for uncensored and unrestricted discussion of wide ranging issues of public concern has now set foot in a number of Arab societies and will have enormous consequences on the agenda and structures of the Arab public sphere. The media is no longer the sole initiator of free and open debate, and the relationship between the Arab public sphere and the sociopolitical structures on the ground is no longer superficial as it used to be. It is like we are witnessing the "rebirth of the Arab public sphere", and this is unquestionably one of the major transformations the Arab spring has brought with it.

Conclusions

Since this research has started in October 2008, significant changes have taken place in Arab media and politics and most importantly, in the relationship between these two spheres. The Arab spring presented us with an extraordinary empirical case study showing how interlinked media and politics have become. The undergoing democratization processes in the four countries where televised mass movements resulted in toppling dictators who have been in power for decades, need fresh thinking on democratization theory. It is time to critically assess our existing knowledge to fill the gap in the traditional orthodoxy and grasp the complexities of the current political changes in the Arab world. As I have argued in this research, among the obvious gaps in the literature on democratization is the increasing influence of the media in facilitating and accelerating the pace of these changes.

In this conclusion, I will first reflect on the key questions I tried to answer in my thesis and then present the main findings which I hope represent an original contribution to developing a theoretical approach to understanding Arab democratization and the emergence of a new Arab public sphere. At the heart of this approach is the impact of Al Jazeera's paradigmatic change in the media-politics relationship.

Rethinking democratization theory and the role of the media in political change

Considering the recurrent cycle of uprisings and social protests that have been taking place in various parts of the Arab world in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the Arab spring is the culminating point of this long sociopolitical process. In the same way as the earlier uprisings resulted in partial liberalization and led to some degrees of

political openings, the Arab spring carried with it similar political changes albeit on a larger scale and with far reaching consequences. Although the political response to those earlier uprisings varied from one country to another, the concerned Arab regimes generally reacted in the form of calculated steps towards democratization and controlled reforms. This can be clearly noticed in the measures taken by King Hassan II of Morocco (1984), President Bourguiba of Tunisia (1978 and 1984), Presidents Sadat and Mubarak of Egypt (1977 and 1986), and King Hussein of Jordan (1989 and 1996).

Scholars of democratization, especially those who always tend to find linkages between economic liberalization and political reforms failed to capture the complexities of the entire process and ended up with presenting us with perspectives on 'the failure of Arab democratization' versus the 'survival of Arab authoritarianism'. The easiest way to explain this widely perceived enduring failure of Arab democratization is to emphasize what has become known as the 'Arab exceptionalism' with all the orientalist packaging that comes with it. It seems to me that, among the main casualties of the current wave of social uprisings that started in December 2010 and resulted in regime change in a number of countries and the introduction of major political and constitutional reforms is the concept of 'Arab exceptionalism' itself. Whether we consider it as a fourth wave of democratization or just a continuation and extension of the third wave, to borrow Huntington's concept, the Arab spring presents a challenging model to both the long established orthodoxy of democratization theory and those who seek to develop a new understanding of Arab democratization.

This current wave of political changes in the Arab region can only support and further substantiate the main argument this research has been elaborating both at the theoretical and empirical levels. Without the critical assessment of traditional theories of democratization which all converge in ignoring the role of two key factors in democratization processes, that are the media and the masses, it would have been difficult to develop alternative approaches in this research field. When the masses stop being passive consumers of media products and become actively involved in creating and distributing those products, this means that new social and political forces are in the making. The participatory and communicative aspects of using the media, especially new media and social media networks serve as a good starting point in any bottom-up process of political change towards democracy. Democratization from below is the alternative approach I adopted in this research as an explanatory model to understand and analyze the different routes Arab democratization has been following for decades. As traditional theories failed to capture and therefore account for these unconventional routes, I believe this thesis adds to our knowledge and understanding of different political processes and contributes to enriching the literature on democratization in general and Arab democratization in particular.

So far, the Arab spring has been successful not only in toppling regimes and preparing the region for a new era of democratic governance; it has also succeeded in attracting the attention of scholars of democratization to rethink their approaches and consider the Arab world as a fertile ground for the study of democratization. Over twenty-five years since the publication of "*Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*", and fifteen years after the publication of "*Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist*

Europe", we started to see new literature on democratization theory with significant revisions and modifications to accommodate what looks as emerging Arab democratization. In their recent piece on Democratization theory and the Arab Spring, Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz introduced new theoretical elements to understand and analyze the complex routes of Arab democratization: the first element is the relationship between democracy and religion; the second is the character of what they called hybrid regimes that mix authoritarian and democratic elements; and the third element is the nature of "*sultanism*" and its implications for transitions to democracy.[1]

In April last 2012, Alfred Stepan published a paper on democratic transition in Tunisia where he employs his concept of "twin tolerations" to discuss the role of "hard" secularism in democratization and analyze the relationship between religion and politics in a democratizing Muslim country.[2]

With regard to the role of the Media in democratic change which I tried to emphasize in my research, we have also seen a new trend in the literature highlighting this dimension. Al Jazeera's coverage of the Arab spring that resulted in political change bringing to power elected assemblies and governments in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, was instrumental in drawing both media and politics scholars' attention to this phenomenon.

This remarkably influential role that the media has played in the success of the 2011 Arab revolutions is likely to continue until democratic systems have been established in those countries. The media that served as a leverage and indispensable platform for activists and political opposition groups to rally support for democratic change will

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[1] Stepan, Alfred and Linz, Juan J. "Democratization theory and the "Arab Spring", *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 24, Number 2 April 2013.
[2] Stepan, Alfred. "Tunisia's transition and the twin tolerations", *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 24, Number 2 April 2012.

transform into a watchdog during transition and consolidation phases. This increasingly visible interplay between media and political change validates my argument as to the democratizing role of the media. It is in this context that chose Al Jazeera as a new media paradigm that reshaped the Arab media scene and paved the way for much of the political transformations that took place under the name of the Arab spring. Before these developments became manifest and translated into a number of regime changes, Al Jazeera has been working closely with the grassroots, involving the masses in continuous debates over public issues. The new Arab public sphere, which developed amidst these debates, brought together Arab elites from various political and ideological backgrounds along with ordinary people from across the region to create a massive intellectual and social movement. It would be hard not to see the links between the recent transformations and this massive movement. It is this connection that makes the study of Al Jazeera's democratizing role and the rise of an Arab public sphere of great significance.

Al Jazeera before and After the Arab spring

As most of the literature on Al Jazeera tends to distinguish in the Arab media between two phases: before and after Al Jazeera, due to the profound impact the channel has had on the Arab media landscape, this research shows that the Arab spring has equally effected the performance of the Arab media including that of Al Jazeera to the extent that we can confidently distinguish between Al Jazeera before and after the Arab spring. Its coverage of Arab affairs for the last fourteen years, just before the eruption of the first protests in Tunisia in December 2010, has been characterized by near complete dominance over the Arab media scene. Even with the advent of international news channels broadcasting in Arabic and targeting the same audience, such as the

BBC, France 24, Russia Today, Al Hurrah etc. Al Jazeera remained beyond competition and its viewership continued to grow steadily. The open platform policy that Al Jazeera has been known for, contributed immensely to generate and manage debates over an unlimited number of issues that are of interest to the Arab public. This is what made the study of the channel's democratization effect an interesting endeavor this research has undertaken.

The arrival of the Arab spring though, has somewhat shaken the image of Arab media in general and Al Jazeera particularly, because of its remarkably heavy involvement in what was perceived as shaping political agendas in certain countries rather than neutrally reporting events. This has led some observers to point out the seemingly difference between the channel's journalistic practice before and during the Arab revolutions. The demarcation between these two types of journalism and the lack of impartiality in covering the revolutions led in turn, to questioning the nature and limits of Al Jazeera's democratization role in certain countries of the Arab spring. This role is proving to be even more problematic in the transitional process, not only because of the rise of local media as new players in the field, but also because the individual situations in each of the transiting countries are considerably different.

Although the Arab revolutions have occurred in quite similar sociopolitical circumstances, they do not seem to be following similar paths in their democratic transitional phase. While the Tunisian example looks to be moving fairly smooth due to the relatively wide consensus among the political elite who managed, at an early stage, to agree on the key steps of the transitional process, the Egyptian revolution is struggling to put together the building blocks of the new political system in an orderly way and limit the role of the Superior Military Council (SCAF) in the political life.

The transition in Yemen and Libya cannot be separated from the regional and international factors that were instrumental in bringing about the change in the first place. The GCC initiative which served as mediator between the revolutionaries and President Salah's regime has also set the agenda for the entire process. The first transitional phase of this process started with a power-sharing formula between representatives of the revolution and elites from the old regime in order to prepare for the next phase: parliamentary and presidential elections. For a number of reasons, the Libyan transition remains the most complicated case among the Arab spring countries. On top of the existing rivalry between tribalism and the newly formed political system, the militarization of the revolution brought with it an additional complication by creating another legitimacy that is of the armed groups. Besides this multidimensional clash of legitimacies, the Libyan transition is also confronted with wide ranging challenges of state-building.

Despite the different processes of democratic transition in the Arab spring countries, they all share a number of common characteristics among which is the central role played by the youth as a new social movement in the Arab world. The second characteristic is the unprecedented media coverage that the revolutions received from all types of media, especially satellite television and social media networks. The combination of these two forces, the youth and the media will have a greater impact on the democratic transition during the consolidation phase as it has had in bringing about the change in the first place. However, the proliferation of local unprofessional and sometimes unregulated media outlets in these countries before the new political and legal systems are fully established could hinder the transitional process at different levels. As substantial parts of the old regimes are still in place and try to

regain control over power through various means, the struggle over the media is intensifying especially in the case of Tunisia and Egypt. The relative retreat of Arab satellite televisions such as Al Jazeera due to the fierce competition they face in covering domestic issues, adds to the potential danger of obstructing, if not reversing the democratic process.

The post-Al Jazeera era

The emergence of free and independent local media in the Arab spring countries is a new phenomenon that is reshaping the Arab media landscape. The rise of Al Jazeera in the 1990s, followed by a number of other Arab-speaking regional and international satellite television channels introduced a dramatic change to the Arab media scene, which in turn contributed to the political changes we have seen for the last two years. The current changes in the local media will not be limited to the countries where the revolutions took place. They are wide ranging and will have further political implications as the Al Jazeera phenomenon has previously had. Indeed, the region is experiencing another media phenomenon which we could call the post-Al Jazeera era.

The new dynamics created by the rise of those media are increasingly visible in Tunisia and Egypt but to a lesser degree in Yemen and Libya. The most noticeable aspect of these dynamics is the mounting competition among national and privately owned television stations. Competition for viewership is not only confined to local media; Arab satellite televisions are also being affected to varying degrees. In Tunisia for instance, audience figures after the revolution show that, for the first time in

decades, local media attract more viewership than pan-Arab and international satellite stations including Al Jazeera.[3]

To face up to these challenges that are reshaping the landscape of Arab media and redistributing power and influence among them, Al Jazeera is trying to reposition itself in the newly structured information market. In Egypt, it has launched a local version of its 24 hour '*Mubasher*' station (Al Jazeera Live Egypt), whereas in Tunisia only a small team of journalists from this particular channel are sent occasionally from Doha to cover certain events.

The political implications of the changes in the media field are of particular significance, especially with regard to the democratization process. As local media continue to consolidate their position within their respective markets and acquire more freedom and professional training, their role in advancing democracy will increase accordingly. They are better positioned to play this role than foreign media, since they are entrenched in their sociopolitical setting and able to engage with it openly and on a daily basis.

As for Al Jazeera and other international media, it seems their political effect is diminishing in the Arab spring countries for the reasons mention above. They will however, continue to play a crucial role in countries where the political situation has not changed. Wherever there is need for free and independent media, Al Jazeera will always preserve its power and influence. Wherever the political situation changes and

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[3] The rating report of *'Sigma Conseil'* issued in February 2012 indicates that the Tunisian national channel (*Al-Watania 1*) leads the way with 37,7% of the total viewership; the private channel (*Hannibal TV*) came second with 15,5%; the third Tunisian channel (*Attounisia*) received 7,1, while Al Jazeera lagged behind and came fifth with only 6,6%. However, It is worth mentioning that these figures have to be taken very cautiously due to the lack of scientifically solid rating practice in the Arab region. It is also difficult to cross-check these figures with figures from alternative sources as they are almost the only ones available.

allows for local media to play their natural role as the fourth estate, the role of Al Jazeera and its political effect will decrease. This has not been the case since it has come on air up until the Arab spring happened, and this is what justifies the claim that the Arab media and politics have now entered a post-Al Jazeera era.

Expanding away from the Arab world: the scope and significance of this move

If the Arab world, or at least parts of it, has really embarked on what I called the post-Al Jazeera era, the rest of the world seems to be going in the opposite direction. Although plans to expand beyond the Arab region have been there before the Arab spring, Al Jazeera's initiatives to move into new markets and launch a number of non-Arab speaking channels have now acquired more significance.

If Al Jazeera wants to stay the course and retains its influence regionally and globally alike, it should adopt a twofold strategy: focus locally and expand globally. Competing with Arab local stations will not be easy unless the channel consolidates its presence in those countries and multiply its local operations to fully engage with the new sociopolitical realities created by the dynamics of the emerging democracies in the region. The journalistic strength of Al Jazeera should be redeployed to explore uncovered issues that the old regimes would not allow to cover. The collapse of major parts of the authoritarian state, particularly the security apparatuses, paves the way for a new journalistic practice to develop in the Arab world that is investigative journalism. Al Jazeera tried to get into this type of journalism and produced a series of investigative programmes but its efforts were obstructed by the endless difficulties it has faced regarding access to information and people in dictatorial regimes. The Arab spring brought with it great opportunities for the media to investigate and break the

silence on many issues such as corruption, torture, forged elections, clandestine immigration etc.

At the global level, expanding to new markets with new languages will inevitably increase the audience of Al Jazeera. The English channel that has only been operating for less than six years, is now reaching more than half a billion households across the world. The Balkans channel which launched in November 2011 is making an inroad, not only in Bosnia-Herzegovina where the station is located, but also for the whole Balkans region. The two new channels, Al Jazeera Turk and Al Jazeera Swahili which are expected to go on air before the end 2013 will add to this global media network new dimensions and give it access to substantial numbers of viewers in both Asia and Africa.[4] The network's online operation *sharek* is already functioning in five languages: Arabic, English, Serbo-Croat, Turkish, Swahili.

This fast moving horizontal expansion, it should be noted, carries with it the danger affecting the quality of journalism Al Jazeera has been providing. The noticeable difference in the coverage of Bahrain between the Arabic and the English channels is just an example. The way Al Jazeera Arabic framed the Syrian case (revolution) is also inconsistent with that of its English sister channel (the war within). With more channels to come, it may become more difficult to control these inconsistencies and develop a strong unified editorial policy.

The Arab spring: the lessons we learned

As has been explained above, the Arab spring cannot be dissociated from the way it has been portrayed in the media. It is certainly a sociopolitical event but it is also a

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[4] On March 18th 2013, during the 9th Al Jazeera Annual Forum, Director General Sheikh Ahmed bin Jasim Al Thani announced that the network is also planning to launch a French-speaking channel.

media phenomenon from which media students will draw endless lessons in the years to come. Following are a few lessons that summarize the findings of my research regarding Al Jazeera's coverage and the role it has played in the Arab spring. These findings are based on the materials I gathered from my interviewees and consequently reflect the Al Jazeera thinking and perception of its own contribution to this historical change:

- Contrary to the widespread perception that the Arab spring has come all of a sudden with no particular history that can explain it, there is a common understanding among Al Jazeera's interviewees that provides a historic explanation. Although no one can claim to have planned the initial events that ignited the flame of the first revolution in Tunisia, what happened with the street vendor who set himself on fire in that remote city of Sidi Bouzid symbolizes the strained relationship between Arab governments and their citizens. The mounting resentment among impoverished and suppressed people over the years on the one hand, and the gradual emergence of a new political awareness to which Al Jazeera has significantly contributed, paved the way for this historic change. From this perspective, the Arab spring is the culmination of a long process of smaller changes. Therefore, it should be understood in this context of a changing landscape of Arab Media and politics and not as a separate decontextualized event.

- Against the ongoing controversies around the nature and limits of the role played by Al Jazeera in this change that is likely to lead to the democratization of substantial parts of the Arab world, there is a general agreement among Al Jazeera's interviewees on a particular interpretation. We should distinguish

between two types of effects Al Jazeera has had in this changing political environment. There is a long term effect in informing, educating and empowering the Arab publics that resulted in the emergence of a vibrant and dynamic Arab public sphere. And there is an immediate effect during the coverage of the Arab spring. Both effects contributed to the shaping of the current landscape at varying degrees. This interpretation of the channel's democratizing role strongly supports the suggestion that Al Jazeera is more than a media outlet; it is indeed an agent for change.

- The role the media coverage played in the success of the Arab spring revolutions was crucial and undeniable. However, it would be erroneous to claim that it was Al Jazeera that triggered these revolutions. Again, here we have a common perception among the interviewees that their channel acted as facilitator of change. The Arab spring is not Al Jazeera's revolution as some would call it; it is "the people's revolution" as strongly suggests the channel's director. It is true that the channel's logos were displayed in protests all over the squares in Egypt, Libya and Yemen but, this is an indication that Al Jazeera is behind these protests. It reflects the protestors' understanding of Al Jazeera's strength and influence. As observes Philip Seib "Media might not make revolutions, but they certainly can contribute to them."[5] In fact, it is the public's willingness to act that is the most crucial factor in political change.

- Although Al Jazeera's management and editors were closely monitoring the developing situation in the Arab world through their knowledge, accumulated expertise, and the wide network of correspondents almost everywhere in the

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[5] Seib, Philip. "New Media and Prospects for Democratization" in Philip Seib (eds.) *New Media and the New Middle East*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) p.10

region, the sudden eruption of the Arab spring took the channel by surprise. Like academics, intellectuals and politicians, the media also failed to anticipate the Arab revolutions. At least no one expected the events to be on that unprecedented scale. It is not common for small-sized protests to turn in no time to full revolutions in four countries with different social, political and historic experiences. These unfamiliar developments meant that the media would face serious challenges in performing consistent coverage. No matter how well Al Jazeera was prepared to cover big events, its coverage of the Arab spring showed some degrees of inconsistencies that, to some extent, damaged the channel's image and caused observers to question its credibility, balance and professionalism.

- Looking at this issue from a different angle, what appeared to some as inconsistency in the coverage of the Arab spring might look to others as a logical practice. Although the channel conducted its coverage from the same studio, by the same staff and according to the same agenda, the editorial policy of the coverage and the output on the screen differed from one country to another. These differences could be explained by the different paths revolutions were taking, the different inputs from field reporters, whose grasp and understanding of the developing stories varied greatly, and the amount and quality of materials the newsroom received from activists and social media. These new dynamics we have seen in this multi-dimensional media coverage of the Arab spring requires us to revisit some existing theoretical frameworks including agenda setting and framing theories.

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- Among the new dynamics that characterized media coverage of the Arab spring was the remarkable interaction between traditional media and new media. With their limited resources, crews and equipment, it appeared that traditional media were unable on their own to cope with the expanding scope of this unprecedented mass movement. Covering a country as big as Egypt with demonstrations taking place simultaneously in dozens of cities is impossible for any news network regardless of how prepared it might be. You cannot cover the whole picture relying only on your reporters using professional cameras and related equipment. On the other hand, the outreach of new or social media remains limited in the absence of television that uses their materials and rebroadcast them to the wider public. It was with the help of citizen journalists using social media networks that the media managed to present us with different sides of this big story that we now call the Arab spring. It was a mutually coordinated exercise where the traditional walls separating old and new media have become something of the past.

To conclude, it remains to mention that, I was fortunate to be part of the Al Jazeera network while working on this thesis. That gave me flexibility and full access to the materials, the people and the working environment of the staff members from whom I acquired my primary data. That also equipped me with an in-depth and unequalled understanding of the organization; the way it functions and the real impact it having on the entire Arab region. However, being located away from the University has certainly ad its disadvantages. For, it deprived me from the privilege of the academic environment which could have had a greater impact on my research in many ways. I missed many opportunity to meet and interact with students and scholars whose

company would have helped me expose my ideas and arguments to further discussion and probably present them in a better shape. Besides, I could have benefitted from the wealth of the University library and tap into more literature that could have definitely enriched my thesis and filled the gaps that I am sure are still there. This brings me to the last point of this conclusion that is the way forward.

New research avenues: the way forward

The Arab spring presents scholars of democratization with plenty of research opportunities, not only to expand the scope of existing literature, which to a large extent neglect the Arab region for a number of reasons I explained in this thesis, but also to explore new dynamics of political change in an area which has long been regarded as categorically different from the rest of the world, whether in terms of culture or social structures. The culture argument that has always been used to explain the absence or at least the delay of democratization in the Arab world should now be revisited and confronted with the new realities in the region. This would be a logical extension of some of the thoughts I tried to develop in this research.

On the other hand, the remarkable difference in the transitional processes between the different countries of the Arab spring needs to be subject to academic investigation. What has happened in Tunisia is different from what we have seen in Egypt, and both processes are definitely different from that of Yemen or Libya. Studying those experiences from a comparative perspective would certainly add a great value to our present knowledge of democratization processes. It will equally deepen our understanding of the various forms of inter-Arab linkages beyond the dominating state-centric approaches. This is another research area where this thesis could be extended further.

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Appendix: List of Interviews

	Interviewee	Position/job	location	Date	Length
1.	Jamil Azar	Chief Language Monitor	Doha	April 2011	48:24 min
2.	Ahmed Sheikh	Chief Editor	Doha	April 2011	43:01 min
3.	Laila Chaieb	News Presenter	Doha	April 2011	28:03 min
4.	Moeed Ahmed	Head of New Media	Doha	April 2011	16:07 min
5.	Mohamed Krichen	News Presenter	Doha	April 2011	39:24 min
6.	Aref Hijjawi	Director of Programmes	Doha	April 2011	26:39 min
7.	Ahmed Ashour	Head of Al Jazeera Talk	Doha	April 2011	44:40 min
8.	Mostefa Souag	Director of News	Doha	April 2011	47:56 min
9.	Nasreddine Louati	News Producer	Doha	May 2011	19:12 min
10.	Mohamed Lemine	Journalist/Translator	Doha	May 2011	32:01 min
11.	Samir Hijjawi	Senior journalist, Al Jazeera Mubasher	Doha	May 2011	51:27 min
12.	Mohamed Dahou	Presenter, Al Jazeera Mubasher	Doha	May 2011	24:45 min
13.	Jamal Shayyal	Senior producer and Field reporter, Egypt	Doha	May 2011	30:33 min
14.	Nabil Raihani	Field reporter, Tunisia	Doha	May 2011	50:20 min
15.	Ahmed Vall Ouldeddine	Field reporter, Libya	Doha	May 2011	53:47 min
16.	Ghassan Abuhsein	Field reporter, Bahrain	Doha	May 2011	76:13 min